



 San Francisco Department of
Early Childhood

2025

Annual Impact Report

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A Note From Our Executive Director

The San Francisco Department of Early Childhood is now entering its fourth year, continuing our mission to strengthen learning and opportunity for young children and their families across our city. Since our inception in October 2022, we have charted a path through our strategic plan to build the nation's best early childhood system of care, and we have achieved just that.

DEC has grown rapidly, building new infrastructure, launching new programs, and distributing unprecedented levels of funding to the community.

We opened financial support for early learning to middle-income families and expanded our network of child care programs. Last year, more than 10,200 children received free or affordable early education. Today, San Francisco is considered a national leader in infant and toddler care.

We have been determined to elevate the early education field by compensating educators fairly. More than 3,100 educators received DEC-funded additional pay this year. Retention improved, turnover declined, and more than 1,400 educators pursued further education and training with DEC's support.

We recommitted ourselves to helping families navigate the challenges of raising children through our Family Resource Centers, which served more than 11,000 parents, caregivers, and children last fiscal year.

Recognizing gaps in systems of support for children with developmental concerns and additional support needs, we took action. Last year, more than 7,300 children received developmental screenings, including over 2,800 through the Sparkler mobile app. Families gained access to a clear, centralized place for support, developmental playgroups, care coordination, and more through Early Connections.

The results from this work are tangible. Kindergarten readiness in San Francisco's Unified School District (SFUSD) has improved for four consecutive years, reaching all-time highs, including for African American children and children enrolled in special education. As a result, more children are on a path towards long-term academic success.

This work is challenging, but the outcomes are immensely gratifying. I am deeply grateful for the partnership and support of City departments, community-based organizations, educators, and families. Together we will continue moving forward — bringing hope, opportunity, and lasting impact to the children and families we serve.

With gratitude,

Ingrid Mezquita

Executive Director of the San Francisco
Department of Early Childhood

Investments Summary



\$149M

in early learning tuition



\$58.6M

in workforce compensation and ongoing education



\$20.2M

in Family Resource Centers



\$10.8M

in child care facilities



\$16.3M

in educator coaching, development, and training



\$3.9M

in child health

Our Impact by the Numbers

25,844

children eligible for early learning financial support under 150% Area Median Income



9,152

children received FREE or reduced-cost child care through Early Learning For All



10,287

children enrolled in city-funded early learning and transitional kindergarten (TK), a record high in San Francisco



11%

increase in overall kindergarten readiness since 2021



7,112

children enrolled in the Imagination Library, gaining access to free monthly books



156

new early learning spaces added through facilities development



3,175

educators received higher compensation through the Workforce Compensation Initiative

7,382

children screened for developmental delays or special needs, a 29% increase from last year

9,600

children and families participated in parenting classes, playgroups, events, and other activities at Family Resource Centers



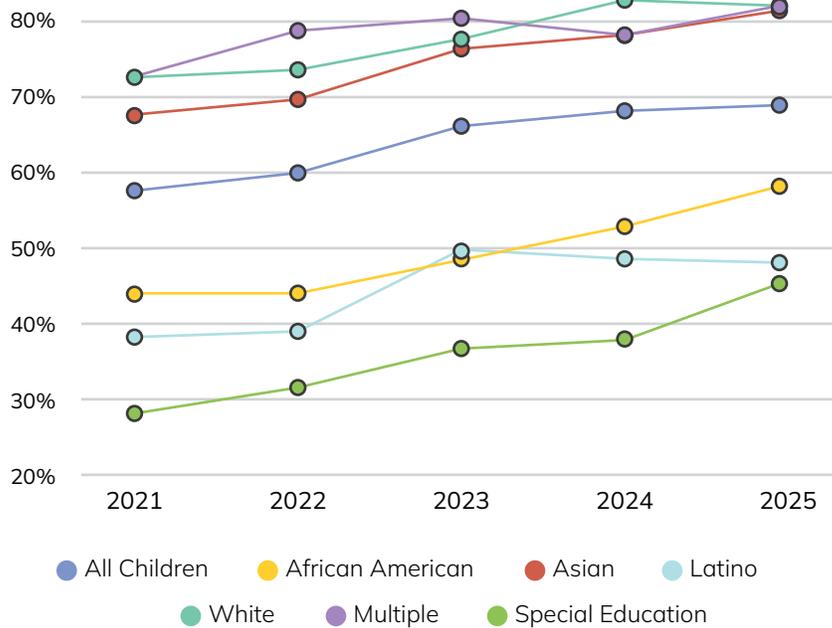
Kindergarten Readiness

Steady Gains and Strong Starts

Since the Department of Early Childhood’s establishment in 2022, more children are entering kindergarten equipped with the skills they need to succeed, and kindergarten readiness continues to rise across San Francisco. In 2025, 69% of children entered kindergarten ready to learn, marking the fourth consecutive year of growth and an 11-point increase since 2021. These gains reflect the collective impact of DEC’s investments and partnerships with SFUSD, child care centers, family child care homes.

