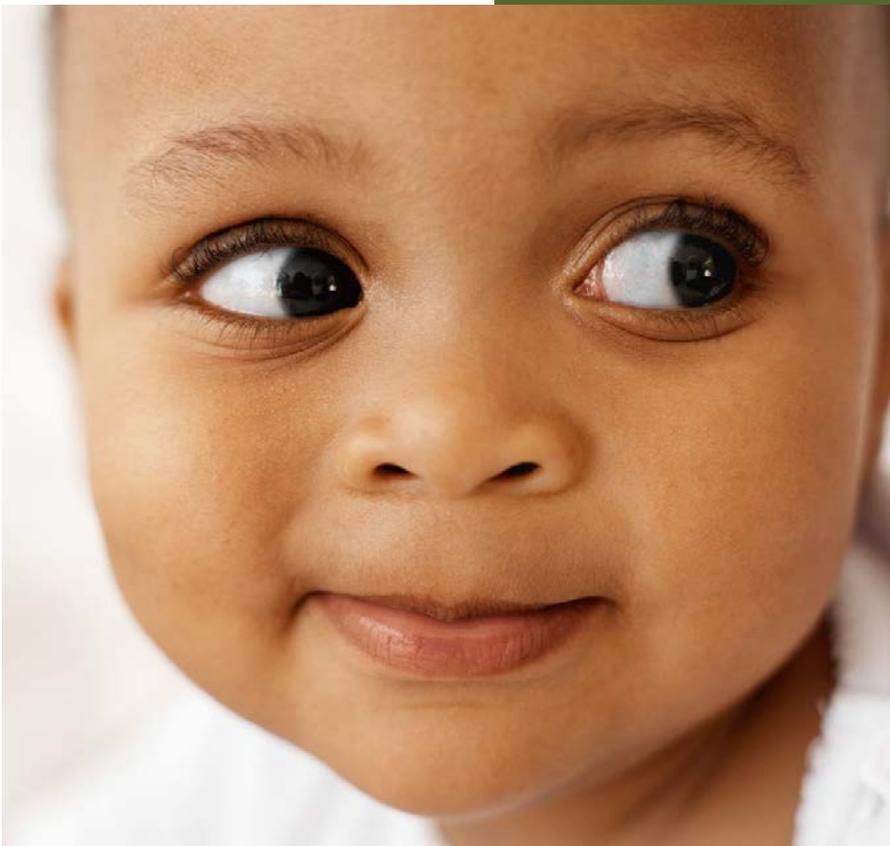


# THE CASE FOR INCREASED INVESTMENT IN L.A. COUNTY'S EARLY LEARNING SYSTEM:

Improving Access and Quality for Children Under 5



**OCTOBER  
2015**

Advancement Project is a next generation, multiracial civil rights organization. In California we champion the struggle for greater equity and opportunity for all, fostering upward mobility in communities most impacted by economic and racial injustice. We build alliances and trust, use data-driven policy solutions, create innovative tools, and work alongside communities to ignite social transformation!

For more than 15 years, Advancement Project has been at the forefront of expanding educational opportunities and ensuring appropriate school facilities for low-income and disadvantaged children.

[www.AdvancementProjectCA.org](http://www.AdvancementProjectCA.org)

# Why Early Care & Education Matters

## CHILDREN WHO START BEHIND, STAY BEHIND

Early care and education programs are crucial to preparing our children for success in the K-12 system, and help close the achievement gap as it first begins to form. In cost-benefit analyses, economists have found high-quality early childhood education offers one of the highest returns of any public investment – more than \$7 for every dollar spent<sup>i</sup>.

National research shows that children who attend high-quality preschool programs:

- Perform better on standardized tests in reading and math
- Are less likely to be placed in special education
- Are less likely to be held back a grade
- Are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college

Too many young children enter kindergarten unprepared, but high quality early learning experiences can help. On average, children who participate in high-quality ECE programs gain about a third of a year of additional learning across language, reading, and math skills<sup>ii</sup>. Conversely, children who received low-quality care in their first 4.5 years exhibited academic and behavioral problems that persisted to age 15, a National Institute of Child Health and Human Development study found<sup>iii</sup>.

