Delaware Early Learning Community and Workforce Needs Assessment Study

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1. Background

As required by Section 376 of House Bill 250, this Community and Workforce Needs Assessment was completed by Delaware's Office of Early Learning (OEL), which is located within the Department of Education (DDOE). The mission of the OEL is to create and sustain a comprehensive and cohesive statewide network of early learning partners to achieve desired outcomes for children, birth through age eight, and their families.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed and heightened the existing difficulty of maintaining a sufficient level of care and education options for children and their families. This includes keeping early childhood programs open and attracting and maintaining well qualified professionals for those programs, which are frequently low-paying compared to the public PK-12 system. Reliable, widely available, high-quality child care options are a foundation for Delaware's entire workforce, and therefore crucial to the economy. Moreover, the early childhood years are critical to childhood development and school readiness. As a result, it is a priority for the State that this crisis be addressed in a systematic, holistic fashion.

The Delaware Department of Education, Early Childhood Support team (DDOE ECS) is tasked with leading this rethinking and prioritization of early childhood care and education delivery, including uplifting the profession and supporting individuals seeking a career in early childhood care and education. The OEL is housed within the DDOE ECS team.

Shine Early Learning was retained by OEL to conduct this Community and Workforce Needs Assessment. Shine Early Learning is a division of Acelero, Inc. — a national organization with 1,700 staff. Since 2011, Shine has worked with states, municipalities, school districts, and individual providers to implement proven practices that deliver positive results for children, families, and communities. All of Shine Early Learning's work is undergirded by the belief that every child has the potential to succeed at the highest levels regardless of income, race, geography, language, or country of origin, and that high-impact, evidence-based approaches can help early childhood programs and systems change the trajectory of a child's education. Too often, however, early childhood education fails to live up to that potential.

2. Overview of Legislation

Section 376 of HB 250 (the budget bill) requires the Department of Education to conduct a Community and Workforce Needs Assessment related to the Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP) by January 1, 2023. The report shall address the following:

- The community needs of pre-k and 3 and 4-year-olds based on the demographics of children. Demographics will include the following: income, race/ethnicity, disabilities status, dual language learners; children living in foster care; and children from families experiencing homelessness.
- A facilities capacity assessment comparing what is already available with how much would be needed for a universal program for all 3 and 4-year-olds in a mixed delivery setting.

 Recommendations on state investments needed to enable expansion of pre-k to serve all children statewide whose families elect to participate.

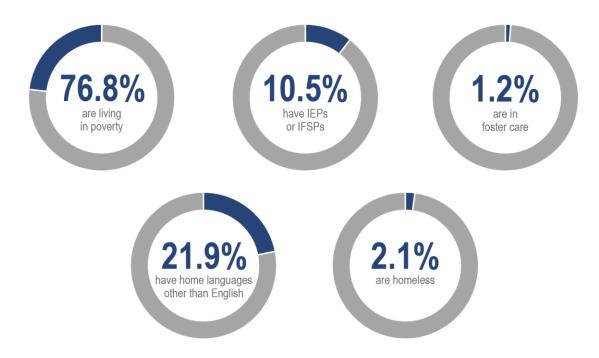
3. The ECAP Preschool Program

The ECAP preschool programs work towards being models of Delaware's highest quality preschool. Programs commit to serving unserved and underserved communities through continuous quality improvement processes that result in: comprehensive, high-quality early learning services for eligible preschool aged children; collaborations with community programs to ensure the delivery of holistic services to children and families; and shared learning across all state-funded preschool programs.

Eligibility for ECAP is determined by individual child or family characteristics including: age of child, family income, disability, housing status, parental status, and other individual/family factors. Ten percent of available slots must be provided for children with disabilities.

The ECAP program has a contracted capacity of 860 "seats" and an investment of \$6,149,300 from state sources. ECAP funding is provided for at least 3.5 hours per day, making all ECAP seats part day. However, ECAP programs can blend and braid other funding sources, including the use of state subsidy (Purchase of Care) dollars, to support the additional service hours needed to provide full day care.

The data below reflects the % of children in each category reported by programs in fall 2021, which is the most recent data available for all programs. Additional ECAP data can be found in Appendix A.



