

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM DATA TRENDS REPORT

OCTOBER 2022 - SEPTEMBER 2023



INTRODUCTION

Joint Initiatives for Youth + Families is home to El Paso County's Early Childhood Council, Alliance for Kids (AFK). We provide support to families, children, and early childhood programs by bringing together organizations that serve these populations. Our primary efforts include professional development for the early childhood workforce, quality improvement for early childhood programs, and health and well-being for children, families, and the early childhood workforce. Research consistently shows that investing in early childhood provides a strong return, as it allows families to join and remain in the workforce, and it provides children with the tools they need to be successful as they grow and develop.

El Paso County (EPC) is Colorado's largest county, with a population of over 730,000. Roughly 15% of the state's population of children under five years of age live in EPC (US Census Bureau, 2021). While 32.4% of the entire EPC population identifies as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) (US Census Bureau, 2021), an estimated 41.0% of children (birth–5) identify as BIPOC (Colorado State Demography Office). This indicates that EPC is becoming increasingly more diverse.

More than half of children under the age of six in EPC live below 300% of the federal poverty level, and nearly 40% of children in EPC qualified for free or reduced-price lunch in Fall 2019 (Kids Count, 2021). In the 2018-19 fiscal year, 44.5% of children (birth – 18) were enrolled in Medicaid.

Colorado Springs, the largest city in EPC, is home to four military installations. This makes us home to an estimated 221,863 (30.1% of EPC's total population) people who are affiliated with the military, not including family members of retirees (Military Installations, 2019; US Census Bureau, 2021). This number includes US Air Force Academy Cadets, active-duty personnel, family members of active-duty personnel, civilian employees, reservists, contractors, and veterans. We currently have 430 early childhood education (ECE) programs, the highest number of programs in any county in Colorado.

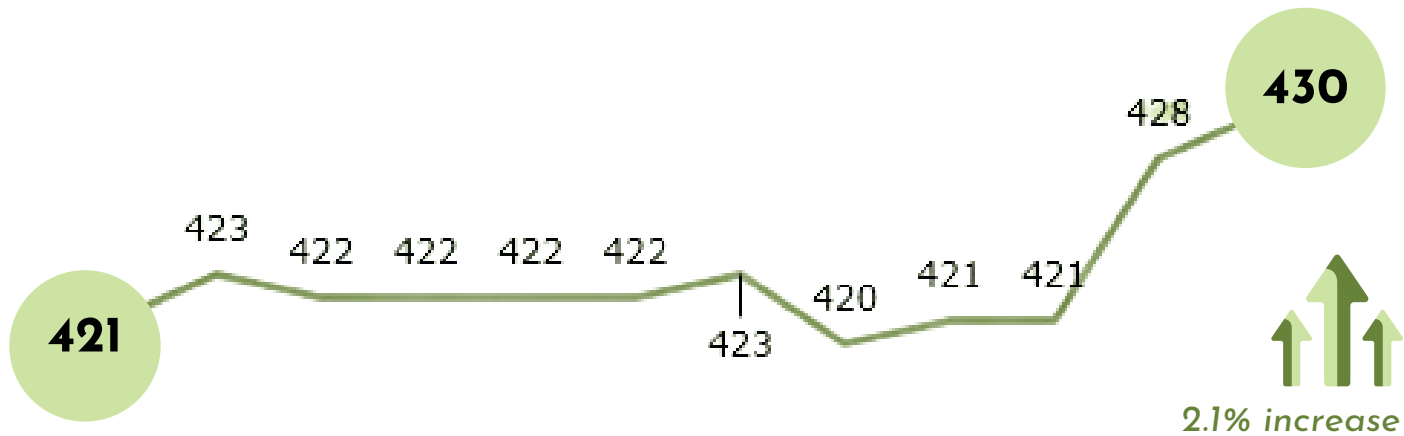
Research consistently shows that investing in high-quality early childhood education provides a strong return, up to \$16 returned for every dollar invested, especially for children from disadvantaged environments .

The following data provides an overview of all early childhood programs, a focus on ECE centers (including both licensed preschools and child care centers), a focus on Family Child Care Home (FCCH) providers, trends regarding Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) programs, and provider capacity for infants and toddlers.

