

New Mexico Child Care Workforce and Wage Growth

Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019-2024



This is the second in a series of [briefs](#) that examine available data describing and trending changes in New Mexico's child care workforce. These briefs are intended to help policymakers, researchers, and child care professionals better understand what available data can tell us about child care workforce outcomes of interest and what further data may be needed.

The production of this brief was supported by Grant #90YE0313 from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of ACF.

Introduction

New Mexico has, since consolidating the state's early childhood programs into a cabinet department in 2020, pioneered policy changes intended to increase family access to quality, affordable child care. The state has steadily increased child care subsidy reimbursement rates paid to providers, based on cost models intended to reflect the true costs of care; dramatically expanded family income eligibility for subsidy; and waived all family copayments. In addition, New Mexico has offered multiple wage enhancement opportunities to eligible members of its early childhood workforce, beginning with temporary wage relief programs during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ Sustained wage initiatives include education-based supplemental wages, pay parity for community-based PreK teachers, incentives for bilingual educators, and enhanced reimbursement rates paid to providers offering extended care hours who meet minimum pay requirements for staff. New Mexico has also offered free higher education tuition and scholarships to eligible students seeking to gain early childhood higher education credentials. Effective November 1, 2025, New Mexico has removed all income eligibility requirements for subsidized child care, completing a policy goal of offering universal no-cost child care to its families statewide. It has simultaneously launched additional supply-building efforts, including a low-interest child care facility loan fund.

ABOUT THE DATA

This brief examines data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS), generated through a semiannual survey of 1.1 million U.S. businesses.² Participating businesses report the number of employees in a specified occupation and their respective wages. Data reflects all workers reported under the occupational code for **childcare workers (39-9011)**. This category includes lead and assistant teachers in a variety of workplaces. It excludes child care center directors/administrators, home-based providers without employees, or other related occupations such as preschool teachers.

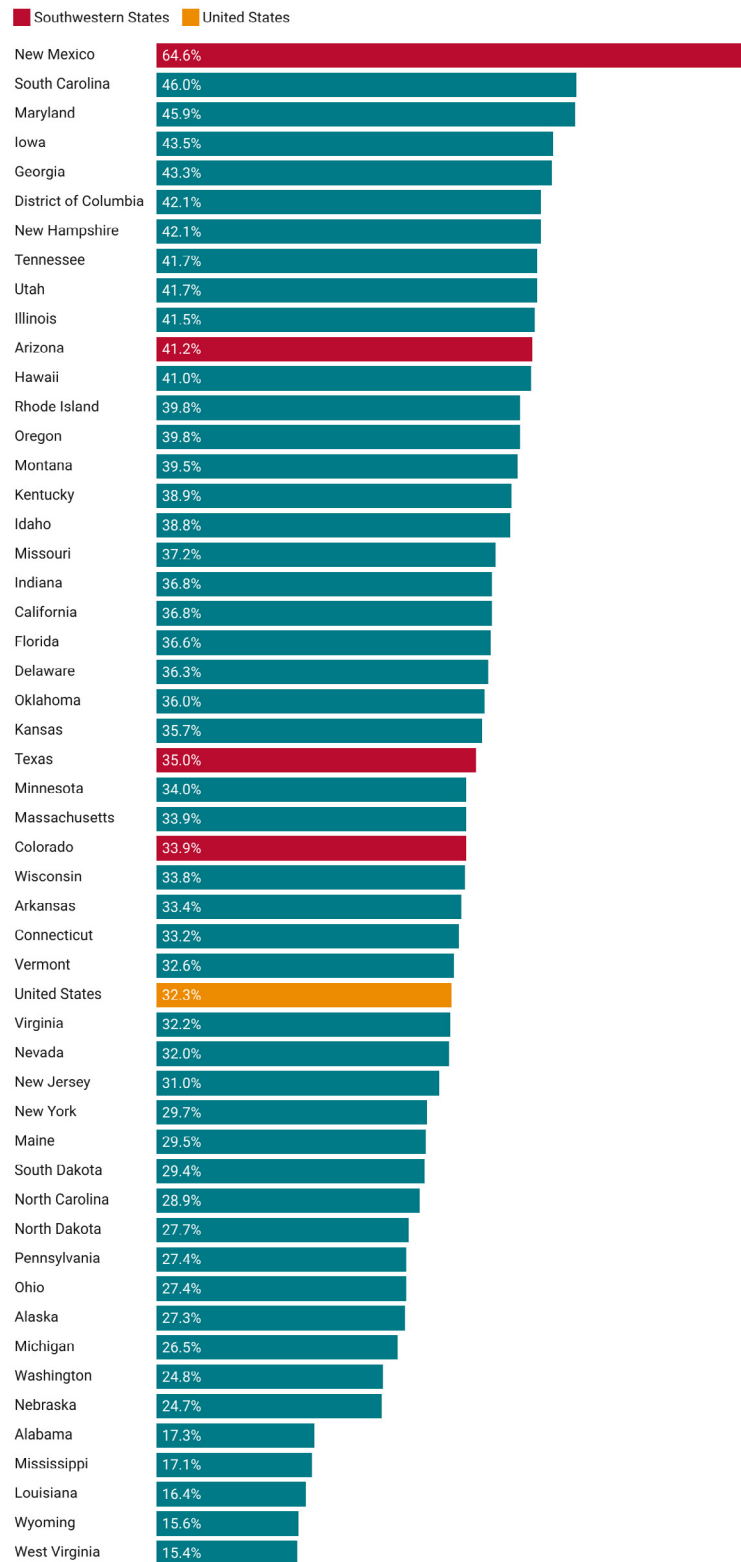
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These initiatives are intended to support expansion of the high-quality, well-compensated child care educator workforce needed for all families to have access to no-cost care. As these expansion efforts continue, it is useful to assess what available data sources tell us about commensurate growth in the child care workforce and its wages.

