



Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3)

FAST FACTS

Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) provides monthly operational grants to the vast majority of licensed early education and care programs in Massachusetts. Launched in 2021 with federal pandemic recovery funds, C3 became fully state-funded beginning in Fiscal Year 2024. Massachusetts is the only state to sustain these grants at or above the initial level of federal funding, helping programs to remain open, support educators, and keep costs down for families.

C3 Priority Investment Areas

- **Workforce Investments:** Improve early educator compensation, recruitment, and retention.
- **Program Quality:** Fund curriculum, screening tools, and other professional supports.
- **Operational Stability:** Fund facilities and operational costs that help keep programs open.

All programs licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care are eligible to receive C3 funding, and grant amounts are determined through a formula that accounts for a program's license capacity, enrollment, and full- or part-time status; the age of the youngest children served (for center-based programs); the number of staff (for family child care programs); and an equity adjustment that enhances support for programs serving low-income families and communities. Grantees spend funds on the above priorities, and center-based programs must invest at least half of their C3 funds into their workforce.

C3 Reach

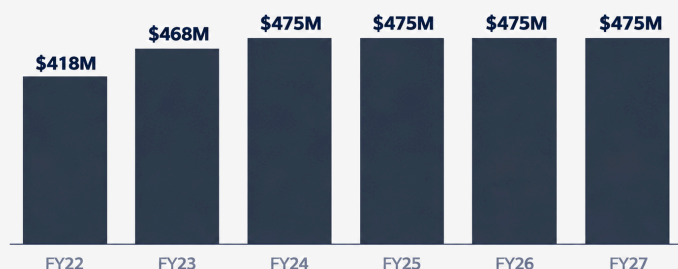
According to November 2025 data, C3 supports over 7,500 early education and care programs across Massachusetts, representing approximately 83% of all licensed providers and more than 42,000 educators. Unlike competitive grant programs, C3 reaches the vast majority of the licensed early education and care system, from large center-based programs to family child care providers.

Investment History

C3 launched in 2021 as a temporary federal relief initiative, funded with \$418 million in pandemic stabilization dollars. As federal funding expired, Massachusetts transitioned the program to state support, the only state to do so, increasing annual funding to \$475 million by FY2024—a level maintained for four consecutive fiscal years. In 2025, the Legislature codified C3 in state law, establishing it as a permanent part of the Commonwealth's early education and care system.

C3 State Funding, FY2022–FY2027

Enacted Appropriations by Fiscal Year (\$ Millions)



Source: Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation (March 2024); Massachusetts General Appropriations Acts, FY2024–FY2027.

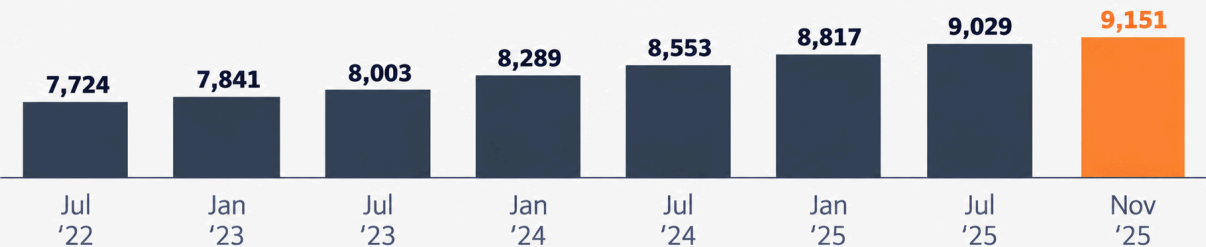
System Growth

Massachusetts' early education and care system continues to grow, and C3 has likely played a contributing role. The number of licensed programs increased from roughly 7,700 in mid-2022 to more than 9,100 by late 2025. However, because C3 has been level-funded for the past four fiscal years, its reach has hit a ceiling, and new programs are typically unable to receive funding.

Program Growth

Number of Programs Licensed and Funded by EEC, Statewide

+1,427 more programs statewide since mid-2022 (+18%)



Source: Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, EEC Board Update (January 2026).

System growth has improved access for families. Massachusetts now has the fewest child care deserts of any state in the nation, with just 1 in 5 children living in an underserved area. However, access varies widely by age: 5% of preschool-age children live in a child care desert compared to 43% of toddlers and 70% of infants.

Sources: Center for American Progress, *America's Licensed Child Care Deserts* (April 2026); Commonwealth Beacon, *70 percent of Mass. infants live in child care deserts, according to state data* (August 2025).

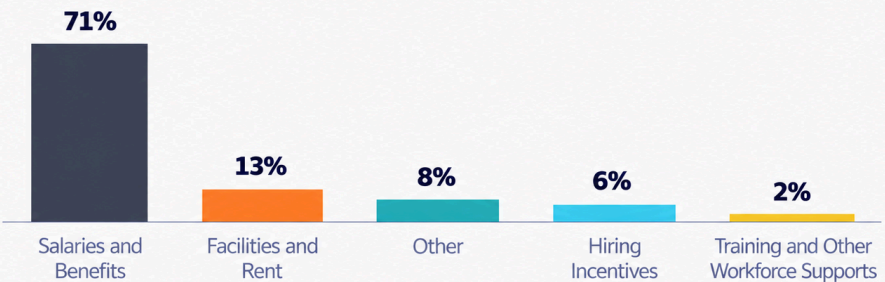
C3 by the Numbers

C3 is helping providers strengthen their workforce, improve affordability for families, and stabilize operations. **79%** of center-based C3 funds are invested in workforce supports, and more than **75%** of programs report that C3 has supported more affordable early education and care for families.

