



# **Early Care and Education Annual Report**

Calendar Year 2022

December 30, 2022

Maine Department of Health and Human Services  
Office of Child and Family Services

## Introduction

As a State, Maine recognizes the importance of accessible, high quality early childhood education. This type of care benefits children during their most formative years by providing a nurturing environment for them to grow and develop. It also ensures that parents and caregivers can work and provide for their family with the knowledge that their children are well cared for in an environment designed to meet their social, emotional, and educational needs. On a macro-scale, child care also has significant benefit for Maine’s businesses and economy. In many situations, parents cannot work if they do not have access to affordable child care and, if that care is not high quality, parents may make the difficult decision not to work in order to provide care for their children directly. The current economic landscape further demonstrates the need for supporting and expanding the accessibility of high quality care; Maine has seen exceptionally low unemployment and businesses across the state struggle to find qualified applicants for open positions.

Recognizing the vitally important role that child care plays in Maine, the Governor’s [Children’s Cabinet](#) has established key strategies intended to increase the accessibility of affordable early care and education, increase the quality of early care and education, and support the early childhood education workforce. The Children’s Cabinet has been a key partner with the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) in implementing these strategies. During 2022, OCFS further prioritized child care by establishing a separate Associate Director of Early Care and Education position. Previously the areas of early care and education and children’s behavioral health were the responsibility of one Associate Director but recognizing the importance of this work and the significant influx in funding attributed to the pandemic, the Governor proposed and the Legislature supported early care and education with funding for a separate Associate Director position.

The important role of child care in Maine’s economy has also been highlighted in the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development’s [Maine Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029](#). Section E of the strategy focuses on efforts to provide support for infrastructure, “To attract talent to move into the state — and to retain the talent we have — Maine needs a supporting infrastructure that ensures a quality of life.” The first action item for this strategy (E1) focuses on setting the bar high for child care and aiming to create a world-class child care system in Maine. Specific strategies center around expanding the number of quality infant and toddler care slots, investing in the child care workforce, and improving access to the child care subsidy program. To quote the document, “Besides attracting new people, this strategy will also help to increase the number of Maine parents in the workforce.”

<b>Child Care Providers</b>			
<i>County</i>	<b>February 2020 Total Providers</b>	<b>September 2021 Total Providers</b>	<b>September 2022 Total Providers</b>
<i>Androscoggin</i>	291	281	306
<i>Aroostook</i>	121	108	115
<i>Cumberland</i>	514	492	481
<i>Franklin</i>	57	57	53
<i>Hancock</i>	89	90	86
<i>Kennebec</i>	231	206	211
<i>Knox</i>	57	59	57
<i>Lincoln</i>	51	49	44
<i>Oxford</i>	101	98	96
<i>Penobscot</i>	245	242	255
<i>Piscataquis</i>	26	26	31
<i>Sagadahoc</i>	67	57	55
<i>Somerset</i>	75	7173	69
<i>Waldo</i>	71	74	73
<i>Washington</i>	50	54	50
<i>York</i>	291	284	279
<b>Total<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>2,337</b>	<b>2,248</b>	<b>2,261</b>

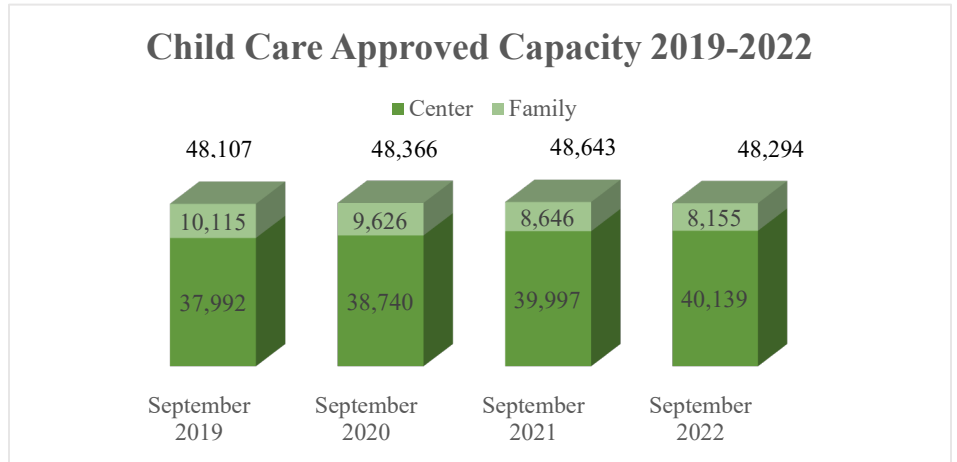
The importance of high quality early childhood education was highlighted during the pandemic. The 2022 report of Maine’s Permanent Commission on the Status of Women noted that due to the pandemic, “Women left the workforce to tend to their family’s needs because they no longer had child

or elder care...The long-term effects of having stepped out of the workforce are likely to be significant for women’s

<sup>1</sup> Total includes camps, CCSP licensed exempt resources, child care facilities and family child care providers.

career paths, earning power, and, ultimately, their retirement income.”<sup>2</sup> The report goes on to note that women’s workforce participation in 2021 averaged around 55% and that this is the lowest it has been in 30 years.

