

# Promoting Equitable Pandemic Recovery for Hartford's Young Children

March 2024



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This report was prepared by  
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# Introduction

Across the nation, the COVID-19 pandemic has had widespread impacts on young children and the systems that support their healthy development. Most child care centers closed during the height of the pandemic and some never re-opened; children have experienced unprecedented child care attendance gaps; and many children experienced severely disrupted routines, social isolation, trauma and stress at a critical developmental period.

This report shares insights on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the early care and education experiences and the development of young children in the City of Hartford, Connecticut. The goal is to provide city administrators, policymakers, early childhood advocates, and early childhood service providers with data they can use to inform their work to promote equitable pandemic recovery for all of Hartford's young children.

This report compiles data from three sources:

- Administrative records from the City of Hartford's Early Childhood Data System
- CTData survey of Hartford child care providers
- CTData focus groups with parents of young children in Hartford

Using these data sources, we analyze:

- Pandemic-related changes in young children's enrollment and attendance in state-funded child care centers in Hartford, overall and disaggregated by age range, racial/ethnic identity, English language learner status, family income level, and zip code of residence
- Child care provider reports of child care slot vacancies and reasons for these vacancies
- Pandemic-related changes in children's receipt of services for a developmental delay or disability
- Child care provider reports of their current concerns about children's development
- Parents' stories of how the pandemic has impacted their family

# Key Findings

## Enrollment

- Total enrollments in Hartford's state-funded child care centers dropped by 43% following the onset of the pandemic.
- As of September 2022, total enrollments were still at just 70% of pre-pandemic levels.
- Enrollments at community-based centers were at just 67% of pre-pandemic levels in September 2022, whereas enrollments at public school preschools had recovered to 86% of pre-pandemic levels.
- Child care providers report insufficient demand from families as the top reason for vacant child care slots in spring 2023.
- Preschool-aged children and those with family incomes below the poverty threshold showed larger and more sustained drops in enrollment. As of September 2022:
  - Enrollments for children aged 3-4 years were at 67% of pre-pandemic levels.
  - Enrollments for children with family incomes below the poverty threshold were at 59% of pre-pandemic levels.
- As of September 2022, young children in poverty residing in Hartford's 06120 zip code (the northeast corner of the city) were disproportionately likely not to be enrolled in a child care program that receives School Readiness or Child Day Care Contract funding from the state, compared to children in poverty residing in other Hartford zip codes.

## Attendance

- Average attendance rates for children in state-funded child care centers dropped by 3 to 4 percentage points after the onset of the pandemic.
- Attendance rates for children identifying as Hispanic and for English Language Learners dropped by 5 to 6 percentage points in the three years following the onset of the pandemic.

## Child Development

- As of spring 2023, child care providers reported moderate to high levels of concern about children's development and high rates of emotional and behavioral problems.
- Providers requested more supports to help them meet the needs of children with developmental delays or challenging behaviors.

# Recommendations for Next Steps

The findings shared in this report provide insight into disparities in the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Hartford's young children. However, they tell us little about *why* these disparities exist.

These findings should be seen as a jumping-off point for conversations among city administrators, child care providers, and parents of young children to explore potential underlying causes for these disparities and to brainstorm solutions.

These findings also provide hints for where additional efforts may be warranted to promote equitable pandemic recovery. For example:

- More thoughtful outreach to families with incomes below the poverty threshold may be needed to return their child care enrollment rates to pre-pandemic levels.
- Child care centers that serve many children who identify as Hispanic or who are English Language Learners may need more support to bolster children's attendance rates.
- Child care center administrators need more resources and supports to meet the needs of children with developmental delays or challenging behaviors.



# Data Sources

## The City of Hartford's Early Childhood Data System

### Background

The City of Hartford manages an Early Childhood Data System that contains data on all Hartford child care centers that are receiving School Readiness Grants or Child Day Care Contract funding from the state. This data system includes information on both children who are enrolled in state-funded slots and, conditional on parents signing a permission form, children who are enrolled in non-state-funded slots at the sites that are receiving state funding.

For this project, CTData obtained non-identified records from the City of Hartford's Early Childhood Data System for children who were enrolled in state-funded child care centers between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, and April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The data request and the research plan were reviewed and approved by the Hartford Data Collaborative and Solutions IRB.

### Analysis Sample

In this report, we focus on enrollments as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of each school year and attendance rates in the 2017-18 through 2022-2023 fiscal years.

We analyze **enrollment data for 47 child care sites** that received state funding since January 2017. Twenty-eight of the 47 sites (60%) had received state funding during each fiscal year from 2017-2018 through 2022-2023.

The enrollment sample consists of **4,812 children** who were enrolled at a state-funded child care site as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of any school year between 2017-2018 and 2022-2023 and who were under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup> of that school year (i.e., they were not kindergarten age-eligible).

We analyze **attendance data for 25 state-funded child care sites** that reported at least three months of attendance data for at least two fiscal years (July 1<sup>st</sup> – June 30<sup>th</sup>) between 2017-2018 and 2022-2023. Our attendance rate calculations exclude March – August of 2020 due to extensive site closures and inconsistent attendance reporting during these months, and all months after April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023, which is when the data were exported. The attendance sample excludes all state-funded preschool programs at public schools since these sites did not enter attendance data into the City of Hartford's Early Childhood Data System prior to the 2022-2023 school year.

The attendance sample consists of **3,590 children** who were enrolled at one of these 25 state-funded sites for at least 40 in-person days (excluding weekends, site closures, and distance learning) in any fiscal year between 2017-2018 and 2022-2023 and who were under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup> of the fiscal year.



# CTData Survey of Hartford Child Care Providers

## Background

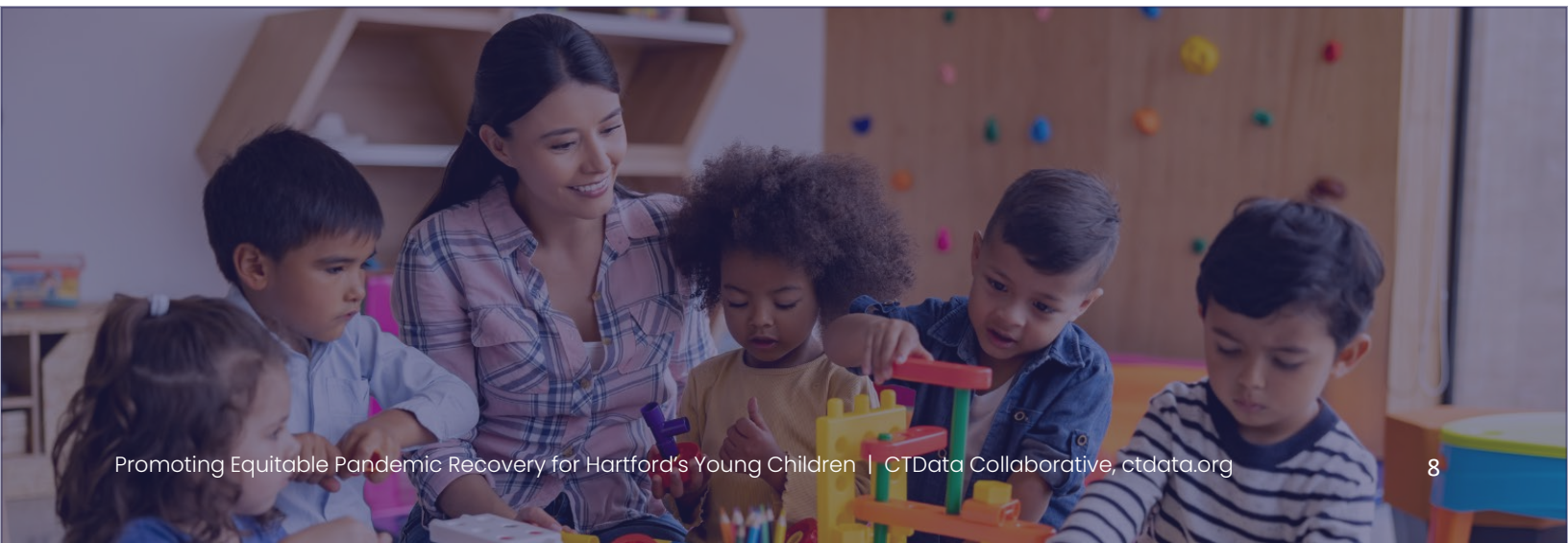
CTData partnered with the Division of Early Learning in the City of Hartford's Department of Families, Children, Youth, and Recreation on a survey that was distributed to administrators of all Hartford child care programs in March through April of 2023. This survey asked about providers' current operational challenges and needs, as well as their concerns about children's development and staff stress levels. The survey was made available in both English and Spanish. All survey research protocols were approved by Solutions IRB.

## Analysis Sample

In total, **49 responses** were collected between March 16th and April 10th, 2023. These included:

- **22 administrators of child care centers**, representing 49% of the 45 Hartford child care center administrators who were invited to complete the survey.
  - These 22 administrators reported on **25 community-based child care centers and 11 public school pre-K's** (with one administrator reporting on all 11 public school pre-K's), representing 61% of the 59 child care centers in Hartford.
- **27 family child care providers**, representing 30% of the 89 family child care providers who were invited to participate.

Thirty-one of the 36 child care centers reported on in the survey (86%) were currently receiving School Readiness or Child Day Care Contract funding from the state. One center was receiving Head Start or Early Head Start funding. Nineteen child care centers (53%) and 21 family child care providers (78%) accepted Care 4 Kids subsidies.



# CTData Focus Groups with Hartford Parents of Young Children

## Background

CTData, in partnership with the Division of Early Learning in the City of Hartford's Department of Families, Children, Youth, and Recreation, conducted focus groups with parents of young children in Hartford to hear their perspectives on the impact of the pandemic on their families and current challenges with child care access in the city. All focus groups were conducted in April of 2023. All focus group research protocols were approved by Solutions IRB.

Parents of young children were recruited through flyers in both English and Spanish distributed to parents by Hartford Public Schools, state-funded child care centers, and family child care providers. Parents and legal guardians were eligible to participate if they lived in Hartford and had any child under 8 years old as of April 2023 (that is, they had a child who was under 5 years old when the pandemic began in the spring of 2020).

## Analysis Sample

In total, 15 parents or legal guardians participated in the focus groups. The focus groups were held in three sessions with between four and seven parents in each session.

Two parents had a child who was born after the pandemic began, eleven parents (73%) had a child who was 0 to 2 years old when the pandemic began, five (33%) had a child who was 3 to 4 years old when the pandemic began, and seven (47%) had a child who was more than 4 years old when the pandemic began.

Child care arrangements used by participating parents for any of their children included child care centers (53%), family child care providers (13%), and parent/guardian-only care (33%).

Four parents (27%) lived in the Asylum Hill neighborhood of Hartford, two (13%) lived in the Clay-Arsenal neighborhood, and the remainder lived in 9 different neighborhoods across the city.



