



# 2023

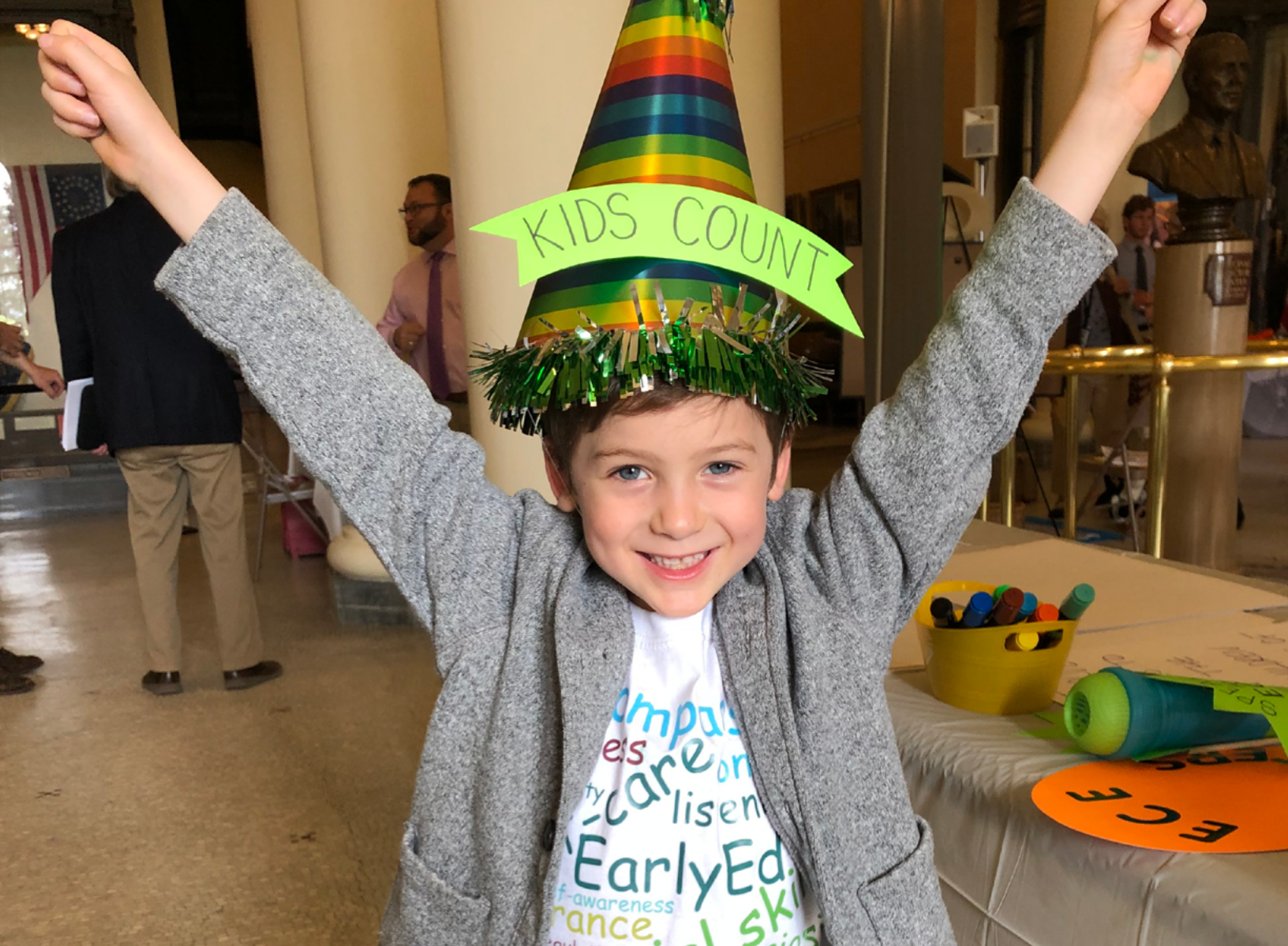
## **MAINE KIDS COUNT®**

The Maine KIDS COUNT Data Book® is a project  
of the Maine Children's Alliance



**Maine Children's Alliance**

Advocating for the well-being of all Maine families.



# EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION



## KEY INDICATORS

High-Quality Child Care

Four-year-olds in Public Preschool

High School Graduation

Chronic Absenteeism

First Year Teacher Salary

Closer Look: Early Intervention



### Quality learning experiences from birth to graduation prepare Maine kids for the future

Quality early learning experiences, including those offered at Head Starts, public preschools, and child care facilities that are of high-quality, lead to significantly better life outcomes for children.<sup>1</sup> Yet, Maine families struggle to find available quality care and providers struggle to attract and retain their workforce. Maine lost ground in the rates of participation in Head Start<sup>2</sup>, public preschool<sup>3</sup> and other early childhood programs due to COVID-19. While public preschool programs have caught up to pre-pandemic rates, Head Start rates still lag behind.

All school-age children, regardless of where they live in Maine, or their race, socioeconomic status, or disability status, should have access to high-quality public school education with social emotional and educational supports. COVID-19 forced education disruptions and widened income-based disparities in proficiency levels.<sup>4</sup> The learning losses were more profound in Maine than most other states. Notably, Maine was last in New England in fourth grade reading proficiency and in eighth grade math.<sup>5</sup> In addition to support for students, investments in educators are critical to building strong schools.

To ensure our youth can pursue higher education and jobs that pay a living wage, they need a solid educational foundation by graduating from high school.