Workforce Investment

Proportion of Center-Based C3 Funds Spent per Category, FY2025

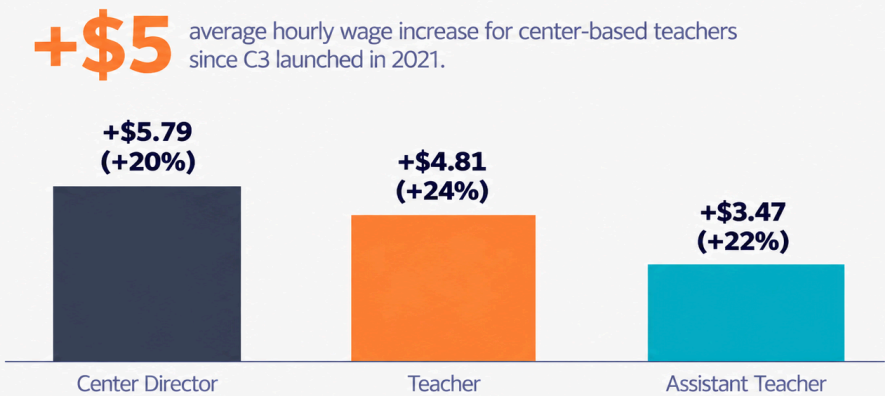
79% of C3 funds spent by center-based programs went to workforce investments.



Source: Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, C3 Data Brief (August 2026).

Educator Wages

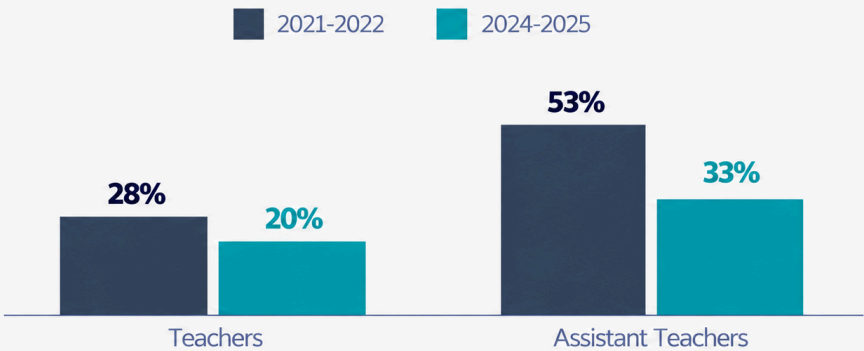
Average Wage Growth for Center-Based Early Education Staff, 2021-2025



Source: Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, C3 Data Brief (August 2026).

Educator Retention

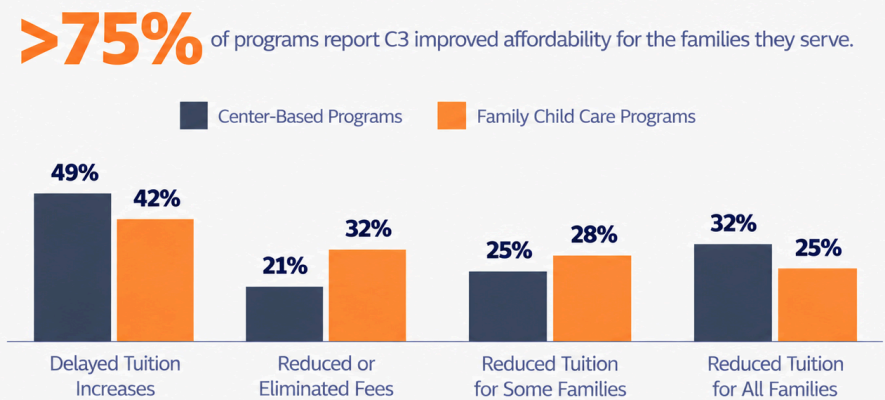
Share of Center-Based Educators Leaving Their Role Each Year



Source: Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, EEC Board Update (January 2026).

Family Affordability

Percentage of Programs Reporting Affordability Measures Supported by C3



Source: Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, EEC Board Update (January 2026).

Further Reading

For additional information, explore the following resources:

- [Commonwealth Cares for Children \(C3\) Grants](#), Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care.
- [Commonwealth Cares for Children \(C3\) Data Brief \(April 2025\)](#), Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care.
- [Commonwealth Cares for Children \(C3\) Data Brief \(August 2026\)](#), Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care.
- [Early Ed 101 Fact Sheet: Commonwealth Cares for Children \(C3\)](#), Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation.
- [Early Educator Wage Growth Under Massachusetts' C3 Program](#), Wheelock Education Policy Center.
- [Importance of C3 Continuation for the Commonwealth](#), Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation.

Sources

Bergeron, V. (2024, March 28). *Importance of C3 continuation for the Commonwealth: Program highlights & looking ahead*. Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation.
<https://www.masstaxpayers.org/sites/default/files/publications/2024-03/MTF%20Chartbook%20-%20Importance%20of%20C3%20Continuation.pdf>

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<https://budget.digital.mass.gov/>

Gibbs, H., & Peeks, C. (2026, April 29). *America's licensed child care deserts*. Center for American Progress.
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<https://www.mass.gov/doc/january-2026-eec-board-meeting-slides/download>

Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care. (2026, August). *Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3): Data brief*. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/commonwealth-cares-for-children-c3-august-2026-data-brief/download>

Smith, J. (2025, August 6). *70 percent of Mass. infants live in child care deserts, according to state data*. Commonwealth Beacon.
<https://commonwealthbeacon.org/education/70-percent-of-mass-infants-live-in-child-care-deserts-according-to-state-data/>