

2023-2024

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

# EARLY LEARNING AND CARE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Sierra County



Sierra County Local Child Care Planning Council

# EARLY LEARNING & CARE: A CRITICAL INVESTMENT

High-quality Early Learning & Care (ELC) is fundamental for child development and bolstering the County's economy. This report assesses the state of ELC in Sierra County, California, highlighting unique challenges faced by rural communities, county-wide and regional needs, and assets. Developed with the Local Child Care Planning Council (LPC), it aims to guide future planning and collaboration.

## Access the full report at:

Link to pdf pending

## Background & Report Methodology

This report, a project of the Local Child Care Planning and Development Council (LPC) and High Sierras Family Resource Center, is funded by the California Department of Education. The assessment uses a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys, interviews, and data from credible sources.

## Acknowledgements

- Sierra County Families
- Provider and Key Informant Interviews
- Local Planning Council Staff
- Sierra Kids Child Development Center, O'Donnell's DayCare, First 5 Sierra County, Sierra County Behavioral Health, Sierra County Schools for Adults, Sierra Nevada Children's Services, SELPA, Plumas Sierra School District



# DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW



## SIERRA COUNTY FAMILIES

- As of 2022, Sierra County has 3,217 residents, with 4% under age five.
- The population is predominantly White (81%), with significant Hispanic/Latino/a/x (13%) and smaller American Indian/Native American populations.
- Notably, 18% of households speak a language other than English.
- Median household income is \$56,152, with some variation across the county.
- 60% of children under age 5 live in households earning under 85% of the state median income.

## GEOGRAPHIC DISPARITY

- Access to licensed child care varies significantly across Sierra County, limiting quality ELC access and economic mobility for families in the western region.
- Eastern County (Loyalton) offers both center-based and home-based licensed childcare options, with additional support through Transitional Kindergarten.
- Western County (Satley, Calpine, Sierra City, Downieville) lacks licensed childcare options forcing families to rely on informal care arrangements or forego work opportunities.

## SUBSIDIZED CHILDCARE

- Eligibility: 50 children under age 5 are eligible for subsidized childcare.
- Enrollment: 13 children under age 5 are enrolled in state and federally subsidized programs.
- Unmet Need: 37 children under 5 qualify for subsidized childcare, but only 13 are enrolled, indicating a significant unmet need (64.86%).

# STRENGTHS: BUILDING ON A STRONG FOUNDATION

“We work really hard - we are able to meet needs much quicker because we know the needs. During the pandemic - we addressed gaps really quickly because we are connected - we know everyone’s name!”

-Key Informant Interview

## FINDINGS

### Quality

Providers engage in professional development, ensuring high-quality care.

### Strong Partnerships

Public and private partnerships leverage resources to expand access.

### Workforce Development

Innovative programs support the childcare workforce and attract new providers.

### Family-Centered Approach

Flexible subsidies and multilingual programs meet diverse family needs.

### Resourceful Infrastructure

Grant funding and collaboration maximize resources for a strong ELC foundation.



# CHALLENGES: GAPS TO ADDRESS IN ELC



“We are fine with ratios, but we want excellent ratios (5:1 or 6:1) and size for families. We are only licensed for 30. In the afternoon for the school age group, we have difficulty making sure we have enough space for all of the families that need care.”

-Key Informant Interview

## FINDINGS

### Limited Availability

Western areas lack licensed care options, forcing families to choose between work/school and childcare, prioritize quality, or endure long commutes.

### Financial Strain

Underfunding and state investments in school sites squeeze private providers' profit margins.

### Barriers for Families

Poverty, language issues, transportation limitations, and lack of awareness hinder access to childcare, even with subsidies.



# OPPORTUNITIES & CALLS TO ACTION

## REINVESTING IN THE LOCAL PLANNING COUNCIL

- Hire new members and develop a strategic plan.
- Broaden community engagement to enhance collaboration.

## EXPAND ACCESS FOR FAMILIES

- Develop a plan to support Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) childcare providers.
- Increase outreach and support for playgroups and license-exempt childcare options.
- Ensure subsidy programs meet diverse family needs, including Spanish-speaking families.

## STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION

- Engage in strategic planning to align efforts between the LPC and other county initiatives.
- Advocate for state policies supporting ELC access in small counties.

## ENHANCE SUSTAINABILITY

- Explore satellite locations of licensed childcare sites.
- Invest in workforce development and increase provider compensation.