Maine’s graduation rates in 2022 did not bounce back from the decline in 2021. Because of systemic inequities including racial discrimination, disparities by race/ethnicity have persisted in graduation rates well before the pandemic. Native American and Black youth in Maine were more likely to live in low-income households and have lower high school graduation rates.<sup>6</sup> All students benefit from programs that improve school climate and target academic support to student needs.



“If I had a magic wand, I would make sure all parents with young children were supported in becoming the best parents they could be and offered the highest quality child care available.”

Resident, CAP Androscoggin, Franklin , Oxford County region

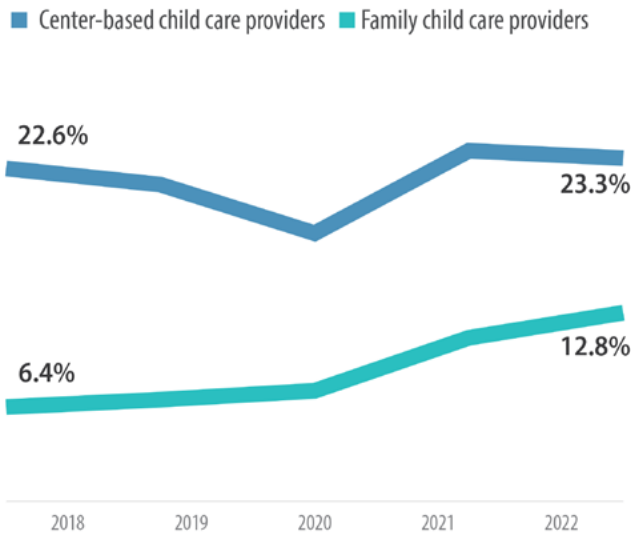


## High Quality Child Care: Child Care Centers at Step 3 or 4 in QRIS [↗](#)

### Improving access to quality early learning opportunities is good for Maine children and families

Twice as many family child care providers achieved the highest quality levels in 2022 compared to 2018

Percent of child care providers at Level 3 or 4 in Quality Rating Improvement System



Average wage of child care educator in Maine: \$31,000 (\$14.90-per hour)<sup>7</sup>

Average cost of infant care in Maine: \$11,700<sup>8</sup>

Source: [KIDS COUNT High-quality-child-care-by-type](#)

NOTE: The state's QRIS will be changing in 2023

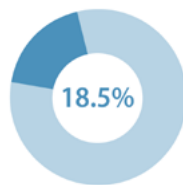
#### WHY IT MATTERS

Research shows the long-term benefits of quality, early learning experiences. Programs that begin at birth lead to better outcomes for children and yield up to a 13 percent annual return on public investment.<sup>9</sup> For families, however, the cost of child care continues to rise, making it hard to find care that enables them to work.

#### HOW MAINE IS DOING

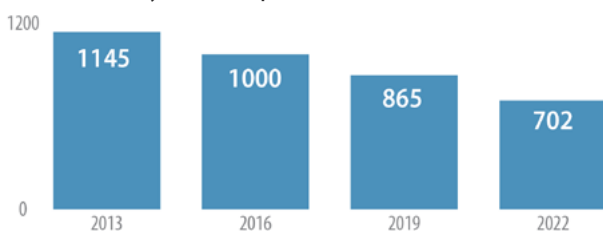
Maine needs more high-quality and affordable early care and education programs to benefit children, families, and employers. An estimated 50,000 children under the age of six need full-time child care.<sup>10</sup> The state has begun to invest more in the early learning system through wage supplements, incentives for improving quality, and financing for new child care sites. Yet, more must be done to advance quality and access. While child care centers tend to serve more children, the closing of family (home-based) child care providers is especially detrimental to Maine's rural areas where center-based care is often not available.

### 241 child care sites achieved step 3 or step 4



Since 2013, the number of family child care providers has declined by 39%

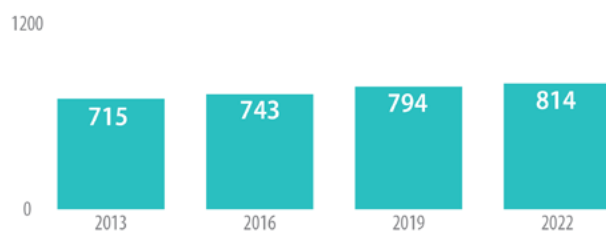
Number of family child care providers



Source: [KIDS COUNT licensed child care](#)

Since 2013, the number of child care centers has increased by 14%

Number of child care centers





## EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

### Four-year-olds in Public Preschool

#### Public investment in early care and education is a sound investment for Maine children and good for our economy

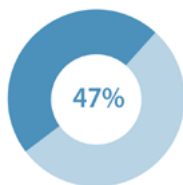
##### WHY IT MATTERS

Public preschool, or prekindergarten, is an affordable early learning option for families. It provides an important foundation for all children to learn social emotional skills through interactions with peers and teachers. Quality public preschool improves early literacy and mathematical skill and has a lasting impact on student success.<sup>11</sup>

##### HOW MAINE IS DOING

In Maine, the number of enrolled four-year-olds and the types of preschool programs vary widely by school district. A program that runs a few hours a day and/or a few days a week is not a viable option for working families. In response to the drop in public preschool enrollment during the pandemic, Maine allocated \$10 million dollars to help schools increase the number of children in preschool and offer more full day/full week programs.<sup>12</sup> Such investments are critical for districts to expand public preschool and for more young children, particularly children in families that are economically disadvantaged, to access quality early learning experiences.