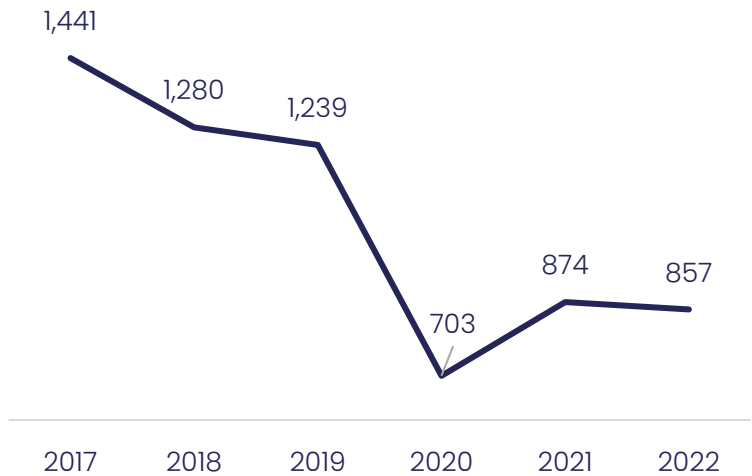
# Child Care Center Enrollments & Attendance

## Total Enrollments

The total number of young children who were recorded as enrolled in a state-funded child care center in Hartford’s Early Childhood Data System **dropped by 43%** from September 2019 to September 2020, six months after the COVID-19 pandemic began.

The number of enrolled children rebounded slightly in 2021 and 2022 but remained at **just 70% of the September 2019 enrollment levels**.

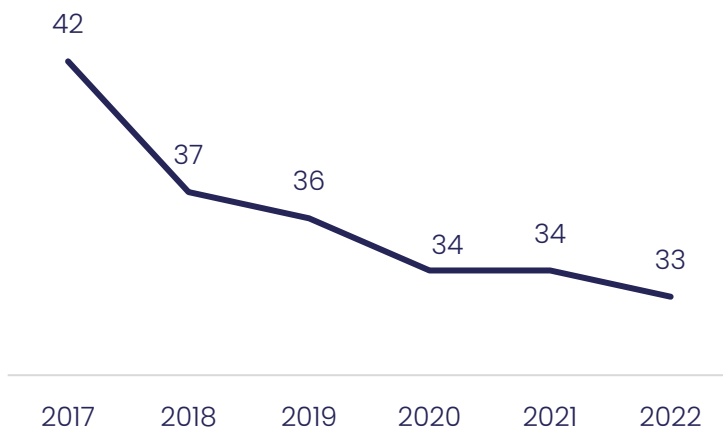
Number of Young Children Enrolled in State-Funded Child Care Centers as of September 30th



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

Note: Enrollments are measured as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year and are limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup>.

Number of Child Care Sites Receiving State Funding in Each School Year



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

Note: Years reported indicate the beginning of the school year (e.g., “2017” refers to the 2017–2018 school year). Sites are counted as receiving state funding in a school year if they had any enrollment records in the City of Hartford’s Early Childhood Data System between September 30th and May 30th of that school year.

There were also two fewer sites receiving state funding in the 2020–2021 school year than in the 2019–2020 school year, which could account for some portion of this decrease in the total number of children enrolled.

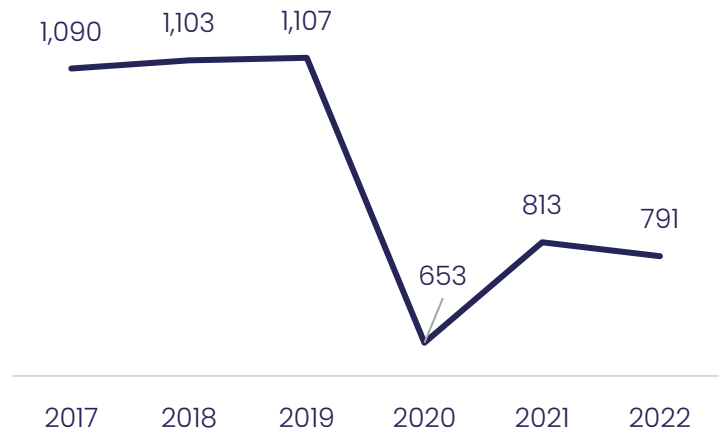
To adjust for the decrease in the number of funded sites, we additionally examined the number of children enrolled only at the 28 sites that had continuously received state funding from the 2017–2018 school year through the 2022–2023 school year.

Child care sites that were continuously funded over the 6-year period experienced a **41% drop in enrollment** between September 2019 and September 2020, and rebounded to just over **70% of pre-pandemic enrollment levels** in 2021 and 2022.

## Enrollments by Type of Child Care Center

Community-based centers experienced **more sustained decreases in enrollments** than did public school preschools. By September of 2022, public school preschools had recovered to 86% of their pre-pandemic enrollment levels whereas community-based centers had only recovered to 67% of their pre-pandemic levels.

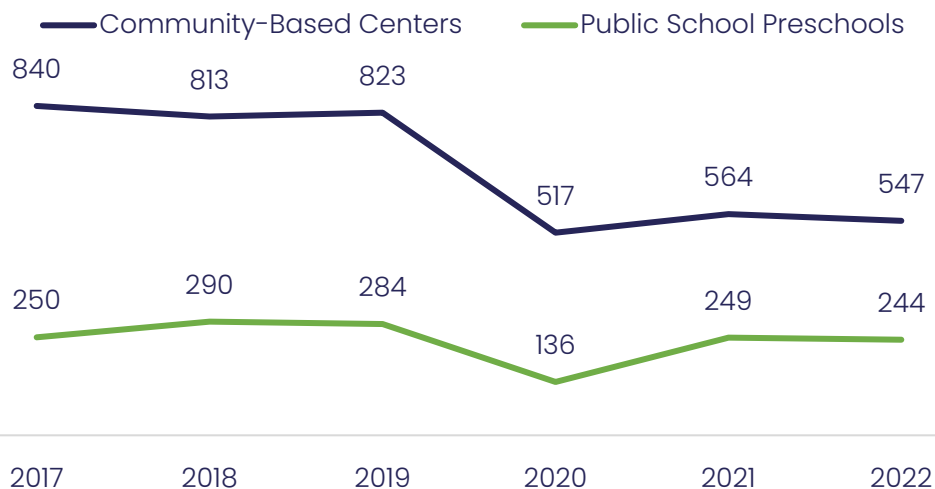
Number of Young Children Enrolled in Continuously-State-Funded Child Care Centers



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

Note: Enrollments are summed across child care sites that received continuous state funding between the 2017-18 and 2022-23 school years (28 sites). Enrollments are measured as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year and are limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup>.

Number of Children Enrolled in Continuously-State-Funded Child Care Centers by Type



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

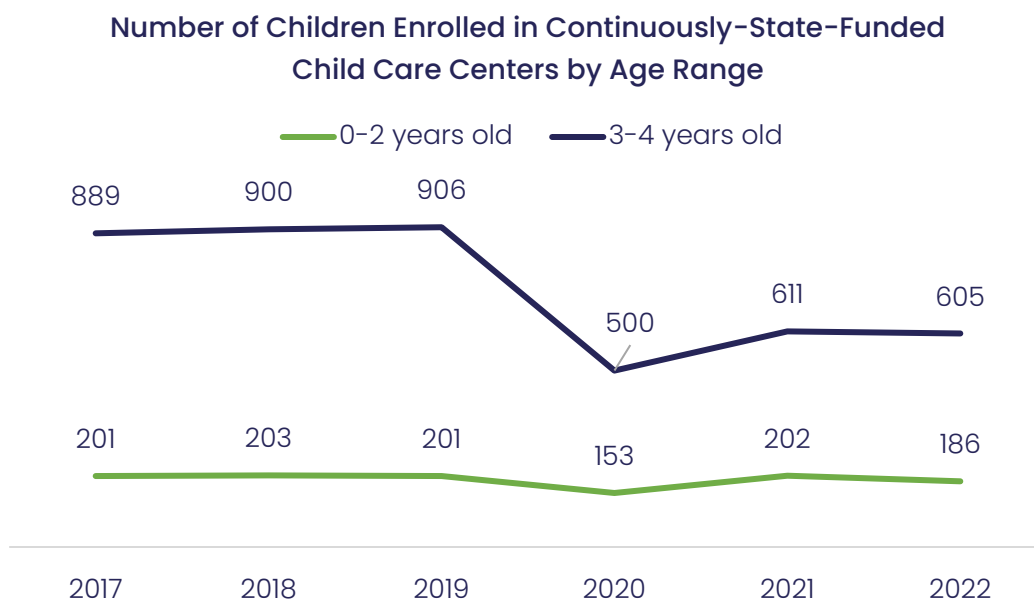
Note: Enrollments are summed across child care sites that received continuous state funding between the 2017-18 and 2022-23 school years (28 sites). Enrollments are measured as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year and are limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup>.

## Enrollments by Child Age Range

The pandemic's impact on enrollment levels was **larger and more sustained for children aged 3-4 years old** compared to children aged 0-2 years.

Enrollment levels for children aged 3-4 years dropped by 45% from September 2019 to September 2020, while enrollment levels for children aged 0-2 years dropped by just 24%.

By September 2022, enrollments for children aged 0-2 years had recovered to 93% of their pre-pandemic level, whereas enrollments for children aged 3-4 years were at just 67% of their pre-pandemic level.



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

Note: Enrollments are summed across child care sites that received continuous state funding between the 2017-18 school year and the 2022-23 school year (n = 28 sites). Enrollment counts and children's ages are measured as of September 30th of each year. Counts are limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup>

## Child Care Provider Reports of Slot Vacancies

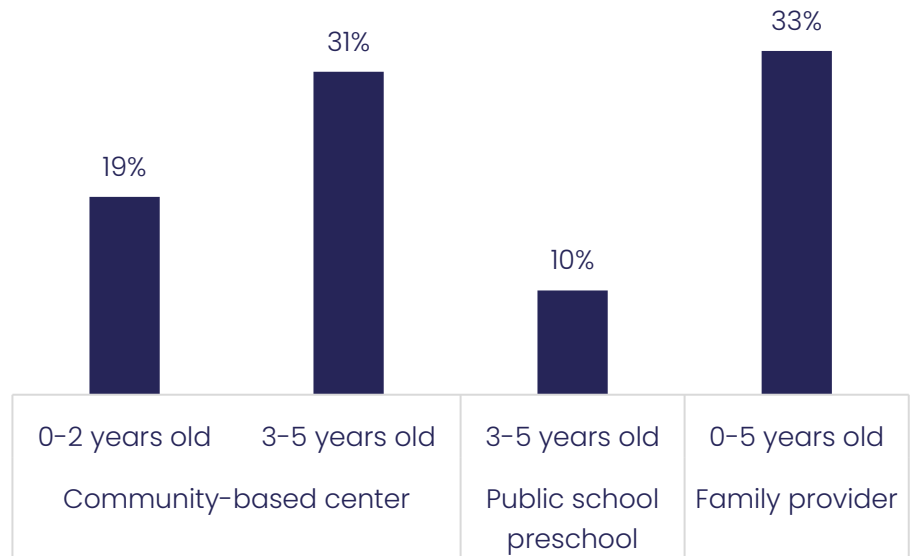
The trends observed in the City of Hartford’s administrative data on enrollments in state-funded child care centers were echoed in the responses to our survey of child care providers in Spring of 2023.

Ninety-six percent of community-based child care centers and 91% of public school preschools were reported to have vacant slots as of March or April of 2023.

Median reported vacancy rates were highest for 3- to 5-year-old slots at community-based child care centers, with a 31% vacancy rate.

Median vacancy rates were lower at public school preschools and for 0- to 2-year-old slots at community-based centers.

Median Slot Vacancy Rates in Spring of 2023  
by Type of Child Care Provider



Source: CTData Survey of Hartford Child Care Providers.