Within the ECAP program, 46.5% of teachers have a Bachelor's degree and 33.7% have a Master's or PhD, for a total of 80.2% of teachers having a Bachelor's degree or above. For assistant teachers, 18.7% have an Associate's degree and 22.5% have a Bachelor's or above, so a total of 41.2% of assistant teachers have an Associate's degree or above.

4. Community Needs Assessment for Pre-K for 3 and 4-Year-Olds

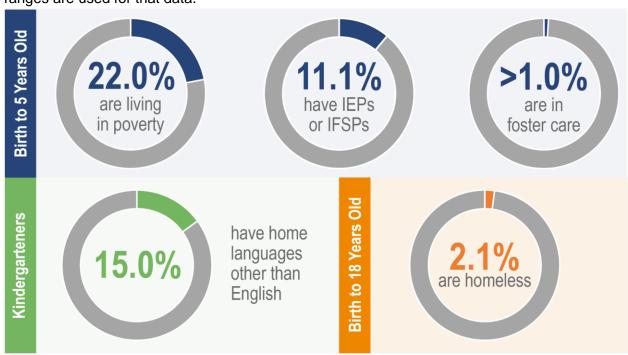
The data in this section was downloaded from the Delaware Kids Count data center in December 2022 and is the most recent data available from that site.

2021 Population Data (Disaggregated by Race/Ethnicity)

Race/Ethnicity	Birth to 5	Percentage of birth to 5 population	3 & 4-year-olds	Percentage of 3 & 4-year-olds
Black	17,298	26%	5,783	26%
Hispanic	9,632	15%	3,266	15%
Other	6,205	9%	2,078	9%
White	33,083	50%	11,178	50%
Total	66,218	100%	22,305	100%

Vulnerable Population Data

For the Experiencing Homelessness and Dual Language Learners indicators, specific data for the birth to 5 population was not available in the Kids Count data center, which is why other age ranges are used for that data.



When the birth to 5 poverty rate is applied to the number of 3 and 4-year-olds in Delaware, that results in an estimated 4,907 population of 3 and 4-year-olds living in poverty in the state.

5. Early Childhood Care and Education Programs

There are a total of 960 child care programs licensed by the Office of Child Care Licensing (OCCL) throughout the state of Delaware, with a total licensed capacity to serve 50,970 children across all age groups (infants, toddlers, preschoolers and school-aged [kindergarten and higher]). As shared above in the most recent Kids Count Data, there are a total of 66,218 children ages birth to 5 in the state of Delaware.

To consider the state's ability to move towards universal pre-K, it should be noted that the current population of children ages 3 and 4 (22,305) comprises nearly half of the reported total licensed capacity of early learning providers across the state. It is also important to note that there may be a substantial difference between licensed capacity and "actual" capacity. As will be described below, a substantial number of programs have classrooms that are closed, most often due to difficulty in hiring staff. In fact, 78% of those who responded to our survey indicated that they were not fully staffed. Therefore, we believe that the actual capacity is substantially lower than licensed capacity.

The tables below provide an overview of the facility count and licensed capacity by facility type across each of the counties within the state:

Facility Count of ECCE Programs

(excluding Summer Camp, Licensed Residential Child Care Facility and Day Treatment Programs)

Facility Type	Kent County	New Castle County	Sussex County	Total	Percentage of Total Facilities
Child Care Center	81	299	79	459	48%
Family Child Care	79	255	91	425	44%
Large Family Child Care	12	43	21	76	8%
Total	172	597	191	960	100%

Child Capacity Count of ECCE Programs

(excluding Summer Camp, Licensed Residential Child Care Facility and Day Treatment Programs)

Facility Type	Kent County	New Castle County	Sussex County	Total	Percentage of Total Capacity
Child Care Center	7,321	32,689	6,489	46,499	91%
Family Child Care	642	2,153	774	3,569	7%
Large Family Child Care	143	510	249	902	2%
Total	8,106	35,352	7,512	50,970	100%

6. Self-Reported ECCE Program Capacity Assessment (Survey)

Description of Survey

OEL distributed a survey to early childhood professionals to better understand the current capacity, workforce and enrollment issues that early childhood providers are facing. The survey was distributed electronically via email and was open for a period of seven days, from December 7th, 2022 through December 14th, 2022. 289 survey responses were received from the 960 programs located in Delaware. A summary of the responses to each survey question can be found in Appendix B.