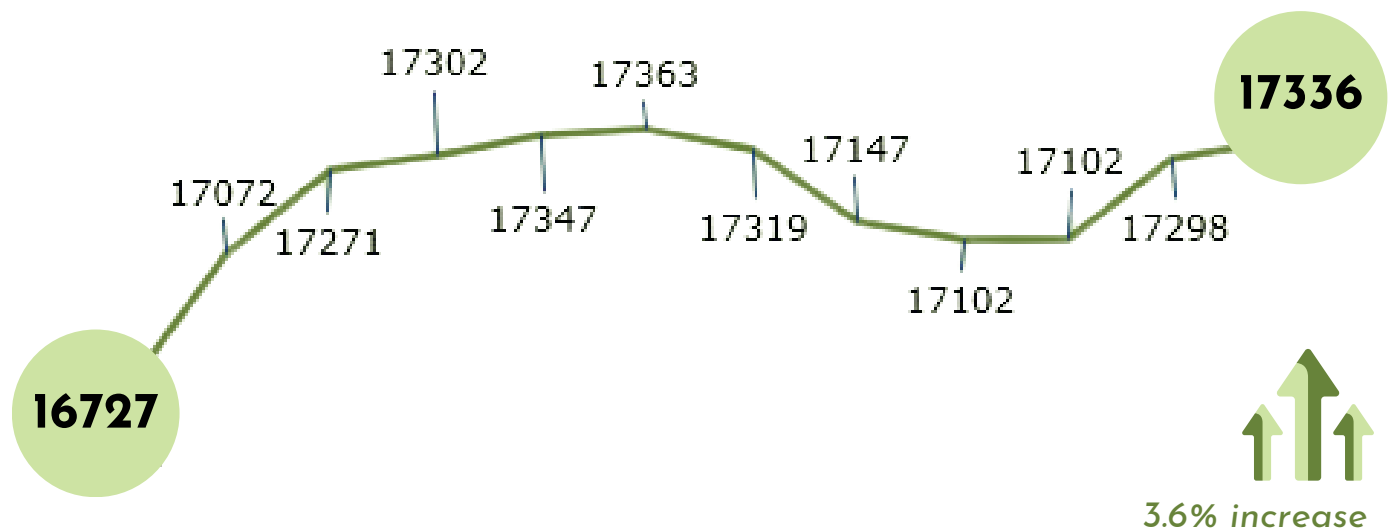
ALL EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS



CHANGE IN NUMBER OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS | OCT 2022-SEPT 2023



CHANGE IN TOTAL LICENSED CAPACITY | OCT 2022-SEPT 2023



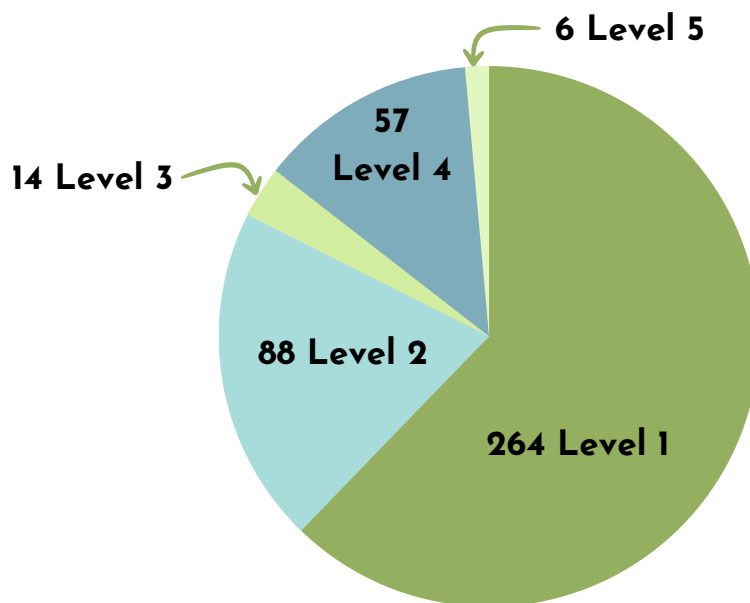
OVERVIEW OF ALL EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AND QUALITY RATINGS

Over the course of the last year, El Paso County has largely increased our number of ECE programs, though we began the year with only 421 programs. We have also seen an increase in the total licensed capacity of programs by 3.6%. All numbers related to total licensed capacity should be considered with caution, as the early childhood workforce crisis has a large impact on a program's ability to keep all its classrooms open, and some FCCH providers may not want to be at full capacity.

