

Early Childhood Care and Education Network Report

Response to Act 198 of the 2021 Regular Session
January 2024

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Overview of Act 198 of 2021

Act 198 of 2021 enacted [R.S. 17:407.23\(E\)](#) and requires the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to coordinate data relative to the early childhood care and education network in order to evaluate the network. This report will assist legislators in evaluating the effectiveness of the network. As a result of this report, legislators will have the data necessary to prioritize funding and services to ensure children from birth through age five achieve Kindergarten readiness.¹

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) provides annual reports to the legislature to meet the requirements of this act.

¹ LA. Rev. Stat. §17:407.23

Findings

Background

Louisiana’s Early Childhood Accountability System relies on local capacity that has gradually grown since early childhood care and education community networks began leading Act 3 implementation in 2012. Louisiana uses the CLASS® tool to measure quality and support improvement in every classroom at every publicly-funded early childhood site in the state. Preschoolers in classrooms with the types of high-quality interactions measured by CLASS® showed greater learning gains across school readiness domains, including executive functioning and early literacy.² Moreover, children in preschool classrooms with consistently high levels of instructional support showed greater gains in language and literacy than children who experienced consistently low-quality instructional support.³ In a study conducted in rural Appalachia, preschool children in classrooms with higher CLASS® scores were significantly more likely to demonstrate Kindergarten readiness across academic and behavioral domains.⁴

Observations in Louisiana are conducted by Community Network Lead Agencies as well as third-party observers from the Cecil J. Picard Center at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Each site receives a rating based on CLASS® observations that measure the quality of all interactions present in the classroom. Researchers at the University of Virginia found that Louisiana observers are accurate and that children learn more in Louisiana classrooms with higher ratings.⁵

At all publicly-funded early childhood care and education sites, each classroom receives a fall and spring observation each year conducted by the local community network. Bulletin 140 stipulates that all publicly-funded early childhood classrooms open October 1 must receive a fall CLASS® observation and classrooms open February 1 must receive a spring CLASS® observation. Local community networks ensure that observers participate in ongoing training, calibration, and reliability audits. In addition, Bulletin 140 requires that community networks conduct inter-rater reliability checks (double-scoring) of 10% of all classrooms, including one inter-rater reliability check for each observer for each classroom age configuration. Furthermore, the LDOE contracts with the Cecil J. Picard Center at the University of

² Vitiello, Virginia et. al. “Measuring the quality of quality of teacher-child interactions at scale: Comparing research-based and state observation approaches.” April 20, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://education.virginia.edu/study-early-education-%E2%80%93-louisiana>.

³ Anne Henry Cash, Arya Ansari, Kevin J. Grimm & Robert C. Pianta (2019) Power of Two: The Impact of 2 Years of High Quality Teacher Child Interactions, Early Education and Development, 30:1, 60-81, DOI: [10.1080/10409289.2018.1535153](https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2018.1535153).

⁴ Justice, L. M., Jiang, H., Khan, K. S., & Dynia, J. M. (2017). Kindergarten readiness profiles of rural, appalachian children from low-income households. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 50, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2017.02.004>.

⁵ Vitiello, Virginia et. al. “Measuring the quality of quality of teacher-child interactions at scale: Comparing research-based and state observation approaches.” April 20, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://education.virginia.edu/study-early-education-%E2%80%93-louisiana>.

Louisiana at Lafayette to conduct third-party audits of local observations in classrooms across the state. The Picard Center typically conducts observations in 50% of all classrooms each semester, including in at least one classroom of each age configuration at each site within the year.

Louisiana’s Early Childhood Accountability System measures core elements needed for positive child outcomes, provides a clear and focused path to improvement, and gives families an easy way to compare choices in their community. Results are shared through a Performance Profile for each site, published on www.LouisianaSchools.com, that contains two components: a Performance Rating (based on CLASS® observations) and Informational Metrics (based on use of best practices such as high-quality curriculum, assessments, and teacher credentials).

As a research-based, nationally-regarded early childhood quality measure for all young children, CLASS® assesses how well teachers interact with children, including expectations for classrooms that are organized into age-appropriate domains:

Expectations for the Classroom:	Pre-K Domains	Toddler Domains	Infant Domains
<i>Warm, positive environment with trusting relationships</i>	Emotional Support	Emotional & Behavioral Support	Responsive Caregiving
<i>Daily routines are organized and disruptions are minimal</i>	Classroom Organization		
<i>Children are supported to learn concepts, develop language, and connect ideas through dialogue and play</i>	Instructional Support	Engaged Support for Learning	