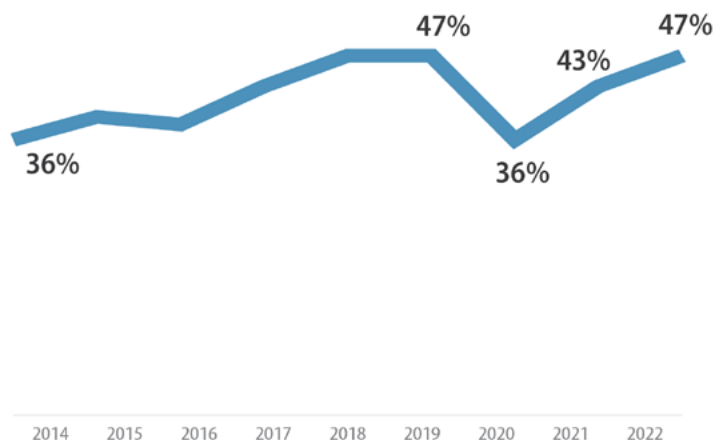
#### 6,269 Four-year-olds in Maine attend public preschool



79 percent of Maine's school districts offer public preschool now, but 85 percent will by 2023-2024. Only 15 school districts with 10 or more first graders do not have, or plan to have, public preschool by 2023-2024.

#### Participation in public preschool has returned to pre-pandemic levels, after dropping in the fall of 2020

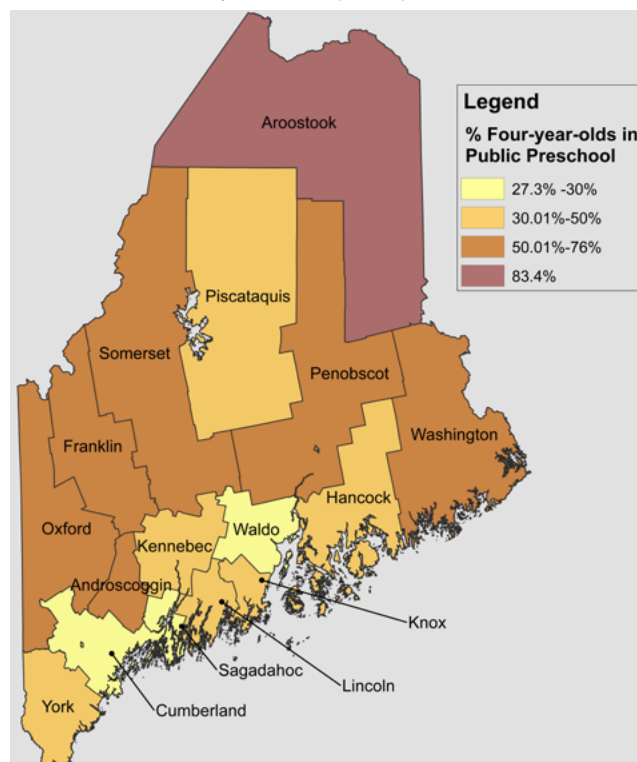
Percent of four-year-olds in Maine public preschools



Source: [KIDS COUNT public-preschool](#)

#### Aroostook County's rate of public preschool (83%) was more than three times higher than Cumberland County's rate (27%)

Percent of Maine four-year-olds in public preschool



Source: [KIDS COUNT Public Preschool, October 2022](#)

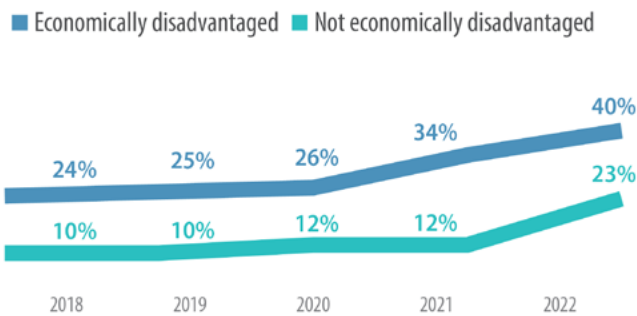


## Chronic Absenteeism, defined as missing 18 or more days of school in a year [↗](#)

### School attendance is critical to student success

Chronic absenteeism increased from 34 percent to 40 percent for economically disadvantaged students and from 12 percent to 23 percent for other students, as the pandemic affected everyone's attendance in the 2021-2022 school year

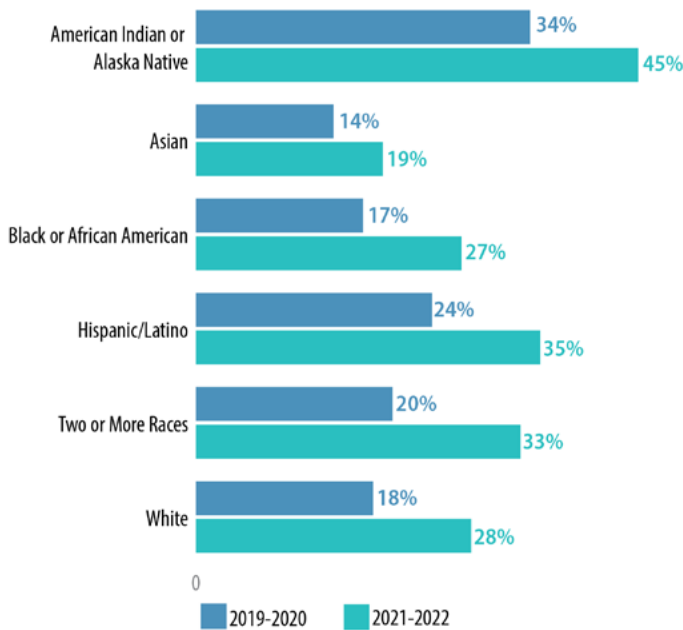
Percent of chronically absent students by economic status<sup>13</sup>