PROGRAM QUALITY LEVELS



NUMBER OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS BY QUALITY LEVEL



OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM QUALITY LEVELS + CHANGES IN LEVELS

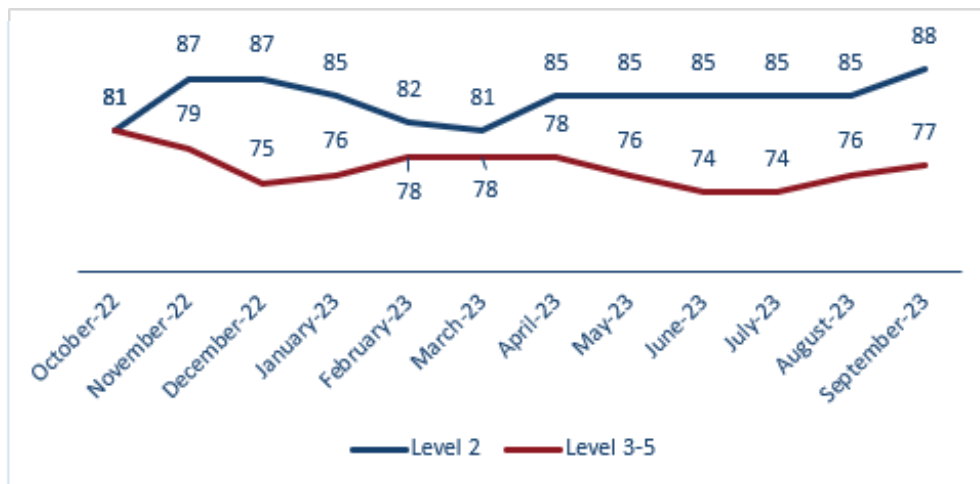
The Colorado Shines Quality Rating program allows programs to demonstrate their quality to families. All programs start at Level 1, and many prefer to remain at this level. In order to get to Level 2, there are training and paperwork requirements, including the development of a quality improvement plan. A Level 2 or higher program is labeled “quality” according to statewide requirements. A Level 3 – 5 rating is considered “high-quality,” as it requires programs to show that they are exceptional in the areas of workforce qualifications, family partnerships, administrative practices, learning environment, and child health. In El Paso County, the majority of our programs are Level 1; our staff work with these programs to help them move to Level 2 and begin their journey towards quality. A total of 74.0% of our high-quality programs are Level 4, which indicates that programs choosing to go through the quality rating process are achieving a high level of quality. There has been a 50% increase in Level 5 programs over the last year (October 2022 – September 2023). In the last year, we have also seen a 12.5% decrease in the number of Level 3 programs. We have maintained the number of Level 2 programs, though we have observed a 4.9% decrease in the number of high-quality programs.

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR CHANGE IN NUMBER OF QUALITY + HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS

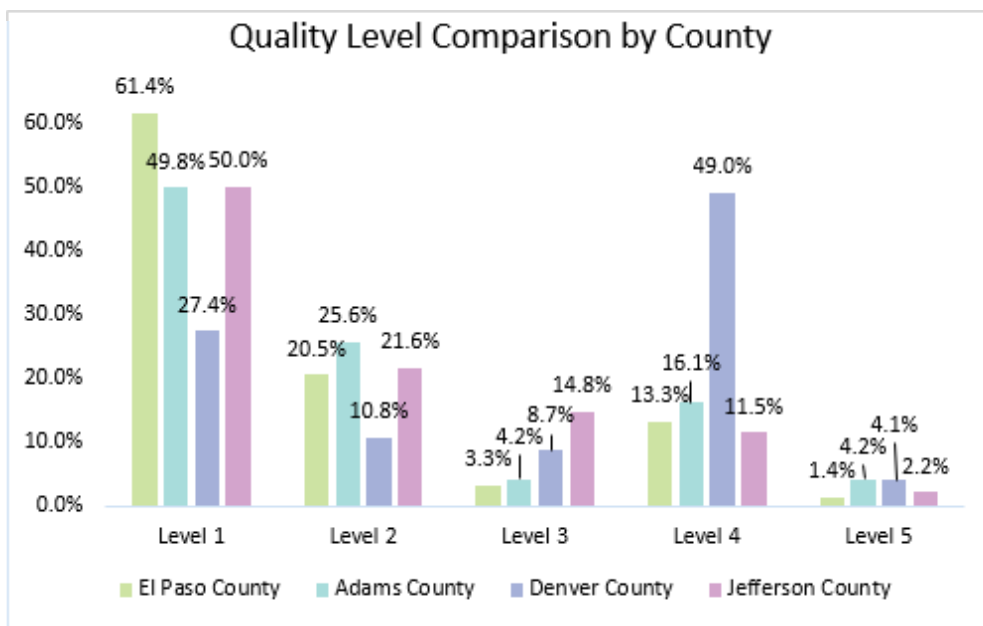
PROGRAM QUALITY LEVELS



CHANGE IN NUMBER OF QUALITY + HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS | OCT 2022-SEPT 2023