ECCE Program Demographics

Of the 289 survey responses received, 46% of the respondents were child care centers, 43% were family child care, and 11% were large family child care. Some centers have multiple sites and responded more than once to describe the different statuses of those sites. When the 26 multi-site responses are considered, the response rate to the survey was 27.4%.

The range of survey participation across the 3 counties in Delaware aligns closely with each county's percentage of programs. New Castle County had the most respondents with 61%, followed by Sussex County with 22% and Kent County with 17%. 42% of the respondents from New Castle County had facilities located in Wilmington and 68% of the respondents from Kent County had facilities located in Dover.

Age Groups Served

Most respondents served the full age range. Toddlers (ages 12 months to 36 months) and preschoolers (36 months to age five) were the top two age groups being served (88% and 89% of providers respectively served these age groups). 74% of respondents reported providing

services to infants (birth to 12 months) and 69% of respondents reported providing services to school-aged children.

Funding Sources

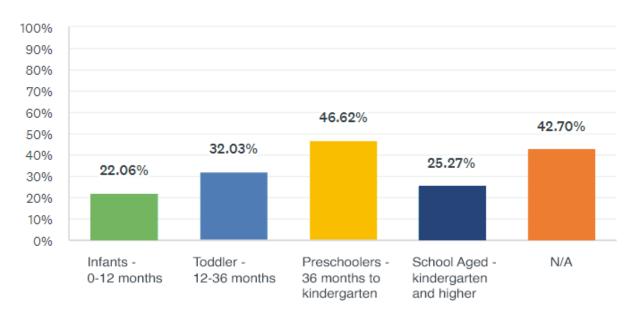
There are five direct funding sources available for early childhood programs in Delaware:

- Purchase of Care a state child care subsidy available to families who have a gross
 income equal to or less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level and a documented need
 for child care.
- ECAP the part-day state funded, early care and education program for income eligible 3 and 4-year-olds and their families.
- Redding the full-day state funded, early care and education program for income eligible 3 and 4-year-olds and their families residing in the City of Wilmington.
- **Head Start** a federally funded program that promotes school readiness of children from birth to age five from income eligible families.
- 21st Century Fund a public/private partnership to address the special needs of at-risk children in Delaware. The intent of the fund is to provide extracurricular experiences to children up to age 21 receiving services from state agencies and community programs.

More than two-thirds of programs participating in the survey (68%) reported receiving Purchase of Care funding to support children and families. Nearly 30% of respondents indicated that they did not receive funding from any of the available public funding sources. 8% of respondents (n=22) indicated that they participated in the state's ECAP program.

Current Child Care Vacancies

57% of respondents reported that their facilities had vacancies. Respondents were asked to select all of the age groups with vacancies at their facility. The percentage of respondents with vacancies reported by age group is in the chart below:



Providers with vacancies were also asked to share a range of the current number of vacancies for their facility.

Range of Vacancies	Percentage of Providers
Between 1 and 3 children	21%
Between 4 and 6 children	10%
Between 7 and 10 children	5%
Between 11 and 13 children	4%
14 or more children	17%

Children Waiting for Care

65% of respondents indicated that their facilities have a waiting list. Survey respondents indicated that the toddler age group (47%) followed closely by the infant age group (43%) were the top two age groups on their waiting lists for care.

Providers with waiting lists were then asked to share the current number of children waiting for care at their facility.

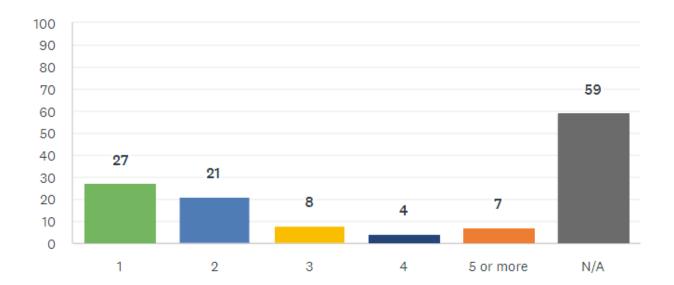
Children on the Waiting List	Percentage of Providers
Between 1 and 3 children	18%
Between 4 and 6 children	12%
Between 7 and 10 children	8%
Between 11 and 13 children	4%
14 or more children	23%

Classroom Closures Across Center Based Programs

There is a nationwide crisis regarding the ECCE workforce. Center-based programs were asked to provide some additional information regarding classroom availability and staffing to help OEL better understand the impact of the workforce crisis.