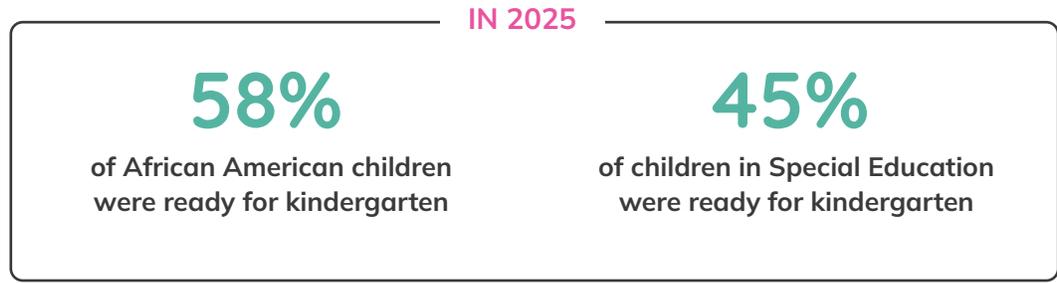
Rising Kindergarten Readiness with Historic Equity Gains

Kindergarten Readiness of Entering SFUSD Students by Race/Ethnicity and Special Education



Historic Gains for African American Children and Children in Special Education

For the first time since kindergarten readiness tracking began, African American children reached a readiness level of 58%, the highest ever recorded, demonstrating progress towards equity. Children in special education enrolled at SFUSD also reached a record 45% readiness, the highest since 2018, highlighting the impact of inclusive early learning environments and strong collaboration among educators, families, and support staff.



Kindergarten Readiness is a Critical Foundation for Academic & Life Success

Research shows that being fully ready for kindergarten sets the foundation for long-term success. Children who begin kindergarten ready to learn:

Score **higher** in English Language Arts and math throughout elementary school

Are **less likely** to be suspended

Are **more likely** to graduate high school on time

DEC's Ongoing Kindergarten Readiness Efforts

Continued Focus on Equity

DEC's continued efforts are strengthening high-quality learning environments, expanding family supports, and advancing culturally responsive programs that help children build the academic, social, and emotional skills they need to thrive. By giving children a strong foundation, San Francisco is not just improving early education outcomes; it's investing in a brighter, more equitable future for every child.

While overall kindergarten readiness continues to climb, persistent disparities remain. Readiness among Latino children remained at 48% for the second consecutive year, below the 2023 level, signaling the need for continued community-driven investment and culturally responsive outreach. Ensuring that every child, regardless of background, language, or ability, has the opportunity to start school ready to succeed remains one of DEC's most important goals.