QUALITY LEVEL COMPARISON BY COUNTY



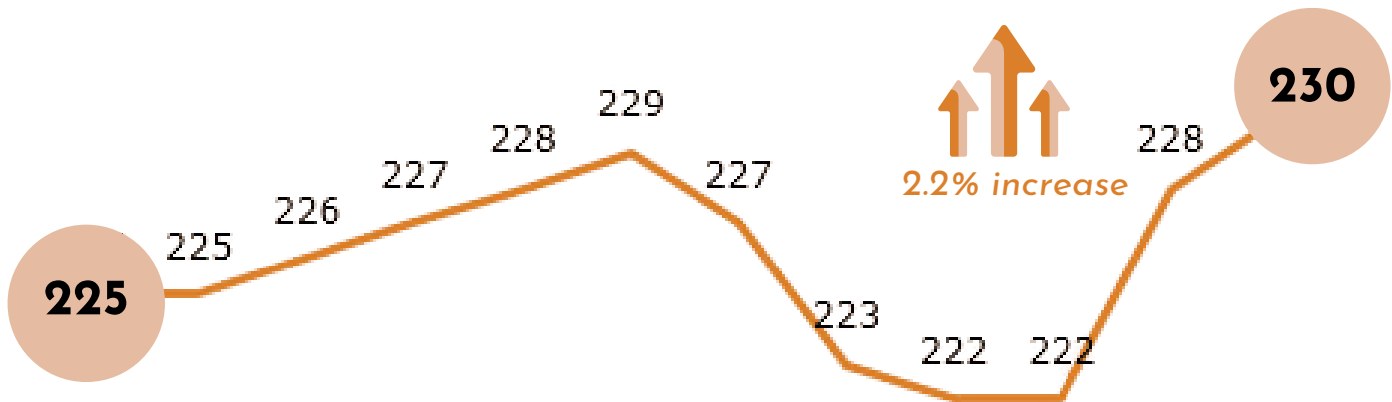
OVERVIEW OF QUALITY LEVEL COMPARISON BY COUNTY

When comparing the quality levels of our ECE programs to the levels of programs in similar counties, we see many parallels. Adams, Denver, El Paso, and Jefferson Counties all have a low percentage of Level 5 programs. In Adams, Denver, and El Paso Counties, the majority of programs that go through the quality ratings process achieve a Level 4 rating. Denver County has the highest percentage of high-quality programs with a total of 61.8% of their programs between Level 3 and Level 5, and El Paso County has the lowest percentage of high-quality programs with a total of 17.9% of our programs between Level 3 and Level 5. Encouraging more programs to go through the quality rating process is an area of opportunity for El Paso County.

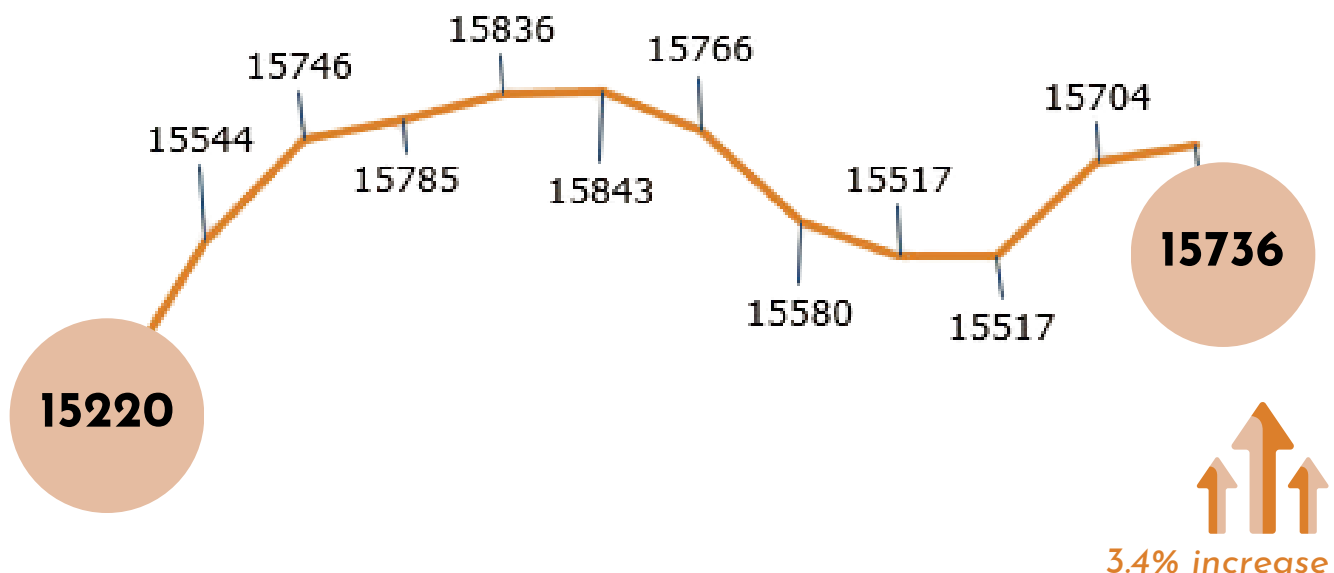
EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS



CHANGE IN NUMBER OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS | OCT 2022-SEPT 2023



CHANGE IN TOTAL LICENSED CENTER CAPACITY | OCT 2022-SEPT 2023



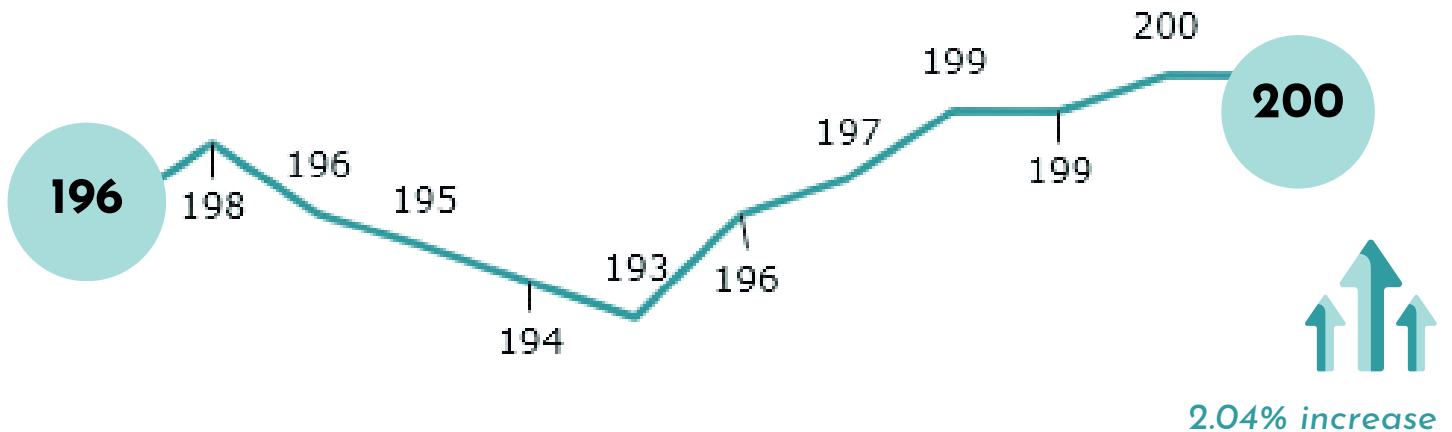
OVERVIEW OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS AND CAPACITY

In October 2022, we started with 225 ECE centers, and we have largely seen a steady increase, followed by a sharp decline ending in June 2023. There has been a 3.4% increase in center capacity over the last year. The number of centers at each quality level has fluctuated some. There has been an 8.3% increase in the number of Level 2 centers and a 7.2% decrease in the number of Level 4 centers. In terms of raw numbers, at the end of September 2023, we had ten Level 3 centers, 51 Level 4 centers, and two Level 5 centers. This indicates that when centers go through the quality rating process, they are largely achieving a high level of quality.

