Community Connections for Children

York County Early Learning Investment Commission

2024 Educator Awards Program

The York ECE Educator Awards Program aims to improve teacher retention and education levels to increase childcare capacity and improve the quality of care provided to children.

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Executive Summary

The York ECE Educator Awards improve teacher retention and education levels to increase capacity and quality of child care programs. Research proves that tenure and education level of teachers positively impacts outcomes for children. In its third year, under the leadership of York ELIC Committee and administered by Community Connections for Children, over $1.6 million has been awarded to over 1,000 educators serving over 12,000 children.

In 2024, over $674,000 was awarded to 404 staff at 67 programs throughout York County serving 4,561 children.

Increase in Program Reach

- 25 zip codes with programs receiving awards
  - Increase from 24 in 2023 and 22 in 2022

Increase in Teacher Retention

- 44% of teachers received an award at the same location all three years of the award program
- 60% received an award previously at any York County location

Decrease in Teacher Vacancies

- 117 vacancies reported by programs receiving awards
  - Decrease from 120 in 2023 and 149 in 2022
- 7 new classrooms opened in last year at programs receiving awards

Increase in Teacher Education in 2024

- 53 educators earned a higher degree - 13% of awardees
  - 37 CDA credentials
  - 9 Associate degrees
  - 6 Bachelor's degrees
  - 1 Master's degree
- 206 educators are currently enrolled in a degree program
  - Increase of over 400% from 2023

> **The question is not whether we can afford to invest in every child; it is whether we can afford not to.**
>
> - Marian Wright Edelman

Background

York County, like most of the Commonwealth, lacks sufficient high quality child care, and the capacity gap has increased due to COVID and the staffing crisis. Most early childhood education (ECE) programs (ECE is used inclusively to mean DHS Certified child care, publicly funded Pre-K, Early Head Start and Head Start) are **operating at an average of 85% capacity**. ECE employers struggle to attract new staff, as well as retain existing staff in a highly competitive marketplace.

In York County, there are over 1,400 ECE educators earning an **average hourly rate of $12.20**. These low wages, typical in the early childhood industry, compound an ever-increasing staffing crisis. In the past year, **28% of programs are serving less children**, 22% permanently or temporarily closed classrooms, and 15% reduced their operating hours - all primarily related to staffing issues.

The ever-fragile ECE sector is at a breaking point, and York County knows its local economy rests on the backs of the ECE workforce. In a 2023 survey, 74% of respondents reported that a lack of access to childcare impacted their employment. Research proves that ECE, as a child, family, and community development program, is critical for the long-term health and future success of local economies. In addition, the economic vitality of York depends on the current and future workforce developed and sustained by the ECE sector.

Pennsylvania Early Learning Investment Commission

The Pennsylvania Early Learning Investment Commission is a partnership of government and business leaders dedicated to making the success of every child in Pennsylvania a top priority. ELIC works to improve tomorrow's economy through smart policy and investment in today's young children by fostering public and private sector investment in high-quality early learning programs. These investments are essential to ensure the best possible return - Pennsylvania's edge in the national and global marketplace.

Community Connections for Children (CCC) administers the York ECE Educator Awards program at no cost. York County Community Foundation (YCCF) serves as the fiscal agent. The ECE Award committee includes Pete Brubaker, Tony Campisi, Brian Grimm, Natalee Gunderson, Wendy Latshaw, Christy Renjilian, and Kevin Schreiber.

2024 ECE Educator Awards

The York County Early Childhood Educator Awards are a public/private initiative funded by individuals, business, organizations, private foundations, and the County of York. Partnering with members of York County ELIC, business and community leaders recognized the critical importance of high-quality early childhood care and education, and its impact on York's current and future workforce.

In order to qualify for an award, ECE Teachers must have completed 9 or more ECE credits, hold a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, or an Associate's, Bachelor's, or Master's degree in ECE or a related field.