Source: [KIDS COUNT chronic-absenteeism](#)

### Chronic absenteeism increased 10 or more percentage points for most races and ethnicities

Percent of chronically absent students by race/ethnicity, 2021-2022 compared to two years before, 2019-2020



Source: [Maine Department of Education ESSA Data Dashboard](#)

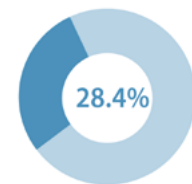
#### WHY IT MATTERS

Students who regularly attend school have better academic outcomes. When students believe that teachers and other adults care about them they are more likely to feel included and engaged and less likely to be chronically absent.<sup>14</sup>

#### HOW MAINE IS DOING

Due to COVID-19, education was disrupted for multiple years and resulted in increases in student anxiety and depression.<sup>15</sup> In 2021-2022, students often were not able to attend school if they were exposed to COVID-19 and typically there was not a remote school option. Chronic absenteeism was more prevalent for economically disadvantaged students and county data indicates it was also more prevalent in rural counties.<sup>16</sup> Establishing a positive school climate is important to recover from these high rates of chronic absenteeism, as is implementing strategies to work directly with students and families to address specific barriers to regular attendance.

**48,651 students were chronically absent in 2021-2022**



"Inclusivity in schools to me means no one being left out and everyone feeling that they belong and are safe."

-Student, Cumberland County



## EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

### High School Graduation [↗](#)

**When students graduate from high school, they are more prepared to succeed in college, careers, and life**

In 2022, Maine’s high school graduation rate for males was 4.5 percentage points lower than for females (84.0 compared to 88.5 percent). This gap foreshadows lower college starting and completion rates for males.<sup>17</sup> The issue starts earlier than high school. Maine is like most other states with eighth grade males nearly a grade level behind females in reading scores.<sup>18</sup> It will benefit all Maine children if children are taught in styles that best suit them, be that primarily through reading and listening, or through pictures and experiential learning.

#### WHY IT MATTERS

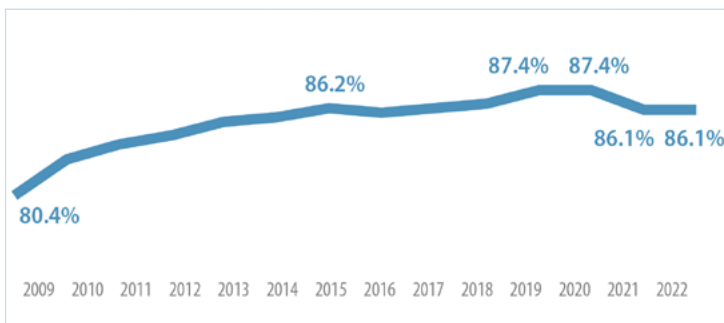
Workers typically need a credential or college degree to obtain a job that pays a living wage. Students who graduate from high school have higher wages, and better long-term physical and mental health.<sup>19</sup>

#### HOW MAINE IS DOING

Statewide, graduation rates fell from 87.4 percent to 86.1 percent from 2020 to 2021 and stayed at that rate in 2022. Many of the student populations who already faced systemic discrimination and experienced the most barriers had greater declines in graduation rates during the pandemic. Investing in personalized education plans and programs that strengthen relationships will help all students feel valued and connected in school.

**2021 high school graduation rates were the lowest since 2016 and did not improve in 2022**

Maine high school four-year graduation rates (June of each year)



Source: [KIDS COUNT](#)

“My school has programs for kids who are ahead and kids who are behind, but not for students in the middle. There is a gap—these students are “forgotten and may feel left out.”

-Student, Cumberland County



“Students can get suspended for the stupidest things! Running in the hallway, pushing someone over by accident, etc. Suspensions should never be a first thought!”

-Student, Cumberland County



## High School Graduation (continued)

Graduation rates of white and Hispanic students did not improve in 2022, while the rate for two or more races was higher than before the pandemic.