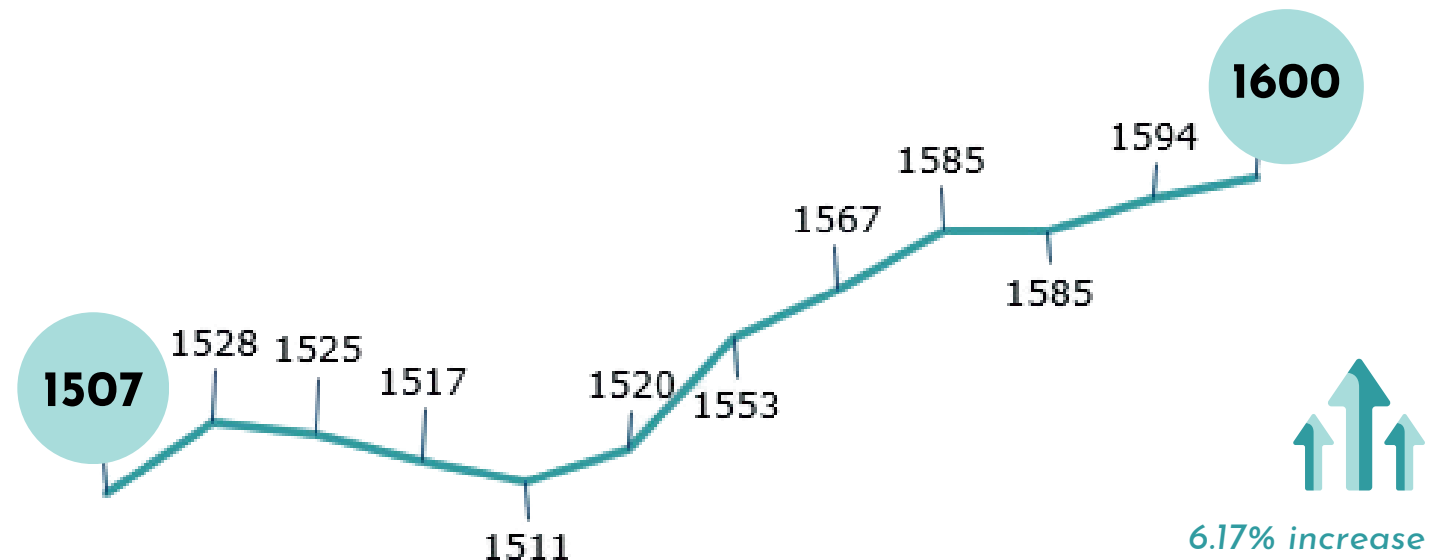
FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES



CHANGE IN NUMBER OF FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES | OCT 2022-SEPT 2023



CHANGE IN TOTAL LICENSED FCCH CAPACITY | OCT 2022-SEPT 2023



OVERVIEW OF FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES AND CAPACITY

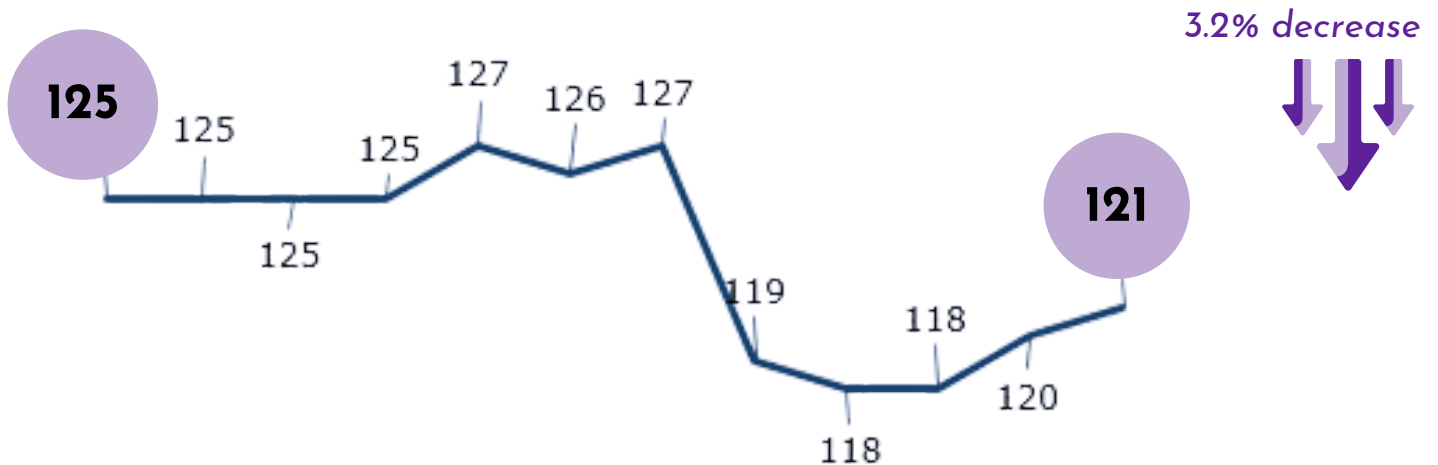
Since October 2022, we have seen minor fluctuation in the number of FCCHs in El Paso County resulting in an overall increase. Currently, FCCH capacity accounts for 9.2% of our total licensed capacity in El Paso County. Over the last year, there was a 33.0% decrease in the number of Level 3 programs and an 8.9% increase in the number of Level 2 programs. There are four FCCH programs that have achieved the highest quality rating, at a Level 5.