Maine’s businesses continue to experience challenges in hiring, which could be aided by additional access to child care. At the same time, the pandemic has significantly impacted the child care sector with issues such as workers leaving the industry due to health concerns, increased costs related to PPE and cleaning supplies, program closures due to illness, etc. From February of 2020 to September of 2022 Maine experienced a 3.3% decrease in the number of child care providers, from 2,337 to 2,261. While the decrease in the number of providers has been concerning, the data reflects that the number of approved child care slots has increased slightly since 2019.



In 2019, Maine participated in a [gap analysis](#) on the need for child care versus available child care slots conducted by the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC). That analysis showed there was a 9.2% gap in demand versus supply across Maine for children under the age of six with all available parents working. This equated to 4,920 children. Maine recently engaged with BPC to conduct an updated gap analysis which showed a 2.4 point decrease in the gap with 3,579 children demand versus supply gap. Notably, the BPC data on licensed capacity also includes public Pre-K programs which are not under the purview of the Department of Health and Human Services and thus are not included in the capacity data provided above. The reduction in the gap is attributed, at least in part, to a 10.9% expansion in facility capacity, although the reduction may also be impacted in part by the decision of some parents to leave the workforce to provide care for their children, thus removing them from being designated as having children in need of care. OCFS also recognizes that capacity reflects an aspirational figure that is not fully reflective of the current ability of providers to meet child care needs. For example, some providers report challenges in staffing their programs at the level required to fill all approved/licensed slots.

## Early Care and Education Relief Efforts

Recognizing the significant impact that the pandemic had on early care and education, the federal Government has provided multiple rounds of relief funding since May of 2020. This funding was delivered through temporary increases in the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). In addition, Maine used portions of more generalized relief funding to support child care providers. Early on in planning for the distribution of relief funds, Maine began using the Children’s Cabinet goals of increasing accessibility, affordability, and quality and strengthening the workforce as a guide for making key investments to support Maine’s early care and education system that both met the short-term financial needs of providers and increased the strength and resiliency of the industry long-term. The pandemic highlighted the industry’s needs regarding workforce. The Department responded with specific initiatives targeted toward recruitment, retention, and training of the early childhood education workforce.

The most significant influx of funding came in 2021 when the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) was passed, which included \$121.9 million for early care and education through CCDBG. The majority of this funding was provided directly to providers through stabilization grants and funding for staff stipends that totalled over \$72 million. Recently the Department released [data](#) on the grants that illustrates the financial support each participating provider received. Over

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.maine.gov/sos/womens-comm/documents/2022%20PCSW%20The%20Care%20Economy.pdf>

95% of eligible programs applied for and received stabilization funding. Maine has received attention<sup>3</sup> for being among the first states to develop a plan for allocating federal relief dollars and to begin distributing funding directly to providers directly to providers.

### Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act

- \$10.9 million through CCDBG
- Funds used to provide grants to providers for COVID-19 related costs, provide child care subsidy for essential workers, and increase support to low-income families by waiving parent fees for families participating in CCSP

### Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF)

- The Governor allocated \$8.4 million of generalized relief funding to provide reimbursement to providers for COVID-19 related business expenses
- Grants totaled nearly \$2.2 million

### Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriation (CRRSA) Act

- \$30.5 million through CCDBG
- 75% (over \$22 million) directed to provider stabilization grants
- Remaining funds used to strengthen the system and support families through initiatives including improvements to professional development opportunities for early childhood educators, improvements to the Child Care Choice website, support for the Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP), and waiving of copayments for CCSP families through 9/30/22

### Payroll Protection Program (PPP)

- OCFS worked with the Small Business Administration (SBA) to identify and provide outreach to early care and education providers which increased both participation in PPP by providers and the average amount of the provider's loans

### American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

- \$121.9 million through CCDBG
- The majority (over \$73 million) funded stabilization grants to providers and \$200 monthly stipends to child care workers
- An additional \$13.6 million has been allocated to transition grants for providers to further stabilize and support the industry with payments occurring from October of 2022 through May of 2023
- Additional funds built upon CRRSA projects to improve quality through professional development opportunities, access through increased CCSP eligibility and incentives for CCSP participation and new providers

In addition to stabilization grants, providers also benefited from over \$10 million in funding to pay Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP) providers based on enrollment, rather than attendance.