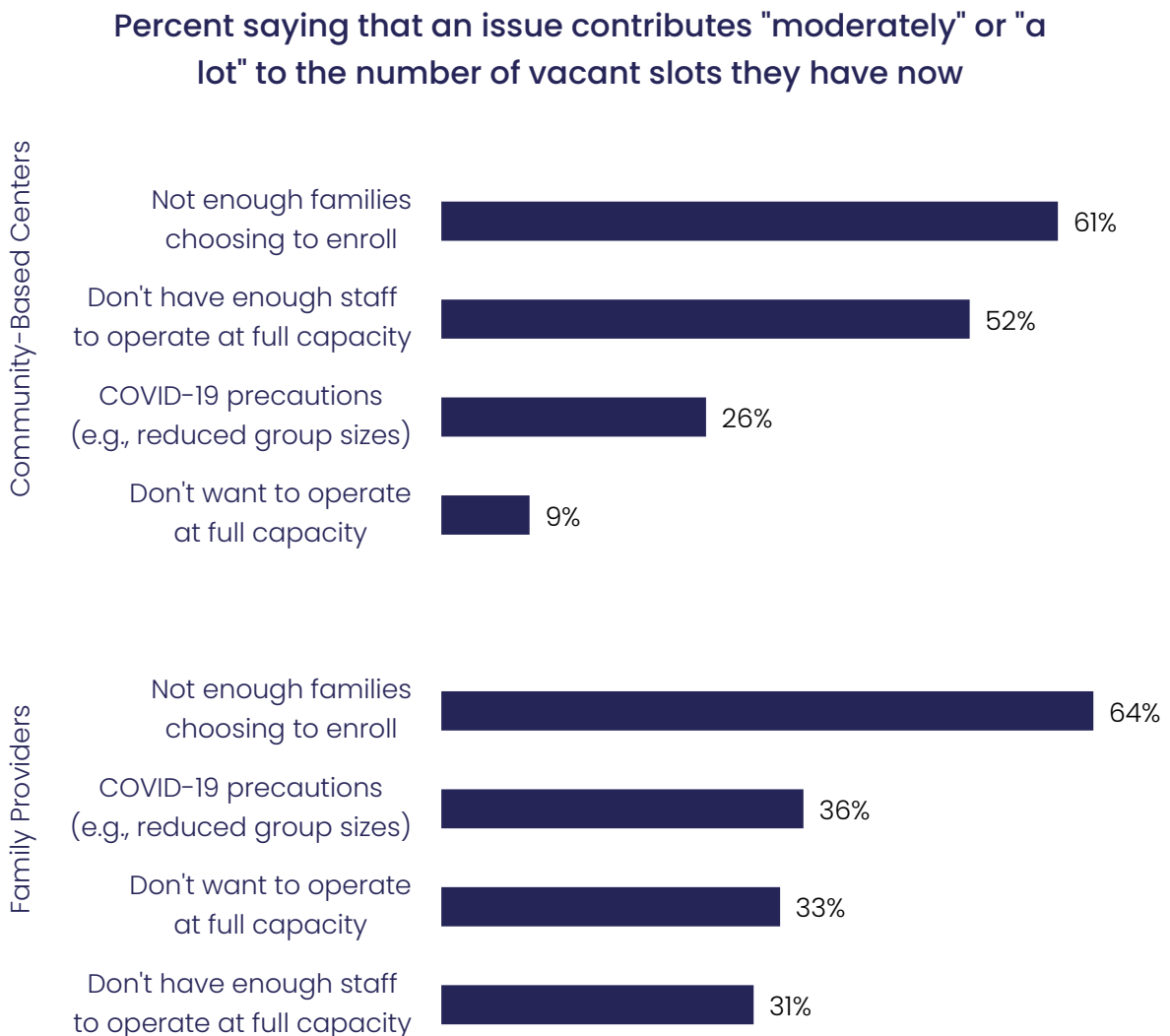
Note: Vacancy rates are calculated from the number of vacant slots and total slot capacity as reported by child care providers in March-April 2023. Sample sizes are: 15 community-based centers licensed to serve children 0-2 years old, 23 community-based centers licensed to serve children 3-5 years old, 11 public school preschools, and 19 family providers.

In addition, 70% of family child care providers reported having vacancies for non-school-aged children as of March or April of 2023. The median non-school-aged slot vacancy rate for family child care providers was 33% (a median of 2 vacant slots per provider).

## Reasons for Slot Vacancies

Our survey of Hartford child care providers asked about the reasons for slot vacancies. For community-based centers, **insufficient demand from families** was the top issue cited as contributing to vacancies (61% of centers), followed by **not having enough staff to operate at full capacity** (52% of centers).

Family child care providers also cited **insufficient demand from families** as the top reason for vacancies.



Source: Source: CTData Survey of Hartford Child Care Providers.

Note: Percentages are based on responses for 23 community-based centers (96% of those with any vacancies) and between 13 and 15 family providers (68% to 78% of those with any vacancies) in March–April 2023.



## Average Attendance Rates

Average attendance rates for children in state-funded child care centers **dropped by 3 to 4 percentage points** after the onset of the pandemic, from a stable rate of 82% in the three fiscal years prior to the onset of the pandemic to 78% - 79% in the three following fiscal years, a change that was statistically significant.

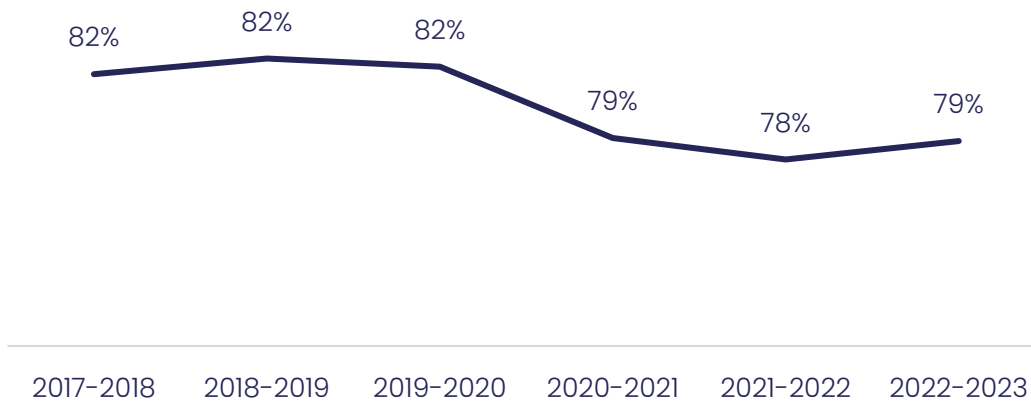
This change does not take into account the months of child care that most children missed in March through August of 2020, since we excluded these months from the attendance rate calculations due to site closures and inconsistent attendance reporting.

The attendance rates reported here also do not account for days missed while sites were closed for quarantines during the pandemic, since these site closures were not recorded separately from routine site closures (e.g., holidays and breaks).

Thus, children’s actual child care attendance during the first year of the pandemic is likely much lower than the attendance rates reported here.

For more details on the attendance rate calculations, see the Data Sources section.

Average Child Care Attendance Rates



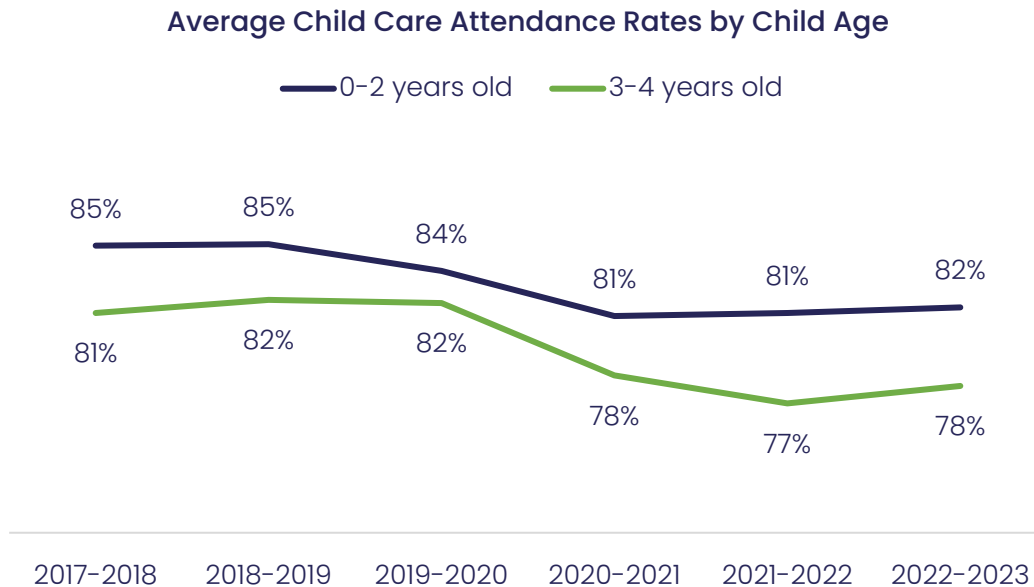
Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

Note: Attendance rates are calculated for each fiscal year (July 1st - June 30th), excluding March-August of 2020 and excluding all dates after April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The sample is limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup> of each fiscal year.

## Attendance Rates by Age

In all fiscal years except 2019–2020, children aged 0 to 2 years old had a significantly higher average attendance rate than did children aged 3 to 4 years.

Children in both age ranges experienced a drop of 3 to 4 percentage points in their average attendance rates after the onset of the pandemic, and there was no significant difference between age ranges in the magnitude of this change.<sup>1</sup>



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

Note: Attendance rates are calculated for each fiscal year (July 1st – June 30th), excluding March–August of 2020 and excluding all dates after April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The sample is limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup> of each fiscal year. Sample sizes for each fiscal year range from 50 to 219 children aged 0–2 years (with less than 100 children aged 0–2 years in each fiscal year prior to 2020–2021), and from 528 to 998 children aged 3–4 years.

<sup>1</sup>Notably, the age distribution of children in the attendance data shifted dramatically between the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 fiscal years. In the 2017–2018 through 2019–2020 fiscal years, 90% – 95% of children in the attendance sample are 3–4 years old, whereas this percentage drops to 70% – 75% in the 2020–2021 through 2022–2023 fiscal years. This shift is attributable to two factors: (1) prior to 2020–2021, enrolled children under 3 years old were less likely than older children to have their attendance reported, and (2) children under 3 years old were more likely than older children to have fewer than 40 days of attendance recorded in any fiscal year. These factors result in a relatively small attendance data sample for children aged 0–2 years prior to the pandemic, which limits the power to detect a statistically significant difference in attendance rate trends from pre- to post-pandemic for children aged 0–2 vs. 3–4 years.