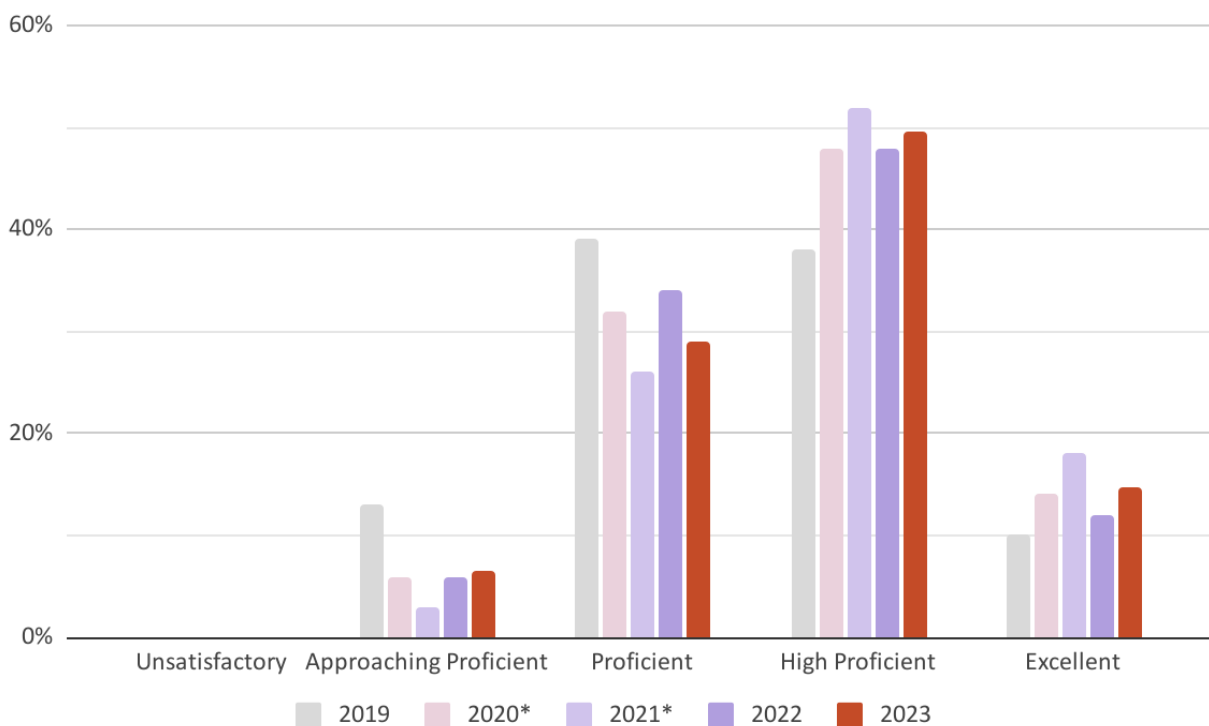
Quality of Care

Since Performance Ratings were first issued in 2016-2017, the number of sites rated “Unsatisfactory” and “Approaching Proficient” has declined, with no sites rated as “Unsatisfactory” in 2022-2023, for the second year in a row. Furthermore, the number of sites rated as “High Proficient” and “Excellent” has increased significantly, as evident in Table 1 and Figure 1. As a result of COVID-19, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education provided flexibilities in the publication of Performance Profiles for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years. This provided the opportunity for sites to extend their Performance Score if their observation results did not increase during that time. Though that “hold harmless” approach in Performance Profile ratings in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 does not reflect that some learning loss occurred during the pandemic, it is important to note that scores, and thus quality, have continued to improve from the period before COVID-19 to the 2022-2023 academic year.

Table 1
Distribution of Performance Ratings Over Time

	2019	2020 ⁶	2021 ⁶	2022	2023
Unsatisfactory	<1%	<1%	<1%	0%	0%
Approaching Proficient	13%	6%	3%	6%	6%
Proficient	39%	32%	26%	34%	29%
High Proficient	38%	48%	52%	48%	50%
Excellent	10%	14%	18%	12%	15%

Figure 1
Distribution of Performance Ratings Over Time⁶



While the Performance Ratings published during COVID-19 were subject to the “hold harmless” approach, the trend of steady, incremental growth in Performance Scores at the Domain level (as seen in Table 2 and Figure 2) also increased for both infants and toddlers in 2022-2023. In addition, pre-K Domain scores experienced a slight increase across all domains (as seen in Table 3 and Figure 3).

⁶ As a result of COVID-19, BESE provided flexibility in the publication of Performance Profiles for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years, providing the opportunity for sites to extend their Performance Score if their observation results did not increase.

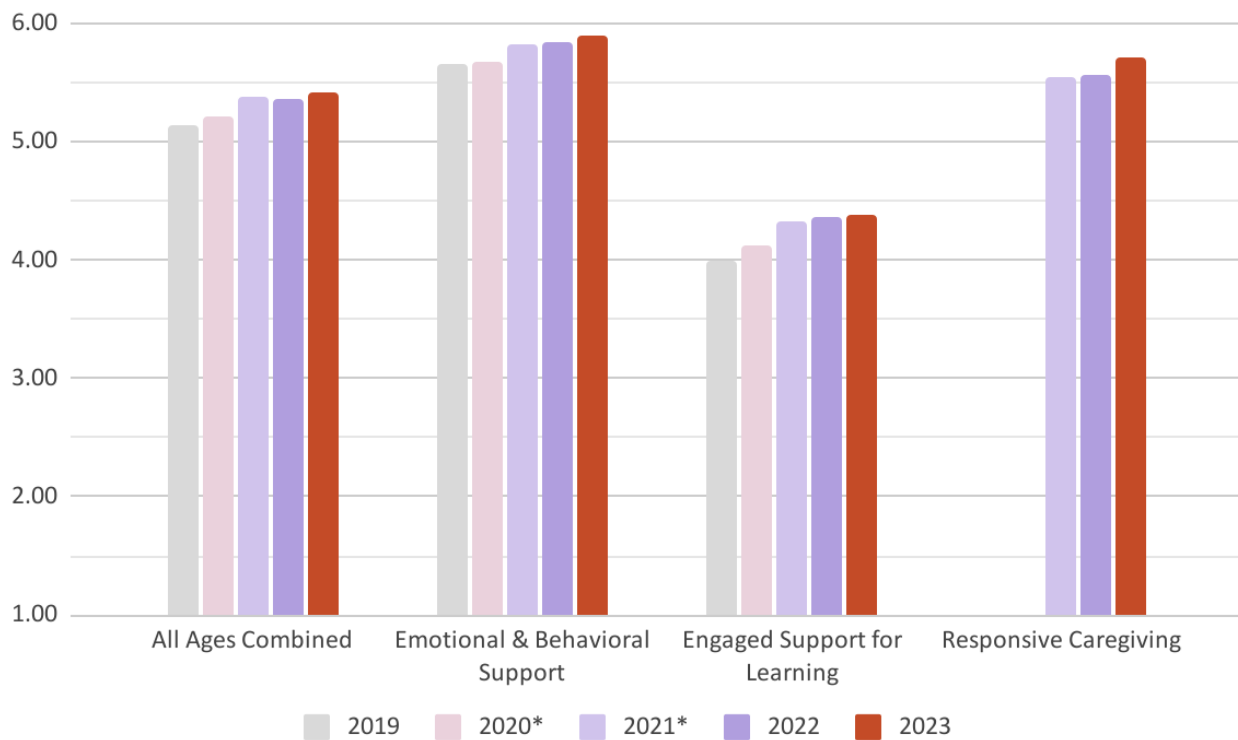
Table 2

Performance Scores by Domain Over Time for Infants and Toddlers

	2019	2020 ⁷	2021 ⁸	2022	2023
All Ages Combined	5.14	5.21	5.39	5.37	5.42
Emotional & Behavioral Support	5.66	5.68	5.82	5.85	5.90
Engaged Support for Learning	3.99	4.12	4.33	4.37	4.39
Responsive Caregiving			5.55	5.56	5.72