Typically, CCSP providers are paid only for the days in which a child attends but this became a significant issue during the pandemic for a variety of reasons including child illness, program closures due to COVID-19 exposure or staff illness, and quarantine requirements for children exposed to COVID-19. These issues were particularly impactful in the time before vaccines were available for children 6 months – 5 years. Paying providers based on enrollment allowed for further financial stability of programs participating in CCSP during COVID-related disruptions.

Additional funding was used to incentivize licensed child care providers to accept CCSP and increase incentives to provide care for infants. A stipend program for newly licensed facilities was also established to provide assistance with start-up costs.

Using federal relief funding, accessibility and affordability

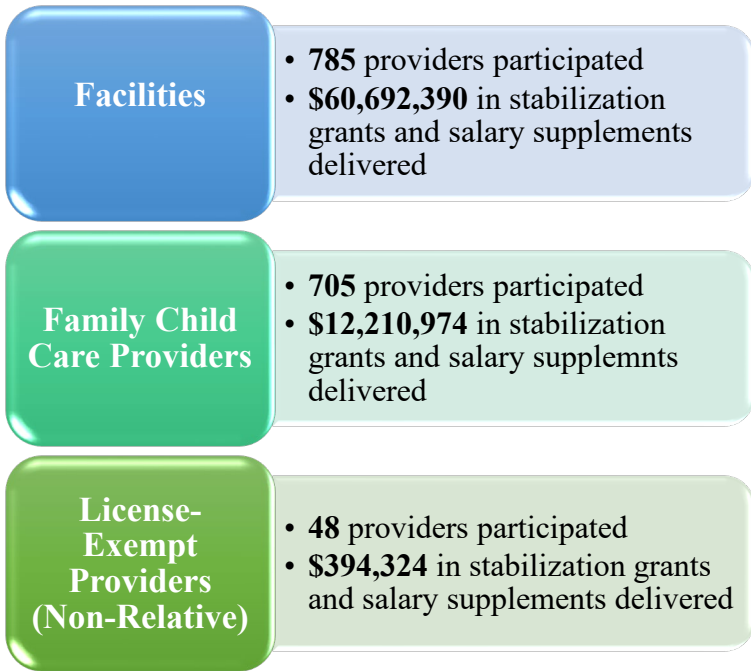
were targeted jointly through initiatives that included waiving of CCSP parent fees for families at or below 60% of the State Median Income until September of 2023 and increased eligibility for CCSP for families at 85%-100% of the State Median Income from May of 2022 until September of 2022.

OCFS has solicited feedback from parents regarding these initiatives and found, based on two parent surveys, that parents overwhelmingly reported that receiving this support was a stress reliever and allowed them to use the savings to meet their

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/10/21/fact-sheet-american-rescue-plan-funds-provided-a-critical-lifeline-to-200000-child-care-providers-helping-millions-of-families-to-work/>  
<https://www.childcareservices.org/2022/01/24/state-investments-in-the-child-care-workforce/>

basic needs, especially in light of rising costs for housing, utilities, and other essentials. Parents reported being able to re-engage in the workforce or enroll in higher education to better their career prospects as a result of this support and that these programs and increased earnings helped them to improve the circumstances of their family.