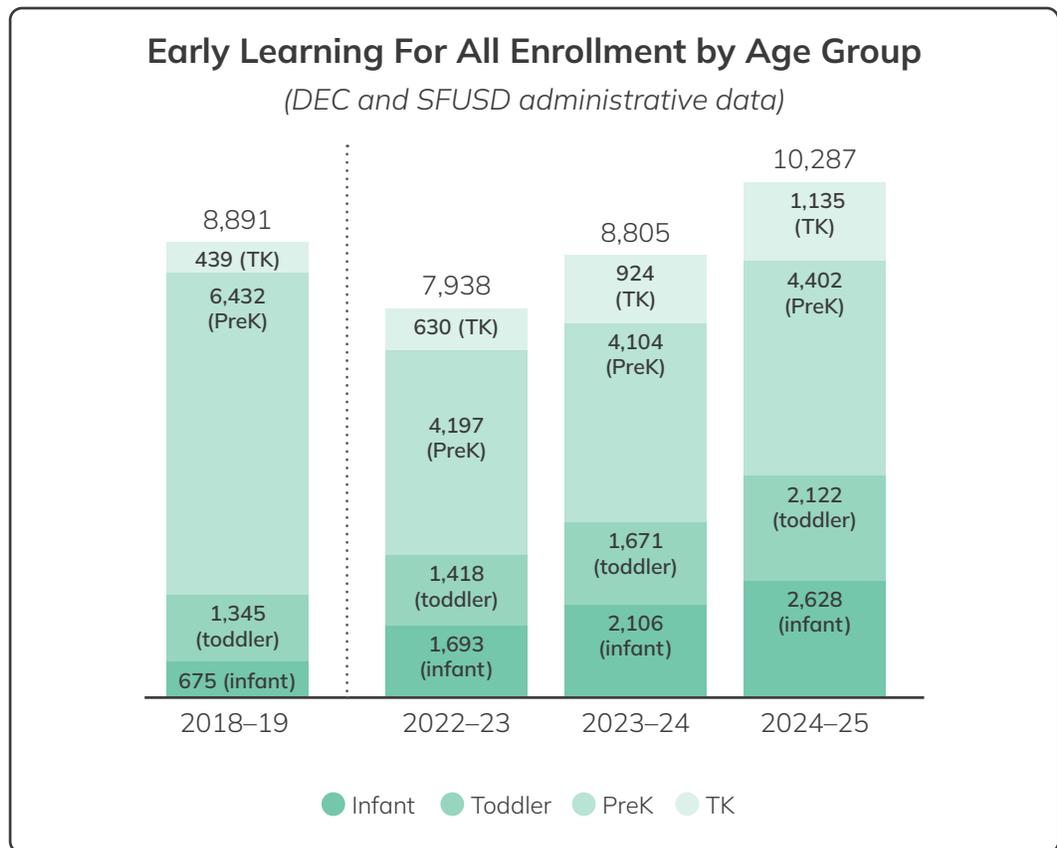
Early Learning For All

Free and Low-Cost Child Care and Preschool

“As lifelong San Franciscans, we wanted our son to grow up in the city we love. ELFA made that possible by offering affordable, high-quality early education. It has been vital to our family’s ability to stay rooted and grow in our community.”

Aisha A., mother of one enrolled at an ELFA Family Child Care Center

San Francisco’s early learning system experienced its strongest enrollment year yet, with participation dramatically exceeding pre-pandemic levels. More children are enrolled in early learning and TK than ever before, with families choosing early learning in growing numbers, and the Early Learning For All (ELFA) network continues to expand to meet that demand.



Infant & Toddler Enrollment up 135% Since 2018

What This Means

Early learning enrollment hit a record 10,287, Even as the 0–5 population dropped 18%. Expanded access to early learning has resulted in more children entering school, with the most significant shift happening among the youngest children. Infant and toddler enrollment has increased by nearly 300% since 2018, reflecting DEC’s long-term focus on affordability, accessible facilities, and early learning opportunities beginning at birth.

What We Did

Through DEC’s targeted investments, provider support, and system expansion nearly half of all licensed programs in San Francisco now participate in ELFA.

ELFA By the Numbers

10,287
children enrolled in city-funded early learning and TK

A record high in San Francisco! Even with a 18% decline in the city’s 0–5 population, more children are participating in early learning programs than before the pandemic.

135%
increase in infant and toddler enrollment since 2018

This increase reflects expanded affordability, new facilities, rising family demand, and the early learning system’s adaptation to TK.

72%
of 3- and 4-year-olds are enrolled in preschool

*Compared to 44% statewide and 46% nationally.
(2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates; still influenced by pandemic-era conditions)*