Education Level of Awarded Educators

198 CDAs or ECE Credits

79 Associate Degrees

113 Bachelor Degrees

14 Master Degrees

$674,306

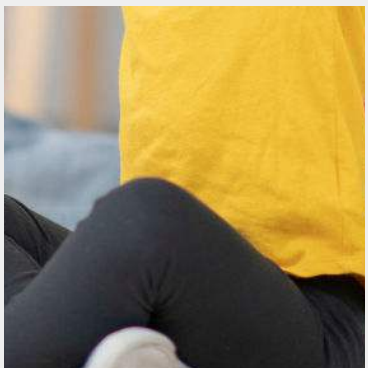
Funds Awarded

4,561

Children Impacted

67

Programs Supported

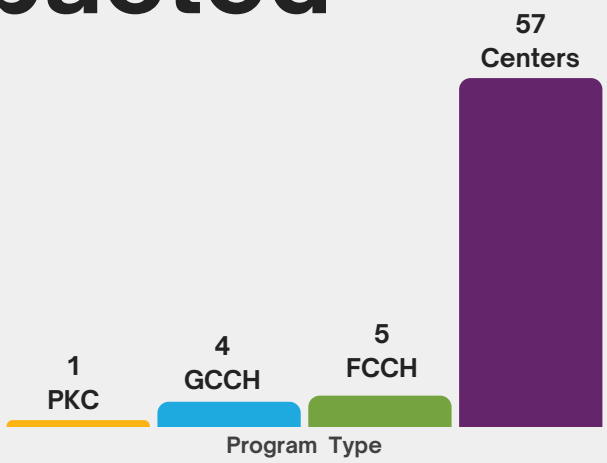


404

Educators Received an Award

Programs Impacted

Childcare programs participating in Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS quality rating system at STAR Level 2, 3, or 4 are eligible to receive educator awards. A total of 67 programs, including childcare centers, Family Child Care Homes (FCCH), Group Child Care Homes (GCCH), and Pre-K Counts (PKC) locations, submitted approved applications.



STAR Level

Keystone STAR Levels of 2, 3, & 4 ranged across the programs.

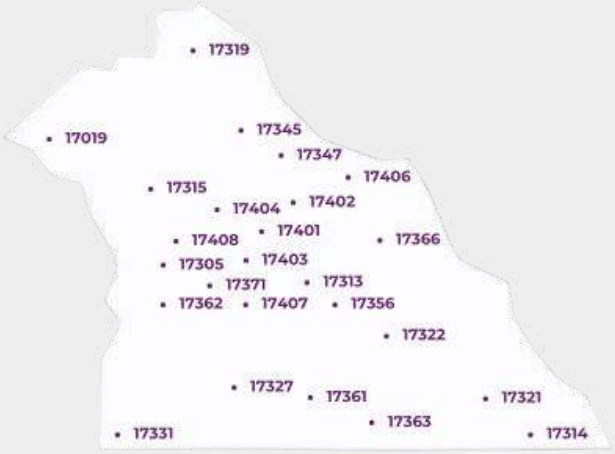
32 ★★☆☆

7 ★★★☆

28 ★★★★

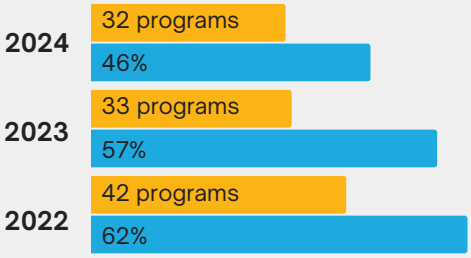
Communities Served

Programs receiving ECE Awards represented 25 zip codes across York County.



Teacher Vacancies

Teaching vacancies result in a lower capacity for children in childcare programs and impacts quality of care provided. Programs reporting vacancies has decreased year over year.

