

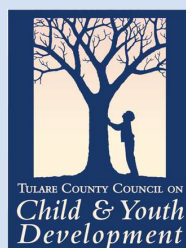
Tulare County Council on Child & Youth Development



Strategic Plan 2026–2031



TULARE COUNTY
BOARD OF
SUPERVISORS



Tulare County
Office of Education

Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools

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1. Introduction

The Tulare County Council on Child & Youth Development, serving as the Local Planning Council (LPC), plays a pivotal role in guiding early care and education (ECE) efforts across the county. The Council serves as a forum for collaboration, strategic planning, and advocacy, aligning community priorities with the state's vision for high-quality, accessible, and equitable early learning opportunities.

This 2026–2031 Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for the Council's work over the next five years. It builds upon the foundation of the 2019–2023 plan while incorporating new data, emerging community needs, and strategic goals developed through a collaborative planning process with local partners, educators, and stakeholders.

The purpose of this plan is twofold:

- To fulfill the state requirement for local planning councils to establish strategic priorities and guide resource allocation for early childhood systems.
- To provide a practical, actionable framework for Tulare County's continued investment in children, families, and the early learning workforce.

By integrating the findings of the 2026 Tulare County Early Care and Education Needs Assessment, 2024 Early Care and Education Economic Benefit Study, and the Strategic Planning Framework developed by the Council and the Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE), this plan ensures that LPC efforts are data informed, locally responsive, and aligned with the county's broader vision for community wellbeing and lifelong success.

2. Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles

Mission

The Tulare County Council on Child & Youth Development supports, promotes, and advocates for increased access to community-wide, high-quality early care and education to meet the needs of all children and families.

Vision

The Tulare County Council on Child & Youth Development's vision is to equip all members of the community with the knowledge of, and the ability to, access high-quality early care and education resulting in lifelong success for the children and families within our community.

Guiding Principles

- Collaboration across sectors and systems to strengthen early learning.
- Support for all 0-12 children and families.
- Data-driven decision making.
- Commitment to continuous improvement in quality and access.
- Support for the early care and education workforce as a foundation for quality.



3. Community Context and County Profile

A. Demographics and Population Trends

Tulare County is home to more than 487,000 residents and continues to be one of the fastest growing regions in California's Central Valley. Approximately 30% of the county's population is under the age of 18, underscoring the importance of a strong early care and education system to support the county's long-term vitality.

Nearly 65% of residents identify as Hispanic or Latino, and more than 40% of households speak a language other than English at home. Median household income remains below the state average, and nearly one in four children live in households experiencing poverty. These demographic realities significantly impact access to early care and education, influencing both affordability and availability.

B. Economic Landscape

Tulare County's economy is anchored by agriculture, food production, healthcare, education, and logistics. 2026 Early Care and Education Economic Benefit Study highlights ongoing challenges tied to seasonal employment and income volatility, both of which affect family stability and child care demand.

While the unemployment rate has gradually improved since the pandemic, it remains above the statewide average. Economic growth has been accompanied by rising housing and child care costs, further widening the gap between what families can afford and the actual cost of quality early learning programs.

C. Implications for Early Care and Education

The intersection of economic challenges, population growth, and workforce shortages presents both urgency and opportunity for Tulare County's early care and education system. The 2026 ECE Needs Assessment identified critical shortages in licensed care, particularly for infants and toddlers, and persistent difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified educators.

These findings emphasize the need for coordinated strategies that strengthen the workforce, expand access to affordable care, and improve system alignment among providers, schools, and community organizations. By addressing these issues through targeted initiatives, the LPC aims to ensure that every child in Tulare County has access to high-quality early learning opportunities.



Figure 1. Tulare County Demographic Overview – Source: Tulare County ECE Needs Assessment, 2026

Most Parents Do Not Have The ECE They Need

Age Group	With ECE	Without ECE	Details
Infants & Toddlers	6%	94%	Only 0.3 of 5 infants & toddlers have ECE. This leaves 19,875 without ECE.
Preschoolers	32%	68%	Only 1.6 of 5 preschoolers have ECE. This leaves 14,680 without ECE.



4. Early Childhood Education Landscape

A. Overview of Early Care and Education in Tulare County

Tulare County's early care and education (ECE) system encompasses a diverse network of public, private, and community-based programs serving children from birth through age 12. These include center-based programs, family child care homes, Head Start and Early Head Start, State Preschool, private preschools, and programs operated by school districts.

The Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE), through the Local Planning Council (LPC), works in close collaboration with state agencies, early learning providers, higher education institutions, and community partners to ensure a coordinated approach to supporting children, families, and educators.