### Stabilization Grant Data

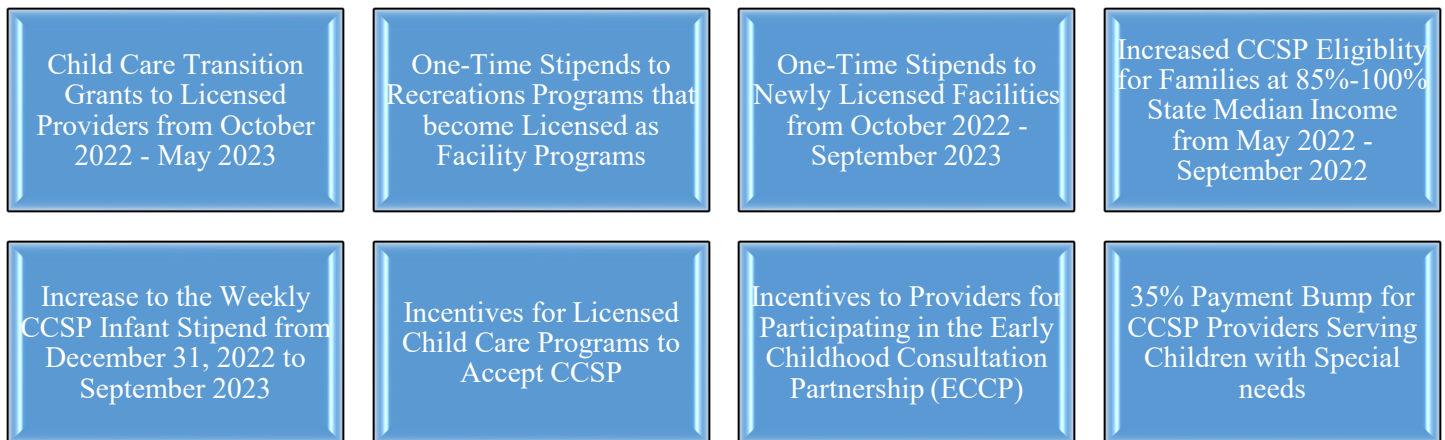


The goal of strengthening the early care and education workforce was targeted through multiple initiatives related to professional development and support for individuals who seek a degree or other certification in the field. One of the most impactful was the implementation of a salary supplement program which provided \$200 per month for each direct care staff person working at a licensed child care program receiving a stabilization grant. Using ARPA funds, over \$16 million was provided directly to staff members through grants to providers that they were required to pass on to their staff. This directly targeted one of the most pressing issues impacting the early care and education workforce: low wages. The May 2021 Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates the mean wage for a child care worker in Maine is \$14.90 per hour, which equates to \$31,000 per year<sup>4</sup>. As many companies across the economy increased starting salaries to recruit individuals to fill vacant positions, providers reported significant challenges competing and the need for additional supports to avoid increasing the cost of child care for the families they serve. The workforce stipend

provided direct assistance in meeting this challenge.

In October 2022, the Department released its updated [Child Care Plan for Maine](#) which outlined new initiatives utilizing available ARPA funding. In planning for these initiatives the Department once again considered the priorities of the Children’s Cabinet and also incorporated feedback from providers. Initiatives were also developed to target areas of the greatest need, for instance infant care, and to encourage participation in programs that benefit providers and families such as CCSP and ECCP.

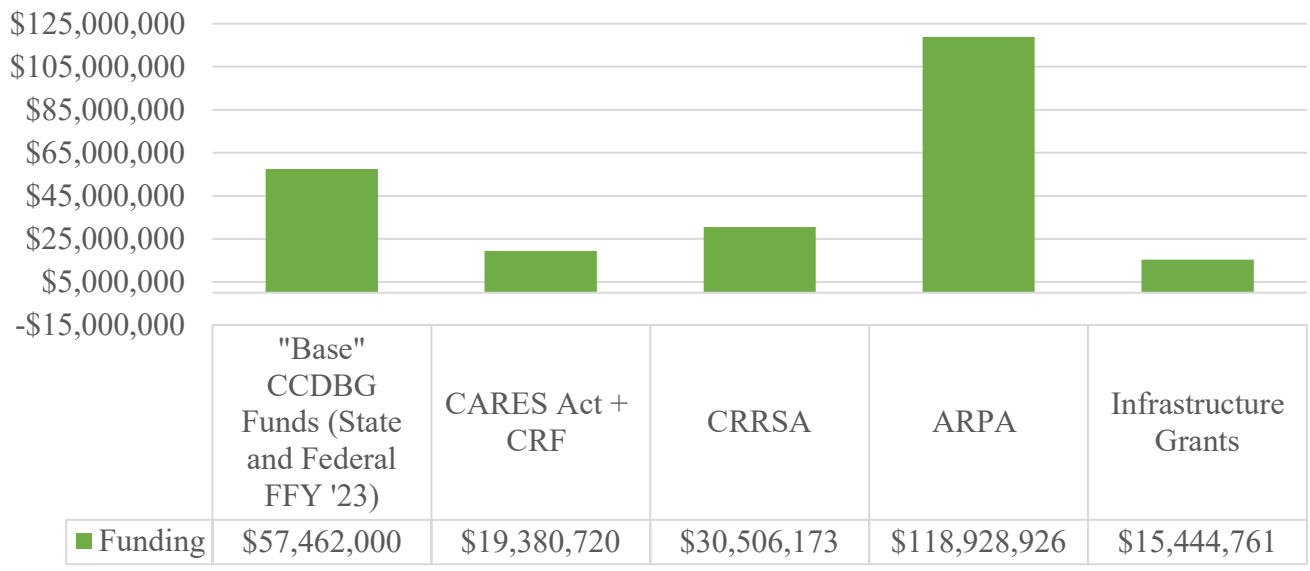
### Child Care Plan for Maine - Highlights



Below is a chart that depicts the financial scope of the federal relief funding that has been infused into the early care and education sector beginning in 2020. In addition, a chart with additional information about the initiatives and projects funded using federal relief dollars is attached to this report as Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes399011.htm#st>

## Federal Relief – Child Care Budget Impacts



### Workforce

Given the success of the ARPA-funded stipends for the early care and education workforce, the Governor worked with Speaker Ryan Fecteau and the Legislature to include funding in the 2022 supplemental budget to continue the salary stipends on an ongoing basis. While federal relief funding was temporary, the salary supplement program was [codified in statute](#) in 2022 and the budget ([Public Law 2021, Ch. 635](#)) included ongoing general funds for these supplements. This has allowed OCFS to continue the \$200 stipends while working to develop and implement a system of tiered salary supplements that is expected to go into effect on July 1, 2023. Per statute, tiers will be based on education and experience with the supplement amount increasing as an individual’s qualifications increase.

