

# Utilization Up, Capacity Down: A Look at 3-K and Pre-K Trends in New York City



New York City  
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The Independent Budget Office (IBO) explored changes in enrollment and capacity for 3-K and pre-K programs participating in the New York City Department of Education (DOE) early childhood program. In 2014, New York City launched Pre-K for All, which expanded existing pre-K options to provide access for every child, although the DOE has not stated a target number for enrollment. In 2017, the City, under Mayor Bill de Blasio, launched 3-K for All, which has expanded 3-K seats citywide but does not guarantee families a seat in their own district (see IBO's [prior report](#) for more on historical changes to each program and IBO's [prior report](#) on enrollment and demographics of 3-K and pre-K programs). In this analysis, IBO found that usage rates broadly increased between the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years, and this increase was primarily driven by decreases in capacity for both 3-K and pre-K programs.

## Definitions of Programs

Early childhood programs include different types of seats, including Extended Day and Year (EDY, income-eligible, free or low-cost, year-round 10-hour care), Head Start (HS, income-eligible, free, year-round 10-hour care), and School Day (SD, which follows an elementary school 6-hour and 20-minute school day). Importantly, IBO's analysis includes only Head Start programs that contract with the DOE, although additional Head Start programs contract directly with the federal government. Some pre-K programs also include Half-Day seats, which offer pre-K for two and a half hours, and are available only by reaching out to a site directly.

3-K and pre-K seats are spread across several types of programs. The DOE oversees 3-K programs in DOE District Schools, DOE stand-alone Pre-K Centers (PKCs), Family Childcare Centers (FCCs), and Community Based Organizations (CBOs, also known as NYC Early Education Centers, or NYCEECs). Individual CBOs may offer a combination of seat types, depending on the program space, staff, and expertise, as laid out in their contract.

## Budget

The DOE has added funds to expand outreach, increase seats in areas of higher demand, and shift available seat types to better meet family needs. Last year's Executive budget increased outreach funds by \$5 million in fiscal year 2025; those funds were allocated across several agencies, including the DOE, the Department of Health and Mental Health (DOHMH), and the Human Resource Agency (HRA). The Mayor's recently released Executive budget for 2025 added additional outreach funds of \$5 million in fiscal year 2026. The Executive budget released this year also baselined \$136 million in funds previously added in fiscal year 2025 alone, including \$20 million to create seats for families on 3-K waitlists, \$25 million to create additional EDY seats, and \$92 million to maintain existing 3-K seats. Previously, the administration funded those areas of the budget with temporary federal COVID-19 stimulus funds or one-time City funds. IBO's analysis extends through the 2023-2024 school year and provides a baseline snapshot that does not include any changes that may result from these recent modifications to the budget.

## Challenges

Advocates and parents have described difficulties within the enrollment process, including application system user issues, as one factor that may drive under-enrollment. Families apply for EDY, HS, and SD seats through a centralized application portal. EDY and HS seats are means-tested, and families must submit additional materials to demonstrate financial eligibility. Finally, to enroll in a Half-Day or charter school seat, families must directly contact sites. Requirements for additional documentation or enrollment steps may deter families from applying.

Sites often host a variety of seat types. Because payment processes differ accordingly, those providers may face additional challenges. While the DOE combines EDY and SD seats within one contract, providers that also host HS seats, which are funded through a federal program and thus have unique requirements, must maintain a second contract for those seats. The DOE's policies for advance payments also vary by seat type. Once providers submit their budgets, programs are eligible for an advance equal to 25% of the annual contract for HS and EDY seats, and 35% of the annual contract for SD seats. After initial enrollment, providers must submit separate invoices by seat type. The DOE considers programs with enrollment below 95% of their contracted seats as under-enrolled. Providers note that these administrative challenges can pose barriers for timely reimbursements.