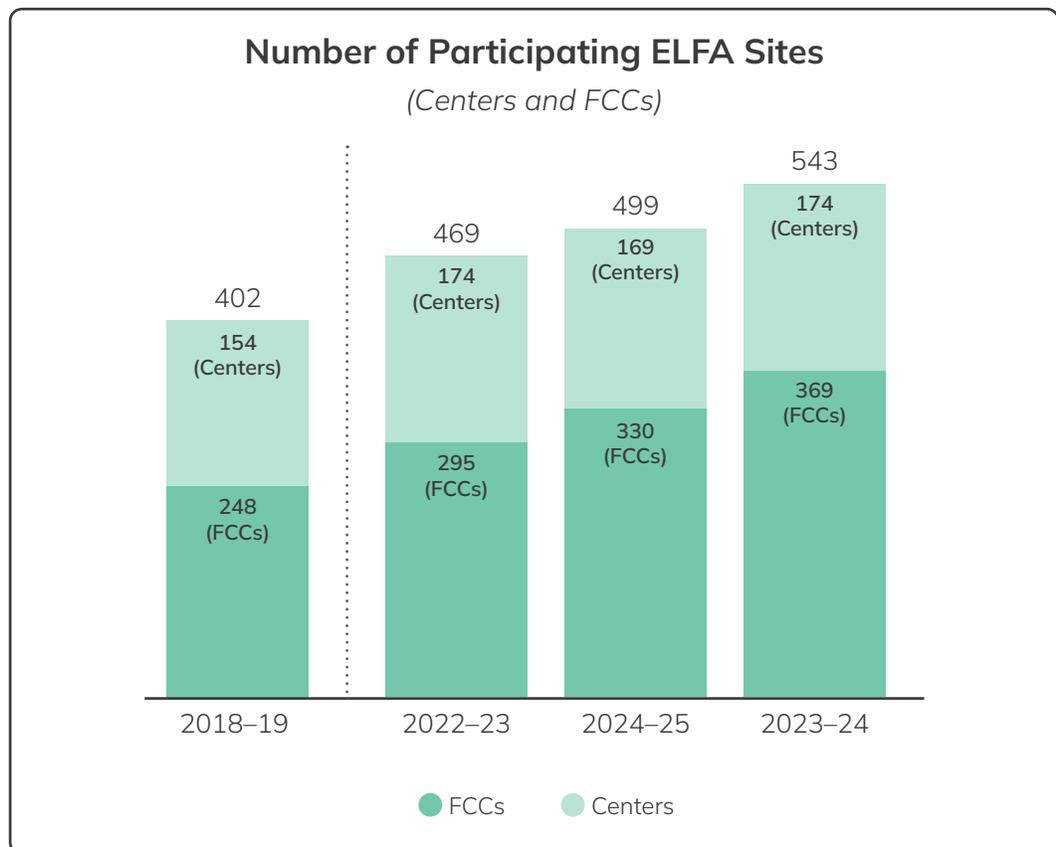
Early Learning for All Network Growth

What This Means

Early Learning for All sites grew from 402 to 543 since 2018-19. San Francisco's early learning system continued to expand this year through targeted investments in facilities, new program partnerships, and the growth of the ELFA network.

What We Did

DEC's efforts added new capacity across age groups, with a strong focus on infant and toddler care, and increased the number of high-quality early learning settings available to families citywide. Together, these investments support San Francisco's robust mixed-delivery system, which includes family child care homes, center-based programs, and SFUSD education settings. By offering a wide range of high-quality options, the system allows families to choose the program that best fits their needs, languages, schedules, and cultural values. Supporting family choice across diverse early learning settings is central to ensuring access and equity, and strengthens the city's early learning foundation, laying the groundwork for expanded access in the years ahead.



How Early Learning For All Expands Opportunity in San Francisco

Across San Francisco, families are gaining access to high-quality early learning through DEC's Early Learning For All initiative. DEC supports families by providing free to low-cost child care, while also funding and expanding early learning facilities to ensure programs can grow, modernize, and reach more families in every neighborhood.



In the Mission District, one such transformation came to life when Christina Maluenda Marchiel, Director of Mission Kids, moved her small, home-based child care program into a brand new facility. “DEC helped us identify a site here in the Mission District and, with their support, helped us build a brand new facility from the ground up,” she shared. “[We went] from serving five children to now 80 children, and it’s a huge milestone for our community.”

Through strategic facility investments, DEC is helping create more spaces where children can learn, play, and thrive. And with over 500 participating early learning programs through the Early Learning for All Network, families across San Francisco have access to free or affordable child care close to home.

Learn more about Early Learning For All





Imagination Library

A Library in Every Home

“These books have helped us instill a love of reading in our daughter. Getting a new and unique book every month has diversified our library and expanded our daughter’s horizon to stories and voices she may not have been exposed to otherwise.”

Thomas Gardner, Imagination Library parent

In September 2025, DEC launched Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library in partnership with the San Francisco Public Library. The program makes every child eligible to receive a free, high-quality, age-appropriate book each month delivered directly to their home until their fifth birthday. Families can register to receive books in English and Spanish. By removing cost barriers and delivering books straight to families, the program ensures all San Francisco children can build home libraries regardless of income or neighborhood.

San Francisco Mayor Daniel Lurie emphasized the program’s importance: “With Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, every young child in San Francisco will have the chance to experience the joy and power of books. This program strengthens our investment in the next generation of San Franciscans and ensures they have the tools they need to thrive in school.”



Why Early Literacy Matters

Research shows that children who are read to daily during their preschool years can start kindergarten having heard about 1.4 million more words than their peers who did not receive daily reading exposure. The Imagination Library is a key component of DEC's strategy to improve kindergarten readiness citywide, addressing the literacy gap at its most critical stage: a child's first five years of life.