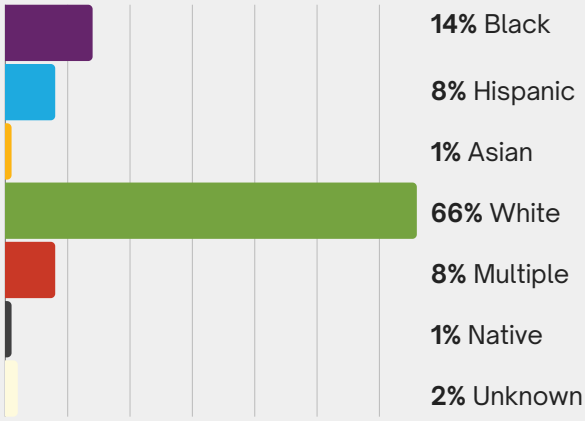


Programs Reporting Teaching Vacancies Year-on-Year

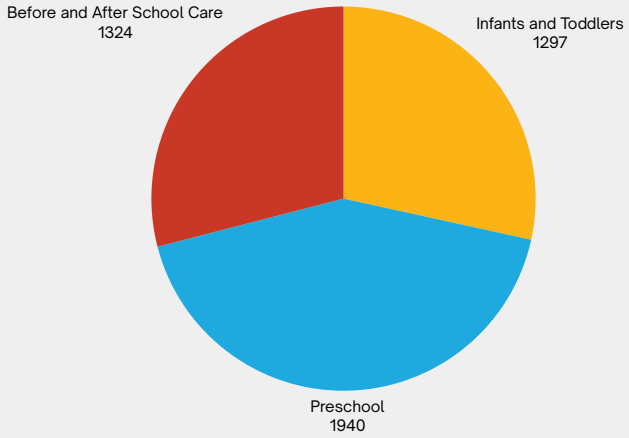
In 2024, **25** programs reported operating at 5 or fewer current teaching vacancies.

Children Impacted

Programs receiving the York ELIC ECE Educator Awards in 2024 serve 4,561 children across York County. This represents approximately 50% of all children enrolled in ECE and 17% of all children under age five. Children served include infants through preschoolers, as well as before and after school care across various ethnicities. Quality care provided enables families to remain in or return to the workforce. Research shows that employees whose children are in quality programs have fewer rates of absenteeism, increased productivity, and retention.



Child Ethnicity



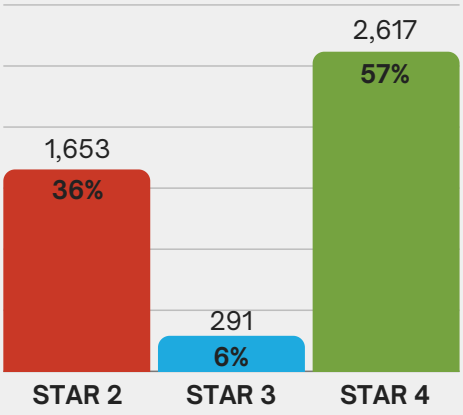
Child Age Groups

Special Circumstances

Every child is unique, and those impacted by the York County ELIC ECE Educator Awards are no different. Childcare programs provide quality care to address a variety of needs and situations faced by children and families.

- **26%** Receive Financial Assistance
- **21%** Non-Traditional Households
- **6%** Receive Supportive Services
- **6%** Primary Language is Not English

Children Attending Programs Receiving Awards by STAR Level



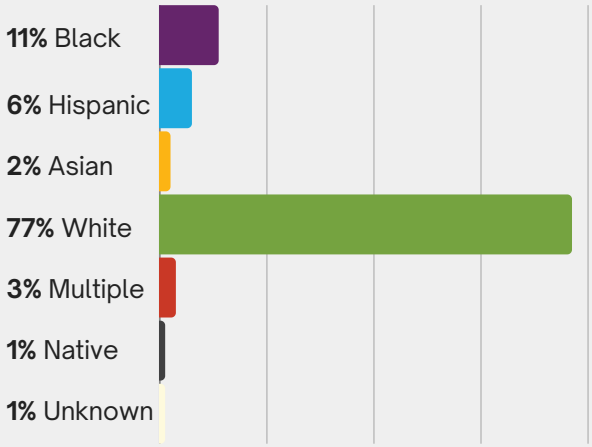
Educators Impacted

Across York County, programs receiving 2024 Educator Awards employ 905 educators. Of those 905, 404 educators received an award based on the eligibility criteria of education level and tenure.

Of those ineligible for an award,

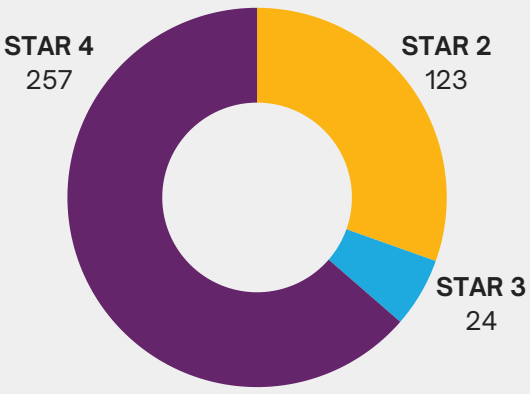
- 73% only hold a High School diploma or GED
- 18% had not been employed at least three months at their current program
- 4% did not work at least 15 hours per week