The Department continues to work with Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ-PDN) to strengthen the workforce through professional development opportunities, accreditation support, and the workforce career lattice. In addition, Maine is partnering with Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC) to fund and support the TEACH scholarship program with the goal of offering educational opportunities to improve both the knowledge and compensation of early childhood educators. The Department recognizes that the value of this program is returned directly to the children and families who receive care from a well-qualified workforce.

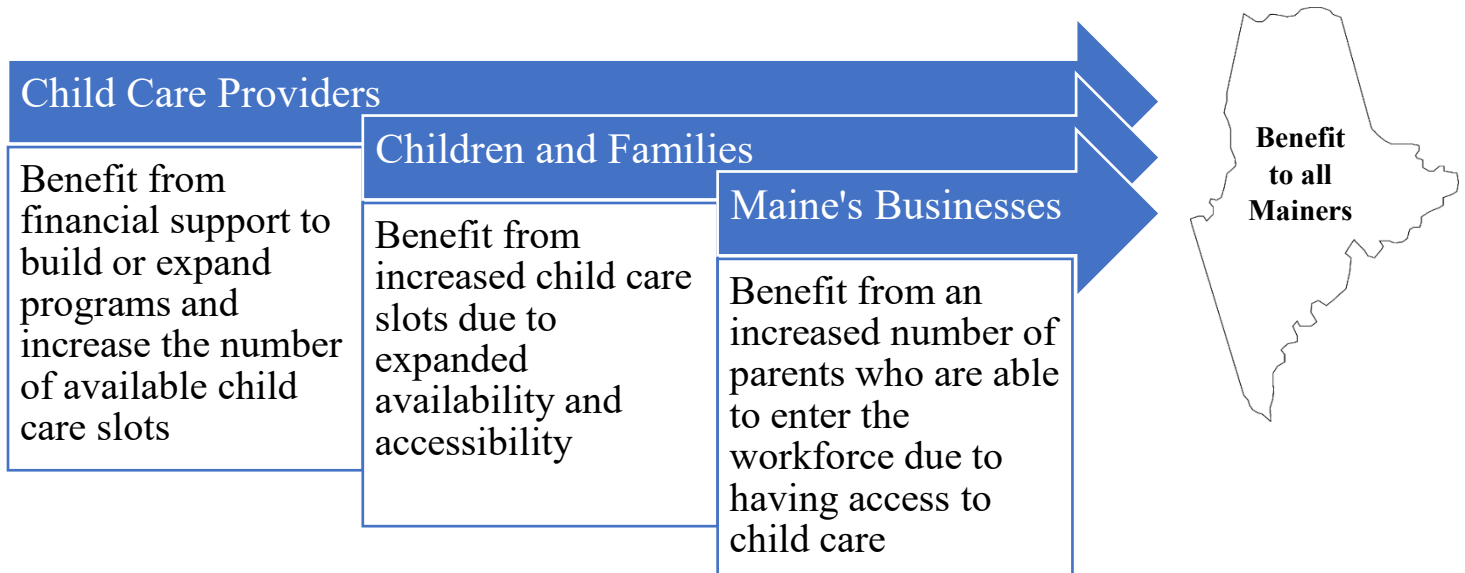
OCFS, in partnership with MRTQ-PDN, was approved by the Maine Department of Labor (DOL) as an Intermediary Sponsor of the Maine Early Childhood Education Registered Apprenticeship Program. Under this program, the Early Childhood Education Specialist 1 (ECES1) occupation was approved by the Maine DOL. Apprentices receive either the Maine Infant Toddler Credential, the Maine Youth Development Credential or the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential at the end of their apprenticeship. Financial support for wage supplements and mentor stipends is part of the program. This will help ensure the success of this apprenticeship model for the early care and education field. Additionally, the first phase of MRTQ-PDN’s sponsorship will be a field test in partnership with KVCAP/Educare Central Maine. MRTQ-PDN’s intention is to then add a second Early Childhood Education Specialist 2 (ECES2) occupation in partnership with the T.E.A.C.H. program, where a practitioner can eventually be awarded an associate degree in Early Childhood Education.



## Infrastructure – Expanding Accessibility

Additionally in 2022, OCFS launched \$15 million of funding from the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan, proposed by the Governor and approved by the Legislature, to provide financial support (through infrastructure grants) for providers to open, renovate, expand, and/or construct new family child care programs and child care facilities. This funding is expected to add more than 3,500 new child care slots within the State and improve the accessibility of child care for families, allowing parents to work and/or engage in educational opportunities to further their career opportunities.