Center-based programs were asked to share the number (if any) of classrooms currently closed. While 47% reported no classroom closures, 53% of the respondents reported having at least one classroom closed. In the 126 centers that responded to the survey, there were over 144 early childhood classrooms closed.

The graph below provides a breakdown of the number of providers and the number of classroom closures reported. For example, 27 programs had one classroom closed, while seven programs had five or more classrooms closed.



Respondents were also asked to share the age groups that were intended to be served by their closed classrooms. The table below shows the % of respondents who had a closed classroom designed to serve a particular age group. It is important to note that the percentages add up to greater than 100% because many centers have closed classrooms for multiple age groups.

County	Infants (0-12 months)	Toddlers (12-36 months)	Preschool (36 months- kindergarten)	School-Aged (kindergarten and higher)	Not Applicable
Kent	5%	24%	19%	10%	57%
New Castle	23%	29%	37%	12%	43%
Sussex	17%	21%	21%	4%	50%
Total	19%	26%	31%	10%	47%

Primary Reasons for Classroom Closure

58% of survey respondents reported that the inability to hire and retain staff was the primary reason for classroom closures at their center. 9% of respondents reported a lack of children available for enrollment as the primary reason for classroom closures. 33% of respondents selected "Other" as the reason for their centers' classroom closures. Some of those "Other" reasons cited included:

- Ongoing construction
- Space constraints

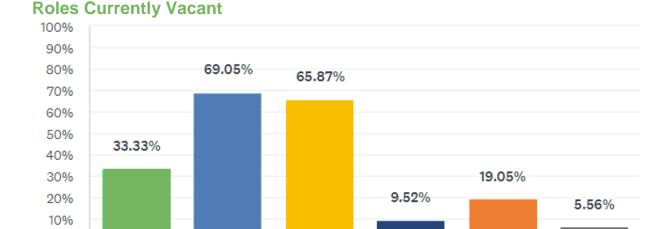
 Part-Time classroom closures (i.e. open Monday/Wednesday/Friday but not Tuesday/Thursday) due to staffing issues

Although 47% of providers reported that all of their classrooms were open, several reported having to limit the number of children in a class as a result of staffing shortages. The number of children in a classroom depends on the number of staff because of the Office of Child Care Licensing's adult to child ratio requirements per age group. While these facilities were able to report that all of their classrooms were open, some of those classrooms were not operating at full capacity.

Staffing Needs

0%

An overwhelming number of respondents (78%) indicated that their centers were not fully staffed. The Assistant Teacher and Teacher roles were identified as the top two roles with vacancies as illustrated below:



The responses included in the "Other" category consisted of non-teaching roles that are currently vacant including, cook, bus drivers, and family support staff.

Teacher

Assistant

Teacher

Administrator

N/A

Other

(please specify)

7. Early Learning Workforce

Intern

The Department of Education's Office of Child Care Licensing (OCCL) uses the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families' (DSCYF) FOCUS database to process applications for early childhood care and education licensure. The FOCUS database contains information showing all active early childhood care and education staff. This data was analyzed to compare the current number of ECCE staff to the number who were active before the pandemic. The current number of staff in the FOCUS database is 8,230, compared to 9,421 on February 1, 2020. This is a decline of 1,191 staff or 12.6% from pre-pandemic levels.

ECCE Staff Credentials

Information about the credentials/degrees of ECCE professionals is collected by the Department of Education's DEEDS database. DEEDS is used to process applications for credentialing early childhood and K-12 professionals to work in Delaware early child care programs, public and charter schools, and adult education programs. The DEEDS system maintains records of the credentials issued including the supporting documentation used to meet the qualifications. While historically used to credential PK-12 professionals, DEEDS was updated in July 2021 to allow all early childhood professionals to apply for credentials. Due to this recent update, only 3,052 of the registered early learning professionals in Delaware have completed the credentialing process using DEEDS, so the data below is based on that 3,052 population.

In the table below, the credentials contained in DEEDS were correlated to the Levels Framework contained in the Early Childhood Educator Targeted Compensation Scale that was created by the DECC.