Figure 2

Performance Scores by Domain Over Time for Infants and Toddlers

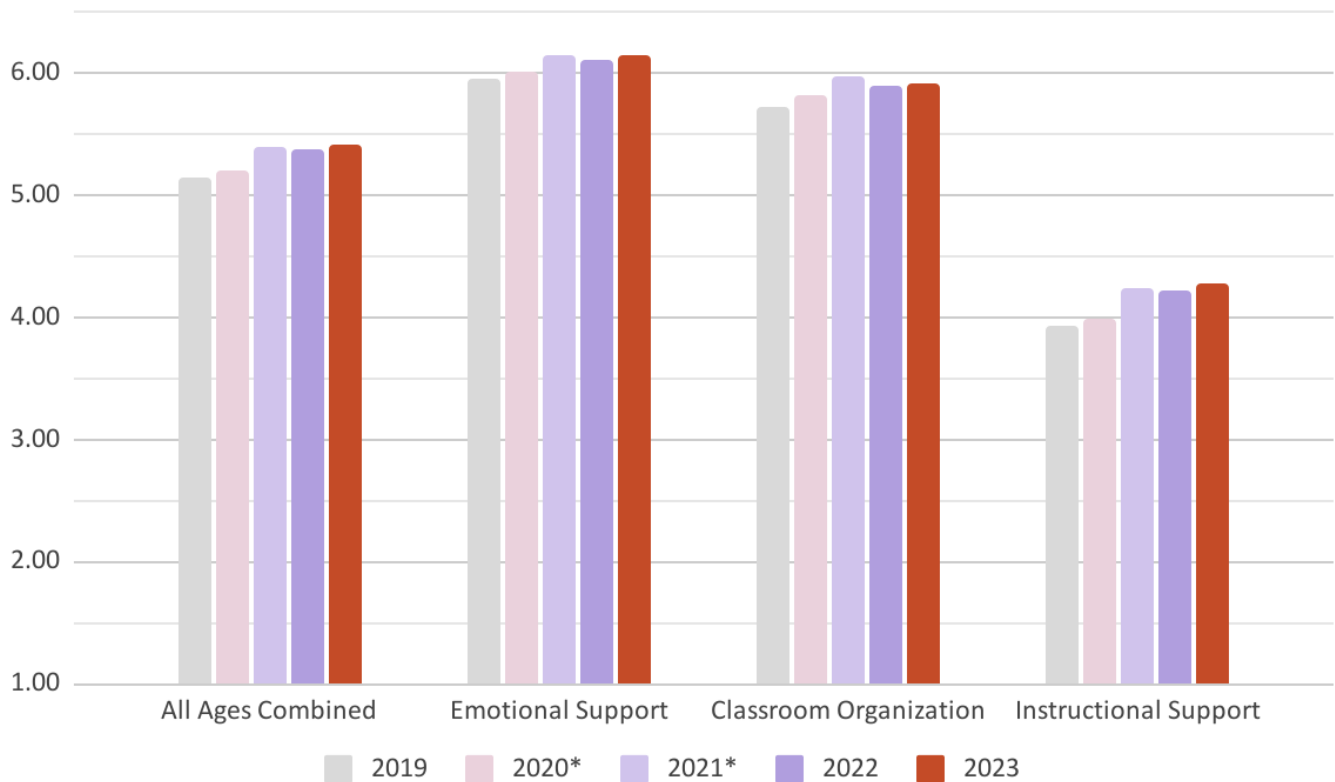


⁷ 2019-20 estimates are unpublished calculations based on observations conducted during the Fall 2019 observation period, which was not disrupted by COVID-19. These data do not reflect the Performance Profile “hold harmless” approach that was used to address the challenges at the height of the pandemic.

⁸ 2020-2021 estimates are unpublished estimates based on observations conducted during the 2020-2021 academic year. These data do not reflect the Performance Profile “hold harmless” approach that was used to address the challenges at the height of the pandemic. 2020-2021 was the first year Infant CLASS® results were incorporated into Performance Scores and Ratings.

Table 3*Performance Scores by Domain Over Time for Pre-K*

	2019	2020 ⁹	2021 ¹⁰	2022	2023
All Ages Combined	5.14	5.21	5.39	5.37	5.42
Emotional Support	5.96	6.01	6.14	6.11	6.15
Classroom Organization	5.72	5.82	5.97	5.90	5.92
Instructional Support	3.93	3.98	4.23	4.21	4.28

Figure 3*Performance Scores by Domain Over Time for Pre-K*

⁹ 2019-20 estimates are unpublished calculations based on observations conducted during the Fall 2019 observation period, which was not disrupted by COVID-19. These data do not reflect the Performance Profile “hold harmless” approach that was used to address the challenges at the height of the pandemic.

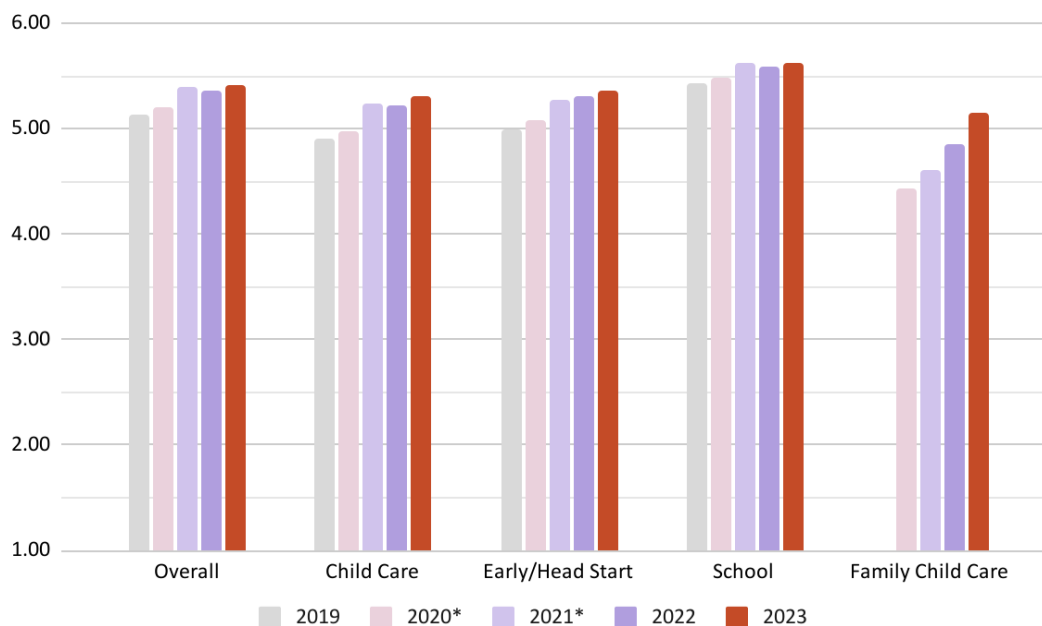
¹⁰ 2020-2021 estimates are unpublished estimates based on observations conducted during the 2020-2021 academic year. These data do not reflect the Performance Profile “hold harmless” approach that was used to address the challenges at the height of the pandemic.