Below, IBO presents a snapshot of capacity and enrollment at the seat and program level during the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years, using the most recent DOE data available as of the end of each school year (June). At the system level, IBO found the overall utilization rate, defined as the share of seats filled, of 3-K and pre-K seats increased between the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years. This trend, however, reflects changes in both capacity and in enrollment: 3-K capacity decreased by 1,063 seats, while enrollment increased by 709 3-K students. Within pre-K programs, capacity decreased by 2,354 seats and enrollment also decreased by 399 pre-K students. IBO found changes in capacity and in enrollment varied in magnitude and direction by seat and program type.

## Defining Capacity and Enrollment

Enrollment measures system usage; capacity measures seat and program availability for families. The DOE determines each site's contracted capacity based on several factors including space, staff, and available resources. Capacity offers insight into DOE planning by program and seat type. This analysis uses capacity and enrollment to determine the seat utilization rate at the level of seat, program, and community school district.

## Citywide Trends

In the most recent school year, 2023-2024, 3-K programs enrolled 43,914 students, a 1.6% increase from the previous year. That same year, pre-K programs enrolled 59,841 students, a 0.7% decrease from the previous year. For citywide enrollment trends dating further back, see [IBO's report](#).

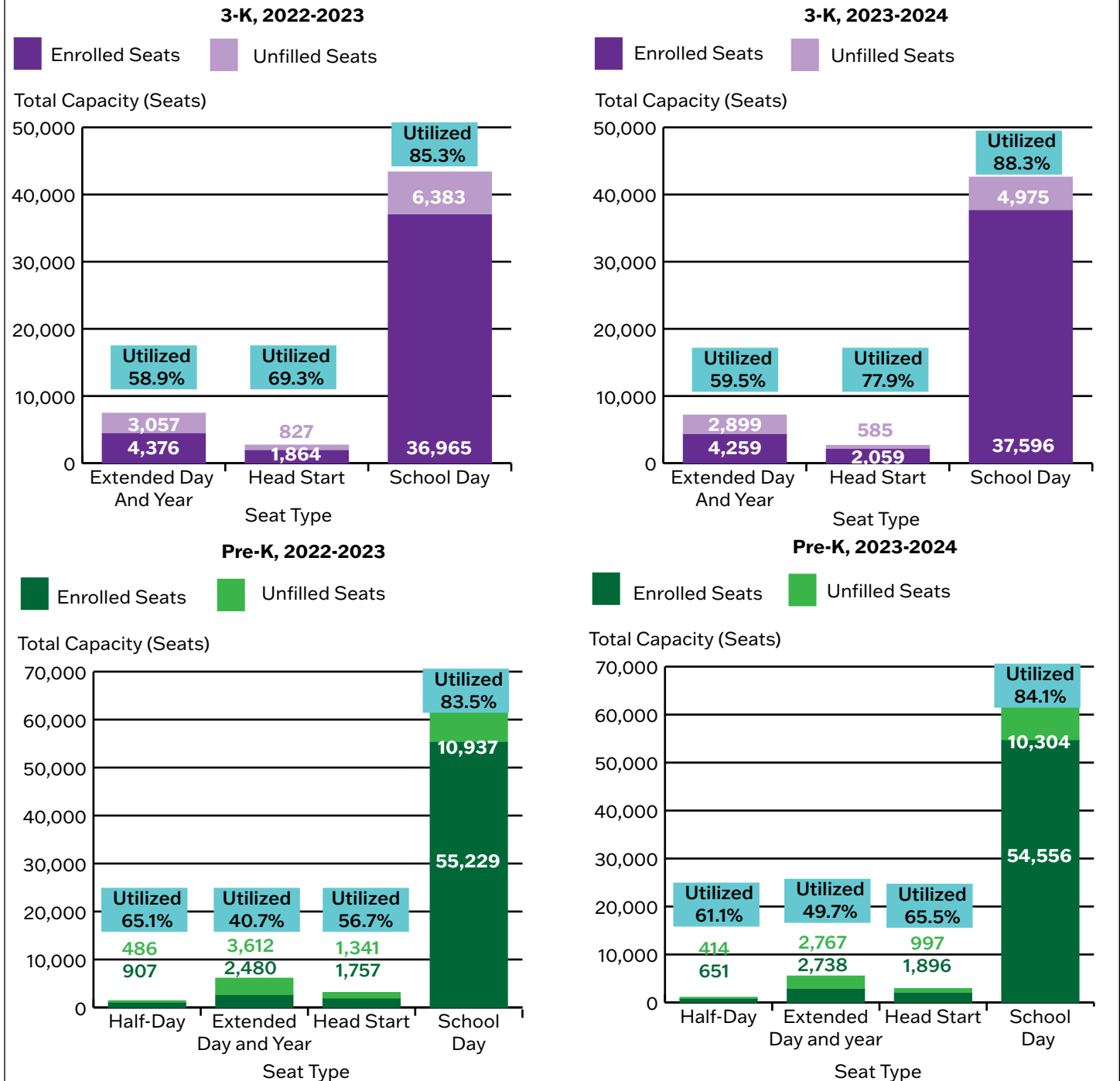
Capacity declined year-over-year between school years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. In the 2023-2024 school year, 3-K programs included 52,373 available seats, a 2.0% decrease from the previous year. That same year, pre-K programs had 74,323 available seats, a 3.1% decrease from the previous year.