This brief examines wages paid to child care workers and the size of the child care workforce between 2019 and 2024 using U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) data, which allow us to track changes over time, including during and after COVID-19 disruptions to the sector. Our analysis also examines how New Mexico's child care workforce has changed in comparison to the nation and to surrounding states, which enacted different policy responses to support the sector during and after the pandemic.

Wage Growth

As seen in Figure 1, the OEWS data shows national growth in child care worker median wages by 32 percent between 2019 and 2024. The wage growth for New Mexico's child care workers, however, was estimated at 65 percent—the highest rate of growth reported by employers across the states. No other state exceeded 46 percent wage growth.



Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) program data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Annual estimates of employment and wage levels for over 800 occupations, including the childcare workers occupation (39-9011). This shows the percentage change from 2019 to 2024 in median annual child care wages.

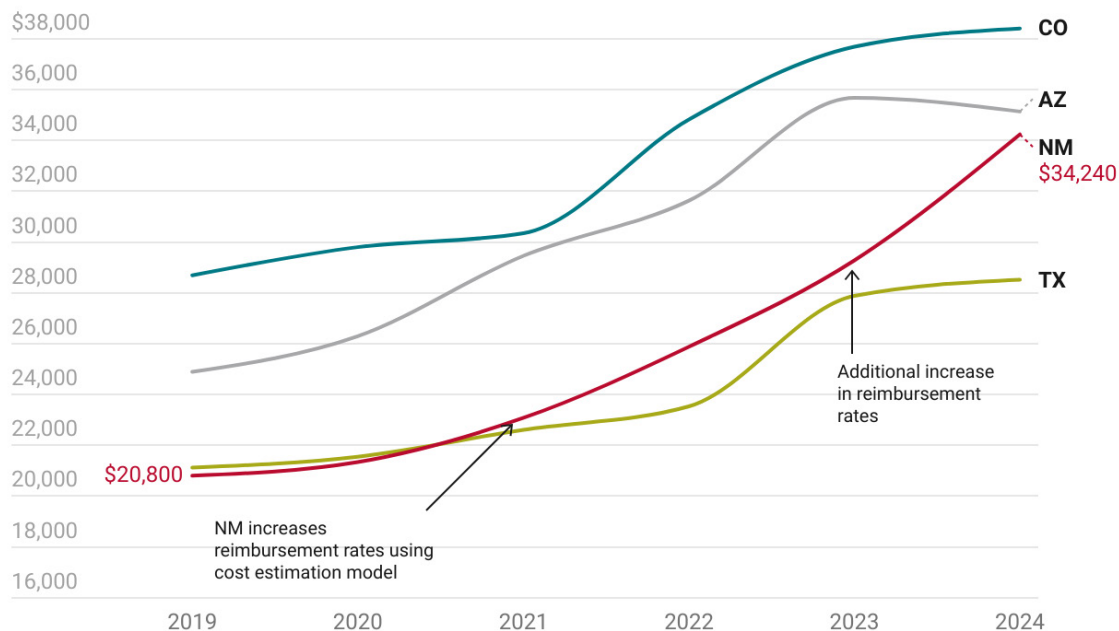