Program Impact

The Imagination Library is supported by more than \$1 million from the City and County of San Francisco over five years (2025-2030), with a 50% cost match from the California State Library.

7,112 children enrolled
in 2025

847 families (12%) signed up
for books in Spanish





Family Resource Centers

Supporting Families With Young Children

Family Resource Centers remain a trusted source of connection and support for families with young children across San Francisco. Together, the network of 26 centers offers parent education, case management, family events, and culturally responsive activities that help families strengthen relationships and support their children’s development. Participation remained strong this year, demonstrating sustained community trust and engagement.

IN 2025

2,106

children ages 0 to 5
participated in Family
Resource Center activities

7,494

parents and caregivers
engaged in classes, workshops,
groups, and events



SAN FRANCISCO
HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

Family Support Programs

The range of services, from leadership activities to support groups, reflects a robust system designed to meet families' diverse needs.

Case Management

Case management helped families reduce stressors that affect child and family well-being. These reductions contribute to more stable home environments that support children's healthy development.

2,217 Parents/caregivers and children participated in case management

At the start of case management, **33%** of families showed risks in one or more key areas

For families who completed case management this year, **only 15.5%** still showed these risks at case closure, a **17.5% improvement**

Parent Education

789 Parents and caregivers participated in a curriculum-based parenting series

759 Curriculum-based parenting sessions

109 One-time parent education workshops

Family Supports

1,593 Enhanced visitation sessions

Community Connection

60 Parent leadership activities

29 Family Resource Center events

86 Parent and peer support groups

91 Parent and child interactive groups





Early Connections & Developmental Screenings

Connecting Families To Early Intervention Services

"[The developmental playgroup] was great! The entire team was so thoughtful and well-equipped to help me and my child grow. We felt very much a part of the community and got to take many skills with us."

Parent participating in an Early Connections developmental playgroup

DEC launched Early Connections in 2025, a new initiative that provides families with timely, personalized support to understand and support their child's development. Recognizing the importance of children meeting developmental milestones, Early Connections integrates developmental screenings, guidance, and referrals so families can access the right resources early in their child's life. Through partnerships with early learning programs, Family Resource Centers, healthcare providers, and the continued expansion of the Sparkler app, DEC saw an increase in developmental screening by 29% over the last year.

Recognizing the importance of early developmental screening and timely connection to early intervention services, the Early Connections initiative includes a Centralized Access Point (CAP) for developmental referrals, Developmental Playgroups across the city, a dedicated Family Resource Center to support early intervention and children with special health care needs, and Care Coordination for families and children requiring more complex service navigation. Early Connections partners also work in close coordination with the Child Care Health Project Public Health Nurse Consultation.

Expanding Health Sector Partnerships

DEC funds and participates in the San Francisco Pregnancy Family Village, which is a collaborative perinatal care model for Black pregnant and postpartum individuals. Partners from across multiple service sectors show up together monthly in the Bayview to provide a reliable one-stop shop of offerings that are built around the community's stated needs. DEC is also

funding training and technical assistance to support the implementation of Healthy Steps and Dyadic Care within SF Health Network Primary Care Clinics serving more than 5,000 Medi-Cal patients ages birth to 5 and their families. This initiative expands child development expertise and integrates team-based behavioral health into pediatric primary care.

Impact Since Launch

Within the first year of the launch of Early Connections, it has already delivered measurable impact through the following services:

1,400

families supported or served through the Centralized Access Point (CAP)

632

families accessed support groups, classes, and developmental resources

319

children participated in fun, nurturing developmental playgroups that promote healthy growth

708

families with complex needs received care coordination, strengthening continuity and access to services

7,382

children received developmental screenings

29% increase from last year

2,835

children screened using Sparkler

44% increase from last year

Sparkler App Accounted for 38% of All Developmental Screenings

Through Sparkler, a free mobile app that helps families support their child's development, families can complete the Ages and Stages Questionnaire® (ASQ) directly in the app and receive developmental tips based on their child's age. After a family submits an ASQ, a Centralized Access Point team member reviews the screening and follows up with guidance, developmental milestones information, and connecting to services, if needed. The Sparkler app empowers families to support their child's development through easy access to developmental tools and resources. This year, Sparkler facilitated 38% of all developmental screenings.