OCFS is partnering with Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI) to administer these grants and, as of mid-October 2022, 115 family child care providers and 85 facilities had applications in process or submitted. More information about the grant process is available on CEI's [website](#).



## Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP)

The Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP) helps eligible families pay for child care so that parents can work, go to school, or participate in a job training program. Special rules also allow for eligibility for families where the adults are retired but serving as the legal guardian of a child. Participants must meet income guidelines, demonstrate proof of eligibility through work or educational program that creates a need for child care, and typically are responsible for a co-pay, also known as a parent fee (note: Maine has used federal relief funding to waive parent fees during the pandemic). Families may pick their own provider, ensuring they can go to work or school safe in the knowledge that their child is being well cared for. Maine also used federal relief funding to increase engagement in CCSP by having the rules, eligibility guidelines, and application for CCSP translated into several of the most common languages in Maine. More information is available on the OCFS [website](#).

From May 2021 to present, there has been a 6% increase in the number of children participating in the Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP). Maine continues to provide subsidy support to 100% of qualifying families that apply. Unlike some other states, there is currently no waiting list for subsidy. Over 3,000 families (and over 4,800 children) currently benefit from CCSP, enabling them to afford child care and work or attend a qualifying educational program.

OCFS has also utilized CCSP as a method to target the state's broader goals around early childhood education. Currently CCSP funds are being used to provide targeted support designed to increase accessibility and quality, as well as strengthen the early care and education workforce. Providers receive a \$100 per week stipend (increasing to \$150 per week through September 2023) for each infant receiving CCSP that they serve. This helps to offset the high cost of providing high quality infant care given the low ratio of staff to infants and thus incentivize providers to provide infant care. Currently

252 infants statewide are benefiting from this stipend. In addition, CCSP providers who participate in the Maine’s Quality Rating Improvement System and are ranked as a high-quality program are eligible for a 10% quality bump payment for enrolled infants and toddlers who receive subsidy – again targeting a population of children for whom providers have traditionally struggled to cover their costs to provide care.



CCSP continues to focus on improving quality by partnering with MRTQ-PDN to provide training opportunities, including Strengthening Business Practices for Child Care training. Additional support for parent leadership programming has also been implemented through the expansion of the Parent Ambassador Program to more parents statewide.

CCSP funding has also been utilized to waive licensing costs for providers and costs associated with completing fingerprint-based background checks for all child care staff. Implementing these background checks brought Maine into full compliance with federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) requirements originally

established in 2014, allowing Maine to avoid a financial penalty associated with non-compliance. OCFS is pleased to be able to bring Maine into compliance while ensuring no financial impact on providers.

## Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP®)

The Early Childhood Consultation Partnership is an evidence-based, time-limited, and intensive consultation service that helps child care providers, educators, and caregivers of young children to build both an understanding of the social-emotional needs of children and the skills to meet those needs. All services are provided at no cost to providers and families. Mental health consultants trained in the ECCP® model work directly with child care staff, educators, and the child’s caregiver(s) to identify and implement strategies to support children’s emotional wellbeing and effectively manage challenging behavior that may otherwise jeopardize a child’s ability to participate in an early childhood education setting.



Consultation is provided directly to early care and education providers, including family child care providers, public Pre-K programs, public elementary schools, and afterschool programs. There are three service types available: Child-Specific

Services, Core Classroom Services, and Family Child Care Program Services. Core Classroom and Family Child Care Program Services focus on improving the social-emotional climate of whole classrooms or home-based child care programs and helping providers respond to the social-emotional needs of all children in their programs. Child-Specific Services work to prevent suspension or expulsion of children from their early care and education program and

### ECCP® Implementation

Phase 1: 2020-21	Phase 2: 2021-22	Phase 3: 2023 onward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LD 997</li> <li>• ECCP model chosen</li> <li>• Installation activities begin</li> <li>• Provider RFP #1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First five consultants trained</li> <li>• Services began</li> <li>• Provider RFP #2</li> <li>• Expanded from 5 to 8 counties</li> <li>• Hired &amp; trained three additional consultants</li> <li>• Evaluation begins</li> <li>• LD 533 enacted</li> <li>• Community trainings &amp; mental health consultation groups start</li> <li>• Integrated processes &amp; systems with MRTQ</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jan 2023: Statewide expansion</li> <li>• Provider RFP #3</li> <li>• 8 to 16 consultants</li> <li>• Statewide coverage</li> <li>• Increase statewide outreach</li> <li>• April 2023: Evaluation complete</li> <li>• Focus on fidelity &amp; sustainability</li> <li>• Workforce development</li> </ul>

connect children and families with mental health resources early to prevent escalation of mental health needs. The service is available for children birth through age eight.