Chart: UNM CCPI • Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 1. Percentage Growth in Child Care Wages, 2019-2024

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The raw increase in median annual wages of child care workers reported by New Mexico employers surveyed over this period was \$13,440. This represents the second highest OEWS-reported raw increase in median annual wages in the country. Even during COVID-19 disruptions to the sector, OEWS-reported wages held steady or trended upward across states.

New Mexico's employers reported the highest 2019-2024 raw wage growth compared to its neighboring states of Colorado, Arizona and Texas (see Figure 2). While New Mexico employers reported the lowest annual child care worker wages among these regional peers in 2019, by 2024 New Mexico had nearly closed its prior median wage gap with Arizona as well as surpassed the median wage reported in Texas.



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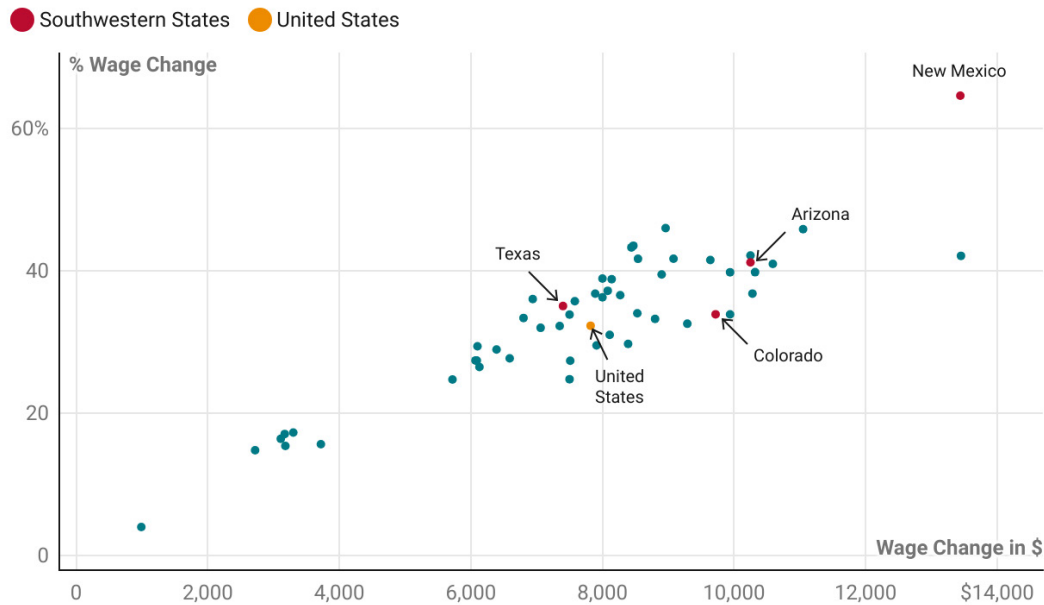
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Figure 2. Median Annual Wages, Child Care Workers, Southwest Region, 2019-2024

Figure 3 shows the combined relative and absolute wage change for child care workers across the states between 2019 and 2024, with New Mexico a clear outlier for reported growth.