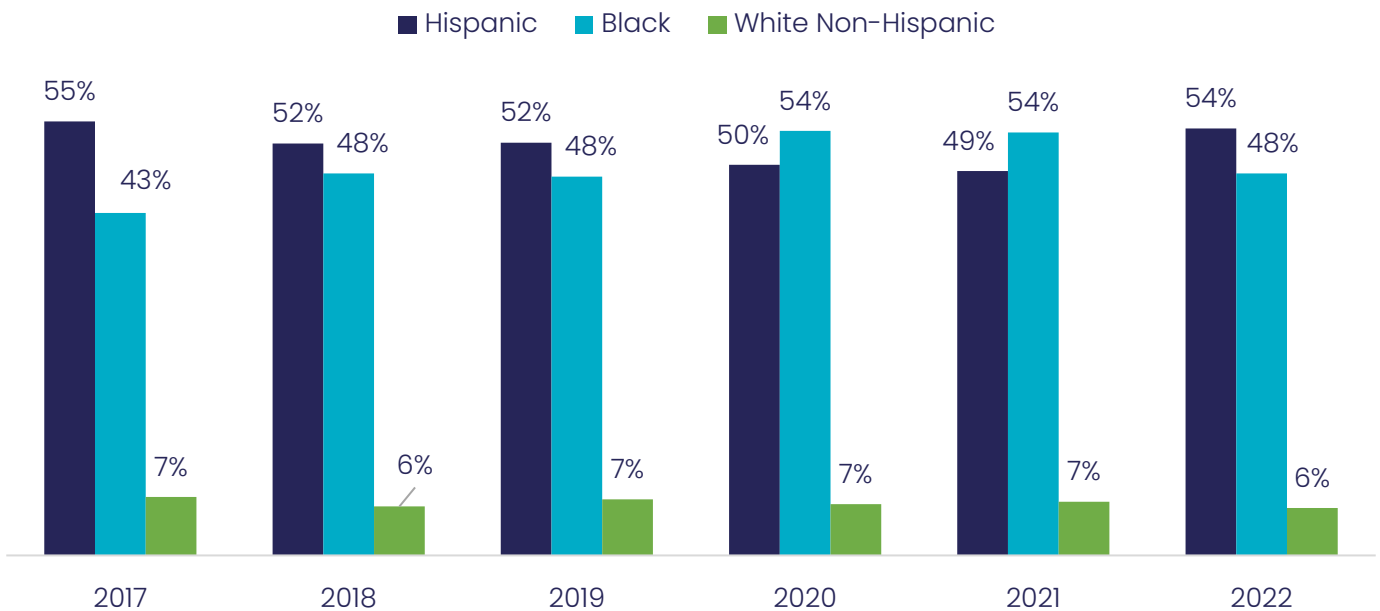
## Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

Shifts in the racial and ethnic identities of children who are enrolled in state-funded child care centers can shed light on racial inequities in children's experiences during the pandemic.

Between September of 2019 and 2020, the percentage of enrolled children identifying as Black **increased by 6 percentage points** (from 48% to 54%), a change that was statistically significant.

Although there was a 2 percentage-point decrease in the percentage of enrolled children identifying as Hispanic from 2019 to 2020, this change was not statistically significant.

Percentages of Young Children Enrolled in State-Funded Child Care Centers by Race/Ethnicity



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

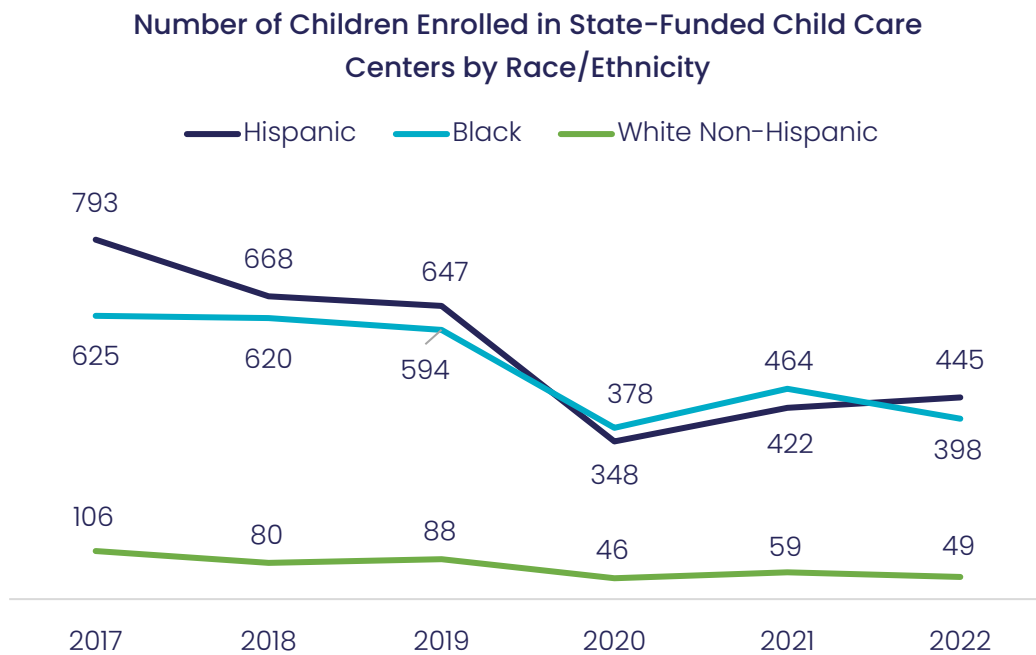
Note: Percentages are measured for children enrolled in state-funded child care centers as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year and are limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup>. Hispanic = Hispanic ethnicity alone or in combination with any race; Black = Black alone or in combination with any other race; White Non-Hispanic = White not of Hispanic ethnicity, alone or in combination with any other race.

Total enrollments for children identifying as Black decreased by 36% between September 2019 and September 2020, while enrollments for children identifying as Hispanic and as White non-Hispanic decreased by 46% and 48%, respectively.

Enrollments for all groups rebounded by about 20% from 2020 to 2021. However, from 2021 to 2022, enrollments for children identifying as Black decreased by 14% whereas enrollments for children identifying as Hispanic increased slightly.

By September of 2022, enrollments for children identifying as Black and for children identifying as Hispanic were both at 67% – 69% of pre-pandemic levels, and the percentage of total enrollments for both racial/ethnic groups were not significantly different from pre-pandemic levels.

A similar trend was seen when limiting the sample to just the 28 sites that were continuously state-funded over the 6-year period.



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

Note: Enrollments are measured as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year and are limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup>. Hispanic = Hispanic ethnicity alone or in combination with any race; Black = Black alone or in combination with any other race; White Non-Hispanic = White not of Hispanic ethnicity, alone or in combination with any other race.

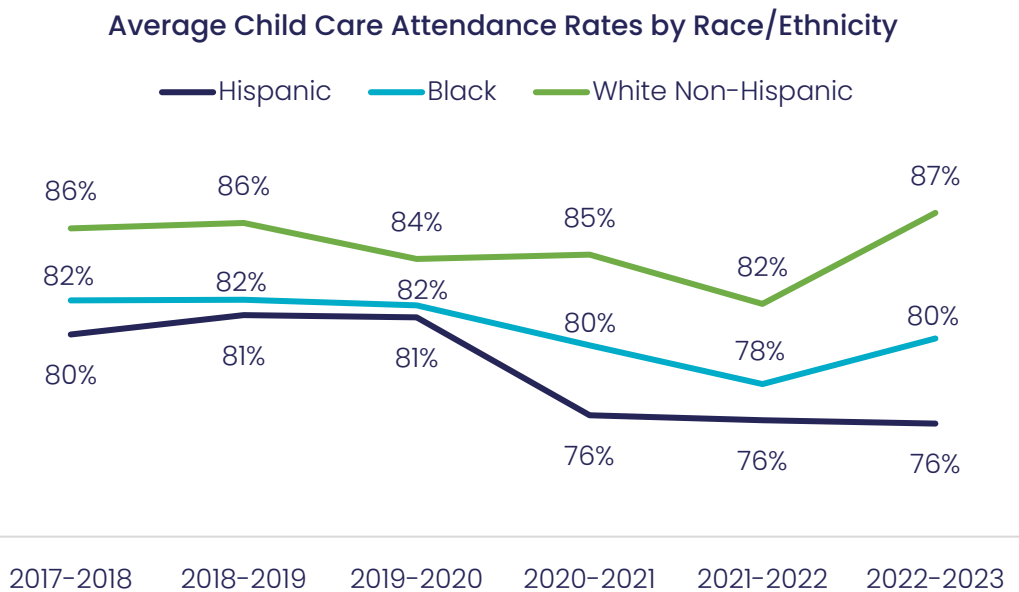
## Attendance Rates by Race/Ethnicity

Children with different racial/ethnic identities showed different trends in attendance rates over the course of the pandemic.

Children identifying as Hispanic **showed a large and sustained drop in attendance** after the onset of the pandemic. Their average attendance rate dropped from 81% to 76% immediately following the onset of the pandemic (a statistically significant change) and remained steady at 76% over the two following fiscal years.

Average attendance rates for children identifying as Black dropped slightly from 82% to 80% immediately following the onset of the pandemic (a statistically significant decrease) and dropped further to 78% in the 2021-2022 fiscal year before rebounding slightly back to 80% in 2022-2023.

In contrast, attendance rates for the relatively small sample of children identifying as White non-Hispanic did not change significantly over the course of the pandemic. Although these children’s average rates appear to change from year to year, these changes are unreliable due to the smaller sample size.



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

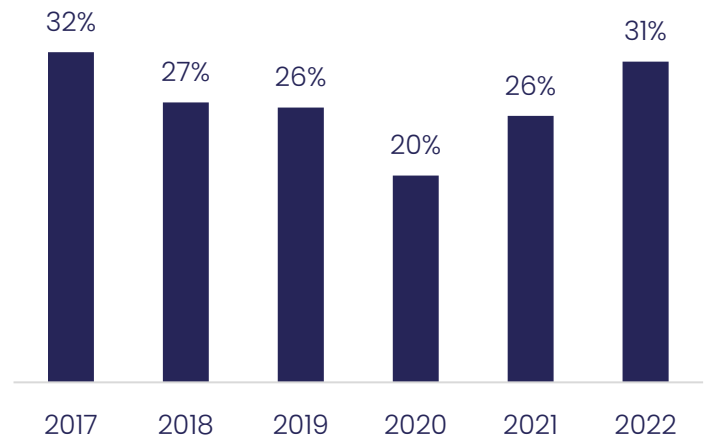
Note: Attendance rates are calculated for each fiscal year (July 1st – June 30th), excluding March–August of 2020 and excluding all dates after April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The sample is limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup> of each fiscal year. Sample sizes for each fiscal year range from 316 to 534 children identifying as Hispanic ethnicity alone or combination with any race; 375 to 533 children identifying as Black alone or in combination with any other race; and 35 to 102 children identifying as White not of Hispanic ethnicity, alone or in combination with any other race.

## Enrollment of Children Who Are English Language Learners

From September 2019 to 2020, the proportion of enrolled children who were English language learners **dropped by 6 percentage points**, from 26% to 20% (a statistically significant decline). Over this period, total enrollments for ELL children dropped by 57% while enrollments for non-ELL children only dropped by 38%.

However, by September of 2022, enrollments for ELL children had rebounded to **80% of pre-pandemic levels** whereas enrollments for non-ELL children were at just 65% of pre-pandemic levels.

Percent of Enrolled Children who are English Language Learners

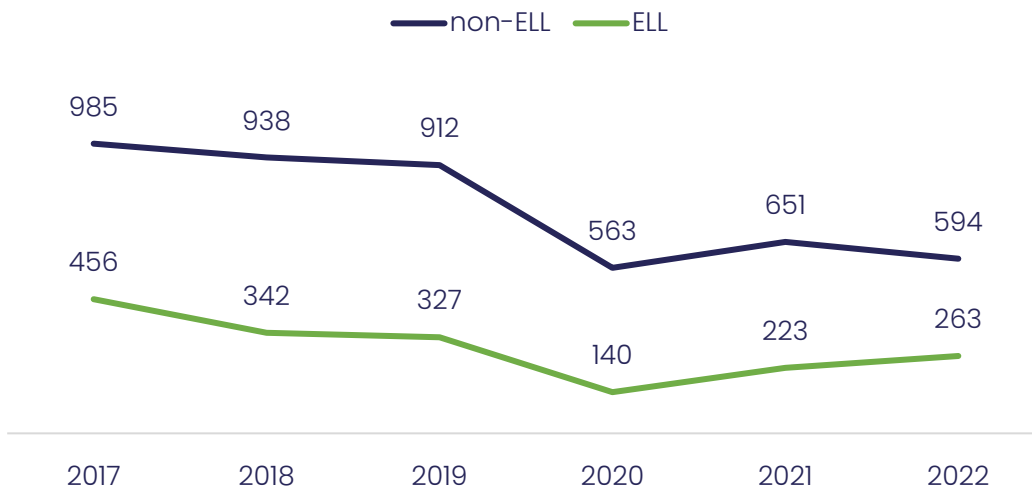


Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

Note: Percentages are measured for children enrolled in state-funded child care centers as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year and are limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup>.