Level	Education/ Credentials	Number	Percentage
Below Entry	15 clock hours of training	1,356	44.4%
Entry	High School diploma or equivalent plus one of the following: • 6 college/university ECE credits • Training for ECE 1 (TECE 1) • High School career pathway	998	32.7%
Level 1	High School diploma or equivalent plus one of the following: • Child Development Associate (CDA) • 9 college/university ECE credits	202	6.6%
Level 2	Associate's Degree in ECE (or Associate's degree with at least 9 ECE credits)	147	4.8%
Level 3	Bachelor's Degree in ECE (or Bachelor's degree with at least 9 ECE credits)	349	11.4%
Level 4	Master's degree in ECE	0	0
Total		3,052	100%

The staff who are in the Below Entry level start as all aides and interns, but beyond that there is not a direct relationship between the education and credential levels of the staff and the position they hold. For example, those who are in the Entry category were both Assistant Teachers and Teachers. Those in Level 2 and Level 3 included both Teachers and Administrators. This data from the DEEDs system that reflects the early childhood workforce landscape as a whole contrasts dramatically from the information shared earlier from the ECAP program, where 80.2% of Teachers had a Bachelor's degree or above.

8. Key Findings and Recommendations

Findings

The findings of this study create a clear picture of the needs of Delaware's early childhood system and a call for action. Some of the important findings are as follows:

- The ECAP program is being implemented as designed and serving those it was created to serve (children living in poverty and those with disabilities). However, it is nowhere near the scale required to meet the needs of all children.
 - ECAP serves 17.5% of Delaware's 3 and 4-year-olds who live in poverty.
 - This state funded preschool program serves less than 4% of the total 3 and 4year- olds in Delaware.
- While the importance of and need for early learning has become ever clearer since the beginning of COVID, over that same timeframe the number of early childhood care and education professionals working in licensed Delaware child care programs has declined by 1,191 (12.6%).
- There is a substantial gap between the required credentials of teachers in the ECAP program and the credentials of the early learning field as a whole. For example, 80.2% of ECAP teachers have Bachelor's degrees or above, compared to 11.4% of private child care professionals in total.
- According to the survey of providers, there is a substantial amount of unmet need.
 - o 65% of respondents indicated their facilities had a waiting list.
 - Contributing to this high percentage of programs with waiting lists is the fact that
 the majority of centers reported they had closed classrooms. 126 centers that
 responded to the survey had over 144 classrooms closed. If these centers are
 representative of centers statewide, it could be extrapolated that about 550
 classrooms are currently closed in Delaware.
 - The level of classroom closure varied by geography and by age group, so the solutions to address this challenge will need to be varied as well. Classrooms serving preschool aged children and classrooms in programs serving New Castle County were the most likely to be closed.
 - The inability to hire and retain staff contributed to closed classrooms, and also limited the capacity of some centers without closed classrooms. This is because they did not have enough staff to care for as many children as their classroom's licensed capacity allowed.

Recommendations

Funding

The table below is in response to the direction in the legislation to assess the community needs based on the demographics of children, as well as the funding that would be required for a universal program for all 3 and 4-year-olds.

The number of seats that would be needed is determined by estimating that 80% of eligible children would choose to enroll in the program, and then subtracting the current number of ECAP seats. That number is then multiplied by the current funding amount for ECAP's half day program, which is at least 3.5 hours. The number is also multiplied by the cost for a full-day program, which is \$16,200 for at least 6 hours per day for 12 months. This is the current rate for the state funded Redding Full Day Preschool program.

Category	Total	Enrollment (= 80%)	Seats needed (Enrollment - 860 ECAP seats)	Half Day additional cost (\$7,140 per child)	Full Day additional cost (\$16,200 per child)
3 and 4-year- olds living in poverty	4,907	3,926	3,066	~\$21.9 million	~\$49.7 million
All 3 and 4- year-olds	22,305	17,844	16,984	~\$121.3 million	~\$275.1 million

Staffing

This assessment demonstrates that there is a multifaceted challenge when it comes to staffing the early childhood system.

- 1. The number of early childhood professionals working in Delaware has declined by over 1,000 people since the pandemic began.
- 2. This decline in the number of staff has led to hundreds of closed classrooms and thousands of children unable to enroll in early childhood care and education programs.
- 3. Those who teach our youngest children in Delaware need significant additional training and support to meet the higher credential requirements of the ECAP program.