Over the past five years, Tulare County has seen substantial progress in expanding Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) access, strengthening professional development supports, and integrating early learning efforts across systems. However, the county continues to face challenges in sustaining adequate capacity, ensuring workforce stability, and meeting the needs of children and families in both rural and urban communities.

B. Key Findings from the 2026 Early Childhood Education Needs Assessment

Access and Availability

- Licensed capacity meets only a portion of estimated demand, particularly for infants and toddlers.
- Geographic disparities persist, with rural communities facing limited access to licensed providers and transportation barriers.
- Expansion of Transitional Kindergarten (TK) has increased access for four-year-olds but has also affected enrollment patterns in community-based programs.

Affordability

- The average cost of licensed child care represents a significant portion of household income for most families, exceeding federal affordability benchmarks.
- Families with limited income often rely on informal care arrangements, reducing exposure to high-quality early learning experiences.

Workforce and Professional Development

- Provider shortages continue across all settings, driven by low wages, limited benefits, and competition from TK–12.
- Many providers identify professional development and pathways to higher education as critical needs for maintaining program quality.
- Local initiatives, such as stipend programs and educator pipelines, have improved retention but remain insufficient to meet overall demand.

Quality and Coordination

- Participation in Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) activities has increased, yet consistent funding and technical assistance are required to sustain gains.
- Coordination among agencies, districts, and private providers continues to be an area of opportunity to ensure continuity of care and learning.

Family and Community Needs

- Families report challenges navigating child care options and eligibility systems.
- Increased family engagement, outreach and resource availability of navigation are ongoing priorities.

C. Summary of Priority Challenges

- Insufficient capacity for infant and toddler care across much of the county.
- Ongoing affordability gaps between family income and program costs.
- Persistent workforce shortages and limited advancement opportunities.
- Uneven access to quality improvement supports and system coordination.
- Limited awareness among families of available early learning resources.

Figure 2. Child Care Supply vs. Demand by Age Group
Source: Tulare County ECE Needs Assessment, 2026

Child Enrollment in Tulare County ECE Across Age Groups				
	Infants & Toddlers	Preschool	School Age	All Ages
Children Enrolled in...				
Licensed Child Care Centers	135	1,974	65	2,174
Licensed Family Child Care Homes (FCCH)	369	655	1,144	2,168
License - Exempt Providers (FFN)	557	557	557	1,671
Subtotal	1,061	3,186	1,766	6,013
Transitional Kindergarten (TK)	NA	1,621	NA	1,621
Elementary School After School Programs	NA	NA	8,211	8,211
Total Enrolled	1,061	4,807	9,977	15,845

5. Strategic Priorities and Goals (2026–2031)

Priority Area 1: Access and Affordability

Goal

- Support the expansion of availability and access to affordable, high-quality early care and education for all families in Tulare County.

Strategies & Initiatives

- Support development and expansion of licensed early learning facilities, particularly in underserved and rural areas.
- Collaborate with school districts, local agencies, and community-based organizations to increase infant/toddler and full-day program options.
- Advocate for increased funding to expand subsidized care and ensure affordability for low and moderate-income families.
- Promote awareness of available early learning programs and resources through coordinated outreach and multilingual communications.

Metrics

- Increase in licensed child care slots countywide by age group.
- Reduction in number of ZIP codes identified as child care deserts.
- Growth in utilization rates for subsidized and state-funded programs.

Priority Area 2: Workforce Development

Goal

- Promote recruitment, retention, and professional advancement opportunities for Tulare County’s early care and education workforce.

Strategies & Initiatives

- Support partnerships with local colleges and universities to create clear educational and career pathways for ECE professionals.
- Support local workforce initiatives such as stipends, mentoring, and substitute pools.
- Support wage enhancement and benefits advocacy to ensure the ECE workforce is valued and compensated equitably.
- Promote access to professional development aligned with the California ECE Competencies and Quality Counts California (QCC) standards.

Metrics

- Increase in the number of credentialed or degree-holding ECE educators.
- Improved workforce retention and reduced vacancy rates across licensed programs.
- Participation growth in professional development and stipend programs.

Priority Area 3: Quality and Coordination

Goal

- Advance quality across all early learning settings through system alignment, continuous improvement, and shared accountability.

Strategies & Initiatives

- Strengthen participation in Quality Counts California and expand quality supports to more programs and providers.
- Foster collaboration among LPC, TCOE, Tulare County Health & Human Services, and partner agencies to align ECE and TK initiatives.
- Support implementation of the Universal Pre-Kindergarten mixed-delivery framework to promote seamless transitions for children and families.
- Integrate data systems and tools that support evaluation of quality outcomes across programs.

Metrics

- Increased number of sites participating in QRIS/QCC.
- Assist in the development of the Tulare County UPK master plan by 2028.