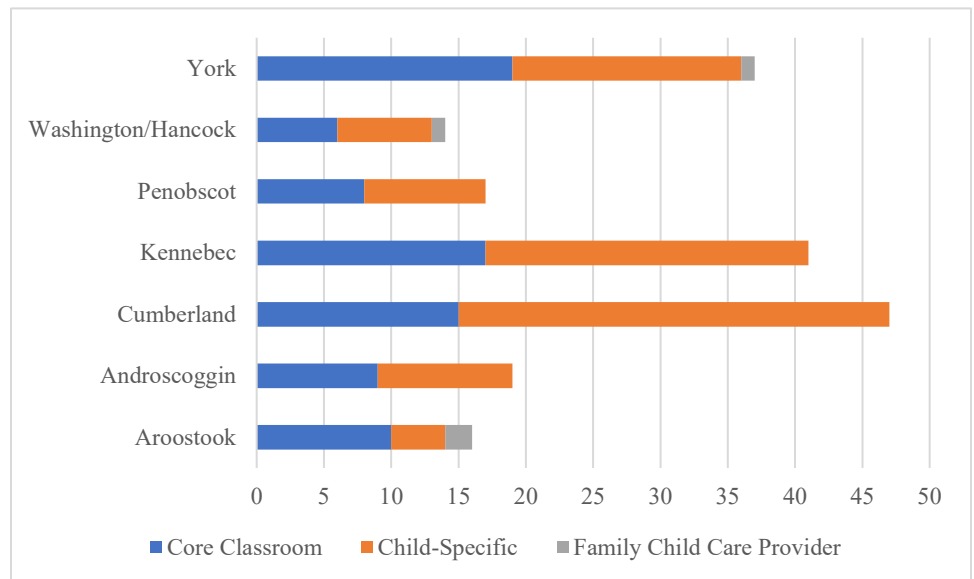
ECCP® was established in Maine following the passage of [Public Law 2019, Ch. 481](#), *An Act to Promote Social and Emotional Learning and Development for Young Children*, which required the Department to develop and implement an early childhood consultation program. In response, OCFS researched, identified, and selected the ECCP® model, an evidence-based model used successfully in Connecticut for over 20 years.

In 2022, OCFS received additional funding from the Legislature and utilized federal relief funding to expand ECCP® and also fund the development and completion of a program evaluation to determine its impact on providers, families, and children. That evaluation will be complete in June 2023. ECCP® is currently available in Androscoggin, Aroostook, Cumberland, Hancock, Kennebec, Penobscot, Washington, and York counties and will expand statewide in early 2023. Currently providers are receiving a financial incentive to participate in ECCP®, funded by federal relief dollars.

Other cross-systems collaboration efforts have been important in supporting the implementation of Maine ECCP®, including working with MRTQ-PDN on a referral and triage process as well as awarding elective Professional Development credit hours through the MRTQ-PDN’s Registry for Core Classroom Services. OCFS also continues to convene a statewide cross-agency workgroup that meets regularly to plan implementation toward eventual statewide expansion.

Since initial implementation in January 2021 through September 2022, Maine ECCP® served 1,081 children and 197 teachers/providers with Core Classroom Services and 102 individual children with Child-Specific Services. Family Child Care Provider Services began in September 2021 with four family child care programs provided this service to date. In early data, 99% of children receiving Child-Specific Services through Maine ECCP® were not suspended or expelled from their child care programs.

**Maine ECCP® Services Opened by County**  
(01/01/21-10/11/22)



OCFS has contracted with SRI International to conduct a process evaluation of the implementation of the Maine ECCP® pilot. Data will be collected in late 2022 through early 2023 with an evaluation report delivered to OCFS in 2023. OCFS and Maine ECCP consultants continued to receive training and technical assistance from the service developers and national experts in 2022. Additionally, data system improvements were also delivered in 2022.

In the coming year OCFS looks forward to statewide expansion and completion of the evaluation, including any recommendations by the evaluator to improve or strengthen the program implementation.

## First4ME Early Care and Education Program

In 2021, the Legislature passed, and the Governor signed [Public Law 2021, Ch. 457](#), *An Act To Support Children’s Health Development and School Success*, which established the First4Me Early Care and Education Program. The goal of First4ME is to improve the social, emotional, educational, and health outcomes for children under the age of six. This is accomplished through access to high quality early child care and education that utilizes a two-generation, community-based approach to caring for children from birth to kindergarten. This model integrates comprehensive resources and services for children and families into the child care settings to build strength among the participating families, provide supportive services to address identify needs, and ensure a wholistic approach to child development that integrates across both home and the child care setting. This model is based on the Elevate Maine/Somerset program implemented by Educare of Central Maine (a program of the Kennebec Valley Community Action Program).

