

Public Preschools in California

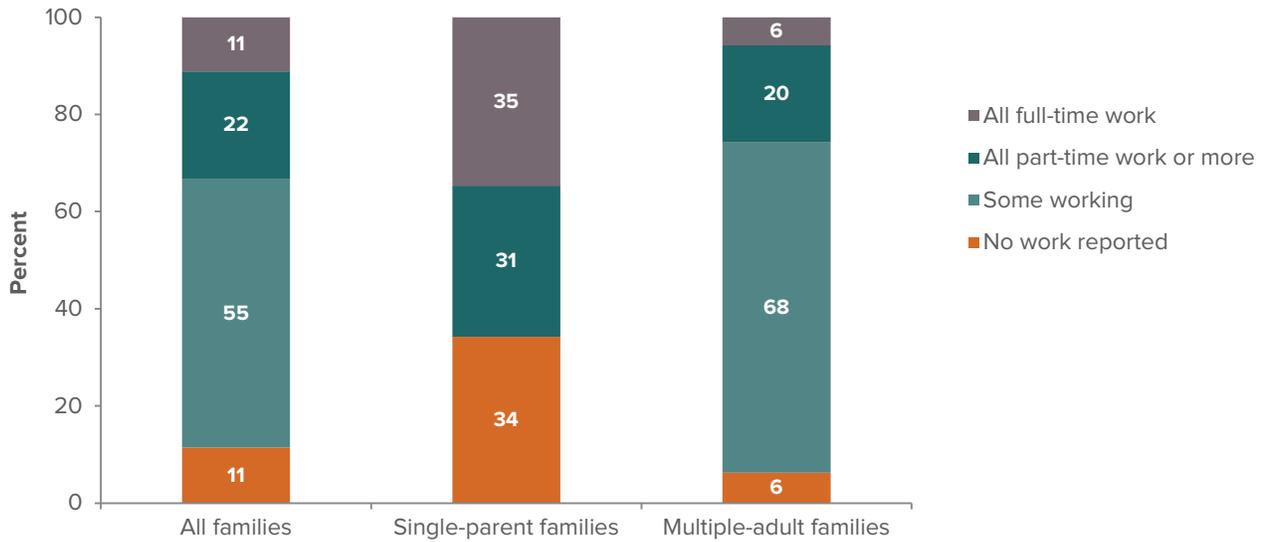
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- **High-quality preschool can improve children's future academic and economic success.** Public investments in early education and child care help promote early learning. Research indicates that children's participation in high-quality preschool improves school readiness, educational success, and longer-term outcomes such as earnings. Thus, investment in public preschool can pay off over the long term, particularly for low-income children who may not otherwise have access to high-quality early learning experiences. The [PPIC Statewide Survey](#) finds two-thirds of adults believe attending preschool is very important for children's school success.
- **Nearly half of California's preschool age children live in low-income families.** California's population of young children includes about half a million three-year-olds and half a million four-year-olds. Statewide, 45% of young children live in low-income families, as determined by eligibility for free or reduced price school meals, a nationwide metric that is not adjusted for cost of living across the state. Of these low-income children, 73% live in families where some or all family members speak a language other than English at home.
- **Most low-income families with young children have at least one working adult.** Public investments in child care also support parents' employment. Better child care options enable more adults, especially single parents, to join the workforce or to work full-time. Overall, 33% of low-income three- and four-year-olds live in families where *all* adults work, and an additional 55% have at least one worker in the family. Notably, single-parent families are more likely to report not working, which may stem in part from a lack of child care options. Over 2012–2014, 34% of low-income, single parents of young children reported no work, compared to 6% among multiple-adult families.
- **Fewer low-income children attend preschool, and those who do are often in public programs.** According to parents' reports, 35% of three-year-olds and 61% of four-year-olds attended preschool in 2012–2014. Focusing on four-year-olds, those from low-income families were enrolled at lower rates (54%) compared to their higher-income peers (68%). In addition, enrollment in public programs appears to be much more common among low-income children (89% of those enrolled) relative to higher-income children (45% of those enrolled). Low-income three-year-olds show similar patterns of enrollment.
- **Public programs have multiple funding sources and eligibility requirements.** Diverse funding streams and eligibility requirements create barriers for ensuring equitable access and program quality. In state fiscal year 2015–2016, \$2.5 billion in state funds and \$958 million in federal funds supported state-led early care and education programs, although not all supported preschools or preschool-age children. Federally funded Head Start and a range of local funds, including from county First Fives, further augmented that total. Large state-led programs include State Preschool, Transitional Kindergarten, and CalWORKs Child Care, which have varying eligibility requirements based on factors such as children's age, family income, and parents' employment. A recent estimate finds that roughly a third of eligible three-year-olds and three-quarters of four-year-olds are served by the largest federal, state, and local preschool programs currently in place, not including CalWORKs Child Care.
- **Policymakers are taking steps to streamline preschool programs and improve quality.** In his January budget proposal, Governor Brown proposed consolidating three funding streams for State Preschool, Transitional Kindergarten, and the Quality Rating Improvement System into a single \$1.6 billion Early Education block grant. California is also the recipient of a federal grant to improve the quality of early learning in the state. As these efforts progress, it will be important for policymakers to take into account the demographics and employment patterns of families with young children.