OEWS data also allow examination of growth in annual wages for child care workers at the lower and higher ends of the pay scale (see Figure 4). Employer reports suggest that employee earnings at the median annual wage or below increased by roughly 60 percent between 2019 and 2024. Employee wages at the 75th percentile appear to have increased by 43 percent during that time period while wages in the 90th percentile have increased by 7 percent. This indicates that wage growth was more modest among child care workers who were already higher earners, and was greater among those at or below the median.

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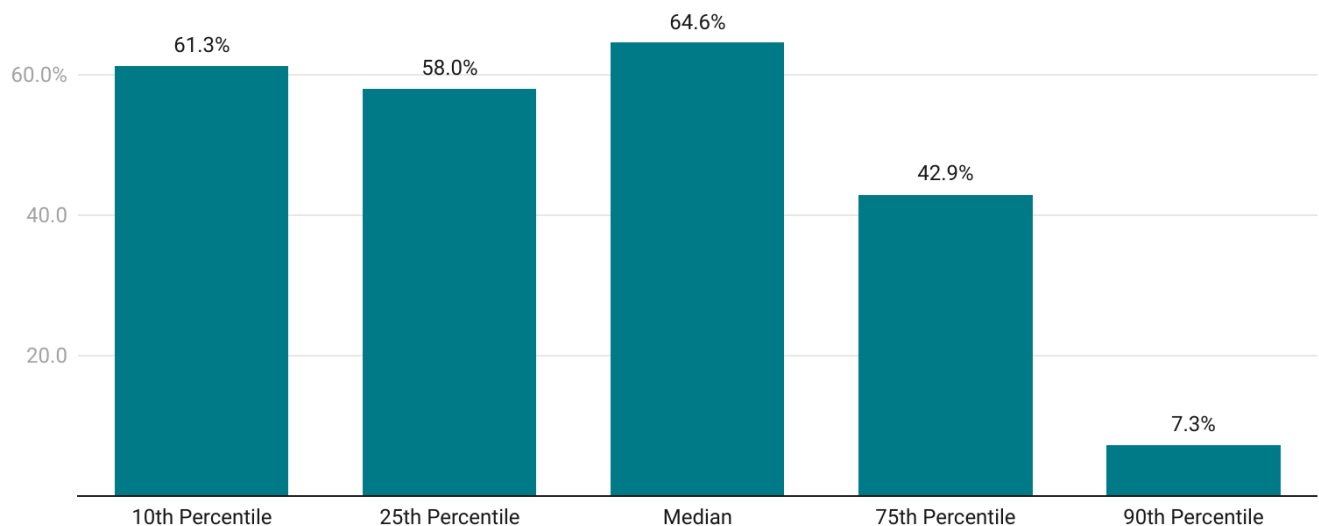


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Figure 3. Relative and Absolute Wage Change for Child Care Workers by State, 2019-2024

Reported wages increased for child care workers across all salary percentiles. During this period, growth was highest for those near the median in annual reported wages.



