

Universal PreK Expansion

How Many 3- and 4-Year-Olds
Does California Enroll?

Technical Supplement

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Introduction

This technical supplement provides additional information about the methodology and data used in the brief *Universal PreK Expansion: How Many 3- and 4-Year-Olds Does California Enroll?* The brief describes trends in 3- and 4-year-old enrollment in California’s publicly funded PreK programs—including transitional kindergarten (TK), the California State Preschool Program (CSPP), Head Start, and subsidized child care—between 2019–20 and 2024–25. This technical supplement summarizes the methods used to create the figures in the brief and provides data used for population, program enrollment, dual enrollment, unduplicated enrollment, and uptake rates.

Data Sources

To estimate the number of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in publicly funded early childhood education (ECE), we added total unduplicated enrollment by age group in TK, CSPP, Head Start, and subsidized child care. To estimate the percentage of all 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in publicly funded ECE, we divided unduplicated enrollment by the total population of 3- and 4-year-olds in California. We used the following data sources:

- **Population.** We used U.S. Census Bureau estimates of population as of July 1, 2025, to estimate the population of preschool-age children in California. Since school age is determined as of September 1, the children in each age cohort are slightly older than the school-age population. Given observed population declines in recent years, using July data likely overestimates the school-year population, therefore yielding conservative estimates of the share of population enrolled. Population data are sensitive to assumptions about migration and birth rate and thus may not match estimates from prior years. Data are estimates rounded to the nearest hundred.
- **TK Enrollment.** Data are publicly available from the California Department of Education and represent census day counts from October of each year.
- **CSPP Enrollment.** Data were obtained from California Department of Education via personal communication and represent averages of October and April enrollment counts for part-day and full-day CSPP. These data are for school year of age (i.e., children having a birthday between September 2 and September 1 of a given school year). (Note that CSPP data on the California Department of Education website are reported by statutory age. California’s statutory definition of a 4-year-old is a child who turns 4 between September 2 of one year and December 1 of the following year—a 15-month span, which includes children who were age 3 if their birthdays were between September 2 and December 1 of the school year. Children considered 3-year-olds by this definition have their 3rd birthday between December 2 and December 1 of the following year.)
- **Head Start Enrollment.** We used cumulative enrollment counts by year of age from the Office of Head Start. Head Start data from 2019–20 and 2024–25 were not available, so we used data from the prior year as a proxy.

- **Subsidized Child Care Enrollment.** We used October enrollment counts from the California Department of Social Services for the following programs: the Alternative Payment Program; CalWORKs Stages 1, 2, and 3; subsidized family child care home networks; General Child Care; migrant programs; and Severely Handicapped. The Bridge Program for foster youth and California Community College CalWORKs Stage 2 were not included due to data limitations. The California Department of Social Services does not report enrollment for CalWORKs Stage 1 by single year of age, but rather for ages 2–5 combined. To estimate the number of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled by single year of age, we assumed that the proportion of children enrolled by age was similar to CalWORKs Stage 2. We therefore multiplied the percentage of children who were either age 3 or 4 in CalWORKs Stage 2 in the same year by the total number of children who were under age 6 in CalWORKs Stage 1 (between 21% and 23%, depending on the year). Total subsidized child care enrollment is an estimate and thus rounded to the nearest hundred.

Calculating Unduplicated Enrollment

Since children may be enrolled in more than one publicly funded ECE program at a time—for example, a child may attend Head Start in the morning and receive a child-care subsidy in the afternoon—we estimated dual enrollment (i.e., the number of children we estimated to be enrolled in more than one subsidized program). Then, we subtracted dual enrollment from program enrollment to estimate unduplicated program enrollment. The dual enrollment estimates rely on the following assumptions.

- **Head Start and CSPP.** We estimate that 25% of Head Start enrollees are dually enrolled in CSPP, based on data from a [survey](#) of California Head Start grantees in the 2014–15 school year conducted by the American Institutes for Research. (More recent data were not available.) We include these children in CSPP enrollment counts only.
- **Head Start and Subsidized Child Care.** We estimate that between 12% and 15% of Head Start enrollees not also enrolled in CSPP are dually enrolled in subsidized child care, based on annual data reported by the Office of Head Start. We included these children in Head Start enrollment counts only.
- **CSPP and Subsidized Child Care.** Data on subsidized child care use among CSPP enrollees were not available. Because their demographics are similar, we assume that the rate of subsidy use in CSPP is similar to that of Head Start, with 12%–15% of CSPP enrollees receiving a subsidy. We included these children in CSPP enrollment only. (This may yield a conservative estimate of unduplicated CSPP enrollment, given that CSPP is more likely than Head Start to offer full-day, full-year programming.)
- **TK and Other Programs.** Data are not available on the percentage of TK students dually enrolled in other programs. We expect that the number of children dually enrolled is small based on a [survey](#) of local education agencies offering TK in the 2022–23 school year. We therefore do not make any adjustments for TK enrollment.

Population Counts and Program Enrollment

Table 1 and Table 2 show the data used to construct the figures in the related [brief](#).