CCCAP PROGRAMS

CCCAP = Colorado Child Care Assistance Program

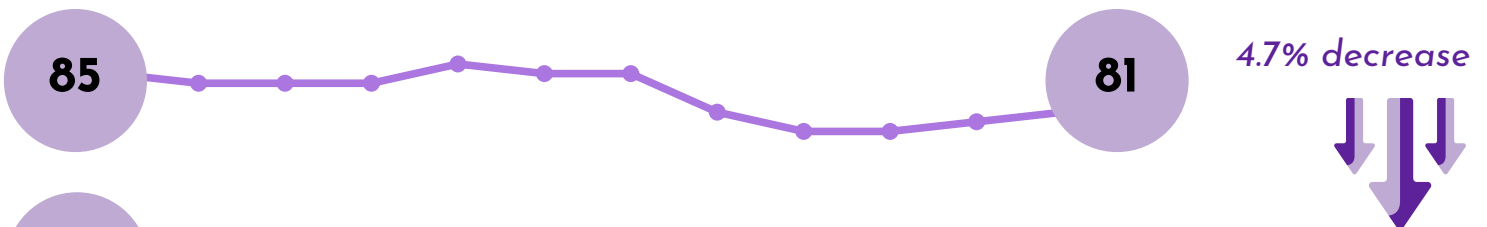


CHANGE IN NUMBER OF CCCAP PROGRAMS | OCT 2022-SEPT 2023

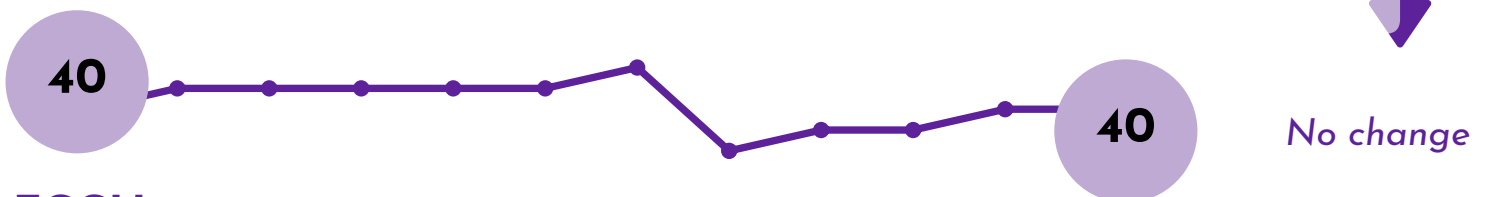


CHANGE IN TOTAL CCCAP PROVIDERS BY TYPE | OCT 2022-SEPT 2023

CENTERS



FCCH



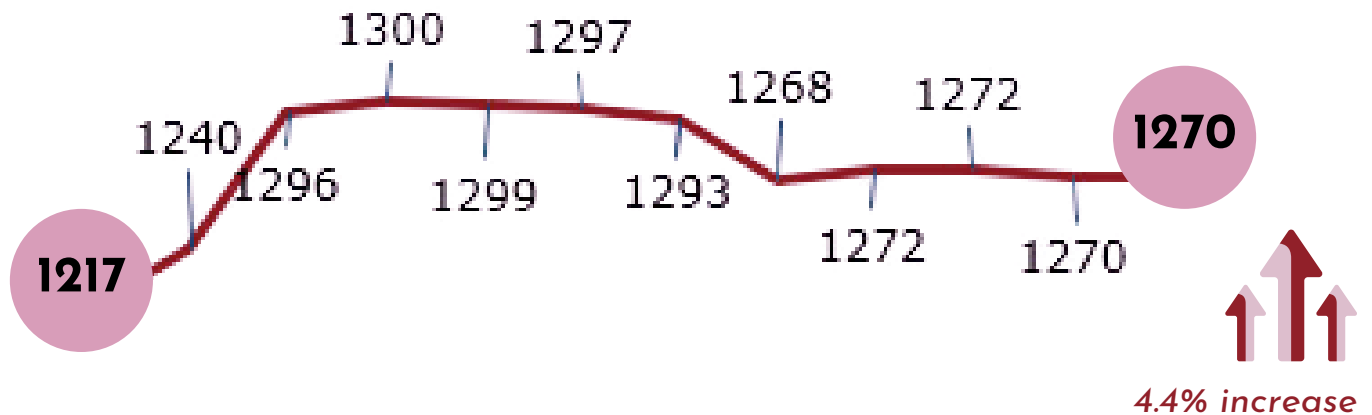
OVERVIEW OF CCCAP PROGRAMS AND CAPACITY

The number of CCCAP programs in our county has overall decreased over the last year. We currently have 121 CCCAP programs, which is an increase since our last report in August. We have seen a 15.4% decrease in Level 3 programs that accept CCCAP. A total of 78.6% of our Level 3 programs and 78.9% of our Level 4 programs accept CCCAP. Encouraging programs to accept CCCAP may be a useful strategy for motivating them to improve their quality rating. Since October 2022, the number of centers accepting CCCAP has decreased by 4.7%, and the number of FCCH providers accepting CCCAP has remained the same.