High-needs children fall further behind their higher-income peers academically even before kindergarten. The readiness gap is especially apparent in their vocabulary development – at age three, low-income children have heard 30 million less words than their higher-income peers<sup>iv</sup>.

## L.A. COUNTY IS HOME TO HIGH-NEED POPULATIONS OF EARLY LEARNERS UNDER AGE 5

There are 150,000 children under five living in poverty in L.A. County. The child population overall is predominantly Latino and more than half of the county’s population over age five speaks a language other than English in the home.

Access to quality ECE is not universal, and is often lowest for low-income families, and families with children of color<sup>v</sup>.

In June of 2015 Advancement Project released three reports and an interactive website that demonstrates the disparities in access and quality of ECE in L.A. County for children and families in low-income and high-need areas, based on recent data. The reports, explanations about methodology and data limitations, and an interactive mapping tool based on access data may be found at [www.ECELandscapeLA.org](http://www.ECELandscapeLA.org). With funding and support from First 5 LA, Advancement Project

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**Early care and education (ECE) refers to the programs and early learning experiences for young children and their families that support children’s development, learning, and ability to succeed in school and beyond.**  
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designed the research, analyzed the data, and produced the reports and website.

The findings of the report made it clear that more ECE seats, and increased ECE quality supports and efforts are needed in L.A. County, particularly for our youngest learners (0-2) in high-need communities.

# Access & Quality Gaps in L.A. County

THE ZIP CODE OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY'S YOUNGEST CHILDREN UNDER 5 FREQUENTLY PREDETERMINES THEIR EARLY EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES AND LOWER-INCOME CHILDREN MORE OFTEN FIND THEMSELVES WITH FEW OPTIONS.

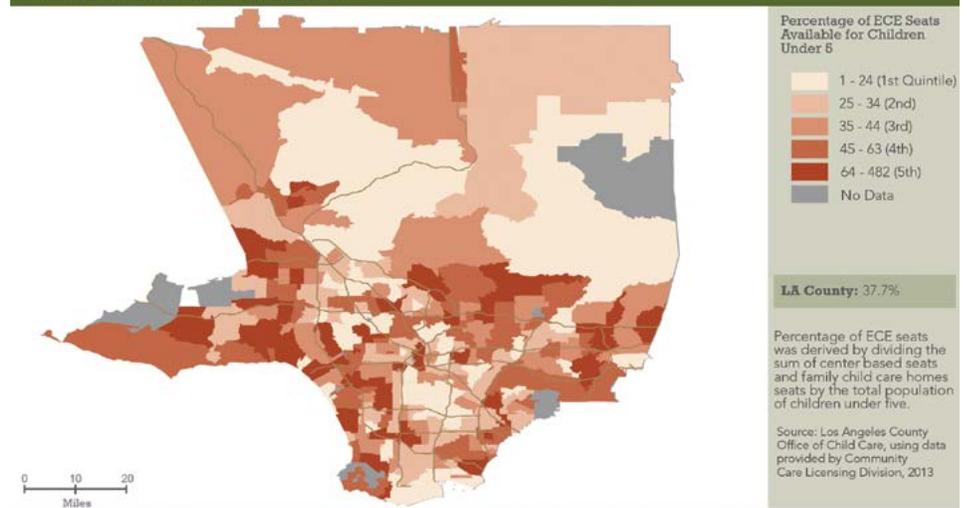
## ACCESS IS LACKING FOR HIGH-NEED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, ESPECIALLY THOSE 0-2

There are hundreds of thousands of children 0-5 in Los Angeles County - especially low-income and bilingual emergent children - who lack ECE opportunities in their home communities. This gap is especially dire for children 0-2; only 2.4% have access to a seat in a licensed ECE center. Gaps are also present for children 2-4, with only 41.3% of preschoolers having access to a licensed ECE center seat.

The shortage of ECE seats is not equally distributed throughout the County, with hot spots of need primarily in low-income communities with more Latino and/or African-American children. The map at right shows the lack of seats in South and Southeast L.A., as well as the Antelope Valley.