Supporting Early Learning Through Play

Developmental Play Story Highlight

In addition to serving as a tool for screening, the Sparkler app is also used to support in-person curriculum for developmental playgroups. Developmental playgroups are a new service DEC is funding for families who are curious or concerned about the development of their children aged birth to 3. Designed to help children with mild to moderate developmental concerns explore and play in a supportive environment, they consist of weekly sessions over the course of several weeks. The sessions incorporate engaging and purposeful play that promotes the development of critical skills in communication, motor coordination, social-emotional growth, and cognitive abilities.

“The program introduced so much creativity to our interactions with our toddler. It helped us find ways to engage with him in a way that feels productive and fulfilling while helping us recognize the strengths we already had and build on that.”

Playgroup Participant





Investing in San Francisco’s Early Education Workforce

The Department of Early Childhood continues to invest in early educators, the heart of the city’s early learning system, to ensure they earn sustainable wages and have access to the professional and financial supports needed to grow and thrive in their careers.

Higher Compensation

In 2025, 3,175 early educators received compensation support through stipends and salary enhancement grants. More than 1,400 educators working in the city’s highest need centers saw their salaries increase by an average of 47% via the Early Educator Salary Support Grant (EESG), a critical step toward closing long-standing wage gaps and stabilizing the workforce. More than 1,700 educators received at least one stipend award, which averaged \$6,653. Annualized across two stipend periods, that’s an average increase of \$13,306.

These salary enhancements recognize the essential role early educators play in children’s development and in keeping San Francisco’s early learning system strong and equitable.

IN 2025

1,445

educators saw their salaries increase by an average of 47% via the EESG

1,730

educators received at least one stipend award, which averaged \$6,653

Advancing Skills & Degrees

DEC's workforce development programs created new opportunities for professional growth. A total of 1,427 current and future educators received support with higher education learning, degree attainment, and career advancement. Many educators advanced or began their early care and education (ECE) careers through Workforce Pathways, which provides free or discounted degree programs, paid apprenticeships, career and educational counseling, and other wrap-around supports. More than 900 educators were awarded stipends for completing educational and professional milestones through the Stipend for Early Educator Professional Development (SEEPD).

IN 2025

456

educators advanced or began their ECE careers through Workforce Pathways

971

educators were awarded stipends for completing educational and professional milestones through SEEPD

A Growing, Supported Workforce

By pairing competitive wages with education, professional development, and career pathways, DEC is supporting a stable and qualified workforce. These investments ensure that every child in San Francisco learns from educators who are valued, prepared, and empowered to succeed.





Expanding Access Through Facilities Investments

“DEC helped us identify a site here in the Mission District. With their support, they helped us build a brand new facility from the ground up. Being part of the Early Learning For All Network has truly transformed our program. We started out as a small family child care program out of my home here in the Mission District, and with the ongoing support of DEC, we’ve been able to grow our capacity from serving five children to now 80 children. It’s a huge milestone for our community.”

Christina Maluenda Marchiel, Director, Mission Kids | Early Learning For All (ELFA) Network

Safe, beautiful, and thoughtfully designed early learning facilities are critical to supporting high-quality early learning experiences. Since 2023, the Department of Early Childhood has utilized Prop C funding to make significant investments to expand and enhance early learning facilities across San Francisco. These efforts have supported the creation of hundreds of new infant, toddler, and preschool facilities and funded upgrades such as Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility, outdoor learning areas, classroom redesigns, and safety improvements.

Capital New Development Projects

3 grants, \$4.9M

Funds major construction or renovation efforts that expand or enhance early learning facilities.

Repayable Grants

3 grants, \$2.2M

Offers flexible, repayable financing for significant facility projects, outdoor improvements, property acquisition, or operational cash-flow needs.

Renovation & Repair

57 grants, \$1.5M

Supports essential repairs, safety upgrades, and space conversions that preserve or expand licensed child care capacity.

Connecting Children to Nature

4 grants, \$535.8K

Supports outdoor play area improvements that create nature-rich, developmentally appropriate spaces.

FCC Expansions (Small to Large)

8 grants, \$477.8K

Supports family child care educators in expanding from small to large licenses through facility renovations that increase capacity.

Pre-Development

6 grants, \$471.9K

Covers early planning activities, such as feasibility work, design, permitting, and project management, needed before major facility projects move forward.

FCC Facilities Acquisition

4 grants, \$400K

Provides support to help family child care educators secure property for their program.

Infant/Toddler Conversion

1 grant, \$217.3K

Helps convert existing preschool or multipurpose spaces into environments designed for infants and toddlers.

Note: Amounts listed do not include grant administration.