Table 1. Population and Enrollment of 4-Year-Olds in Publicly Funded PreK and Child Care

Category	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Population (estimated)						
4-year-old population	495,200	483,300	466,900	447,800	436,100	430,000
Program enrollment						
TK	88,883	68,701	75,465	116,898	151,491	177,570
CSPP	78,417	50,128	53,072	52,313	47,664	41,695
Head Start	40,572	28,147	26,084	24,215	21,396	21,396
Subsidized child care	23,800	23,500	23,500	24,800	31,600	37,900
Dual enrollment (estimated)						
CSPP and Head Start	10,100	7,000	6,500	6,100	5,300	5,300
Head Start and subsidized child care	3,700	2,400	2,600	2,500	2,400	2,400
CSPP and subsidized child care	9,500	5,700	7,000	7,300	7,000	6,100
Unduplicated program enrollment (program enrollment minus estimated dual enrollment)						
TK	88,883	68,701	75,465	116,898	151,491	177,570
CSPP	78,417	50,128	53,072	52,313	47,664	41,695
Head Start	30,400	21,100	19,600	18,200	16,000	16,000
Subsidized child care	10,600	15,400	13,900	15,100	22,200	29,400
Total unduplicated program enrollment in TK, CSPP, Head Start, or subsidized child care (estimated)						
Number of 4-year-old enrolled	208,300	155,300	162,000	202,400	237,400	264,700
Percentage of the 4-year-old population enrolled	42%	32%	35%	45%	54%	62%
Total NOT enrolled in TK, CSPP, Head Start, or subsidized child care (estimated)						
Number of 4-year-olds not enrolled	286,900	328,000	304,900	245,300	198,700	165,300
Percentage of the 4-year-old population not enrolled	58%	68%	65%	55%	46%	38%

Sources: California Department of Education. *Transitional kindergarten data from 2019–20 to 2024–25* [DataQuest. Annual enrollment data.] (accessed 09/01/2025); California Department of Education. *California State Preschool Program, two-month average data reports by school year of age* [Dataset], obtained through personal communication with Jian Hua Liang, Education Administrator, California Department of Education (2026, January 5); Anthony, J., Muenchow, S., Arellanes, M., & Manship, K. (2016). *Unmet need for preschool services in California: Statewide and local analysis*. American Institutes for Research; California Department of Education. *Average number & percent of children by program type and age group, October 2019/April 2020* [Dataset]; California Department of Social Services. *October enrollments by age group: 2020–2024* [Dataset]; Office of Head Start PIR Reports. (n.d.). *Enrollment statistics report*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). *State population by characteristics: 2020–2024. Annual estimates of the resident population by single year of age and sex for California: April 1, 2020, to July 1, 2024* [Dataset SC-EST2024-SYASEX-06] (accessed 07/02/2025); U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *State population by characteristics: 2010–2019. Annual estimates of the resident population by single year of age and sex for California: April 1, 2010, to July 1, 2019* [Dataset SC-EST2019-SYASEX-06] (accessed 07/15/2024); Wang, V., Leung-Gagné, M., Melnick, H., & Wechsler, M. E. (2024). *Universal prekindergarten expansion in California: Progress and opportunities*. Learning Policy Institute.

Table 2. Population and Enrollment of 3-Year-Olds in Publicly Funded PreK and Child Care

Category	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Population (estimated)						
3-year-old population	485,900	471,500	450,900	436,500	427,600	411,000
Program enrollment						
CSPP	56,057	28,502	39,581	46,908	52,033	54,694
Head Start	39,800	23,000	26,400	26,700	26,300	26,300
Subsidized child care	24,800	23,300	21,500	25,800	33,300	40,700
Dually enrolled (estimated)						
CSPP and Head Start	9,900	5,800	6,600	6,700	6,600	6,600
Head Start and subsidized child care	3,600	2,000	2,600	2,800	2,900	2,900
CSPP and subsidized child care	6,800	3,300	5,200	6,500	7,600	8,000
Unduplicated program enrollment (program enrollment minus estimated dual enrollment)						
CSPP	56,057	28,502	39,581	46,908	52,033	54,694
Head Start	29,800	17,300	19,800	20,000	19,700	19,700
Subsidized child care	14,400	18,000	13,700	16,500	22,700	29,800
Total unduplicated program enrollment in CSPP, Head Start, or subsidized child care (estimated)						
Number of 3-year-old enrolled	100,300	63,800	73,000	83,500	94,500	104,200
Percentage of the 3-year-old population enrolled	21%	14%	16%	19%	22%	25%
Total NOT enrolled in CSPP, Head Start, or subsidized child care (estimated)						
Number of 3-year-old not enrolled	385,600	407,700	377,900	353,100	333,200	306,800
Percentage of the 3-year-old population not enrolled	79%	86%	84%	81%	78%	75%

Sources: California Department of Education. *California State Preschool Program, two-month average data reports by school year of age* [Dataset], obtained through personal communication with Jian Hua Liang, Education Administrator, California Department of Education (2026, January 5); Anthony, J., Muenchow, S., Arellanes, M., & Manship, K. (2016). *Unmet need for preschool services in California: Statewide and local analysis*. American Institutes for Research; California Department of Education. *Average number & percent of children by program type and age group, October 2019/April 2020* [Dataset]; California Department of Social Services. *October enrollments by age group: 2020–2024* [Dataset]; Office of Head Start PIR Reports. (n.d.). *Enrollment statistics report*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). *State population by characteristics: 2020–2024. Annual estimates of the resident population by single year of age and sex for California: April 1, 2020, to July 1, 2024* [Dataset SC-EST2024-SYASEX-06] (accessed 07/02/2025); U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *State population by characteristics: 2010–2019. Annual estimates of the resident population by single year of age and sex for California: April 1, 2010, to July 1, 2019* [Dataset SC-EST2019-SYASEX-06] (accessed 07/15/2024); Wang, V., Leung-Gagné, M., Melnick, H., & Wechsler, M. E. (2024). *Universal prekindergarten expansion in California: Progress and opportunities*. Learning Policy Institute.



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