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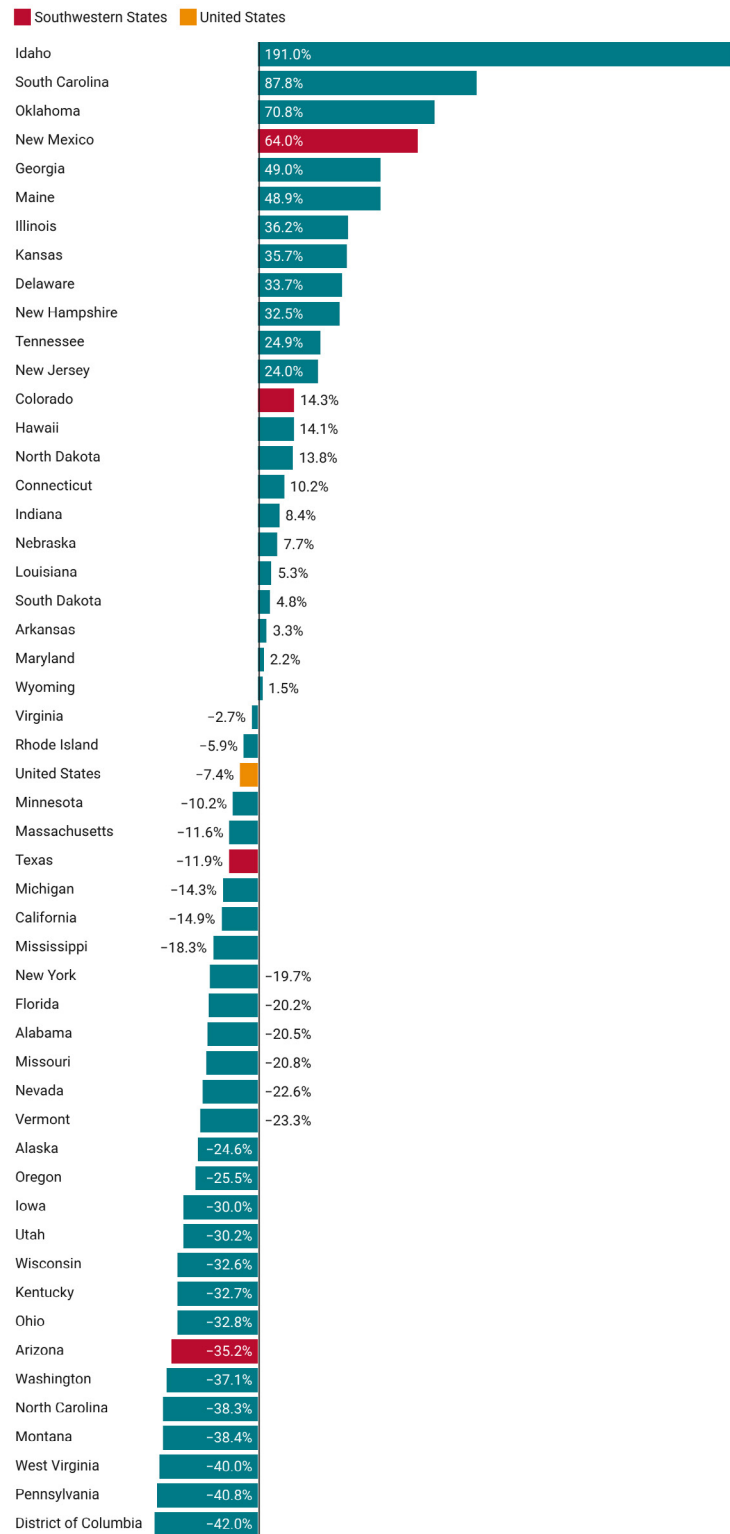
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Figure 4. Mean Annual Wage Growth by Salary Percentile, New Mexico Child Care Workers, 2019-2024

Workforce Growth

From 2019 through 2024, OEWS employer-reported data show a New Mexico child care workforce growth of 64 percent compared to a national decline of 7.4 percent (Figure 5). The state's relative growth in the size of the child care workforce was the fourth highest in the nation, at a time when employers surveyed in more than half of states reported a relative decrease. Across the nation, child care employment declined by over 25 percent at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.³ Within New Mexico, OEWS data show that out of the 185 occupations with over 1,000 employees included in the data in 2024, child care ranked 19th overall in growth since 2019 – making it one of the fastest growing occupations over the past five years.