Performance results are provided at the statewide level and organized by site type. While many sites have multiple programs, each site is assigned a type based on how it is set up and funded:

Site Type	Includes:	Does not include:
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public schools Nonpublic schools that receive public funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School-based classrooms located in child care or Head Start centers
Early Head Start / Head Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Licensed Type III centers that serve children entirely or almost entirely funded through Head Start Head Start programs located in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership programs in child care centers
Child Care Centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Licensed Type III centers that serve children through many sources, including Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), private pay, local funding streams, NSECD, LA 4, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools or Head Start sites that offer CCAP for before/after care Schools with licensed classrooms to serve three year olds
Family Child Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CCAP-certified Family Child Care sites that have opted into Academic Approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Child Care sites not participating in the state's accountability system

Figure 4 and Table 4 provide information about site performance by site type, providing insight into how to target interventions to support improvement in preparing children for Kindergarten. The 2022-2023 data shows that all sites in Louisiana improved from the previous year, earning the highest scores since the beginning of accountability in 2016-2017.

Figure 4
Performance Scores Over Time by Site Type



*As a result of COVID-19, BESE provided flexibilities in the publication of Performance Profiles for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years, providing the opportunity for sites to extend their Performance Score if their observation results did not increase.

Table 4
Performance Scores Over Time by Site Type

	2019	2020*	2021*	2022	2023
Overall	5.14	5.21	5.39	5.37	5.42
Child Care	4.91	4.98	5.23	5.23	5.31
Early/Head Start	5.00	5.09	5.28	5.31	5.37
School	5.44	5.49	5.62	5.59	5.63
Family Child Care		4.44	4.61	4.86	5.16

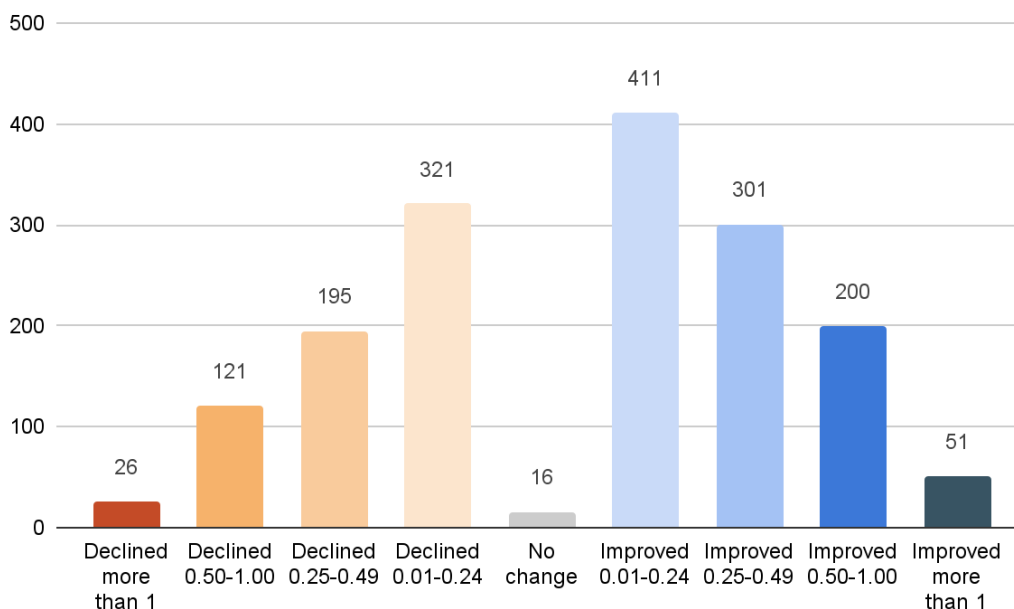
Across Louisiana, more sites’ scores improved than declined when comparing published Performance Ratings in 2020-2021, which included BESE-approved flexibilities, with CLASS® observation results in 2021-2022. As seen in Figure 5, in 2021-2022 768 sites’ scores improved whereas 721 sites’ scores decreased. This decrease in scores could be attributed to the suspension of the COVID-19 flexibilities temporarily put in place by BESE for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, increased teacher turnover, increased staffing shortages in classrooms across the state, and long-term closures due to Hurricane Ida.

The majority of sites’ Performance Ratings in 2021-2022, even those sites that declined (as seen in Figure 5), were at the Proficient level or higher (as seen in Figure 4). Furthermore, although 721 sites showed some decrease in scores, only 10 sites scored below 3.75 and were mandated to participate in the Department’s Site Improvement Planning (SIP) process for the 2022-2023 academic year based on their CLASS® observation results in 2021-2022.

The SIP process was developed by the Department in 2017-2018 for publicly-funded sites rated below 3.75 for the previous academic year, to support against further decline in quality. Sites participating in the SIP process are assigned a regional Department field support consultant who assists in creating an improvement plan based on individualized site needs and self-assessment results. These sites receive prioritized resources that are included as part of improvement plans (e.g., CLASS®-based coaching, curriculum support, mental health consultation, and professional development). In 2022-2023, 5 low-performing sites were notified regarding their mandated or recommended participation in SIP based on their CLASS® observation results in 2021-2022. Four of the five sites participating in SIP in 2022-2023 improved their quality and are no longer mandated or recommended for SIP participation in 2023-2024.

In addition to the supports provided via the SIP process, hundreds of sites statewide also receive training and coaching from Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies. Thus, the additional sites that showed a decrease in scores still have the opportunity to receive supports focused on increasing quality at the site-level even though they were not mandated to participate in the SIP process.