These observations are not a criticism of those who currently do this essential and important work and who currently receive substandard wages (the recent Early Childhood Workforce Study submitted by OEL to the Legislature reported the median hourly wage for Child Care workers in Delaware is \$10.99). But rather, this is an acknowledgement that the system to support early learning professionals is insufficient and underfunded and needs to change if we are going to serve substantially more children in programs meeting the ECAP standards.

Appendix

A. The ECAP Preschool Program

The ECAP programs are models of Delaware's highest quality preschool. Programs commit to serving unserved and underserved communities through continuous quality improvement processes that result in: comprehensive, high-quality early learning services for eligible preschool aged children; collaborations with community programs to ensure the delivery of holistic services to children and families; and shared learning across all ECAP programs.

ECAP goals and objectives include:

- Providing eligible three and four-year-old children and their families in unserved and underserved communities with high-quality early childhood educational and comprehensive services as defined by relevant federal and state statutes, regulations, and standards
- Ensuring that program's services are responsive to the community's, families' and children's needs
- Providing self-assessment and continuous improvement for achieving program goals that ensures child safety and the delivery of effective, high-quality program services.
 This includes facilitating shared learning across all ECAPs to assure the delivery of holistic services to children and families
- Using data-informed decision making and maximizing available resources to provide effective high-quality early childhood educational and comprehensive services
- Achieving school readiness goals that align with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework

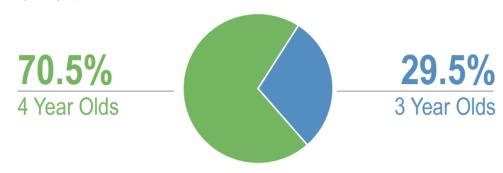
Eligibility for ECAP is determined by individual child or family characteristics in addition to age. ECAP-funded children must meet the federal Head Start eligibility guidelines. Eligibility is determined based on age of child, family income, disability, housing status, parental status, and other individual/family factors. Ten percent of available slots must be provided for children with disabilities. Effective as of the Head Start Act of 2007, 35% of enrollment may be children whose family incomes are between 100% and 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) after priority is given to children at or below 100% FPL.

ECAP funding is provided for at least 3.5 hours per day, making all ECAP seats part day. However, ECAP programs can blend and braid other funding sources, including the use of state subsidy (Purchase of Care) dollars, to support the additional service hours needed to provide full day care. Some ECAPs align with school district schedules while others operate for at least nine months but do not necessarily follow school district calendars.

ECAP Data

The data below reflects numbers reported by programs in Fall 2021 and therefore totals may be different from the number of funded "seats" (860).

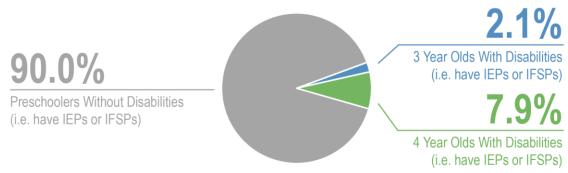
Enrollment



Waitlist

• As of Sept 2021 = 246

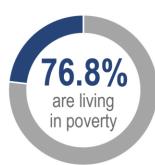
Number of preschoolers with disabilities (i.e. have IEPs or IFSPs)