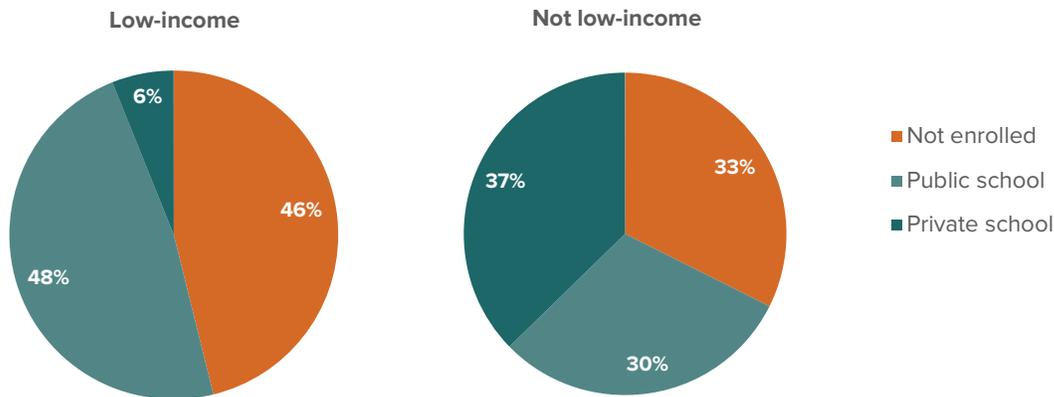
The majority of low-income, preschool-age children have at least one working adult in the family



Sources: Authors' calculations from the California samples of the American Community Survey for 2012–2014.

Notes: All estimates are averages over the period 2012–2014. “Low income” designates annual family income under 185% of the federal poverty line; “preschool age” designates children ages 3 and 4. All adults living in the family unit are included in the work calculation, whether or not they are parents of the child. Full-time indicates 30 or more usual hours of work per week over 48 or more weeks worked during the year. Part-time includes fewer hours worked and/or fewer weeks worked. Families can include cohabiting partners and adult relatives. An estimated 11% of three and four year olds live in families with one adult, 64% live in two-adult families, and 25% live in families with more than two adults. All estimates shown exclude children in foster care.

Low-income four-year-olds are more likely to attend public rather than private preschool



Sources: Authors' calculations from the California samples of the American Community Survey for 2012–2014.

Notes: All estimates are averages over the period 2012–2014. “Low income” designates children living in families with annual cash incomes (before taxes) below 185% of the federal poverty line. Estimates of low-income children also include all children in foster care. Because family incomes can vary within the year, estimates of eligibility based on current income at a point in time (e.g., the start of the school year) will differ. The American Community Survey questionnaire asks survey respondents to report school enrollment in the current or the previous three months among children ages 3 and older. In our analysis, preschool programs include both “nursery school” and “preschool.”

Sources: American Community Survey, 2012–2014; CEA, December 2014; LAO, February 29, 2016; LAO, June 19, 2015; LAO, March 4, 2015; AIR, March 2016; AIR, August 2012; NIEER, State of Preschool 2014; Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge; CCDF Reauthorization.

Note: Estimates of the number of 3 and 4 year olds by county can be found on the PPIC website.

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