Seat utilization rates, calculated as enrollment divided by capacity, increased citywide. 3-K seats were 80.9% filled in the 2022-2023 school year, and 83.8% filled in the 2023-2024 school year. Pre-K seats were 78.6% filled in the 2022-2023 school year, and 80.5% filled in the 2023-2024 school year.

## Seat-type Trends

The seat utilization rate in 3-K programs increased in 2023-2024 across all seat types, except for Extended

**Figure 1**  
**Enrollment, Capacity, and Utilization by Seat Type for Each Grade Level and School Year**

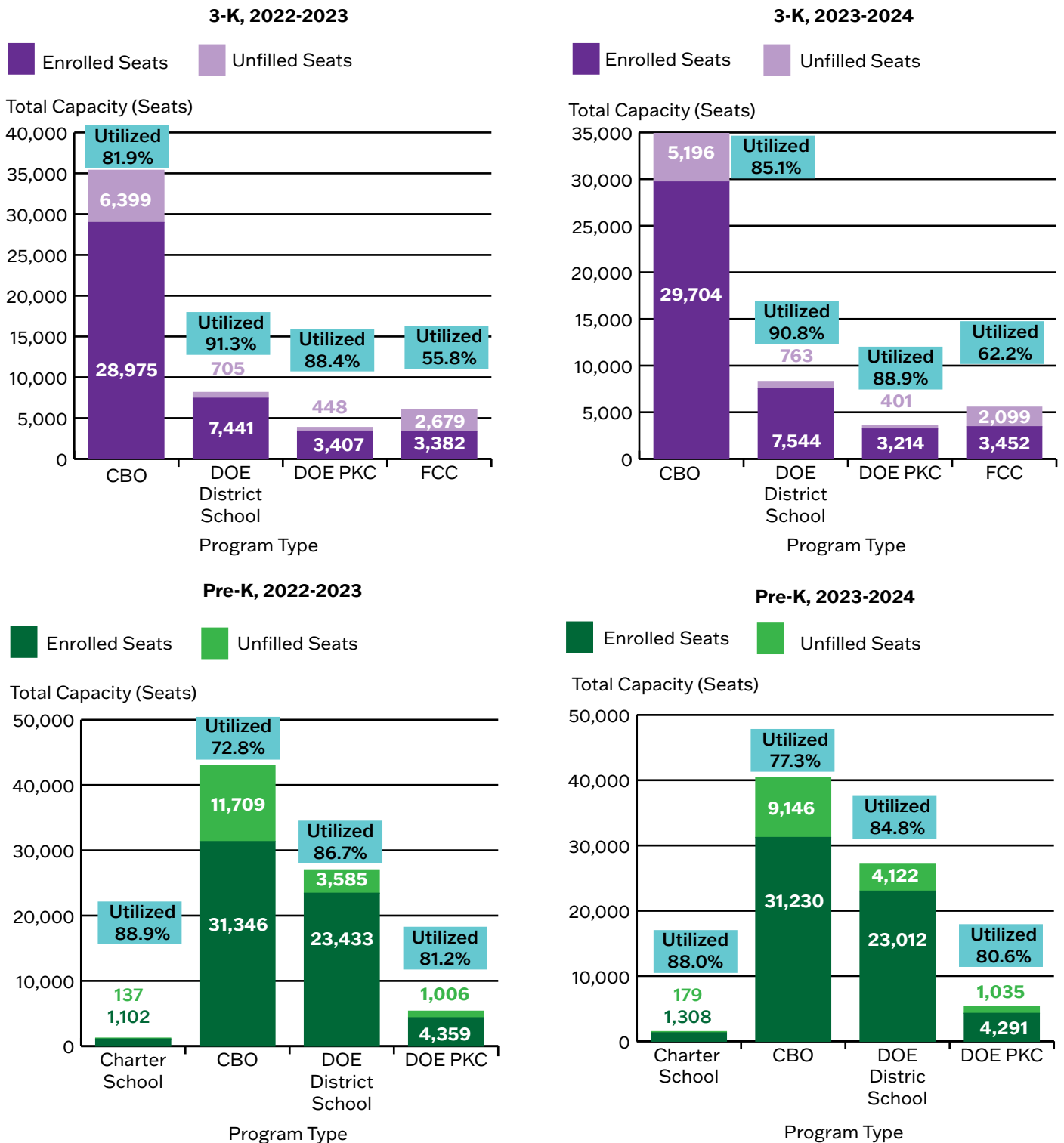


Day and Year which remained nearly the same. The increase primarily reflects a decrease in capacity, although enrollment in 3-K Head Start and 3-K School Day seats also increased. The seat utilization rate in pre-K programs increased year-over-year across all seat types except for Half-Day seats, which declined. As with 3-K, while capacity decreased across all pre-K seat types, changes in enrollment varied. The underlying data table for Figure 1 is available in the Appendix in Figure 1B.

## Program Trends

Seat utilization rates varied widely by program type. From 2022-2023 to 2023-2024, the seat utilization rate increased within all 3-K program types except for DOE District Schools, which decreased very slightly.