This trend was the same when limiting the sample to just the 28 sites that were continuously state-funded over the 6-year period.

Number of Enrolled Children by English Language Learner (ELL) Status



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

Note: Enrollments are measured as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year and are limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup>.

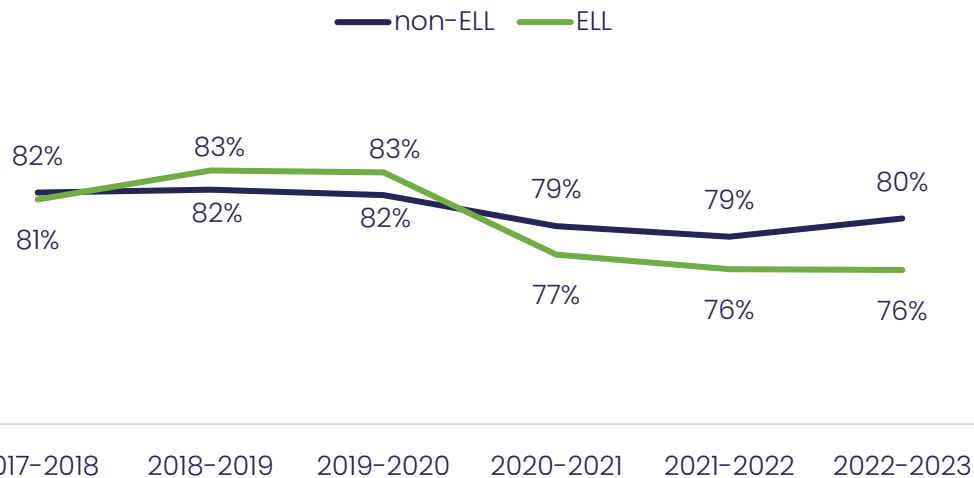
## Attendance Rates for Children Who Are English Language Learners

Children who were English language learners also experienced a **steep drop in their average attendance rates** immediately following the onset of the pandemic, from 83% to 77%. This drop in attendance rates was significantly larger than that observed for children who were not English language learners.

Furthermore, attendance rates for children who were English language learners remained at a lower average of 76% over the two following years.

Prior to the pandemic, there was no significant difference in attendance rates between children who were and were not English language learners. However, a gap in attendance rates grew in the years following the pandemic and by the 2022-2023 fiscal year, children who were English language learners had significantly lower attendance rates than did children who were not English language learners.<sup>2</sup>

Average Child Care Attendance Rates of Children by English Language Learner (ELL) Status



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

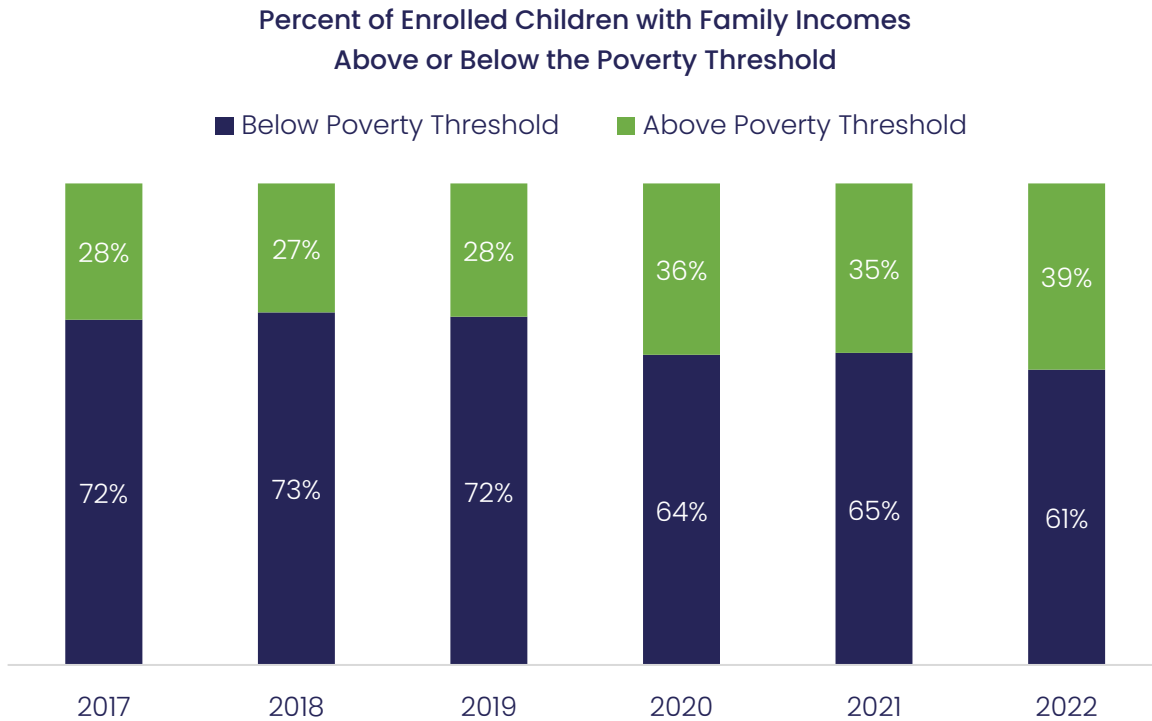
Note: Attendance rates are calculated for each fiscal year (July 1st - June 30th), excluding March-August of 2020 and excluding all dates after April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The sample is limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup> of each fiscal year. Sample sizes for each fiscal year range from 153 to 301 children who were English Language Learners (ELL) and from 520 to 861 non-ELL children.

<sup>2</sup>It is worth noting that, although most children who were English language learners also identified as Hispanic, the reverse is not true. In each year, 80% - 84% of enrolled children who were English language learners identified as Hispanic. However, the percentage of all children identifying as Hispanic who were English language learners ranged from 33% to 48% in each year.

## Enrollment by Family Income Level

State-funded child care centers are required to have at least 60% of enrolled families with incomes at or below 75% of the state median income.<sup>3</sup>

Our analyses of the family income data recorded in Hartford’s Early Childhood Data System show that, in 2017 through 2022, between 61% and 73% of enrolled children’s family incomes were at or below the federal poverty threshold for a family of four.<sup>4</sup>



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

Note: Percentages are measured for children enrolled in state-funded child care centers as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year and are limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup>. Family income categories are calculated relative to each year’s federal poverty threshold for a family of four.

Between 2019 and 2020, the percent of enrolled children whose family income was at or below the federal poverty threshold decreased by 8 percentage points (from 72% to 64%), a change that was statistically significant. The percent of enrolled children with family incomes below the poverty threshold did not change significantly between 2020 and 2022.

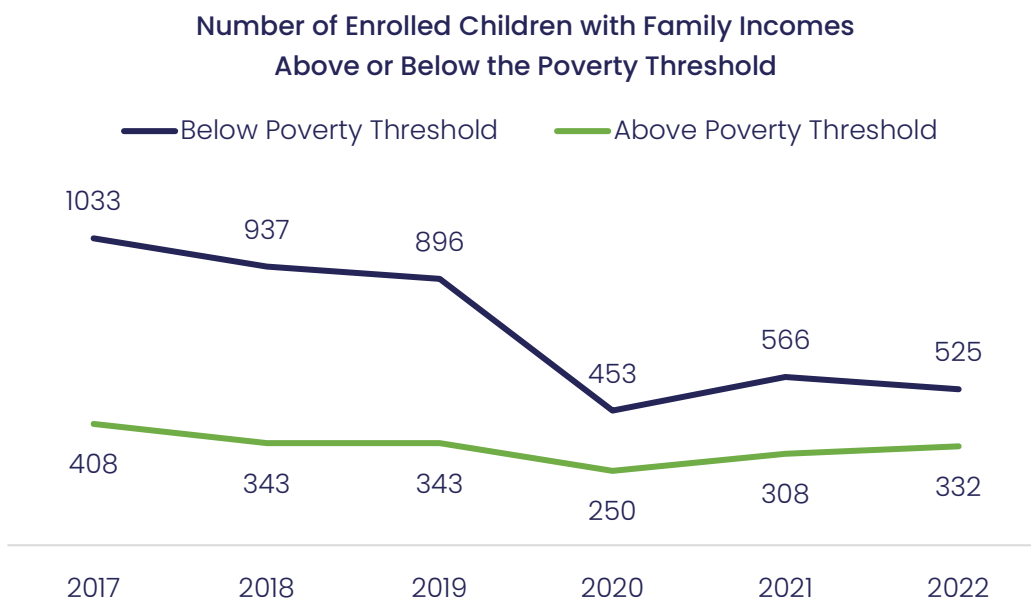
<sup>3</sup>Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (2023). [Connecticut Administered State-funded General Policy B-03: Eligibility, Enrollment, Attendance in State-funded Programs.](#)

<sup>4</sup>According to the American Community Survey 2020 5-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata, the average size for a Hartford family with a child under five years old is four members.



Between September of 2019 and 2020, enrollments for children with family incomes below the federal poverty threshold **decreased by 49%**, whereas enrollments for children with family incomes above the poverty threshold only decreased by 27%. By September of 2022, enrollments for children with family incomes below the poverty threshold were at just **59% of pre-pandemic levels**, whereas enrollments for children with family incomes above the poverty threshold had recovered to 97% of pre-pandemic levels.

The pattern of findings was the same when limiting the sample to just the 28 sites that were continuously state-funded over the 6-year period.



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

Note: Enrollments are measured as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year and are limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup>. Family income categories are calculated relative to each year's federal poverty threshold for a family of four.