Four-year graduation rates by race/ethnicity 2020, 2021 & 2022

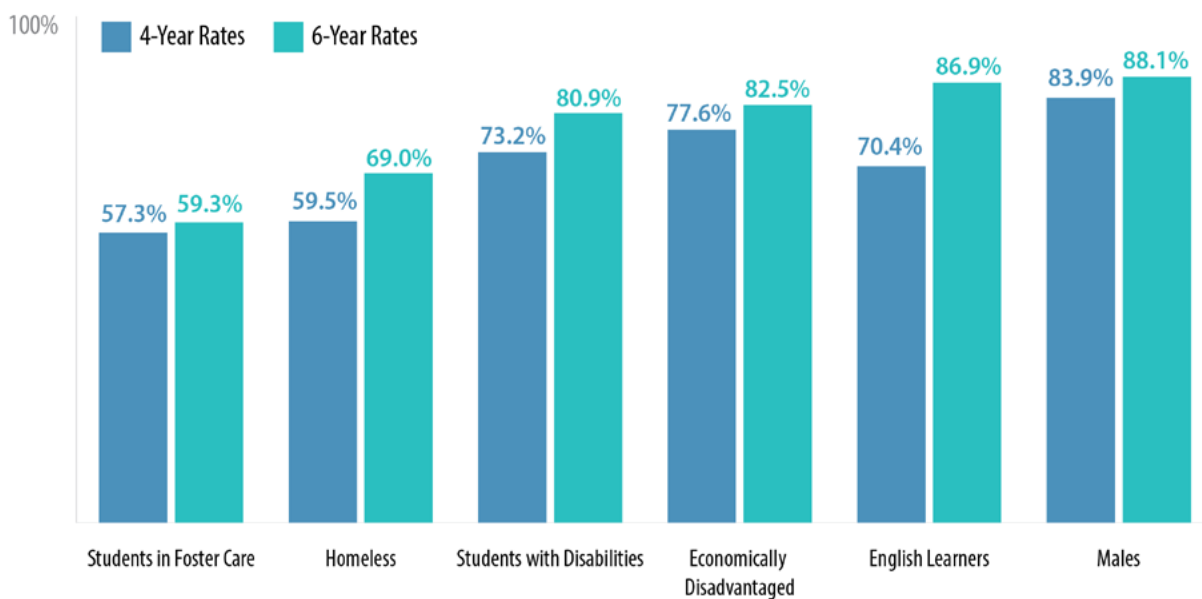
4-Year Graduation Rates	2020	2021	2022	Trend
Asian	94.8%	91.3%	92.4%	
Black/African American	83.1%	75.9%	81.2%	
Hispanic/Latino	81.9%	76.9%	76.1%	
Native American	72.2%	71.3%	NR	
Non-Hispanic white	87.8%	86.9%	86.7%	
Two or more races	82.0%	81.7%	84.4%	
<b>All youth</b>	<b>87.4%</b>	<b>86.1%</b>	<b>86.1%</b>	

Source: [KIDS COUNT](#)

\* Note that no rate was published for the American Indian/Alaska Native rate for 2022.

Certain populations of students are less likely to graduate high school in four years. When given the time and support they need, more of these students can graduate within six years.

Four-year and six-year high school graduation rates in 2022 for certain populations



Source: [Maine Department of Education Data Warehouse](#), Student Outcomes





## First-year Teacher Salary

### Good teachers are essential to student success

#### WHY IT MATTERS

Teachers are the most important in-school factor impacting student success.<sup>20</sup> Teachers need to make a livable wage. A recent study showed that a 10 percent increase in wages improved student performance.<sup>21</sup> Without adequate compensation, schools struggle to attract and retain teachers.

#### HOW MAINE IS DOING

An important way to improve the achievement of Maine students is to invest in its teachers. The Maine state legislature passed a bill to raise the statewide minimum teacher salary to \$40,000 for 2022-2023. Yet, this amount does not account for high levels of inflation since 2020 and Maine teacher salaries continue to lag behind most other states. Additionally, wealthier school districts are able to compensate teachers more. Teacher turnover is expensive and is concentrated in districts with more economically disadvantaged students.<sup>22</sup> Given the important role of teachers in supporting student success, ensuring teachers across the state are compensated fairly is critical.

**Maine ranked 43rd of 50 states in 2021.<sup>23</sup> The average starting teacher salary in Maine in 2022 was \$39,195.**

“The school system is one of the largest employers in the area, but they struggle to find qualified people to work for them.”

-Resident, Penobscot, Piscataquis & Knox area

#### Maine starting pay for teachers was lowest in New England

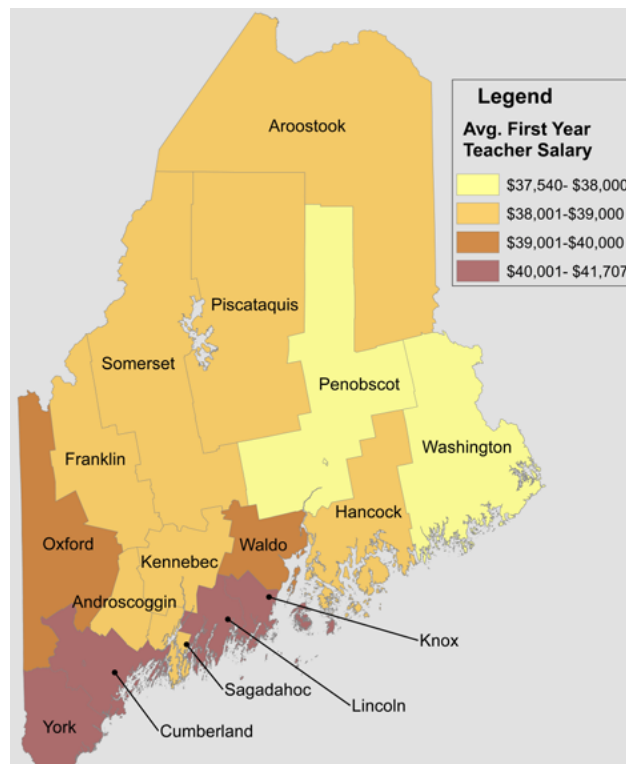
Average first year teacher salary by state, 2021



Source: [NEA](#)

#### Although Maine sets a minimum starting teacher salary, school districts in more prosperous counties are able to pay more