**Figure 2**  
**Enrollment, Capacity, and Utilization by Program Type for Each Grade Level and School Year**



In pre-K programs, charter school programs had the highest absolute utilization rates across both years, although those programs represent a small share of all pre-K programs. While pre-K utilization rates in charter schools, DOE District Schools, and Pre-K Centers all decreased into 2023-2024, pre-K programs in CBOs experienced an increase in utilization rate. That change in rate for CBOs was driven by a large

**Figure 3**  
**Minimum and Maximum Seat Utilization Rates by District**

Grade Level	Year	Minimum Seat Utilization Rates		Maximum Seat Utilization Rates	
		District	Seat Utilization Rate	District	Seat Utilization Rate
3-K	2022-2023	5	64.4%	26	96.6%
	2023-2024	23	61.2%	30	97.7%
Pre-K	2022-2023	9	64.3%	31	92.5%
	2023-2024	1	66.0%	20	89.6%

SOURCE: IBO analysis of DOE's Early Childhood Education (ECE) Count and Capacity Data

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decrease in capacity and a slight decrease in enrollment. The underlying data table for Figure 2 is available in the Appendix in Figure 2B.

## District-level Trends

Geographically, 3-K and pre-K program enrollment and capacity varied widely. By and large, the seat utilization rate for both 3-K and pre-K programs increased across districts year-over-year. For 3-K programs, eighteen districts increased in seat utilization, while fourteen decreased. For pre-K programs, twenty-three districts increased in seat utilization and nine decreased. IBO reports the range of utilization rates by district in Figure 3 above. A breakdown by school district for both grade levels is available in the Appendix.