The law directs the Department to select up to five pilot sites through a competitive bid process with these sites commencing a three-year pilot project beginning in January 2023. The pilot program was funded with \$2.9 million per year. Currently OCFS is partnering with Educare, Head Start and the First 10 Initiative on implementation. The competitive bid process is underway and in the coming year the pilot(s) will commence. The First4ME team within OCFS is fully staffed and prepared to support the pilot sites. The pilot will also include an evaluation component to determine the impact of the program and feasibility of further expansion of the model. The Department is in the process of procuring an independent evaluator to conduct the evaluation which will run through December 2025, with the result being a report on program outcomes, cost analysis, impact on participant child and families, and expansion viability.

## Help Me Grow

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[Public Law 2021, Ch. 457](#) also codified the Department's plans to establish Help Me Grow in Maine, which seeks to connect individuals with information and services about child development and community resources available to children and families. OCFS partnered with 211 Maine to allow any parent, caregiver, or provider to call for support and referrals. Help Me Grow launched in November 2022 with the goal of increasing access to and referrals for early intervention services, with the additional goal of increasing the early periodic screening, diagnosis, and treatment (EPSDT) services that ensure children receive needed services as the earliest possible juncture. Maine was the 29<sup>th</sup> state to establish an affiliation with Help Me Grow.



At its core, Help Me Grow serves to connect families to information in services. Through a centralized access point (call to 211 Maine) caregivers can share any concerns, learn about child development, and receive information and referrals for community resources. Help Me Grow also includes follow-up with parents and

is provided at no cost.

Help Me Grow Maine aligns with an initiative from the Maine Children's Cabinet to increase developmental screening and surveillance. The pilot initiative for promoting the Ages and Stages Question Online Tool became embedded as part of the Help Me Grow Maine system from the start. These initiatives are intentionally woven together and supported by state-level leadership to promote the priority of maintaining a focus that children grow up in safe, healthy, and supportive environments, providing a foundation for them to thrive throughout their lives.

To bolster access to developmental screening, the Office of MaineCare Services and the Office of Child and Family Services have collaborated to purchase the Ages and Stages Questionnaire® Online. This is an online platform that allows families to complete questionnaires at home from any device and receive child development learning activities. This partnership combines several key partners across offices to promote the use of the system, including the Department of Education, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Office of MaineCare Services, and Office of Child and Family Services. Since the start of this project, 28 Ages and Stages Social Emotional® (ASQ:SE-2) screens have been completed and 24 Ages and Stages Questionnaires®(ASQ-3) developmental screenings have been completed.

Through this work, the State, including the Departments of Health and Human Services and Education and the Children's Cabinet can engage in more long-range planning as the needs of the population are identified, as well as allowing for the identification and addressing of any gaps in services.

## Preschool Development Grant (PDG)

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The Office of Child and Family Services, in partnership with the Early Learning Team and Child Development Services at the Department of Education (DOE), submitted a PDG (B-5) Renewal Grant application to the Administration of Children and Families at the US Department of Health and Human Services in November 2022 and was recently notified that Maine had been awarded the grant..

With the grant funding OCFS and DOE will work to build needed infrastructure and capacity to create a more coordinated, efficient, and high-quality mixed delivery system for children ages birth to five and their families, targeting key needs surfaced in the initial PDG needs assessment. This plan builds upon the successful cross agency work to ensure that all children enter Kindergarten prepared to succeed.

## 2023 and Beyond

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As OCFS looks to 2023 and beyond, the focus will continue to center around expanding the accessibility and affordability of high-quality early care and education. Soon, the Bipartisan Policy Center is expected to release an updated child care gap analysis which will provide valuable insight into ongoing efforts to support the child care sector in areas where the need is the greatest.

In 2023, OCFS expects to see the benefits of the infrastructure grants as new providers launch their programs and existing providers expand. OCFS is also looking forward to full implementation of ECCP®, Help Me Grow, the Child Care Salary Supplement program and First4ME and will continue to work collaboratively with contracted providers to conduct comprehensive evaluations of these services to ensure they are effective resources for Maine’s families and early care and education providers. OCFS is committed to ensuring that services and supports are not only available to families and providers, but that they are effective and utilize state resources in a manner that maximizes effectiveness.

Maine’s ongoing initiatives to support providers and conclude the distribution of federal relief dollars will continue as outlined in the [Child Care Plan for Maine](#). In addition, Maine will continue to partnerships in-state and nationally to advocate as appropriate for additional federal attention and funding to early care and education to ensure the long-term sustainability of this vitally important sector.

Leadership and staff at the Department of Health and Human Services also extend our deep gratitude to the early care providers and educators who have navigated incredibly challenging waters over the last few years. Their commitment, paired with recent investments and the launch of new and bolstered programming, keeps Maine well-positioned to meet the needs of children and families.