Priority Area 4: Family and Community Engagement

Goal

- Empower families as active partners in their children's early learning and strengthen community collaboration to improve child and family outcomes.

Strategies & Initiatives

- Increase family engagement and leadership opportunities through community forums, parent advisory groups, and local events.
- Promote public awareness campaigns on the importance of early learning, literacy, and school readiness.
- Enhance coordination with Family Resource Centers, libraries, and health agencies to connect families to comprehensive supports.
- Ensure and responsive outreach materials are available in all major communities.

Metrics

- Support the number of families participating in engagement initiatives.
- Increased awareness and utilization of early learning resources.
- Enhanced cross-agency partnerships that support integrated family services.

Priority Area 5: Data and Advocacy

Goal

- Strengthen the use of data to inform planning, evaluate outcomes, and advocate for policies that advance early care and education in Tulare County.

Strategies & Initiatives

- Develop and maintain data-sharing partnerships to improve access to ECE-related information across systems.
- Use local data to inform decision-making, funding requests, and public policy recommendations.
- Produce annual progress reports highlighting LPC initiatives and outcomes.
- Engage in state and regional advocacy to promote sustained investment in early learning systems.

Metrics

- Annual publication of LPC Data and Annual Report.
- Increase in data-informed policy recommendations and funding proposals.
- Support an increase of stakeholder participation in advocacy efforts.



6. Implementation Framework

A. Implementation Approach

- **Collaboration:** Engage cross-sector partners including early learning providers, school districts, higher education institutions, and community-based organizations.
- **Accountability:** Establish clear roles and measurable outcomes to track progress toward each goal.
- **Promote:** Initiatives that support access, quality, and workforce opportunity.
- **Support:** The alignment of resources and investments to ensure long-term impact beyond the plan's five-year term.

B. Roles and Responsibilities

Local Planning Council (LPC)

- Serve as the central coordinating body overseeing implementation of the Strategic Plan.
- Monitor progress, review data, and make policy recommendations based on local needs.
- Convene partners and facilitate communication among agencies and providers.
- Report annually on outcomes, highlighting key achievements and areas for improvement.
- In collaboration with the following agencies.
 - Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE)
 - Provide administrative and operational support for LPC activities.
 - Support data collection and integration efforts across early learning systems.
 - Facilitate alignment of LPC initiatives with state and county education priorities, including Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) implementation.
 - Community Partners and Providers
 - Participate in implementation of targeted initiatives aligned with LPC priorities.
 - Contribute data, feedback, and expertise to support continuous improvement.
 - Engage families and local organizations in outreach and advocacy efforts.

- Higher Education Institutions
 - Advocate workforce development efforts through aligned coursework, certificates, and degree programs.
 - Collaborate with LPC and TCOE to strengthen career pathways and practicum opportunities.
- Local and State Agencies
 - Advocate for funding streams, technical assistance, and data systems to reinforce shared outcomes.
 - Coordinate policies and investments supporting early learning, health, and family services.

D. Partnership and Coordination Structure

Community Resources Committee

- Purpose: Identify, promote, and strengthen partnerships and resources that enhance access to high-quality early care and education for children and families.
- Responsibilities: Resource mapping, partnership development, data review to identify gaps, and recommendations for advocacy and alignment.
- Reporting: Meets at least quarterly and provides updates and recommendations to the full LPC.

Events Committee

- Purpose: Plan, coordinate, and evaluate events that promote professional development and community awareness in alignment with the goals outlined in the council's strategic plan and the unmet need in the ECE needs assessment.
- Responsibilities: Organize conferences, recognition events, and trainings; coordinate with partners to maximize participation; collect feedback for improvement.
- Reporting: Provides regular status updates to the LPC, including calendars, budget summaries, and post-event evaluations.

Collaborative Alignment

- The Community Resources Committee strengthens partnerships and identifies opportunities.
- The Events Committee elevates partnerships through engagement and professional learning.
- Together they ensure the Council's work remains visible, coordinated, and community-driven.

E. Communication and Reporting

Internal Communication

- Committee-to-Council Reporting: Written summaries or verbal updates at regularly scheduled LPC meetings.
- Annual Review: Committees collaborate with LPC staff to compile an annual progress report.
- Shared Documentation: Meeting minutes, agendas, and committee materials are maintained by TCOE staff.

External Communication

- Public Transparency: The LPC website will post meeting schedules, approved minutes, and announcements.
- Community Updates: Events, trainings, and initiatives distributed via newsletters, social media, and partner networks.
- State and Stakeholder Reporting: Annual reports and data summaries to the California Department of Education and other oversight entities.