## Conclusion

This analysis found that across most 3-K programs, overall usage rates have increased. The changes are broadly due to decreases in capacity and increases in enrollment, although actual trends vary by seat type, program type, and district. Usage rates within pre-K programs also increased. The changes are broadly due to decreases in capacity and, unlike 3-K programs, decreases in enrollment. Similar to 3-K programs, actual trends vary by seat and program types, as well as location. While program and seat types are harder to shift to meet demand, district-level usage rates may offer insight into where the Administration should focus further outreach and seat reallocations.

*Report prepared by Emma Gossett*

## Appendix

**Figure 1B**  
**Enrollment and Capacity by Seat Type for Each Grade Level**

Grade Level	Seat Type	2022-2023			2023-2024		
		Capacity	Enrollment	Percent Filled	Capacity	Enrollment	Percent Filled
3-K	Extended Day And Year	7,433	4,376	58.9%	7,158	4,259	59.5%
	Head Start	2,691	1,864	69.3%	2,644	2,059	77.9%
	School Day	43,348	36,965	85.3%	42,571	37,596	88.3%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>53,472</b>	<b>43,205</b>	<b>80.8%</b>	<b>52,373</b>	<b>43,914</b>	<b>83.8%</b>
Pre-K	Half-Day	1,393	907	65.1%	1,065	651	61.1%
	Extended Day And Year	6,092	2,480	40.7%	5,505	2,738	49.7%
	Head Start	3,098	1,757	56.7%	2,893	1,896	65.5%
	School Day	66,166	55,229	83.5%	64,860	54,556	84.1%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>76,749</b>	<b>60,373</b>	<b>78.7%</b>	<b>74,323</b>	<b>59,841</b>	<b>80.5%</b>

SOURCE: IBO analysis of DOE's Early Childhood Education Count and Capacity Data

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**Figure 2B**  
**Enrollment and Capacity by Program Type for Each Grade Level**

Grade Level	Program Type	2022-2023			2023-2024		
		Capacity	Enrollment	Percent Filled	Capacity	Enrollment	Percent Filled
3-K	CBO	35,374	28,975	81.9%	34,900	29,704	85.1%
	DOE District School	8,146	7,441	91.3%	8,307	7,544	90.8%
	DOE PKC	3,855	3,407	88.4%	3,615	3,214	88.9%
	FCC*	6,061	3,382	55.8%	5,551	3,452	62.2%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>53,436</b>	<b>43,205</b>	<b>80.9%</b>	<b>52,373</b>	<b>43,914</b>	<b>83.8%</b>
Pre-K	CBO	43,055	31,346	72.8%	40,376	31,230	77.3%
	Charter*	1,239	1,102	88.9%	1,487	1,308	88.0%
	DOE District School	27,018	23,433	86.7%	27,134	23,012	84.8%
	DOE PKC	5,365	4,359	81.2%	5,326	4,291	80.6%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>76,677</b>	<b>60,240</b>	<b>78.6%</b>	<b>74,323</b>	<b>59,841</b>	<b>80.5%</b>

SOURCE: IBO analysis of DOE's Early Childhood Education Count and Capacity Data

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**Figure 4**  
**3-K Capacity and Enrollment by Community School District**