Children and Nature

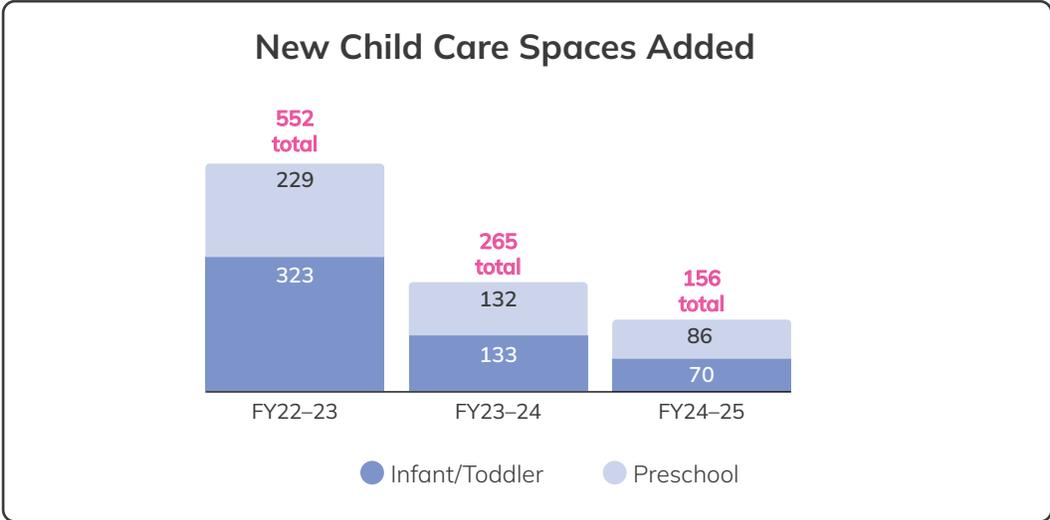
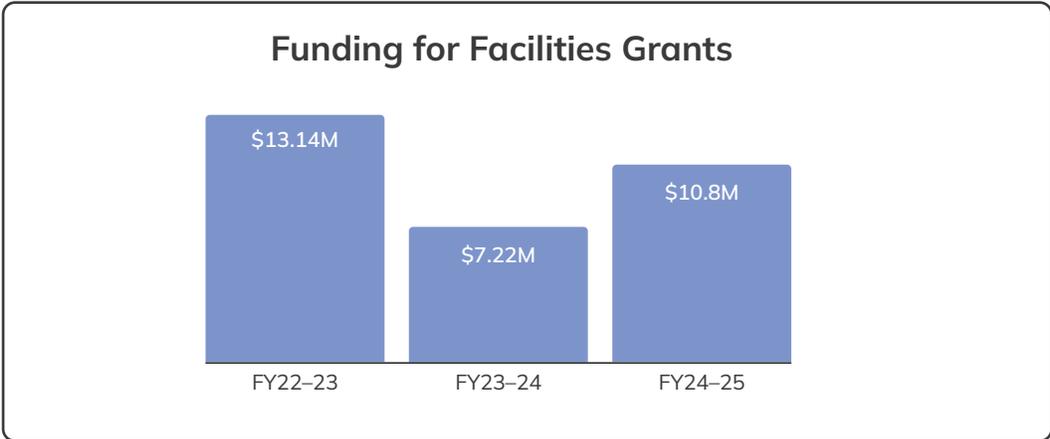
Knowing the importance of outdoor learning areas for young children in an urban environment, DEC is a lead partner and funder of San Francisco's Children in Nature Collaborative, a citywide effort to ensure every child in San Francisco can play, learn, and grow in nature each day. Through this partnership, DEC supports the enhancement of outdoor play spaces at early care and education sites, provides professional development for educators on nature-based learning, and expands access to developmentally appropriate outdoor materials and activities.



Mayor Daniel Lurie and partners from DEC, Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF), Family and Child Empowerment Services (FACES), SF Children & Nature, and SF Recreation & Parks celebrating new nature-rich play spaces created through the Connecting Children with Nature program.

Building and Expanding Early Learning Spaces

In 2025, DEC awarded 83 facilities grants to early learning centers and family child care homes, investing almost \$11 million to improve early learning spaces for San Francisco’s youngest learners. These investments support both new construction and renovations that ensure learning environments are safe, inclusive, and designed to meet the needs of diverse children and families.



Facility Investments Expand Early Learning and Long-Term Commitments

What This Means

Facilities investments expanded early learning capacity. In 2025, three Capital Development projects created and preserved 140 spaces, and expansions at eight family child care programs added 47 new spaces, strengthening access citywide. In addition to facility upgrades and subsidies, DEC offers an FCC Facility Acquisition Program to help family child care providers purchase homes, strengthening long-term stability for programs serving the city’s youngest residents. In 2025, four FCC educators were provided with support to secure stable early learning environments for their programs.