Trending OEWS data for New Mexico compared to other states suggests that New Mexico's child care workforce declined less than other states during the COVID-19 pandemic and expanded substantially between 2021 and 2024. As seen in Figure 6, OEWS data across other states indicates a child care workforce decline of nearly 25% during COVID, while New Mexico showed only a 10% decline. The mean growth between 2021 and 2024 shown by all other states combined was 19%, while New Mexico employers reported its child care workforce had increased by more than 80 percent.

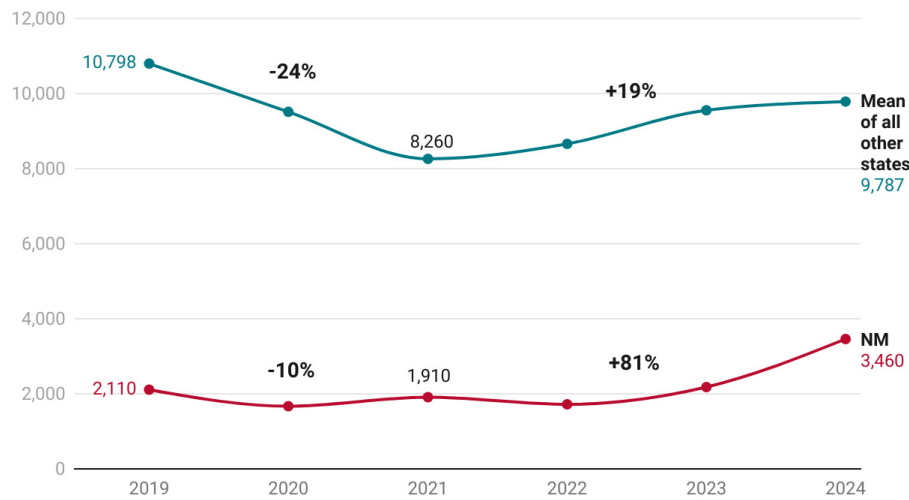


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Figure 5. Percentage Change in Child Care Workers, 2019-2024

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Figure 6. Trending New Mexico Child Care Workforce Growth with All Other States, 2019-2024

Limitations and Conclusions

Overall, these findings suggest that between 2019 and 2024, New Mexico's child care workforce experienced some of the largest increases in wages and the size of its workforce relative to all other states.

Though the OEWS data analyzed here are frequently used to trend workforce changes over time⁴, there are important limitations to consider. The OEWS data system was originally designed to give point in time estimates, meaning that at those points in time, based on survey sample and response rates, values represent the estimated number of child care workers and their wage distribution in a state. Each OEWS estimate is based on a three-year average of survey data, so do not offer precise year-over-year trend data. The methodology for collecting survey data can result in irregularities in reporting across occupations as well. A strength of the data is that child care administrators and other non-teaching staff are not included in the worker occupation classification (a weakness associated with other sources), allowing analysis to focus more precisely on child care teachers. The occupational classification code includes child care teachers in various settings, including employer-provided care, gyms, and others. However, the sample does not survey most home-based child care providers, so this data does not represent the full range of child care professionals in New Mexico.

It is important, then, to triangulate this data with other data sources to capture a fuller understanding of changes over time to the child care workforce and its wages in New Mexico, as the state implements policies and programs intended to support the recruitment, retention and advancement of the early childhood education workforce needed to support full family access to quality care. Future briefs in this series will offer analysis of other primary sources of workforce data.

¹The ECE Workforce Compensation Policy Database, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/data-snapshot/compensation-tracker/>

²<https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>. Estimates for a given year are based on a rolling sample of six panels across the previous three years. Every year, two new semiannual survey panels are added, and the two oldest panels are dropped.

³Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. (2025, September 10). BLS Quarterly Dashboard. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/data-snapshot/bls-quarterly-dashboard/>

⁴For example, see <https://www.chicagofed.org/publications/chicago-fed-insights/2024/childcare-labor-market> or <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/07/13/u-s-newsroom-employment-has-fallen-26-since-2008/>.