

6. Child Care Availability

What It Is

The availability of licensed child care can be measured by comparing the available licensed child care spaces to the estimated number of children who are either receiving informal care, such as that offered by a relative, nanny, or neighbor, or who are unsupervised. The potential need for child care is based on the number of children with a single working parent or two working parents, while the supply figures are based on the number of spaces available in licensed child care centers and smaller family child care homes.

Why It Is Important

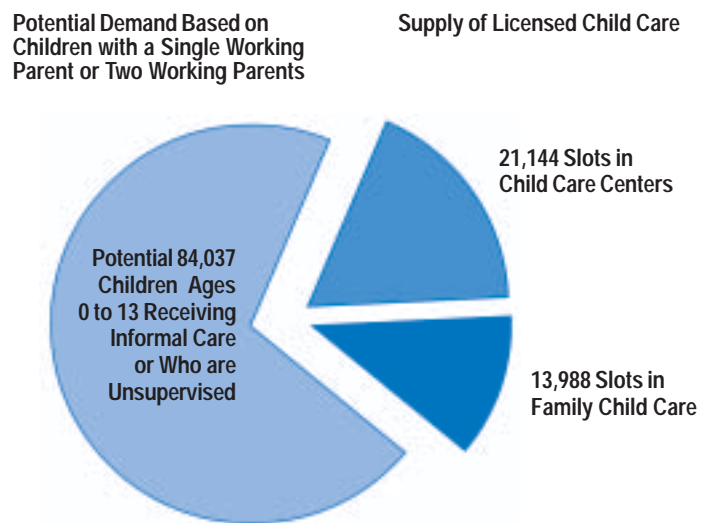
The availability of quality, affordable child care makes it possible for parents to work and helps children prepare for school. Child care for those who need it, and in particular subsidized care for low income families, is essential in helping children access early socialization experiences that will prepare them for kindergarten. Quality child care and preschool experiences can provide developmentally appropriate enrichment. Pre-literacy activities can provide children with the necessary social and cognitive skills to prepare them for later school success.

How We Are Doing

Licensed child care slots are in short supply in comparison to the potential demand. In 2000, there were an estimated 119,169 children ages 0 to 13 who had either a single working parent, or two parents who both worked. At the same time, as there were only 35,132 licensed child care spaces, the remaining 84,037 children either receive informal care, such as that offered by a relative, nanny, or neighbor, or were unsupervised.⁴ Subsidized child care that is available to low-income families also is a critical issue, particularly for those families transitioning off of public assistance. In fiscal year 2001-02, the Contra Costa Child Care Council reported that out of 1,794

licensed child care centers and licensed family child care homes, 48 or 2.7% were subsidized child care centers serving 3,132 children ages 0 to 13.⁵

Figure 6.1 — Number of Licensed Spaces Available, and Potential Number of Children Receiving Informal Care or Unsupervised, 2000



Source: California Resource and Referral Network, California Child Care Portfolio, 2001.

Note: For children ages 0 to 13.

Data Development

More data is needed to learn about the condition of child care in Contra Costa County, including the number of children who are in informal child care or who are unsupervised, the number of child care facilities that are exempt from state licensing, the quality of child care programs, and affordability of child care, especially the eligibility of child care subsidies for low-income parents. Please refer to the Data Development Agenda section of this report for more information.

⁴ State child care licensing laws exempt those who care for the children of only one family, besides their own, from child care licensing requirements. There is no data available on these "exempt providers," nor is there data available on the number of young children cared for in their own homes by a relative or nanny.

⁵ For a resource directory of 183 after school and school-age care programs in selected areas of Contra Costa County, see "Contra Costa Afterschool for All," June, 2001, available at www.afterschoolforallcontracosta.org