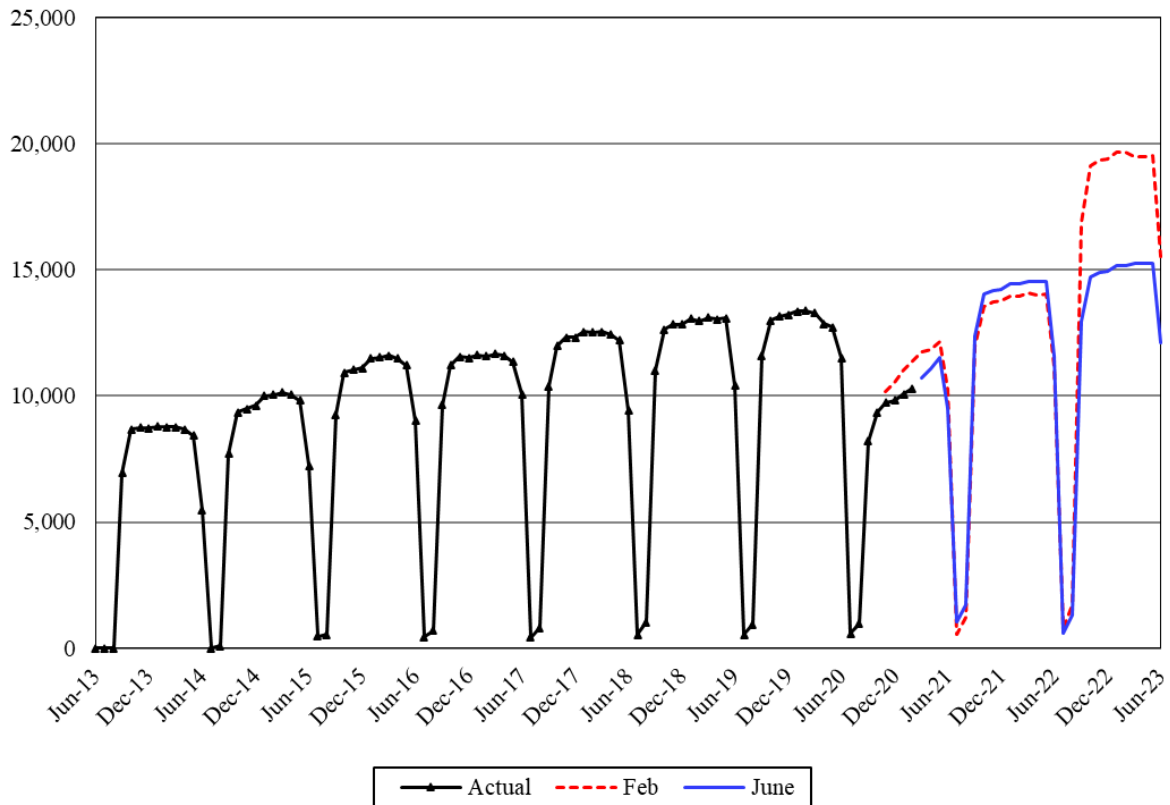


Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program



The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) provides comprehensive nutrition, health, education, and family support services to eligible children between the ages of three and five years old who are not eligible for Kindergarten to enhance their opportunity for success in the common school system. ECEAP enrollment is forecast as total annual enrollment calculated as a ten-month average to more accurately reflect that the majority of enrollment occurs during the standard school year. Per statute, children who participate in Head Start are not eligible for ECEAP and, as a result, are not included in the forecast.

Forecast Comparisons (Academic Year Averages)

Fiscal Year	Feb-21 Forecast	Jun-21 Forecast	Feb to Jun Difference	Percent Difference
2021	10,825	10,184	-641	-5.9%
2022	13,626	14,161	535	3.9%
2023	19,054	14,763	-4,291	-22.5%

The June 2021 forecast is 641 cases or 5.9 percent lower than the February 2021 forecast for FY 2021 and, on average, 1,878 cases or 11.5 percent lower for the 2021-23 Biennium.

Tracking the Current Forecast

	Feb-21 Forecast	Actual	Variance	Percent Variance
Nov-20	10,153	9,739	-414	-4.1%
Dec-20	10,530	9,814	-716	-6.8%
Jan-21	11,023	10,060	-963	-8.7%
Feb-21	11,381	10,299	-1,082	-9.5%

Actuals have been tracking 794 cases or 7.4 percent below the February 2021 forecast. Over the final months of the 2020-2021 school year, the ECEAP caseload did not show a consistent pattern of change; however, enrollment for September and October of 2020 was on average 28.6 percent lower than it was for the same months in 2019. This decline was likely due in large part to closures and lower occupancy limits at public school facilities and has continued in 2021.

ECEAP eligibility is primarily based on a child’s age and family income. Children otherwise ineligible may also participate under rules adopted by DCYF, provided that the number of such children is no more than 25 percent of enrollment in the program. During the 2019-2020 school year, the program served an average of about 496 such children per month during the school year. These children are not considered part of the state-funded entitlement caseload and are not counted in the ECEAP forecast.

Prior to the 2021 Legislative Session, ECEAP was scheduled to become an entitlement program during the 2022-23 school year. Under the provisions of E2SSB 5237 (Chapter 199, Laws of 2021) the conversion to an entitlement program was rescheduled for the 2026-2027 school year. At present the level of enrollment is driven primarily by the number of slots funded through legislative appropriations. During the 2021 session, the Legislature increased the total number of slots by 500 in FY 2022 and an additional 250 for FY 2023. The Legislature also provided for a further 468 slots per month for July and August 2021 only. The June 2021 forecast for the 2022-2023 school year is lower than the February 2021 forecast due to the revised implementation date for program entitlement.

Academic Year Average Caseload Change

	Academic Year	Caseload	Change from Prior Year	Percent Change
<i>Actual</i>	2013-2014	8,196		
	2014-2015	9,356	1,160	14.2%
	2015-2016	10,965	1,610	17.2%
	2016-2017	11,294	329	3.0%
	2017-2018	11,989	695	6.2%
	2018-2019	12,660	671	5.6%
	2019-2020	12,955	295	2.3%
<i>Forecast</i>	2020-2021	10,184	-2,771	-21.4%
	2021-2022	14,161	3,977	39.1%
	2022-2023	14,763	603	4.3%

Beginning July 1, 2026, E2SSB 5237 directs that the maximum family income for ECEAP income eligibility will become 36 percent of the state median income (SMI) adjusted for family

size and that beginning in the 2030-31 academic year the maximum income eligibility will be increased to 50 percent of SMI. These and other provisions of E2SSB 5237 will increase the population of children eligible for ECEAP once it is an entitlement program; however, those effects lie outside of the current forecast period and so are not included in this forecast.

Risks to the Forecast

Risks to this forecast are moderate. ECEAP participation was not as affected as some other caseloads by COVID-19 related impacts in the final months of the 2019-2020 academic year; however, program participation declined at the start of the 2020-2021 academic year and the pace of recovery will be influenced the progress achieved in the reopening of schools and in limiting COVID-19 case counts in the community.