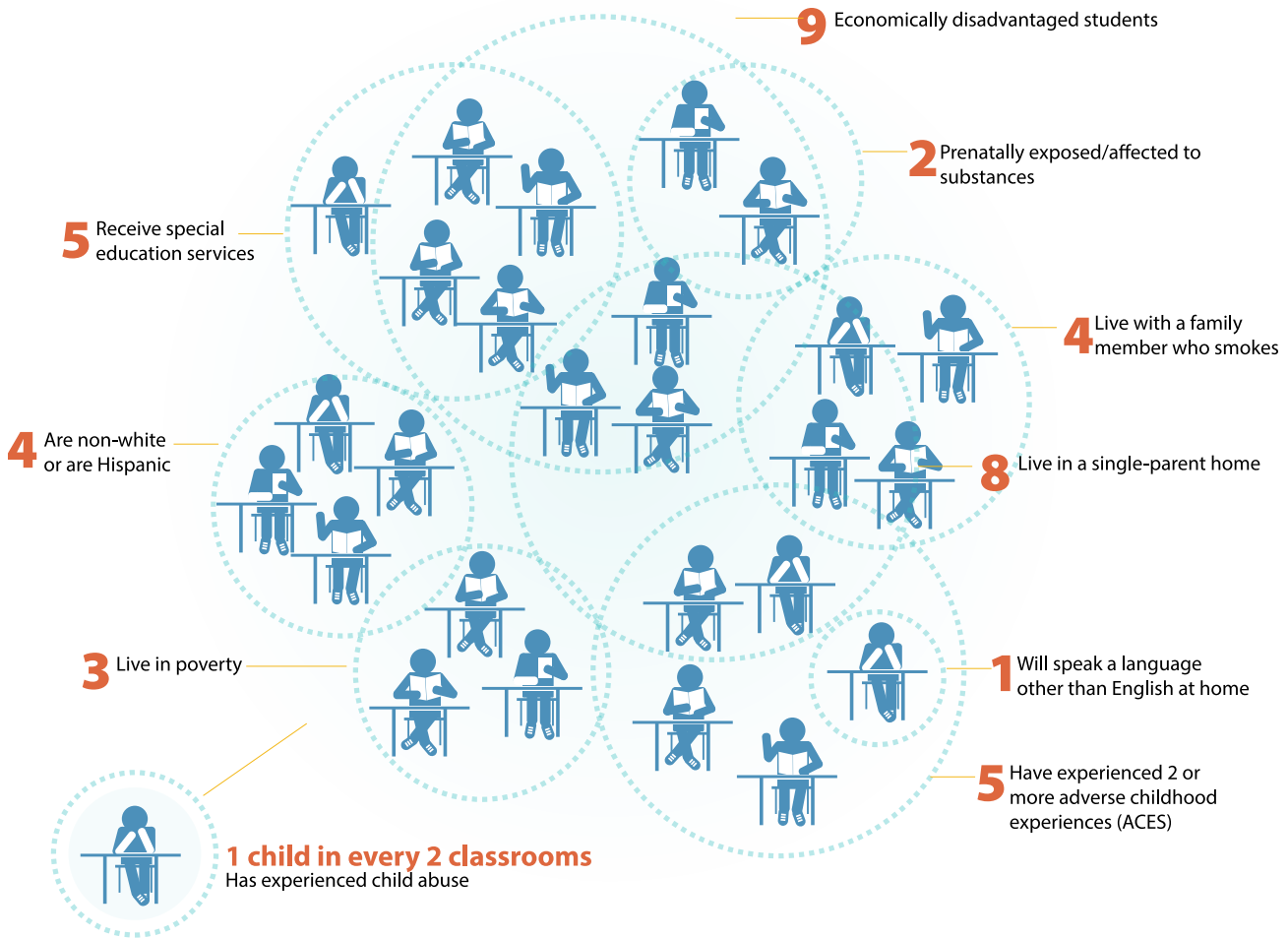
Average first year teacher salary by county in 2022-2023



Source: [KIDS COUNT](#) -Salary of first year teachers showing the amount a district has agreed in their contract to pay a first-year teacher with a Bachelor’s Degree and no experience teaching. Note: This is an unweighted average. This means that it reflects the average of the districts starting salaries in a county, not the average pay of all the first-year teachers hired in a county.



# A HYPOTHETICAL CLASSROOM OF 25 FIRST GRADERS IN MAINE





### Solutions

Public education is foundational to our society. The pandemic created significant stressors for children, including disruptions in their education, as well as increased social isolation and stress.<sup>24</sup> Children need us to invest in their futures. Policy recommendations include:

- ✓ Increase investments in the early care and education system, including incentivizing a mixed delivery system that includes public and private child care partnerships and Head Start.
- ✓ Increase investments in school districts to provide full-day, full-week preschool and to increase outreach to families about the benefits of enrolling.
- ✓ Help school districts improve school climate and inclusion of youth who face more discrimination and bullying, such as LGBTQ+ youth and youth of color.
- ✓ Increase investment in teacher compensation and teacher retention.
- ✓ Maintain the state's obligation to provide 55 percent of the cost of preschool and K-12 education.
- ✓ Strengthen school and community-based children's mental health services.
- ✓ Expand the Community Schools' programs including after-school tutoring and extended day schooling.