District	School Year					
	2022-2023			2023-2024		
	Capacity	Enrollment	Percent Filled	Capacity	Enrollment	Percent Filled
1	564	433	76.8%	576	442	76.7%
2	1,480	1,181	79.8%	1,739	1,495	86.0%
3	732	604	82.5%	727	640	88.0%
4	795	564	70.9%	735	564	76.7%
5	727	468	64.4%	659	527	80.0%
6	1,236	963	77.9%	1,134	974	85.9%
7	921	738	80.1%	780	686	87.9%
8	1,106	933	84.4%	1,001	926	92.5%
9	1857	1258	67.7%	1678	1159	69.1%
10	2,000	1,654	82.7%	1,873	1,537	82.1%
11	1,510	1,229	81.4%	1,428	1,307	91.5%
12	735	592	80.5%	690	579	83.9%
13	818	653	79.8%	902	825	91.5%
14	1,090	844	77.4%	1,018	888	87.2%
15	1,492	1,352	90.6%	1,603	1,438	89.7%
16	522	374	71.6%	507	356	70.2%
17	1,436	1,181	82.2%	1,388	1,107	79.8%
18	1,102	855	77.6%	1,095	841	76.8%
19	1,330	1,051	79.0%	1,308	993	75.9%
20	2,800	2,592	92.6%	2,977	2,720	91.4%
21	2,230	2,057	92.2%	2,365	2,149	90.9%
22	2,233	1,999	89.5%	2,291	2,097	91.5%
23	846	464	54.8%	786	481	61.2%
24	2,040	1,875	91.9%	2,078	1,897	91.3%
25	2,335	2,115	90.6%	2,337	2,058	88.1%
26	1,276	1,233	96.6%	1,337	1,261	94.3%
27	2,184	1,749	80.1%	2,113	1,754	83.0%
28	2,172	1,915	88.2%	2,259	1,973	87.3%
29	1,616	1,352	83.7%	1,534	1,352	88.1%
30	1,973	1,898	96.2%	2,059	2,011	97.7%
31	3,247	2,847	87.7%	2,891	2,688	93.0%
32	1,006	800	79.5%	954	737	77.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47,411</b>	<b>39,823</b>	<b>84.0%</b>	<b>46,822</b>	<b>40,462</b>	<b>86.4%</b>

SOURCE: IBO analysis of DOE's Early Childhood Education Count and Capacity Data

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**Figure 5**  
**Pre-K Capacity and Enrollment by Community School District**

District	School Year					
	2022-2023			2023-2024		
	Capacity	Enrollment	Percent Filled	Capacity	Enrollment	Percent Filled
1	886	559	63.1%	832	549	66.0%
2	3,111	2,121	68.2%	3,116	2,246	72.1%
3	15,28	11,53	75.5%	1,401	1,107	79.0%
4	1106	762	68.9%	1,068	765	71.6%
5	1169	804	68.8%	1,108	809	73.0%
6	1913	1,354	70.8%	1,884	1,501	79.7%
7	1,478	1,133	76.7%	1,366	1,047	76.6%
8	2,227	1,826	82.0%	2,090	1,747	83.6%
9	2,806	1,804	64.3%	2,625	1,898	72.3%
10	3,927	2,805	71.4%	3,657	2,768	75.7%
11	3,136	2,430	77.5%	2,749	2,317	84.3%
12	1,308	1,034	79.1%	1,402	1,078	76.9%
13	1,519	1,182	77.8%	1,495	1,188	79.5%
14	1,785	1,225	68.6%	1,767	11,99	67.9%
15	2,809	2,466	87.8%	2,713	2,274	83.8%
16	727	550	75.7%	709	478	67.4%
17	2,165	1,819	84.0%	2,159	1,554	72.0%
18	1,754	1,230	70.1%	1,654	1,189	71.9%
19	2,033	1,664	81.8%	1,979	1,437	72.6%
20	4,246	3,504	82.5%	3,936	3,525	89.6%
21	3,613	2,953	81.7%	3,485	2,889	82.9%
22	3,232	2,727	84.4%	3,304	2,689	81.4%
23	941	614	65.2%	869	608	70.0%
24	3,856	3,333	86.4%	3,734	3,282	87.9%
25	3,290	2,541	77.2%	3,182	2,696	84.7%
26	1,951	1,614	82.7%	1,907	1,703	89.3%
27	3,295	2,715	82.4%	3,281	2,718	82.8%
28	3,611	2,853	79.0%	3,498	2,939	84.0%
29	2,406	1,929	80.2%	2,547	2,047	80.4%
30	3,456	2,803	81.1%	3,324	2,885	86.8%
31	4,161	3,850	92.5%	4,281	3,766	88.0%
32	1,304	883	67.7%	1,201	943	78.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>76,749</b>	<b>60,240</b>	<b>78.5%</b>	<b>74,323</b>	<b>59,841</b>	<b>80.5%</b>

SOURCE: IBO analysis of DOE's Early Childhood Education Count and Capacity Data

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