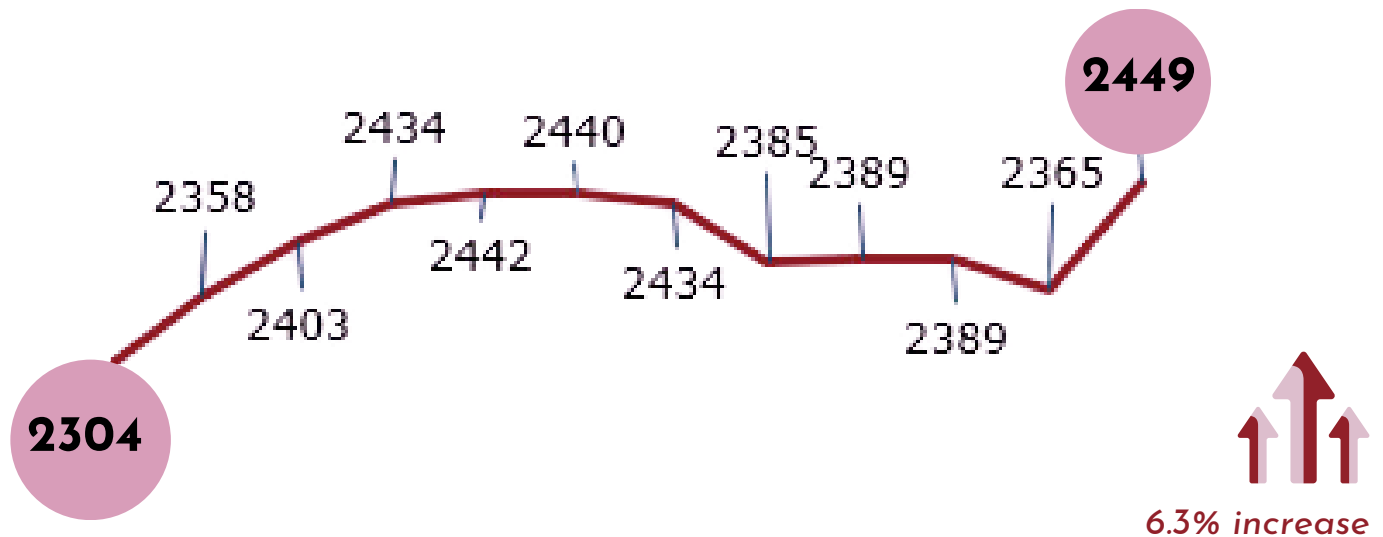
INFANT + TODDLER CAPACITY



CHANGE IN INFANT CAPACITY | OCT 2022-SEPT 2023



CHANGE IN TODDLER CAPACITY | OCT 2022-SEPT 2023



OVERVIEW OF INFANT + TODDLER CAPACITY

There has been some fluctuation in the estimated infant and toddler capacity of programs in El Paso County, but both are exhibiting an overall increase. We now have roughly 1300 infant slots and roughly 2400 toddler slots. These estimates are based on the Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance's (ECCLA's) proposed method of capturing FCCH capacity for infants and toddlers and adding that number to the capacity centers report for the Colorado Information Marketplace Licensed Child Care Facilities dashboard. We have seen a 4.4% increase in estimated infant capacity and a 6.3% increase in estimated toddler capacity.

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CONCLUSION

ECE programs are the backbone of our community; the growth of our local economy is dependent on them. We have a strong early childhood sector in El Paso County with 430 licensed early childhood programs able to serve up to 17,336 children. There are a lot of center-based child care programs, and 44.3% of those programs are committed to being quality programs.

Many of the family child care providers in our community are highly involved in advocacy at the state level as well as at the local level through professional organizations. Our CCCAP providers are made up of many of our quality and high-quality providers, which means that many of the most vulnerable children in our community have access to some of our best providers. Despite these strengths, the early childhood field as a whole has many struggles, including a workforce crisis.

We need to continue our work supporting these early childhood programs, their employees, and the children and families who rely on them to ensure a positive economic outlook for our community.