### Additional Indicators

- › [All parents of children under age 6 in the workforce by Maine county](#), KIDS COUNT
- › [Children Served: Number of Children with Open Subsidy Authorization by Age Group](#), Maine Office of Child and Family Services
- › [Head Start Enrollment](#), KIDS COUNT
- › [Children receiving early intervention services by state ages 0-1 and ages 0 -3 Child Count Data Charts](#), IdealInfantToddler.org
- › [Right From the Start Maine Coalition Indicators](#), Multiple indicators from KIDS COUNT
- › [Profile of English Language learners in Maine](#), Maine Department of Education
- › [State of Maine Profile of Reading and Math Proficiency of fourth and eighth graders](#), (NAEP) Nations Report Card and [Fourth-grade reading achievement levels](#), and [Eighth-grade math achievement levels](#), KIDS COUNT
- › [Characteristics of Maine students enrolled in special education](#), Maine Department of Education
- › [College starting within 12 months of graduating high school](#), KIDS COUNT
- › [Students completing a two-year degree or four degree within 6 years of graduating high school](#), KIDS COUNT



## Resources

- › [Profile of Maine legislation for early childhood in 2022 from Alliance for Early Success](#)
- › [Early Care and Education Annual Report, Calendar Year 2022](#)
- › [Maine - Prenatal-to-3 State Policy Roadmap 2022](#) from Prenatal to 3 Policy Impact Center
- › The [2021 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth in our Nation's Schools](#)

## ENDNOTES

1. [Key Concepts Serve and Return](#), Harvard Center for the Developing Child, 2015.
2. [Head Start Enrollment](#), KIDS COUNT.
3. [Public Preschool Enrollment](#), KIDS COUNT.
4. [The State of the American Student: Fall 2022](#), Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE).
5. Maine's fourth grade reading scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2022 test showed that Maine was among two states with a statistically significant decline in fourth grade reading proficiency from 2019 to 2022. [Nation's Report Card Maine Profile](#). Further, in [fourth grade reading achievement levels](#) KIDS COUNT, 39 states had better scores than Maine. Maine was last in New England with 29% of students at or above proficiency. In [eighth grade math achievement levels](#), KIDS COUNT, 27 states had better scores than Maine and Maine was again last in New England with 24% of students at or above proficiency. Academic achievement is not included as an indicator in this Data Book because no test was given in 2019-2020 and the new state test given in 2020-2021 cannot be compared to previous years and does not measure of the percent of students who achieved proficiency.
6. [Children in poverty by race and ethnicity](#), KIDS COUNT, and [High school graduation rates](#) by race and ethnicity, KIDS COUNT.
7. [Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics](#), Maine, Occupation Code, 39-9011, May 2021
8. [Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Childcare State Factsheet](#), February 2023, page 21.
9. Garcia, Jorge Luis and Heckman, James J. and Ermini Leaf, Duncan and Prados, Maria, [The Life-Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program](#), December, 2016. NBER Working Paper No. w22993.
10. [Children under age 6 with all available parents in work force](#), KIDS COUNT, 2021
11. [Untangling the Evidence on Preschool Effectiveness](#), Learning Policy Institute, January 2019.
12. [Maine Pre-Kindergarten Expansion Grants](#), Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan.
13. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of enrolled days, so for a complete school year, that is 18 or more days of school. It includes excused and unexcused absences. Economically disadvantaged refers to students who live in families whose income is 185% or below federal poverty levels. This was \$49,025 for a family of four persons in 2021.
14. [Count Me In](#) and [Attendance Works](#)
15. Elharake, J. A., Akbar, F., Malik, A. A., Gilliam, W., & Omer, S. B. (2022). [Mental Health Impact of COVID-19 among Children and College Students: A Systematic Review](#). *Child psychiatry and human development*, 1–13.
16. [County Profiles](#), Maine Children's Alliance, 2022. Note, the three most prosperous counties of York, Cumberland and Sagadahoc already had low rates of chronic absenteeism and did not see their rates rise after the pandemic.
17. [The New England Secondary School Consortium \(NESSC\) Common Data Annual Report -2022](#)
18. [Boys left behind: Education gender gaps across the US.](#), Brookings Institute, October 2022.
19. Klebanoff Cohen, A., and S. Leonard Syme, S. L. (2013). [Education: A Missed Opportunity for Public Health Intervention](#). *American Journal of Public Health*, 103
20. [Understanding Teachers' Impact on Student Achievement Teachers Matter](#), RAND Corporation, 2019.
21. Fullard, J. (2021). [Relative wages and pupil performance, evidence from TIMSS](#), ISER Working Paper Series, No. 2021-07, University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), Colchester.
22. [The Cost of Teacher Turnover](#), Learning Policy Institute, September 2017
23. [Educator Pay and Student Spending: How Does Your State Rank](#), National Education Association for 2020-2021 school year.
24. [The State of the American Student: Fall 2022; A guide to pandemic recovery and reinvention](#), CRPE, Arizona State, 2022.



### A Closer Look: Early Intervention for Infants and Toddlers

An explosion in the science of early childhood development has shown that the brain's architecture is built over time and from the bottom up, and early experiences and relationships are the building blocks.<sup>1</sup> Like building a house, providing a strong foundation in the beginning is key to all the development that follows.

Early intervention services can help children make progress toward achievement of age-appropriate developmental milestones, be more prepared for kindergarten, have more positive interactions with their peers, and reduce the need for special education services during their school years.<sup>2</sup> In Maine, early intervention services are administered by [Child Development Services](#) (CDS) within the Department of Education.