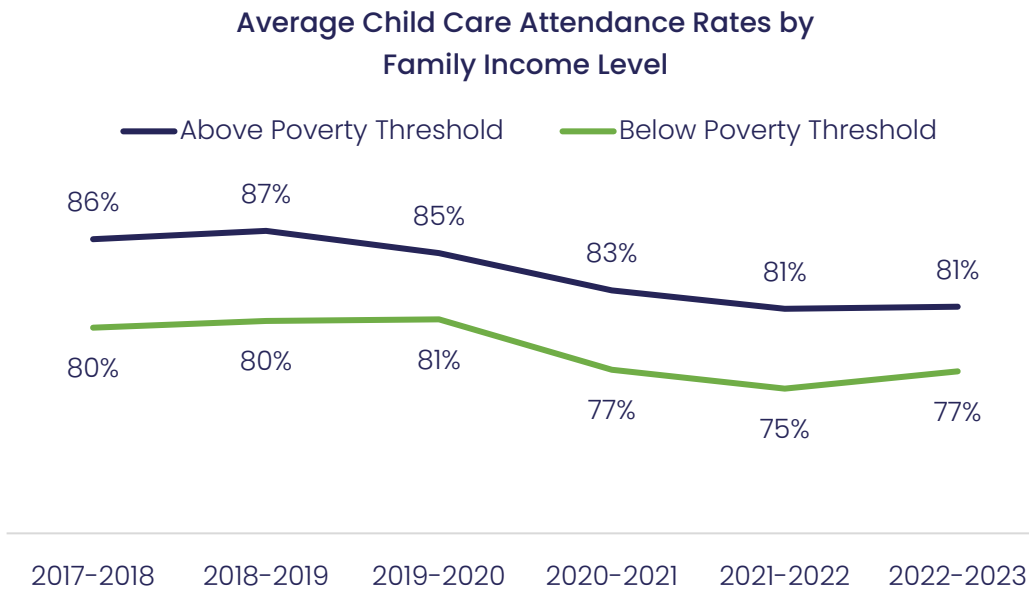
We analyzed data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) to understand whether shifts over time in the total percentage of Hartford families with children that had incomes below the federal poverty threshold could account for these changes in enrollment levels by poverty status. However, ACS 1-year estimates show no significant change from 2019 to 2021 (the first post-pandemic year for which single-year estimates were released) in the percentage of families with children under 5 years old whose incomes were below the federal poverty threshold, either in Hartford or across the state of Connecticut.

In September of 2019, young children living under the poverty threshold who were enrolled in state-funded child care centers accounted for about 29% ( $\pm 5\%$ ) of all young children living under the poverty threshold in Hartford according to 2017-2021 ACS 5-year estimates. In contrast, as of September of 2022 this percentage had dropped to just 17% ( $\pm 3\%$ ).

## Attendance Rates by Family Income Level

Children whose family incomes were below the federal poverty threshold had significantly lower average attendance rates in each fiscal year relative to children whose family incomes were above the federal poverty threshold for a family of four.

Following the onset of the pandemic, both groups of children showed a significant and sustained decrease in attendance rates. There was no significant difference in the magnitude of this decrease between families above versus below the federal poverty threshold.



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

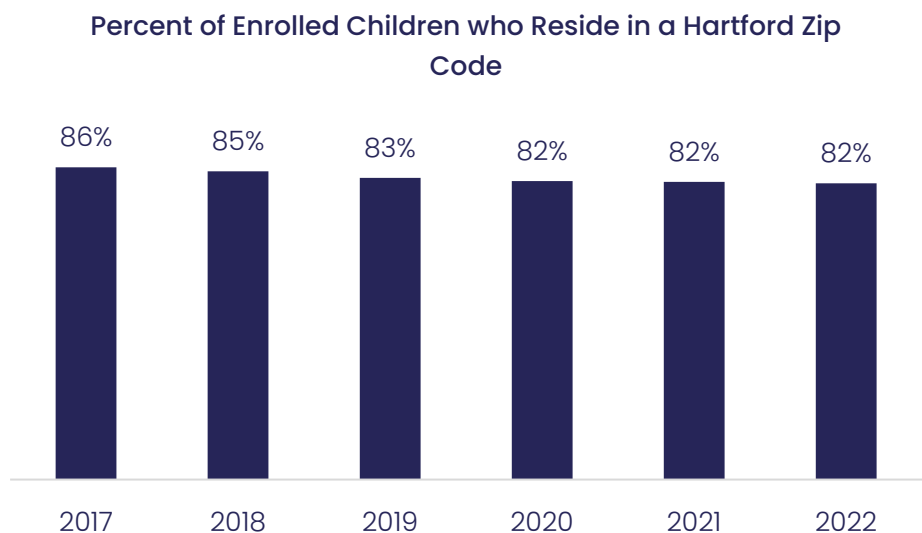
Note: Attendance rates are calculated for each fiscal year (July 1st - June 30th), excluding March-August of 2020 and excluding all dates after April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The sample is limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup> of each fiscal year. Family income categories are calculated relative to each year's federal poverty threshold for a family of four. Sample sizes for each fiscal year range from 423 to 781 children whose family incomes are below the federal poverty threshold and from 250 to 335 children whose family incomes are above the federal poverty threshold.



## Enrollment by Zip Code of Residence

To understand whether there were disproportionate changes in state-funded child care enrollments over the course of the pandemic for children residing in different zip codes, we analyzed the zip code of residence for children who were enrolled in a state-funded child care center as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year. We separately analyzed children who resided in a Hartford zip code and those who resided in a zip code outside of the city of Hartford.

In September of 2019, 83% of the children enrolled in state-funded child care centers resided in zip codes located within the City of Hartford. This percentage did not change significantly during the first three years of the pandemic.



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

Note: Percentages are measured as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year and are limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup>.

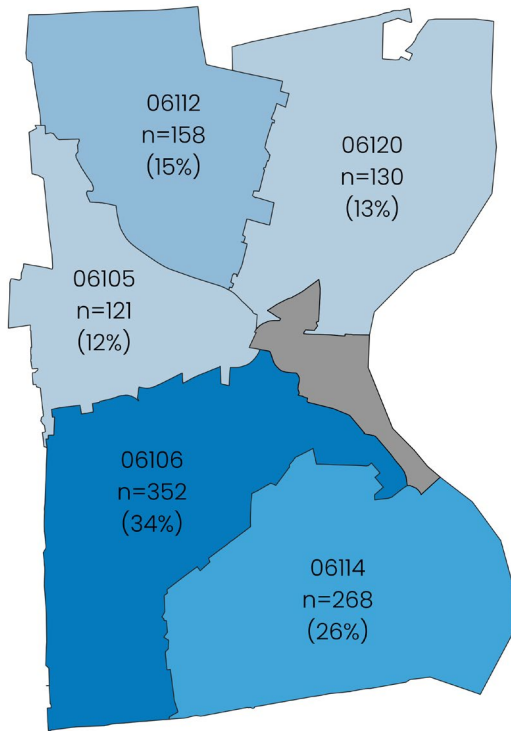
In September of 2019, 60% of enrolled children who resided in Hartford zip codes lived in the southern part of the city (zip codes 06106 and 06114, encompassing the neighborhoods of South End, South West, South Meadows, Behind the Rocks, Barry Square, Frog Hollow, Parkville, South Green, and Sheldon-Charter Oak).

Twenty-eight percent of enrolled children who resided in Hartford zip codes lived in the northern part of the city (zip codes 06112 and 06120, encompassing the neighborhoods of Upper Albany, Clay-Arsenal, Blue Hills, Northeast, and North Meadows).

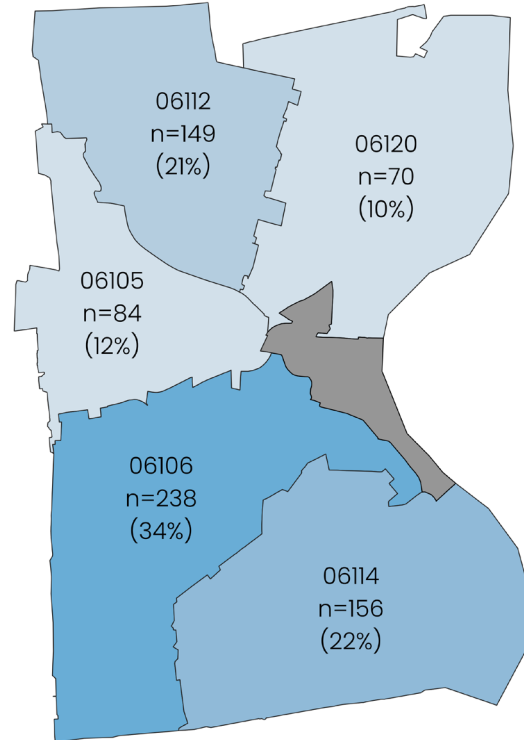
Only twelve percent of enrolled children from Hartford zip codes lived in the central-western part of the city (zip code 06105) encompassing the West End and Asylum Hill neighborhoods.

## Number of Children Enrolled in State-Funded Child Care Centers by Hartford Zip Code

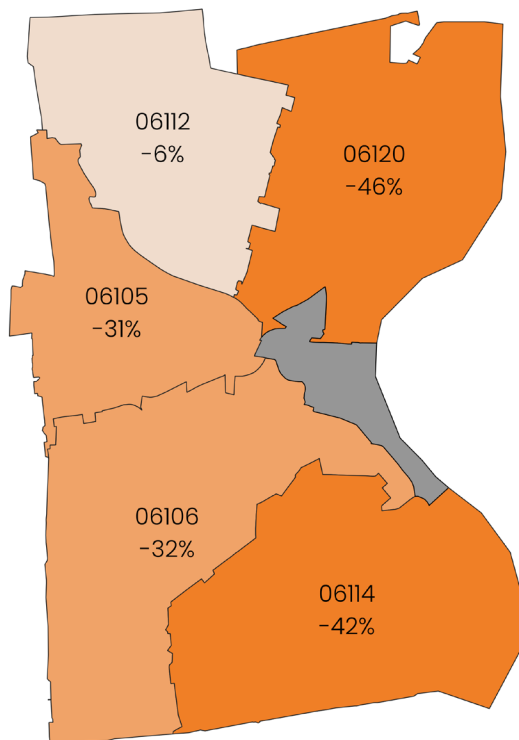
September 2019



September 2022



Percent Change in Number of Children Enrolled from September 2019 to September 2022

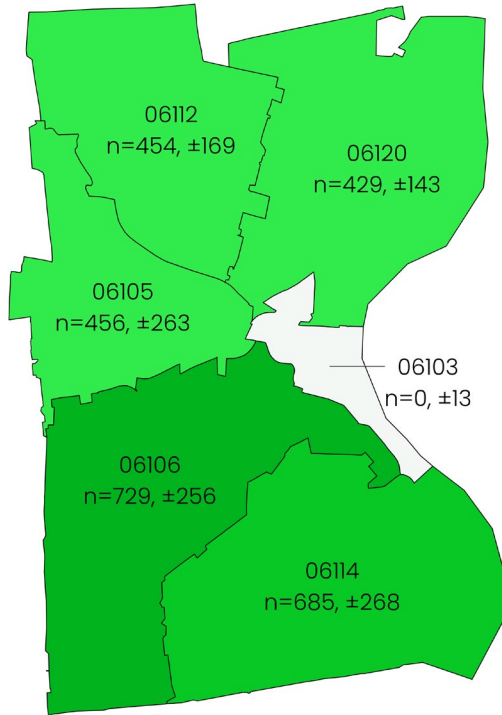


Between September 2019 and September 2022, the number of children enrolled in state-funded child care centers decreased by between 31% and 46% within each Hartford zip code, except for the 06112 zip code (in the northwest corner of the city, encompassing the neighborhoods of Blue Hills, Upper Albany, and portions of Northeast), where enrollments only dropped by 6%. As a result, the percentage of enrolled children who reside in the 06112 zip code increased significantly from 15% of all enrolled children in 2019 to 21% in 2022. Although small decreases were observed in the percent of all enrolled children who were residing in the 06114 and 06120 zip codes, these changes were not statistically significant.