Educator Demographics



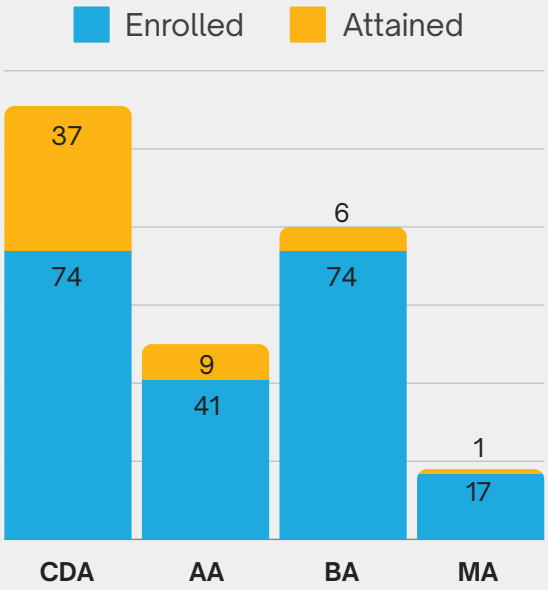
Educators Receiving Awards by STAR Level

Eligible educators are employed at childcare programs achieving STAR 2, 3, or 4 status. In 2024, 64% of educators receiving an award are employed at STAR 4 programs.



Educator Degree Enrollment and Attainment

In 2024, 206 award recipients were currently enrolled in a degree program. Additionally, 53 award recipients completed a degree since the last award round.



Educator enrollment in educational programs increased by 300% from 2023, while degree attainment increased tremendously year on year.

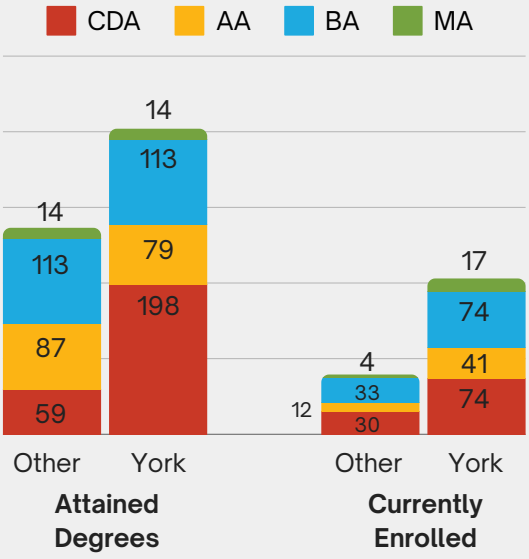
How Does York County Compare?

Low wages are a driving factor in the childcare crisis. Pay inequities have led to high turnover and less-qualified teachers in early care and school age care classrooms. While we are still in the early stages of implementation, the data implies that the ECE Educator Awards are having an impact on the quality of childcare in York County.

Controlling for Provider Type, STAR Level, and Non/For Profit status, we pulled a random sample of childcare programs from neighboring counties to assess the results and impact of the York ECE Educator Award Initiative.

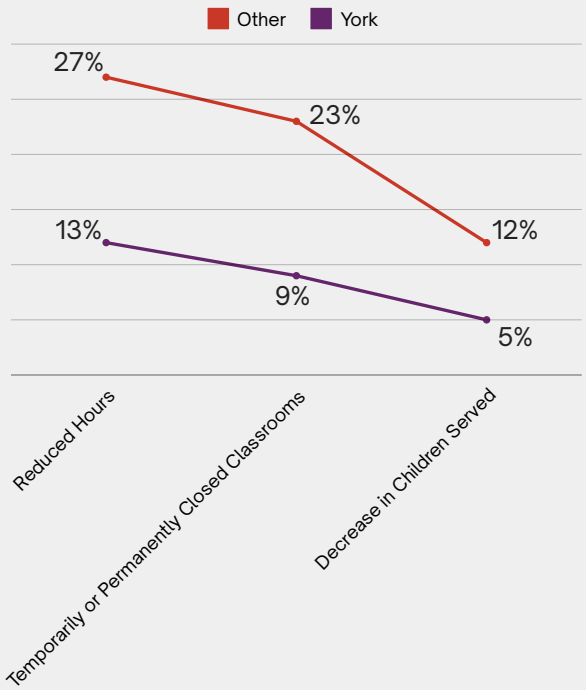
Education

Educated teachers are the foundation for quality early and school age care programs. Sample results from other counties show that similar programs have fewer qualified staff with attained degrees or staff working toward a degree than York County.