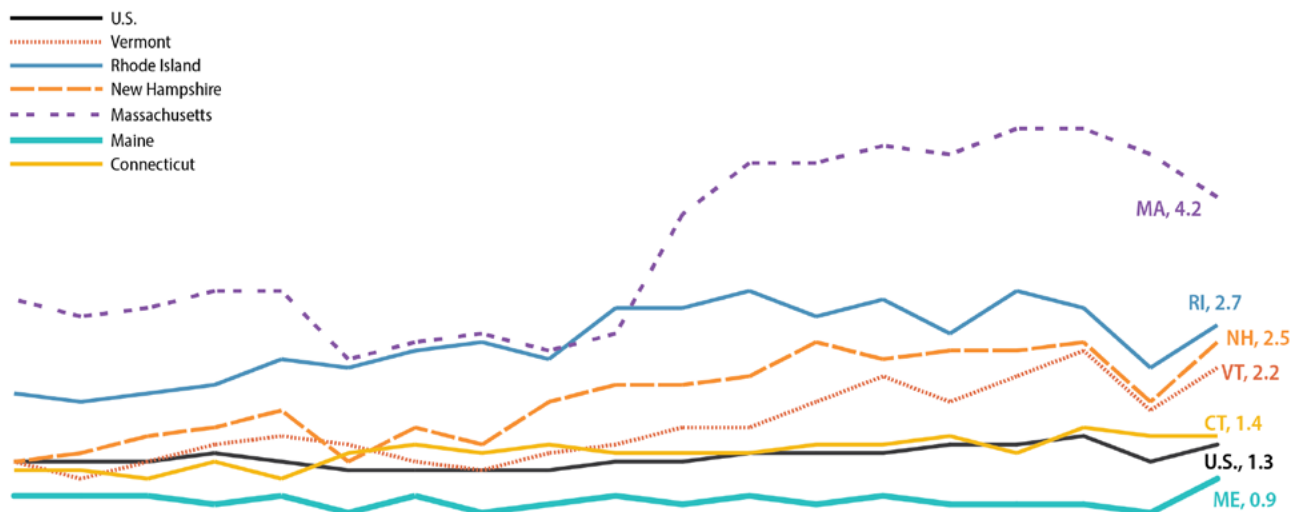
Infants and toddlers who do not meet developmental milestones within expected time frames need professional assessment and treatment as early in life as possible. But in Maine, we are not finding and connecting enough children under age one to the evidence-based services that they need.

In federal fiscal year 2020, Maine's early intervention program identified just 66 infants before their first birthday. This number increased to 98 babies in 2021 and to 118 babies in 2022, yet this is still less than one percent of all babies and below the national average.<sup>3</sup>

Maine could also improve developmental screening rates of young children. Medical claims for annual developmental screenings for children ages one to three for federal fiscal year 2020, show that just 36 percent of children with MaineCare had a claim for receiving a developmental screening. While this is equal to the national median rate of the 30 states that reported, the neighboring states of Massachusetts and Vermont had significantly higher rates of 75 percent and 57 percent respectively, by incentivizing providers to conduct developmental screenings.<sup>4</sup>

#### Maine was the only New England state below the national average every year from 2003-2021

Percent children birth to age one in early intervention services (point in time)



Infant Toddler Coordinators Association, [Child Count Data Charts, 2021](#)



## Solutions

To give children a strong foundation, it is essential that developmental concerns are identified as soon as possible. Policies to improve Maine’s provision of early intervention services include:

- ✓ Implementing significant reforms to improve early childhood special education in Maine. Policymakers should review recommendations from PCG’s Independent Review in 2020 and bills (LDs [135](#), [255](#), & [386](#)) passed in 2021.<sup>6</sup>
- ✓ Expanding the criteria for “developmental delay”<sup>7</sup>, as Maine is one of 16 states with the most restrictive eligibility requirements for infants and toddlers.<sup>8</sup> Increase public awareness that children may be automatically eligible if they already have an “established medical condition.”<sup>9</sup>
- ✓ Establishing a centralized billing system with the State’s Office of MaineCare for schools and CDS to be able to utilize MaineCare to fund more of their special education services.<sup>11</sup>

## Additional Indicators

- › [Students with disabilities](#), KIDS COUNT
- › [Home Visiting](#), KIDS COUNT
- › [Pre-term births](#), KIDS COUNT
- › [Federal policy recommendations for young children with disabilities](#)
- › [Public Consulting Group \(PCG\): Maine’s Early Childhood Special Education Services Cost Study Report](#) and related [Final Phase I Report](#), and [Implementation Plan Report](#) from 2020, and [related legislative study materials](#)

## Resources

- › [Help Me Grow Maine](#) connects families to information and services about child development and community resources.

## ENDNOTES

1. National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004). Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships: Working Paper No. 1. Retrieved from [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu).
2. Karoly, Lynn A., M. Rebecca Kilburn, and Jill S. Cannon, [Proven Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions](#), Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005.
3. [Infant Toddler Coordinators Association, Child Count Data Charts, 2021](#)
4. [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Core Set of Children’s Health Care Quality Measures for Medicaid and CHIP](#) (Child Core Set) (Federal Fiscal Year 2020), Table-DEV CH
5. E. Burak and M. Odeh, (2018) [Developmental Screenings for Young Children in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program](#), Georgetown University Center for Children and Families.
6. Maine Early Childhood Special Education, Independent Review, Final Phase 1 Report [PCG Report Template Blue](#) (maine.gov)
7. [Maine Unified Special Education Regulation Birth to Age Twenty](#), August 25, 2017
8. See endnote #3.
9. [Established Conditions List](#) A list of Established Conditions that make children under the age of 3 automatically eligible for Early Intervention Services through Part C. See also: [Information for families and/or caregivers who have young children with disabilities](#).
10. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, [Information on School-Based Services in Medicaid: Funding, Documentation and Expanding Services](#), (August 2022).
11. [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](#) provides links to centralized billing systems established in six states.