Figure 5
Change in Performance Scores between 2022 and 2023

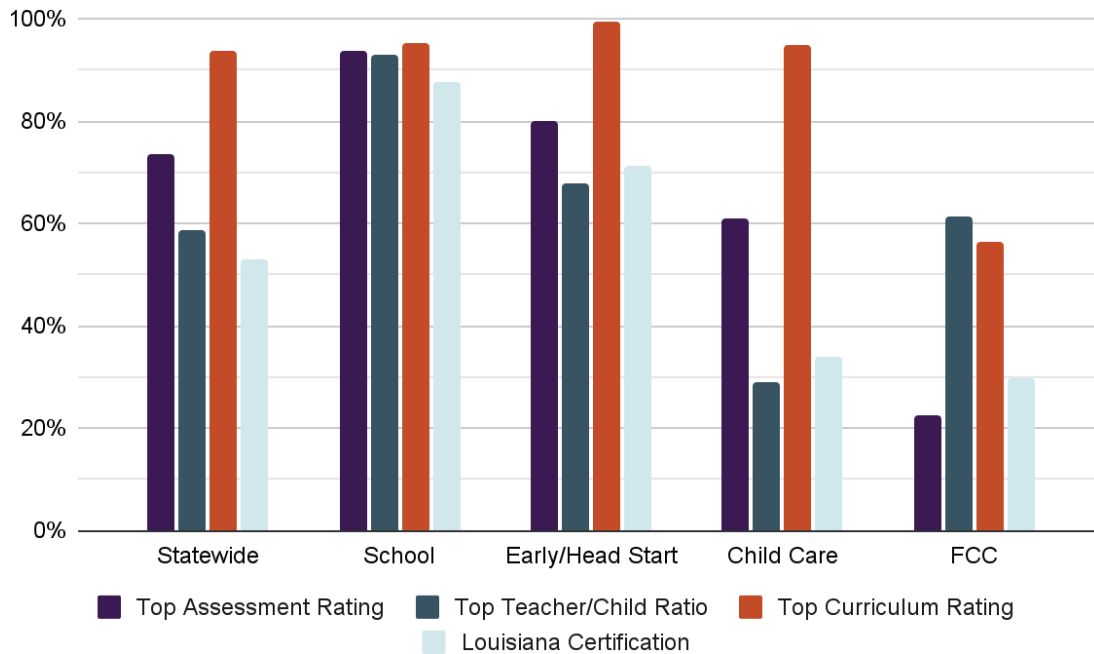


However, sites vary in their implementation of classroom best practices that promote high-quality experiences for children (shown in Figure 6). These best practices currently include:

- The number of publicly-funded children assessed using Teaching Strategies Gold®, a high-quality assessment tool
- The ratio of children to teachers, a research-proven intervention that benefits children’s outcomes
- The use of a high-quality curriculum, another important component of early childhood care & education
- The percentage of teachers with Louisiana Certification, an indicator of teacher preparation and qualifications

The Department’s collection of these informational metrics indicates that, across programs, the large majority of sites have a quality curriculum. In addition, all sites improved in their 3-star assessment rating.

Figure 6
Informational Metrics by Site Type



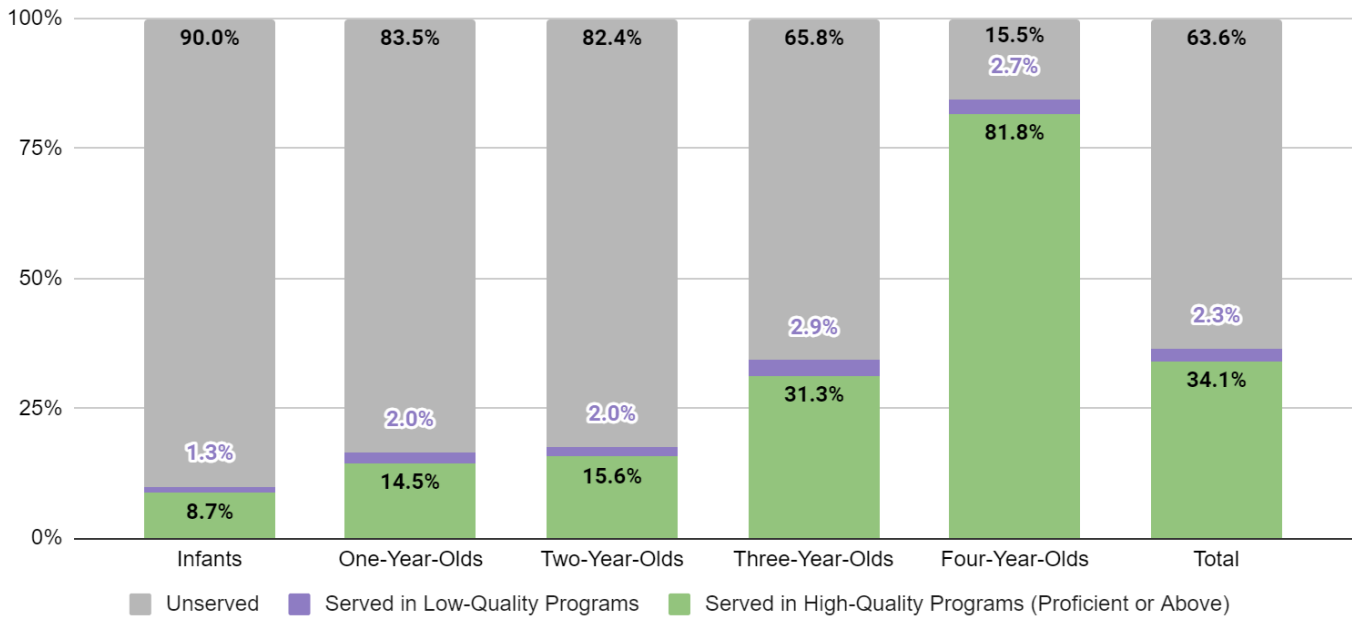
Louisiana continues to empower communities to strengthen classroom quality by expanding current initiatives and launching additional quality measures and supports. These efforts include several facets:

- **Providing High-Quality Instructional Tools:** These supports will ensure all early childhood classrooms are utilizing high-quality curriculum and receive professional development to support effective implementation of instructional tools.
- **Expanding Developmental Screening:** These efforts will prepare communities and teachers to identify children in need of intervention through a developmental screening process and provide the supports needed to prepare children for success in school and beyond.

Access to Care

While sites across the state continue to make gains in CLASS® scores, there are still too few children in need, especially infants and toddlers, who can access publicly-funded high-quality programs. It is estimated that in 2022-2023, 63.6% of economically-disadvantaged children aged birth through four were unserved, representing an increase of 7.6% more children served from the previous academic year. Access, broadly, was highest for four-year-olds: an estimated 81.8% of economically-disadvantaged four-year-olds were served in high-quality programs (see Figure 7). Louisiana has also seen slight gains in access for infants, one year olds, and two year olds in the last year, due to an influx of federal stimulus dollars. However, access to those publicly-funded high-quality seats for our youngest learners is expected to decline after the 2022-2023 academic year due to the discontinuation of temporary federal stimulus investments awarded to Louisiana, and the state had to initiate a CCAP waitlist in October 2022 in anticipation of those declining funds.

Figure 7
Access to Quality Care for Economically-Disadvantaged Children



**The above figure reflects the data from October 2022 Child Count*

As in prior years, during the 2022-2023 academic year, families and Type III centers benefited from Star Ratings that provide incentives for quality. Among the children who receive public funding, the majority (93%) are served in sites that were rated three or more stars (i.e., as quality) in 2021-2022 (see Table 5).