Looking ahead to 2026, several new facilities are projected to open, continuing to expand access for San Francisco’s infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Each new facility funded by DEC represents a long-term investment in children’s futures and the city’s early learning ecosystem.



Why it Matters

DEC is stewarding a once-in-a-generation public investment to design beautiful, inspiring early learning spaces and programs—places where children can explore their curiosity and experience joy, and where families receive the support they need. This is how San Francisco strengthens its future, one child at a time.

Our facility funding offers an equity lens and framework that increases high-quality licensed early care and education capacity in underserved communities, prioritizing infants and toddlers.

As the demand grows for licensed early learning programs seeking DEC’s financial support to repair, expand, or improve their early learning environments, DEC will continue its commitment to invest in high-quality licensed early learning facilities to ensure our city’s children have access to inspiring classroom environments that nurture and facilitate the love of learning.

Felton Learning Center Grand Re-Opening

In 2025, DEC celebrated the grand re-opening of the Felton Learning Center in Visitacion Valley, marking a significant investment in the neighborhood's early learning infrastructure.

Since 1971, the Felton Institute has provided comprehensive early care and education programs to San Francisco families through their learning centers. Through a strategic partnership with DEC and the Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF), Felton Institute renovated their Leland Avenue site in San Francisco to create a modernized, state-of-the-art learning environment specifically designed for Visitacion Valley's youngest learners.

The renovated facility features upgraded classrooms, improved outdoor play areas, and enhanced safety features, allowing Felton Institute to provide an exceptional early learning experience for local families.



Photo Credit: Somaly Son, Felton Institute

Strengthening San Francisco's Early Learning Infrastructure

Our future facility planning efforts will emphasize quality improvement and increased capacity for infants and toddlers, with a focus on strengthening the existing Early Learning for All sites. Planning for our future investments demonstrates the Department of Early Childhood's commitment to building a strong early learning infrastructure that expands access, supports providers, and ensures every child in San Francisco starts life with the care and education they deserve.



Continuous Quality Improvement for Educators

This fiscal year, the Department of Early Childhood continued to strengthen San Francisco's early learning ecosystem by providing educators access to a wide array of free, continuous quality improvement opportunities. DEC funded hundreds of field experts to provide one-on-one, group, online, and in-person coaching, training, and early childhood mental health consultations to thousands of educators. These supports, grounded in DEC's Early Learning For All quality standards, focus on improving teaching practices, strengthening family engagement, and promoting equitable outcomes for young children across the city.

Coaching & Quality Improvement

Over the course of the year, DEC's instructional coaches dedicated 9,151 hours to supporting early care and education programs citywide. Working side by side with educators, coaches helped programs meet goals outlined in their Quality Improvement Plans, emphasizing:

Strengthening teacher-child interactions & creating engaging learning environments

Connecting child observations with intentional learning opportunities

Supporting children with diverse learning needs

Deepening family partnerships that sustain long-term child success

During the 2024-2025 year, DEC hosted 147 trainings, totaling over 13,000 hours and reaching 2,263 educators, each contributing to continuous quality instructional improvement in San Francisco's early childhood system. Nearly 78% of trainings were offered in Spanish, Mandarin, and Cantonese, expanding access and advancing equity for multilingual educators.

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

“When I started, there were children with challenging behaviors that I didn’t understand... I had to learn how to work through this, with these children, find ways to give them hands-on experiences that could alleviate whatever they were trying to communicate. Before the consultants came on board, I noticed a lot of teacher burnout, teachers weren’t prepared, and there weren’t any experts on board. In the years I’ve been with the mental health consultants, I find it is really, really crucial.”

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultee

Mental health consultation remained a cornerstone of DEC’s quality support network. Currently, 93% of neighborhoods have active early childhood mental health consultants, who collectively spend an average of 1,200 hours each month supporting ELFA sites. These consultations provide tailored guidance and strategies across areas such as:

Classroom or group consultation	<p>Early childhood mental health consultants spend an average of</p> <h1>1,200 hours</h1> <p>each month supporting ELFA sites</p>
Site observation and rapport building	
Staff-focused program consultation	
Child-focused consultation	
Family-focused consultation	

Through this approach, consultants help educators and families nurture children’s emotional well-being, strengthen inclusive learning environments, and address behavioral or developmental concerns early.