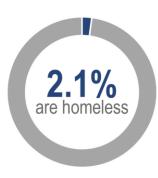


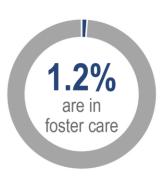
Home language



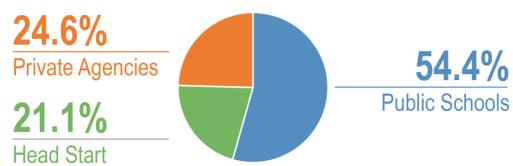
Child Status



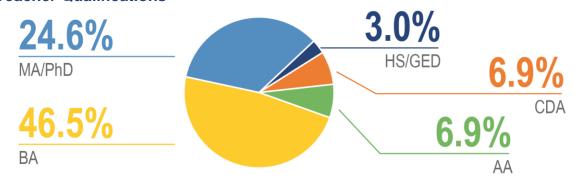




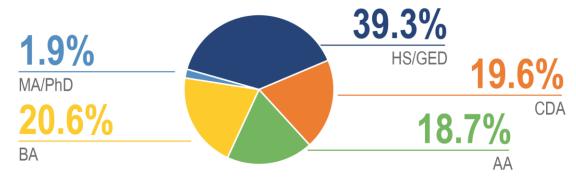
Enrollment by location type



Teacher Qualifications



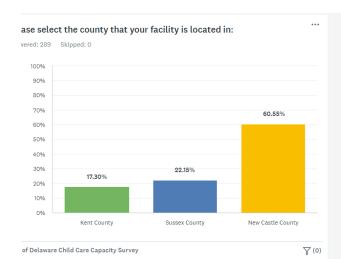
Assistant Teacher Qualifications

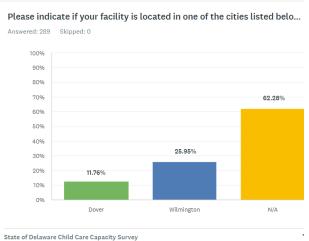


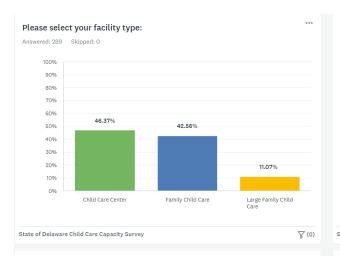
ECAP Funding

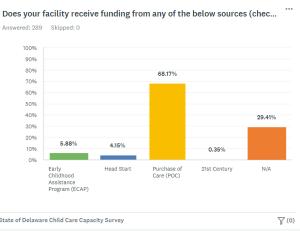
The ECAP program has a contracted capacity of 860 "seats" and an investment of \$6,149,300 from state sources. That level of state investment has remained consistent that last two procurement cycles.

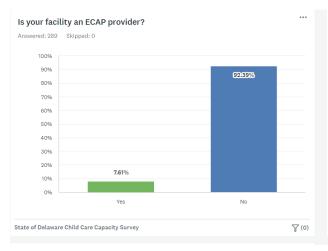
B. Self Reported ECCE Program Capacity Assessment (Survey)

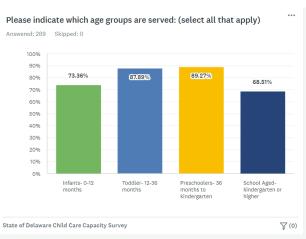


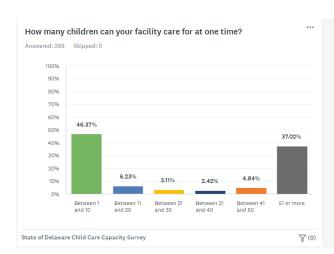


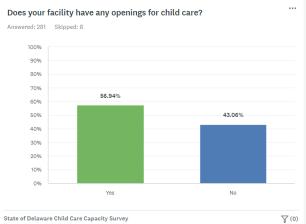


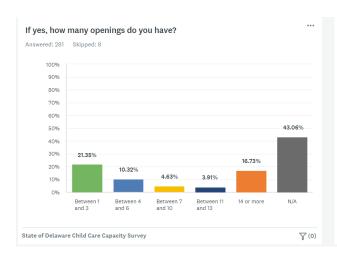


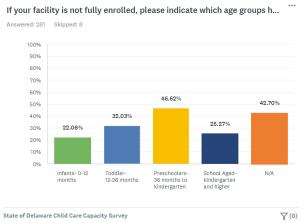


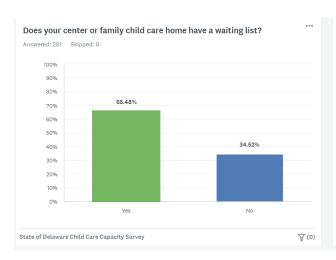


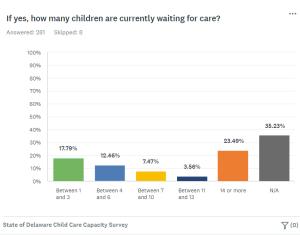


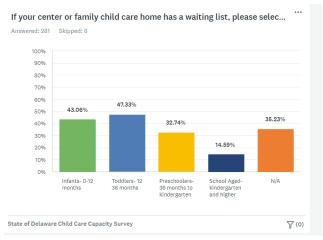


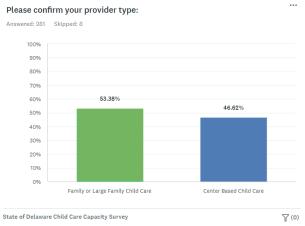












Center Only Questions