Table 5
Enrollment by Star Quality Rating

CLASS® Score Range	2021-2022 Performance Rating	2023 Star Rating *	CCAP Children Ages B-5 Authorized in Oct. 2022	Estimated Children Ages B-5 Enrolled with Other Public Funding Sources Oct. 2022	Total Children Enrolled
6.00 - 7.00	Excellent	5 Stars	554 (5%)	6,337 (14%)	6,891 (12%)
5.25 - 5.99	High Proficient	4 Stars	4,910 (42%)	23,860 (53%)	28,770 (51%)
4.50 - 5.24	Proficient	3 Stars	4,483 (38%)	12,271 (28)	16,754 (30%)
3.75 - 4.49	Approaching Proficient	2 Stars	833 (7)	557 (1%)	1,390 (2%)
3.00 - 3.74	Approaching Proficient	1 Star	102 (1%)	173 (<1%)	275 (<1%)
1.00 - 2.99	Unsatisfactory	0 Stars	0 (0%)	97 (<1%)	97 (<1%)
N/A	Not Rated in 2021-2022	0 Stars	793 (7%)	972 (2%)	1765 (3%)
<i>Total</i>			11,675	44,267	55,942
*2023 Star Ratings are based on the 2021-2022 Performance Profile ratings; only Type III early learning centers received Star Ratings during that time period.					

Access to publicly-funded care is available to eligible children, based on eligibility criteria that vary by funding program. Table 6 provides an overview of major public funding sources. Many public funding sources have eligibility requirements based on State Median Income (SMI) and Federal Poverty Level (FPL).

Table 6

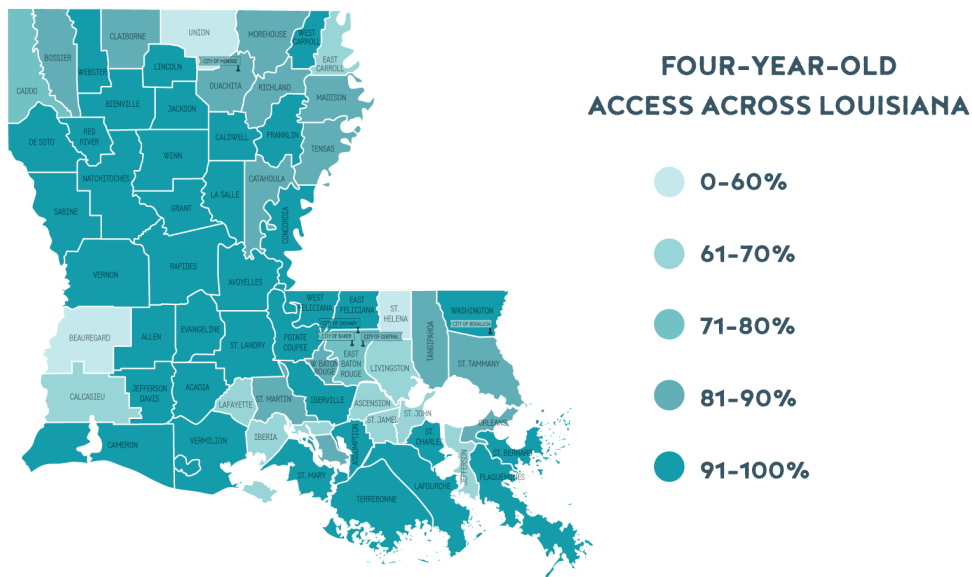
Details on Louisiana’s Public Funding Programs for Early Childhood Care & Education, 2022-2023

	CCAP (Child Care Assistance Program)	Early Head Start / Head Start	LA 4	NSECD (Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development)	B-3 Seats
Eligibility criteria	Families that are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At or below 85% of State Median Income (SMI) Working, in school, or in training 20 hours per week or more; actively seeking employment; or experiencing homelessness Age B-13 years old or up to 18 if child with disabilities	Families that are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At or below 100% Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (Also 30% up to 135% of the Federal Poverty Level and 10% over income) Head Start: 3 and 4-years-old Early Head Start: Infants and toddlers	Families that are at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) 4 year olds	Families that are at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Primarily 4 year olds; some (small number of) 3 year olds potentially if the site also serves 4 year olds with NSECD	Families that are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At or below 85% of the State Median Income (SMI) Working or in school 20 hours a week or more or actively seeking work Infants through 3 year olds
Program requirements	Type III licensed child care centers and child care assistance-certified home- and school-based providers	School districts, educational service districts, community action agencies, faith-based organizations, community colleges/ universities	School systems apply for seats for LA 4	Eligible providers for NSECD are BESE-approved nonpublic schools and Type III child care centers	Eligible providers are CCAP-certified, rated Proficient or higher, have all teachers with or pursuing the Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate, and offer infant care
Hours/days	8-hour day, full-year	6-hour day, academic year	6-hour day, academic year	6-hour day, academic year	6-hour day, 10 months (at minimum)
Total funding and source	\$114,445,567 Source: Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) \$87,867,381 Source: State General Fund	\$209,932,116 Source: Administration for Children and Families (ACF)	\$30,632,000 Source: TANF \$64,892,879 Source: State General Fund	\$7,840,932 Source: State General Fund	\$9,146,696 Source: Preschool Development Grant \$33,315,024 Source: ARPA CCDBG
Number of slots (October 2022)	<u>Enrolled and Funded*</u> : Infants: 1,569 1 year olds: 3,609 2 year olds: 4,219 3 year olds: 3,873 4 year olds: 2,950 > 5 year olds: 5,685 Total: 21,905 *A CCAP Waitlist began on 10/1/2022	<u>Enrolled</u> : Early Head Start: 2,431 Head Start: 10,996 <u>Funded</u> : Early Head Start: 3,344 Head Start: 16,724	<u>Enrolled</u> : 4 year olds: 15,731 <u>Funded</u> : 4 year olds: 17,100	<u>Enrolled</u> : 4 year olds: 1,001 <u>Funded</u> : 4 year olds: 1,404	<u>Enrolled</u> : B-3 year olds: 3,185 <u>Funded</u> : B-3 year olds: 3,201
Amount of public funding per child	Annual funding ¹ : Infant: \$17,952 1 and 2 year olds: \$11,088 ≥ 3 year olds: \$8,316 Note: rates increased in 2/2022 for an average cost of \$12,500 per child	Early Head Start: \$15,567 Head Start: \$9,107	\$5,580 per child ²	\$5,580 per child ²	Infants: \$18,940 1 and 2 year olds: \$11,700 3 year olds: \$10,670
¹ This reflects a full-time, annual per child rate as of October 2022 and does not include bonuses ² This reflects per child allocation, not average expenditure					

The eligibility criteria for publicly-funded programs provides insight into the socio-economic status of children participating in Louisiana’s Early Childhood Care and Education Network.

Understanding how access varies by geography is a requirement in the reporting stipulated in Act 198 of 2021, and this distribution is integral to identifying opportunities to deploy strategic supports moving forward. Access to early childhood care and education across all age groups shows that there is variation across the state. Figure 8 shows the level of access of four year olds to publicly-funded early care and education across Louisiana.