Program Capacity

Programs, regardless of location, are operating below typical enrollment due to teacher and workforce shortages. Many programs have extensive enrollment waiting lists. However, York County programs have been able to close the gap between the lack of educators and high need for childcare, leading to 7 new classrooms in the last year.



Unmet Need

While the York ECE Educator Awards have improved teacher retention and education levels leading to increased capacity and quality of child care programs over the past three years, the childcare industry is still under-resourced. Staffing, capacity, and quality of care are important factors which impact community and economic outcomes.

Program Capacity

- 102 York County childcare providers have closed since 2019
- 161 DHS Certified programs are operating at an average of 85% capacity

Community & Economic Impacts

- Average hourly rate for ECE Educators in York County is $12.20
- 74% of respondents to a YCEA survey indicated that access to childcare impacted on their employment
- 44% adjusted their work schedule due to the childcare crisis
- 37% changed or reduced the number of hours they worked
- 15% were terminated or quit their job
- 81% of PA employers reported they have moderate or significant recruitment and retention issues due to childcare
- 69% of businesses said it is extremely or very important to help employees meet childcare costs

Children in Need

- 24,412 children under the age of five live in York County
  - 5,140 qualify for tuition assistance via Child Care Works
    - Approximately 2,000 children are enrolled in childcare and only 900 are enrolled in a STAR 3 or STAR 4 program
  - 14% live in poverty
  - 25% are ALICE households

> **The science of early brain development can inform investments in early childhood. These basic concepts, established over decades of neuroscience and behavioral research, help illustrate why child development - particularly from birth to five years - is a foundation for a prosperous and sustainable society.**
>
> - Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University

Why Does It Matter?

It is no secret that child care supports family well-being and child development, improves family economic stability and mobility, and contributes to a community's economic growth. The work of economists, psychologists and neuroscientists shows that early childhood development directly influences economic, health, and social outcomes for individuals and society. Early childhood development drives success in school and life.

The Harvard Center for the Developing Child shares that early experiences affect the quality of brain development. While brains are built over time, 90% of the brain is developed by age five. In the first few years of life, more than 1 million new neural connections are formed every second.

Healthy brain development requires stable, caring and interactive relationships with adults, including childcare professionals. Developing brains can be damaged by toxic stress, potentially leading to life-long problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health.

The current staffing shortage and high turnover in early childhood education threatens stable and caring relationships in childcare programs. Recruiting and retaining qualified ECE professionals is crucial to child development life-long success.

How Can You Help?

York County has made innovative steps forward in combatting the childcare crisis, including the York County ECE Educators Awards Program. However, the work is far from over.

If you are interested in learning more, or considering making a donation towards the York County ECE Educators Awards Program, please visit https://yccf.org/our-work/early-childhood-education.

Investing in early childhood education is a cost-effective strategy for promoting economic growth. Those seeking to reduce deficits and strengthen the economy should make significant investments in high quality early childhood education. Our economic future depends on providing the tools for upward mobility and building a highly educated, skilled workforce. Early childhood education is the most efficient way to accomplish these goals as it has a 7% to 13% return on investment.

Thank You

On behalf of the York County Early Childhood Education programs, Community Connections for Children thanks the following funders for their generous donations to support the York County ELIC ECE Educator Awards.

STAR 4 Contributors
$25,000+ per year

Brougher Foundation	Powder Mill Foundation
Meg & Pete Brubaker	Mark & Ruby Schmidt
Tony & Stef Campisi	Warehime Foundation
The Arthur J. & Lee R. Glatfelter Foundation	WellSpan
Glatfelter Insurance Group	Women's Giving Circle
Heinz Endowments	County of York ARPA Funds
M & T Bank	York County Community Foundation

STAR 3 Contributors
$15,000 - $24,999 per year

PA Automotive Association Foundation	Wendy & Jim Flinchbaugh

STAR 2 Contributor
Up to $15,000 per year

Fred Fay

For more information about the York County Early Learning Investment Commission and the York County Early Childhood Educator Awards, please contact:

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