### ECE Seats Available for Children Under 5

BY LOS ANGELES COUNTY ZIP CODES



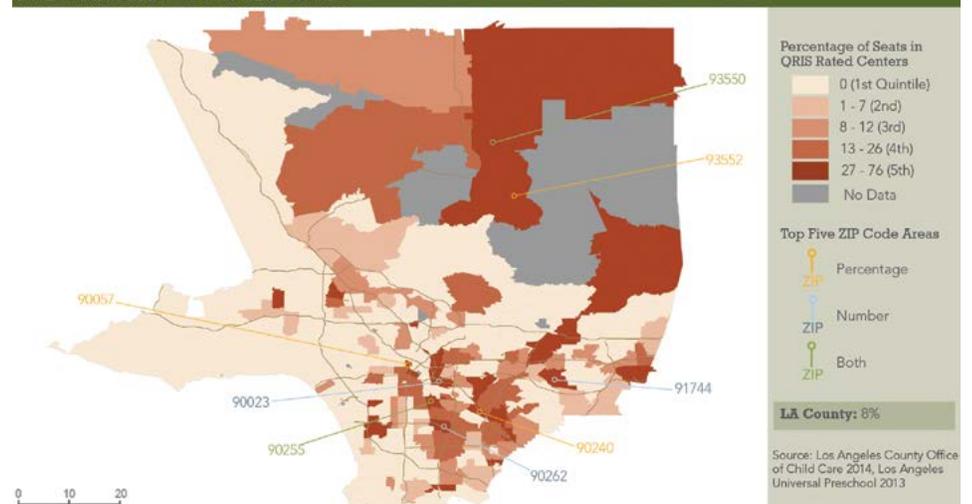
## QUALITY RATING AND IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS ARE NOT WIDESPREAD WITHIN THE COUNTY

Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) is “a method to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education settings”<sup>vi</sup> and is used in L.A. County to understand and improve the quality of ECE. L.A. County lacks consistent, countywide QRIS coverage - only 9% of all centers in the County and 2% of all licensed family child care homes had received a rating at the time of data analysis. Additionally, providers serving infants and toddlers have not participated in QRIS efforts in high numbers.

Of the small number of ECE providers that had received a QRIS rating at the time of analysis, just over half (57%) were ranked highly, achieving a 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5. ECE providers' participation in QRIS requires an investment of funds and time that, without additional support, is beyond the reach of many providers.

### Seats in QRIS Rated Centers

BY LOS ANGELES COUNTY ZIP CODES



# Call to Action

Advancement Project believes that these findings provide a clear roadmap for how to improve outcomes for L.A. County’s youngest residents. We call for elected officials to champion investment in and prudent policy change regarding the ECE needs of children, particularly children in low-income and high-need communities, and especially infants and toddlers. The research points to some obvious choices for policymakers to make with regard to access, quality, and affordability of ECE when formulating legislation and determining budget priorities.

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## ACCESS

Increased investment in ECE seats and beneficial policy change to support access is needed in order to begin to fill the access gaps experienced by infants and toddlers, children in high-need communities, and preschoolers.

## QUALITY

In order to ensure that our youngest children are served by the highest-quality early learning programs possible, increased investment in quality services, supports, and improvement efforts is needed. To understand what quality looks like in early learning programs in Los Angeles County, and to improve quality where it is needed, expansion of QRIS efforts is necessary.

## AFFORDABILITY

Research has shown that there is a need to increase the affordability of high-quality ECE programs. This will allow more providers to consistently provide higher-quality services, and more families to access those services. Providers struggle financially – specifically to afford higher-quality initiatives – because of insufficient reimbursement rates and lack of other supports. In addition to providers, low-income families need increased support and subsidies to afford high-quality care for their children.

## STEPS TOWARD A BRIGHTER FUTURE

While the research identifies significant challenges in the ECE landscape in L.A. County, it does provide clarity about the extent of the gaps and points the way toward policy shifts that can address those needs. To improve our common future, it is imperative that L.A. County legislators become active participants in improving ECE for our youngest learners.



i Heckman, 2012  
ii Yoshikawa et al, 2013  
iii Vandell et al., 2010  
iv Hart and Risley, 2003  
v Barnett, Carolan, and Johns, 2013  
vi Mitchell, 2005