Figure 8
Access across Louisiana for Economically-Disadvantaged Four-Year-Old Children



Across the state, the following parishes are categorized in the highest and lowest ranges for four-year-old access to publicly-funded care and education.

Highest Range: 90% or more

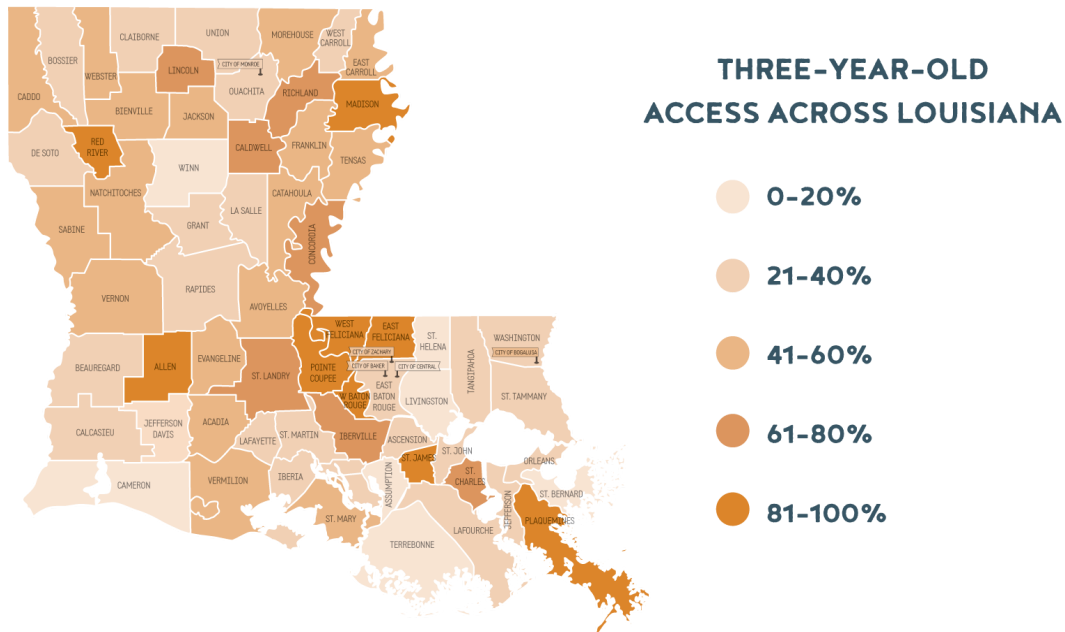
- Acadia
- Allen
- Avoyelles
- Bienville
- Bossier
- Caldwell
- Cameron
- City of Baker
- Claiborne
- DeSoto
- East Baton Rouge
- East Feliciana
- Franklin
- Grant
- Iberville
- Jackson
- Jefferson
- Jefferson Davis
- La Salle
- Lafourche
- Lincoln
- Natchitoches
- Plaquemines
- Pointe Coupee
- Red River
- Sabine
- St. Charles
- St. James
- St. Landry
- St. Martin
- St. Mary
- Vermilion
- Vernon
- Washington
- Webster
- West Baton Rouge
- West Carroll
- West Feliciana
- Zachary

Lowest Range: Less than 60%

- Beauregard
- St. Helena
- Union

Figure 9

Access across Louisiana for Economically-Disadvantaged Three-Year-Old Children



An estimated 65.8% of economically-disadvantaged three-year-old children do not currently have access to publicly-funded early childhood care and education. As seen in Figure 9, this access ranges geographically across Louisiana.

Across the state, the following parishes are categorized in the highest and lowest ranges for access to publicly-funded care and education for three-year-old children:

Highest Range: 80% or more

- Assumption
- Cameron
- East Feliciana
- Iberville
- Pointe Coupee
- Red River
- St. James
- West Feliciana
- Zachary

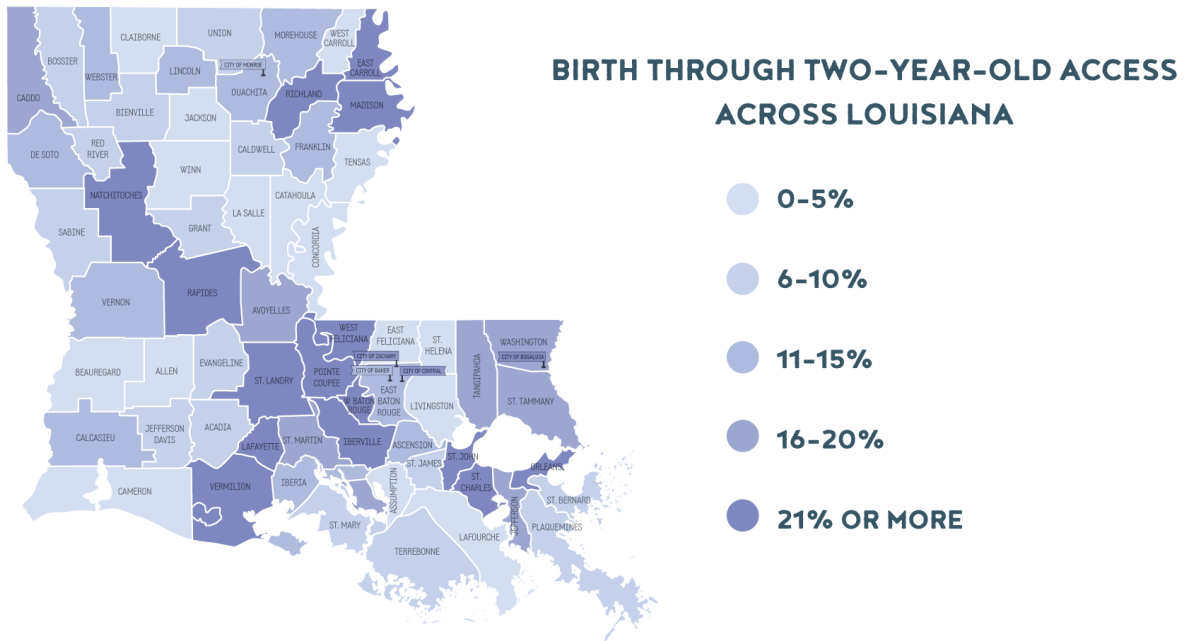
Lowest Range: Less than 20%

- Beauregard
- Calcasieu
- City of Bogalusa
- East Carroll
- Lafayette
- St. Helena
- St. James
- Union