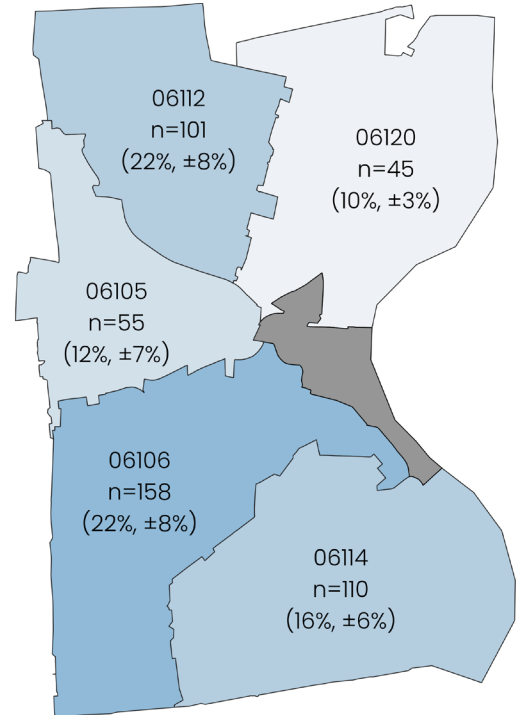
Maps Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

Maps Note: Enrollments are measured as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year and are limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup>. Data are suppressed for zip code 06103 because fewer than 15 children from this zip code were enrolled.

**Number of Children Under 5 Years Old Whose Family Incomes Are Below the Federal Poverty Threshold**



**Number of Children Under 5 Years Old Enrolled as of September 2022 Who Are in Poverty (% of all Children Under 5 in Poverty)**



Sources: 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table S1701; City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System

Note: Enrollments in state-funded child care centers by zip code and poverty status are measured as of September 30<sup>th</sup> of 2022. Data are suppressed for zip code 06103 because fewer than 15 children from this zip code were enrolled. Percentages reflect the estimated percentage of all children under 5 years old in poverty who are enrolled in state-funded child care centers, by zip code.

In September of 2022, within each Hartford zip code, the number of children under 5 years old in poverty who were enrolled in state-funded child care centers ranged from roughly 10% (±3%) to 22% (±8%) of the estimated total number of children under 5 years old in poverty residing within that zip code. The differences in percentages between each zip code and the city average (17%, ±3%) were not statistically significant with the exception of the 06120 zip code (Clay-Arsenal, portions of Northeast, and North Meadows), where the estimated percentage of young children under 5 years old in poverty who were enrolled in state-funded child care centers was significantly lower than the city average.

This suggests that young children in poverty in the 06120 zip code are **disproportionately likely not to be enrolled** in a child care program that receives School Readiness or Child Day Care Contract funding from the state. Notably, this analysis does not take into account children enrolled in Head Start programs, Early Head Start programs, or any other child care centers offering free or reduced tuition to low-income families that do not also receive state funding through a School Readiness or Child Day Care Contract grant.

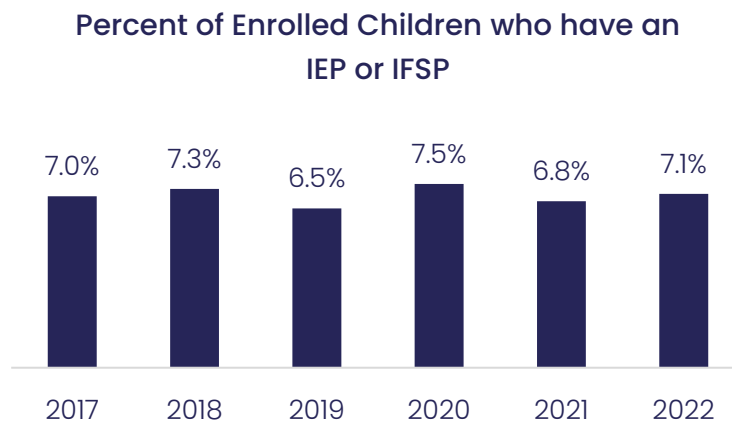
A photograph of a man from behind, lifting a young child into the air. The man is wearing a dark red t-shirt and has his arms extended upwards, supporting the child. The child is wearing a bright red polo shirt and dark pants, and is smiling. The background is a light-colored brick wall with a dark door on the right. The overall image has a blue-tinted overlay.

# Children's Development

## Percent of Enrolled Children Receiving Services for a Developmental Delay or Disability

Children with an identified developmental delay or disability are eligible to receive publicly-funded early intervention services under the Federal Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA). In Connecticut, early intervention services under IDEA for infants and toddlers under 3 years of age are managed by Connecticut Birth to Three, and preschool special education services for children aged 3 to 5 years are managed by local and regional school districts.

Infants and toddlers who are receiving Birth to Three services receive an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), and children who are receiving preschool special education services receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).



Source: City of Hartford Early Childhood Data System.

Note: Percentages were measured for children enrolled in state-funded child care centers as of September 30th of each year and are limited to children under 5 years old as of December 31<sup>st</sup>.

Our analysis of the City of Hartford’s Early Childhood Data System shows that the proportion of children enrolled in state-funded child care centers who had an IEP or IFSP did not change significantly between 2019 and 2020, and the proportion of children with an IEP or IFSP in the following two years was also similar to pre-pandemic levels.

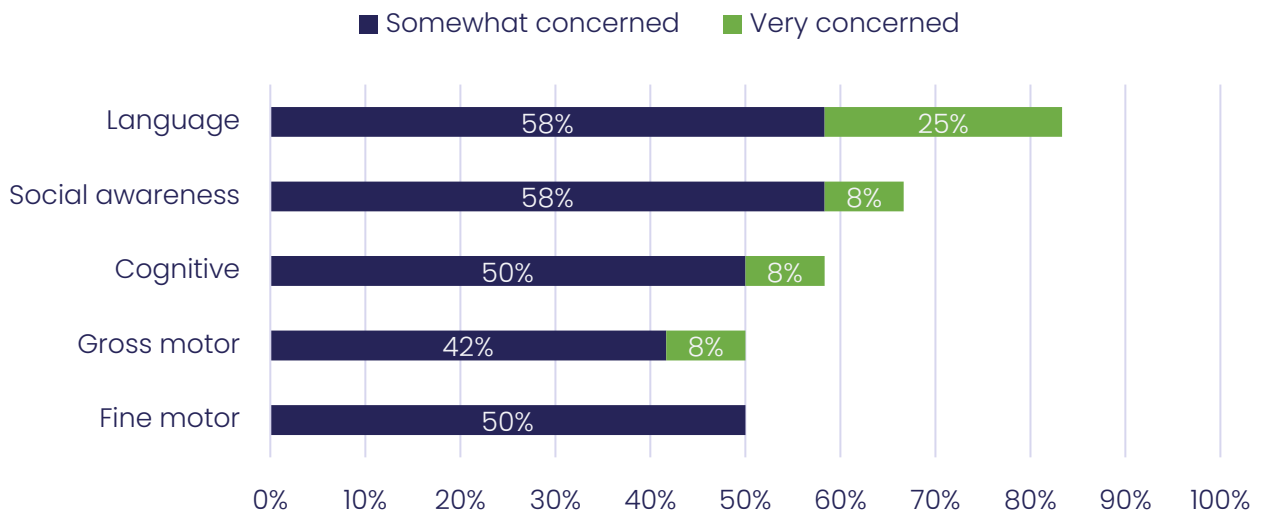
The findings were the same when limiting the sample to the 28 sites with continuous state funding.

# Child Care Provider Reports of Concerns about Children’s Development

Although our analysis of records in the City of Hartford’s Early Childhood Data system did not reveal any significant change in the percent of enrolled children who were receiving services for a developmental delay or disability since the onset of the pandemic, most respondents to our Spring 2023 survey of Hartford child care providers reported moderate to high levels of concern about the development of the children in their care.

## Concerns about the Development of Children Ages 0 to 2 Years

Percent of Child Care Center Administrators Who Were "Somewhat" or "Very" Concerned About the Development of Children Ages 0 to 2 Years



Source: CTData Survey of Hartford Child Care Providers.

Note: Percentages are out of the 12 child care center administrators whose sites were licensed to care for children under 3 years old and who responded to all of the above items on our survey in March–April 2023.

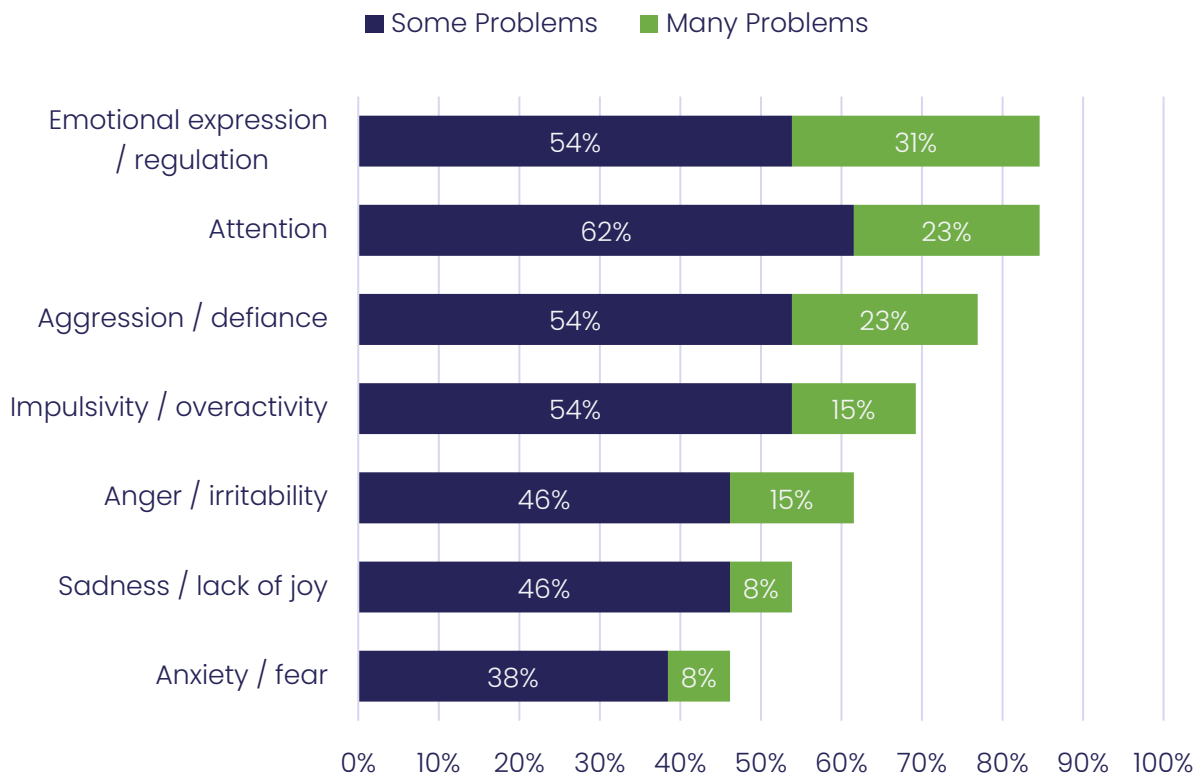
Twelve child care center administrators whose sites were licensed to care for children ages 0 to 2 years responded to our survey questions about these children’s development. Ten (83%) of the twelve center administrators reported that they were “somewhat” (n=7) or “very” (n=3) concerned about the **language development** of the children in this age range who were in their care as of April–March of 2023. In addition, eight (67%) of these administrators reported that they were “somewhat” (n=7) or “very” (n=1) concerned about these children’s development of **social awareness**.



