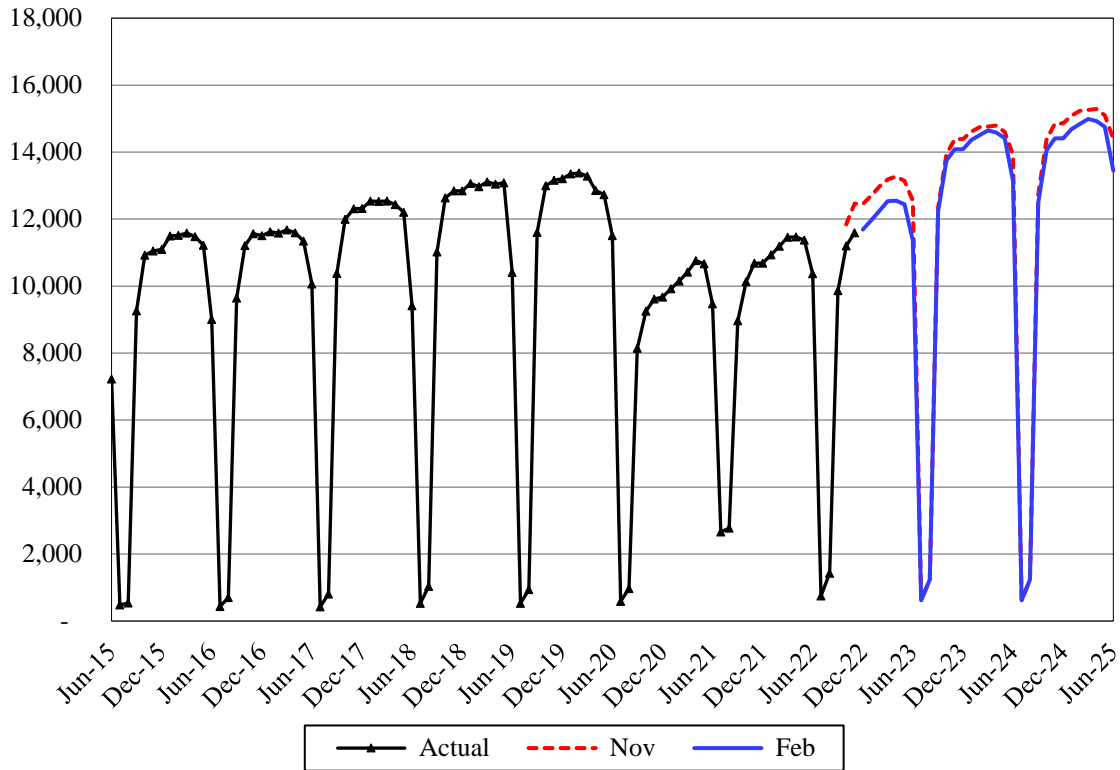


# Early Childhood Education and Assistance (ECEAP)

Caseload Forecast Council  
February 10, 2023

Early Childhood Education and Assistance



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 forecasted 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 (Fiscal Year Averages)

Fiscal Year	Nov-22 Forecast	Feb-23 Forecast	Nov to Feb Difference	Percent Difference
2023	12,659	11,962	-697	-5.5%
2024	14,437	14,168	-269	-1.9%
2025	14,905	14,490	-415	-2.8%

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The February 2023 forecast is 698 cases or 5.5 percent lower than the November 2022 forecast for FY 2023 and, on average, 343 cases or 2.3 percent lower for the 2023-25 Biennium.

**Tracking the Current Forecast**

	Nov-22 Forecast	Actual	Variance	Percent Variance
Oct-22	11,838	11,201	-637	-5.4%
Nov-22	12,467	11,590	-877	-7.0%

Actuals are tracking, on average, 757 cases or 6.2 percent below the November forecast.

ECEAP enrollment during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with average monthly caseloads being 23.1 percent lower in 2020-21 and 16.9 percent lower in 2021-22 when compared with the 2019-20 school year. The June forecast anticipated a return to pre-pandemic patterns of enrollment; however, while the program participation was higher in September 2022 than in September of 2021 or 2020, it was still 15.2 percent below September 2019 enrollment. The caseload has been impacted both by delayed deployment of funded program slots into classrooms and lower enrollment rates within the slots currently available.

This forecast assumes that the available program slots will approach maximum funded levels during the 2023-24 school year, but that program enrollment will increase more gradually over the remainder of the current school year and the 2023-2025 Biennium.

**Academic Year Caseload Change**

	Academic Year	Caseload	Change from Prior Year	Percent Change
Actual	2015-2016	10,965		
	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%
	2020-2021	9,964	-2,991	-23.1%
	2021-2022	11,270	1,307	13.1%
Forecast	2022-2023	11,962	691	6.1%
	2023-2024	14,168	2,206	18.4%
	2024-2025	14,490	322	2.3%

ECEAP eligibility is primarily based on a child’s age and family income. Children otherwise ineligible may also participate under rules adopted by the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), provided that the number of such children is no more than 25 percent of enrollment in the program. During the 2021-22 school year, the program served an average of about 866 such children per month, an increase over the 729 children per month seen in the 2020-21 school year. These children are not considered part of the state-funded entitlement caseload and are not counted in this forecast.

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### *Risks to the Forecast*

Risks to this forecast remain high. While program participation is higher for the start of the 2022-23 school year than at the beginning of the 2020-21 or 2021-22 school years, it is still well below the levels of the June and November forecasts. It appears that enrollment will continue to be impacted by the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as a tight labor market and, potentially, competition from other early education options.

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