Figure 7, “Access to Quality Care,” highlights that the largest access gaps exist for children ages birth through two years old. An estimated 84.7% or more of economically-disadvantaged children ages birth through two years old are not served in publicly-funded early childhood programs, as shown in Figure 7. This level of access likewise ranges geographically across Louisiana, as seen in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Access across Louisiana for Economically-Disadvantaged Birth to Two-Year-Old Children



Across the state, the following parishes are categorized in the highest and lowest ranges for access to publicly-funded care and education for birth to two-year-old children:

Highest Range: 20% or more

- Central
- City of Bogalusa
- East Carroll
- Lafayette
- Madison
- Natchitoches
- Pointe Coupee
- Richland
- St. Charles
- St. John the Baptist
- St. Landry
- Vermilion
- West Baton Rouge
- West Feliciana
- Zachary

Lowest Range: Less than 5%

- Ascension
- Beauregard
- Caddo
- Calcasieu
- City of Bogalusa
- East Baton Rouge & City of Baker
- East Carroll
- Iberia
- Jefferson
- Lafayette
- Livingston
- St. Helena
- St. James
- St. John the Baptist
- Union

Racial and Ethnic Demographics of Early Care and Education

In order to more completely understand any gaps in access that may remain for specific populations, the Department launched a pilot to collect racial demographic information as part of its October 2020 child count process. In October 2022, all Community Network Lead Agencies reported demographic information for the 55,942 children reported in that Child Count. The percentages of racial categories are represented in Table 7 below.

Demographic information collected in Child Count is made up of three categories: background demographics to determine the extent to which children experience homelessness, foster care, and home languages other than English (none of which are mutually-exclusive) as well as ethnicity (Hispanic/Latino) and racial demographics (mutually-exclusive). The demographic information collected providers' information on the populations accessing publicly-funded early care and education and resulted in the following findings:

- 1.41% of children counted were categorized as homeless
- 1.06% of children counted were categorized as foster children
- 3.79% of children counted were categorized as dual language learners
- 6.10% of children counted were categorized as Hispanic/Latino
- Black or African American children make up the majority of publicly-funded children served

Table 7

Racial Demographics of Publicly-Funded Children, 2022-2023

Race	Percentage
American Indian/ Native American	0.45%
Asian	0.65%
Black or African American	58.31%
Hispanic/Latino	6.10%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.19%
White	29.62%
Two or More Races	3.52%
Other or Unknown	1.16%

While access to care increases with age, with many more three year olds and nearly all four year olds in quality settings, the persistent gap for infants and toddlers has unsettling implications for the workforce in Louisiana. Families without reliable access to quality care and education face persistent hardships when they enter the labor force, causing downstream costs for employers, Louisiana's economy, and tax revenue.¹¹ It is estimated that Louisiana businesses lose \$762 million annually from missed work, turnover, and other related costs due to parents not having reliable access to high-quality child care. This creates a

¹¹ Davis, Belinda et. al., "Losing Ground: How Child Care Impacts Louisiana's Workforce Productivity and the State Economy." May 2017. Louisiana Policy Institute for Children. Accessed through: https://0cd902dd-9de1-4dae-8781-4a355ebda8df.filesusr.com/ugd/20d35d_476f91b779d74b74937ccdd9965d74e3.pdf.

ripple effect on the economy beyond employers and individual households, as lost income from missing work directly impacts purchasing power and productivity.¹²

Efforts to continue to expand access to high-quality early childhood care and education across Louisiana include:

- **Support for Ready Start Networks:** The Department provides support for Ready Start Networks to develop blueprints to strategically guide their network to success; create a coalition of community leaders to promote, support, and advocate for network initiatives; establish local advisory council structures to inform decision-making; and identify local funding opportunities to support strategies to increase quality and access to quality early care and education at the local level. The Department supports Ready Start Networks in the use of community-level access and landscape analyses to determine the current state of access within the communities in the network and to develop community-level strategies and solutions to increase supply of, and access to, quality early childhood care and education that meets the needs of their specific communities.
- **Integrating Family Child Care:** Family Child Care (FCC) sites are now able to participate in the state quality rating system by opting into “Academic Approval.” FCC educators often serve in areas where child care options are scarce and often provide needed infant and toddler care; by opting into Academic Approval, FCC sites will be well-positioned to serve families previously not able to find care. There are currently 114 FCC sites with Academic Approval across Louisiana, and the Department continues to work with community networks to recruit and support new FCC sites..

¹² The Kathleen Babineaux Blanco Public Policy Center. April 2021. [Policy Brief] Child Care and the Economy in Louisiana. Accessed through: <https://policyinstitutela.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Blanco-Center-Economics-of-Childcare-Policy-Brief.pdf>

Conclusion

In order to resolve access gaps that remain for Louisiana’s most vulnerable children, the state must prioritize care that serves infants and toddlers. Partnerships are the key lever for growing access to quality early childhood care and education. Through the coordinated enrollment process, families partner with Community Network Lead Agencies to explore quality child care options. Every community network works with and across all program providers and provider types to engage and recruit families and reduce burdens on enrollment. Louisiana will need to continue to examine different avenues of care, including even deeper engagement of family child care providers, in Louisiana’s statewide quality and access efforts. Additionally, the majority of children in need live in urban areas, but the high concentrations of vulnerable children in rural areas indicate the need to continue to explore community-level strategies to be successful in all areas of the state.

Louisiana’s innovative Ready Start Network approach demonstrates a commitment to finding local solutions to increasing access to high-quality early care and education. As part of these efforts, Ready Start Networks also work to identify local funding that can be utilized for increased access. To support local revenue generation, the legislature implemented the Louisiana Early Childhood Education (ECE) Fund, which enables local communities to have locally-raised funds matched dollar-for-dollar by state funds. In the 2022-2023 fiscal year, four Community Network Lead Agencies raised a total of \$3,476,000 locally. The LDOE allocated a dollar-for-dollar match of State General Funds, meaning nearly \$7 million invested in Early Childhood Education for this project alone, which allowed those four Community Network Lead Agencies to serve 637 children at each network’s peak enrollment. In the 2023-2024 fiscal year the LDOE allocated and matched \$25,653,844 across seven Community Network Lead Agencies, for an investment of more than \$50,000,000 to increase local access. The LDOE continues ongoing communication with Community Network Lead Agencies year-round to evaluate how many are working to raise funds for future years. The LDOE anticipates the number of Community Networks Lead Agencies raising eligible funding will continue to increase each year.

Furthermore, existing partnerships with the Louisiana Departments of Health and Children and Family Services have broadened the support systems for vulnerable children. Continued collaboration will ensure that Louisiana continues to make strides in providing all children ages birth through four with opportunities for high-quality early childhood care and education that sets the foundation for success for children in school and beyond.

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