## Emotional and Behavioral Problems Among Children Ages 0 to 2 Years

We also asked child care providers whether any of the children in their care are exhibiting more emotional or behavioral problems than they would expect for children their age. Thirteen child care center administrators whose sites were licensed to care for children ages 0 to 2 years responded to these questions. Eleven (85%) of the 13 center administrators reported that “some” (n=7) or “many” (n=4) children were showing problems with **emotional expression and regulation**. Eighty-five percent of administrators also noted problems with **attention** (“some:” n=8; “many:” n=3), and 77% noted problems with **aggression or defiance** (“some:” n=7; “many:” n=3).

Percent of Child Care Center Administrators Who Reported “Some” or “Many” Emotional or Behavioral Problems in Children Ages 0 to 2 Years

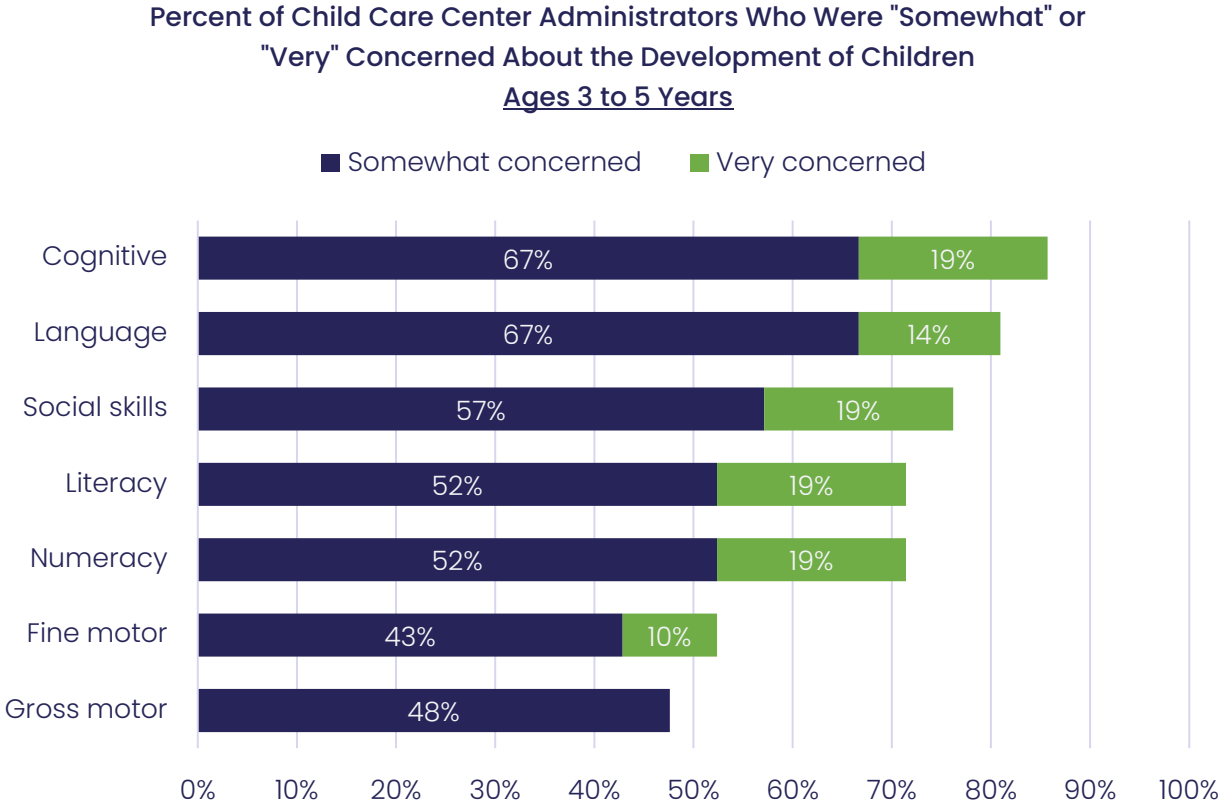


Source: CTData Survey of Hartford Child Care Providers.

Note: Percentages are out of the 13 child care center administrators whose sites were licensed to care for children ages 0 to 2 years and who responded to all of the above items on our survey in March–April 2023.

## Concerns about the Development of Children Ages 3 to 5 Years

Twenty-one child care center administrators whose sites were licensed to serve children ages 3 to 5 years reported on their concerns about the development of the children in this age range who were in their care as of March–April of 2023.



Source: CTData Survey of Hartford Child Care Providers.

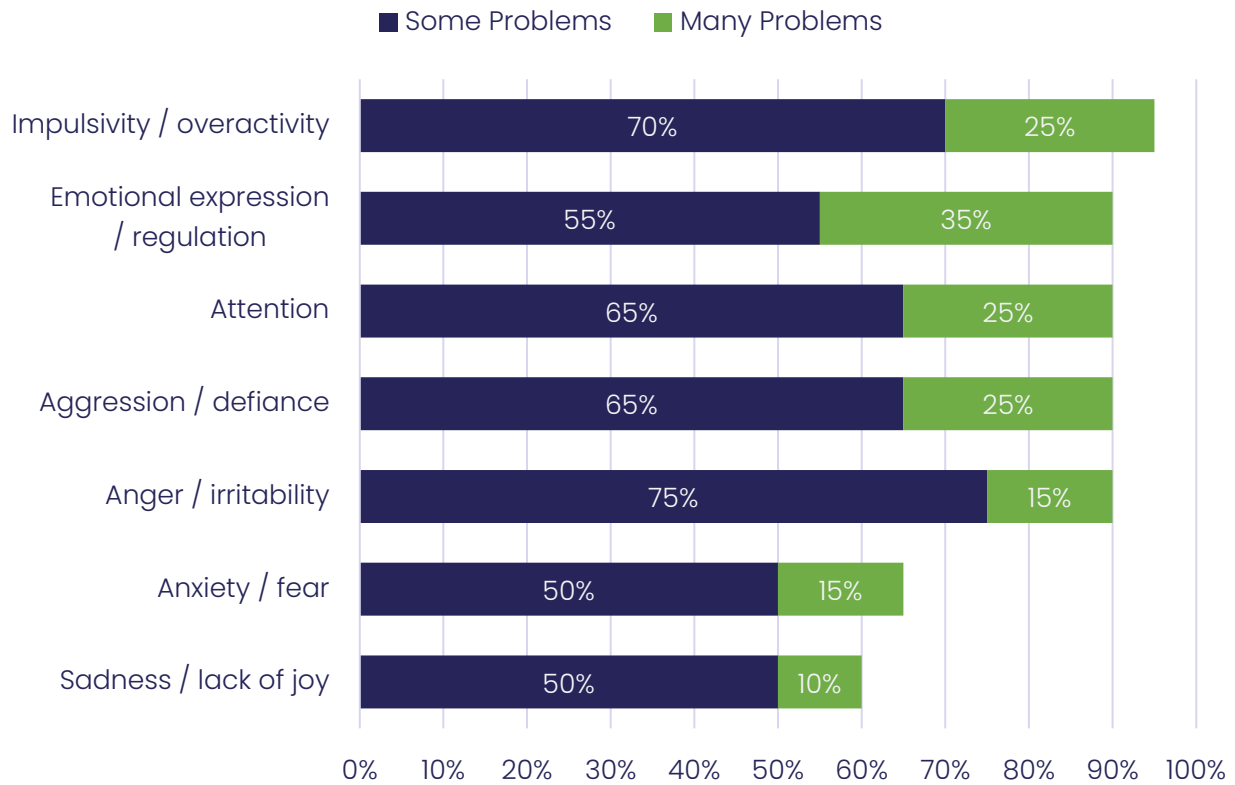
Note: Percentages are out of the 21 child care center administrators whose sites were licensed to care for children ages 3 to 5 years and who responded to all of the above items on our survey in March–April 2023.

Eighteen (86%) of these 21 center administrators expressed that they were “somewhat” (n=14) or “very” (n=4) concerned about the **cognitive development** (i.e., learning, thinking, and problem-solving) of children ages 3 to 5 years. In addition, 17 (81%) of the center administrators said they were “somewhat” (n=14) or “very” (n=3) concerned about these children’s **language development**, and 16 (76%) reported they were “somewhat” (n=12) or “very” (n=4) concerned about these children’s **social skills**.

## Emotional and Behavioral Problems Among Children Ages 3 to 5 Years

Twenty child care center administrators whose sites were licensed to care for children ages 3 to 5 years reported on whether these children were showing more emotional or behavioral problems than expected for their age. Nineteen (95%) of these center administrators reported that “some” (n=14) or “many” (n=5) children were showing problems with **impulsivity or overactivity**. Eighteen (90%) of these administrators also noted problems with **emotional expression and regulation** (“some:” n=11; “many:” n=7), **attention** (“some:” n=13; “many:” n=5), **aggression/defiance** (“some:” n=13; “many:” n=5), and **anger/irritability** (“some:” n=15; “many:” n=3).

Percent of Child Care Center Administrators Who Reported “Some” or “Many” Emotional or Behavioral Problems in Children Ages 3 to 5 Years



Source: CTData Survey of Hartford Child Care Providers.

Note: Percentages are out of the 20 child care center administrators whose sites were licensed to care for children ages 3 to 5 years and who responded to all of the above items on our survey in March–April 2023.

## Child Care Providers' Requests for Support

In their write-in responses on our survey, many child care providers emphasized that they were concerned about behavior problems and delays in social-emotional development among the children in their care.

Providers asked for more supports to help them meet the needs of children with developmental delays or challenging behaviors, including:

- More in-classroom special education support staff or paraprofessionals
- Expansions to early intervention services
- Coaching
- Support from mental health counselors

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"Many are coming in with significant deficits in social/emotional skills. Most of the children we are getting now have been home for 3 years and come into school with little developmentally appropriate skills."

- Hartford Child Care Center Administrator

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The challenge of meeting children's needs is heightened by the current child care staffing crisis and high levels of provider burnout. In our survey of Hartford's child care providers:

**86%**

of child care center administrators said it is **hard to hire and retain qualified staff**

**85%**

of child care center administrators said **staff seem stressed or burnt out on the job**

**55%**

of child care center administrators said they are **considering leaving the child care industry**

## Parents' Reports of Concerns about Children's Development

During our focus groups with parents of young children in Hartford, parents expressed concern that the pandemic has negatively impacted their children's development of social skills.

Parents spoke of keeping their children at home due to their fear of them becoming sick at daycare, stopping visiting family and friends, and not allowing their children to play with other kids during the pandemic.

Several parents mentioned that their children have developed shyness, social anxiety or separation anxiety which they attribute to the pandemic.

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"It was really hard for me to figure out what to do with childcare when they would send her home so much... I just would have to pick her up, I didn't have any option, I had to get her... I'd just have to drop work or whatever I was doing and pick her up."

- Hartford Parent of a Young Child

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Parents also spoke of mental health challenges, stress in the home, and the grief of losing family members and friends during the pandemic.

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"Definitely [the pandemic impacted] social interactions, learning simple things like sharing and being amongst other kids and making friends... It impacted starting school. Having that separation anxiety because of spending so much time together during the pandemic and then having to be out on our own, [and] social anxiety... because of the pandemic and not being able to stay in childcare as much... and not having that constant routine and that constant exposure."

- Hartford Parent of a Young Child

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Parents shared how the pandemic has put strain on their families and careers. Frequent disruptions to child care during the pandemic made it hard for working parents to maintain sufficient work hours. Parents were forced to miss many work hours resulting in reduced pay, or even quit their job so they could care for their child during frequent quarantines and absences due to illness.

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"Mental health [was the hardest thing about the pandemic]... The pandemic took my mom out, so it really affected the whole household because she was our only family besides my husband. It really messed us up."

- Hartford Parent of a Young Child

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