Continuous Feedback Loop

- Regular updates and documented outcomes support adjustments to strategies.
- Open dialogue and data reflection promote continuous improvement and accountability.



7. Evaluation and Progress Monitoring

Effective evaluation and progress monitoring are essential to ensuring accountability, measuring impact, and guiding continuous improvement. The Tulare County Council on Child & Youth Development will utilize a structured system for tracking progress toward the goals and objectives outlined in this plan.

A. Evaluation Framework

- **Monitor Implementation:** Track completion of strategies and initiatives under each priority area.
- **Measure Outcomes:** Assess measurable progress toward goals using defined metrics and indicators.
- **Inform Decisions:** Provide data and analysis to guide adjustments in strategy, resource allocation, and partnership focus.
- **Demonstrate Impact:** Communicate results to stakeholders and funding partners.

B. Roles and Responsibilities

Local Planning Council (LPC)

- Oversees the overall evaluation process and ensures progress monitoring is embedded in regular meetings.
- Reviews data reports and provides direction for mid-cycle adjustments.
- Approves the annual progress report for submission to the state and local stakeholders.



Committees

- Support collaboration with community partners, to enhance outreach opportunities and community engagement outcomes.
- Track stakeholder attendance, evaluate event effectiveness, and gather feedback to plan for future advocacy efforts.

Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE) Staff

- Provide administrative and technical support for data collection, analysis, and reporting.
- Maintain a central repository for all performance data, reports, and supporting documentation.
- Ensure evaluation tools and processes remain consistent across the five-year cycle.

C. Data Collection and Indicators

- Licensed child care capacity reports and ZIP code-level access data.
- Workforce development program participation and retention statistics.
- Quality Counts California (QCC) participation and rating outcomes.
- Family engagement survey results and community feedback.
- Event participation data and post-event evaluations.
- Partner agency and committee reports summarizing local collaboration outcomes.



D. Reporting and Review Cycle

Timeline	Activity	Output
Quarterly	Committees collect and review implementation data; updates shared at LPC meetings.	Committee progress summaries and meeting minutes.
Annually	Comprehensive review of metrics and initiatives by LPC and TCOE staff.	Annual Strategic Plan Progress Report submitted to CDE and shared publicly.
Mid-Cycle (2027)	Formal evaluation to assess midterm outcomes and adjust strategies.	Mid-Cycle Review Report and updated action plan.
End of Cycle (2029)	Final evaluation assessing goal attainment, lessons learned, and recommendations for the next strategic plan.	Final Evaluation Report and recommendations to LPC and TCOE leadership.

E. Continuous Improvement and Learning

- Transparency: Sharing data openly with stakeholders.
- Support: Ensuring evaluation methods encompass the needs of all children and families.
- Collaboration: Using evaluation results to strengthen partnerships and system alignment.
- Adaptability: Adjusting initiatives in response to new opportunities, barriers, or community trends.

F. Reporting to Stakeholders

- Annual reports presented to the LPC, TCOE leadership, and the California Department of Education.
- Public summaries and infographics shared via the LPC website and community networks.
- Presentations at key events and community meetings to share impact and gather input.

G. Looking Ahead

The Council's commitment to evaluation ensures that this plan remains a living document one that evolves alongside Tulare County's children, families, and educators. By monitoring outcomes, celebrating progress, and responding to data, the LPC will continue to strengthen the early care and education system and contribute to lifelong success for all members of the community.

8. Appendices

Appendix A – LPC Membership Roster

- Comprehensive list of current Tulare County Local Planning Council members.
- Includes names, affiliations, roles (provider, consumer, public agency, discretionary), and term dates.
- Updated annually and maintained by the Tulare County Office of Education.

Appendix B – 2026 Early Childhood Education Needs Assessment Summary

- Key findings and data highlights drawn from the Tulare County ECE Needs Assessment – Final Report (Feb 2025).
- Child population by age and geography; licensed capacity versus estimated demand; workforce trends; parent survey results.
- Selected charts and infographics incorporated for visual clarity.

Appendix C – Tulare County Economic and Demographic Indicators

- County-level economic and workforce data drawn from the Tulare County Executive Summary (Aug 2024) and Economic Study (Aug 2024).
- Employment sectors and job growth; income and cost of living; poverty rates and educational attainment; implications for affordability.

Appendix D – Strategic Framework Crosswalk

- Table linking strategic priority areas to goals, strategies, responsible parties, and metrics.
- Demonstrates alignment between this plan and the TCOE – LPC Strategic Planning Framework.

Appendix E – Committee Charters

- Full text of the Community Resources Committee Charter and Events Committee Charter.
- Describes each committee's purpose, scope of work, and reporting responsibilities.

