

Pathways to Universal Pre-K (UPK) Series: Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI)

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Access to high-quality child care is critical for a child’s educational and developmental success. It also ensures that working families can maintain financial security through employment. Massachusetts has some of the [highest child care costs in the nation](#), which causes significant strain for many families, especially families with low and moderate incomes.

The child care system in Massachusetts is multifaceted and can be complex. Through our mixed-delivery system, families can seek care in home-based programs or center-based programs, via federal programs like Head Start or even within public school districts, among [other informal options](#). For families, navigating these options and identifying a placement that works for both adults and children can be challenging. Without a cohesive child care network across a community, families can fall through the cracks easily, and educators miss out on opportunities to share valuable resources and expertise.

The Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI) is a Massachusetts state program that supports access to high-quality, inclusive preschool for children in 30 cities and towns across the state. Through CPPI, the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), individual school districts, and community-based child care programs collaborate to increase the number of children enrolled in formal early education. This program seeks to promote kindergarten readiness and provide equitable access to high-quality education and care, including special education services.

This paper is the first in a series exploring the pathways to achieving universal pre-K in Massachusetts. This research is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

How does Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI) work?

CPPI is administered primarily by EEC through collaboration with school districts, municipalities, and child care programs. School districts, regional school districts, and municipal authorities who oversee local child care administration can apply for and receive CPPI grants¹. These grants support the costs associated with establishing and maintaining a CPPI program, including staffing costs and curricula implementation costs. To receive a grant, the district must have a high percentage of high-need students² and must also identify at least two community-based organizations (e.g. center-based programs, family child care programs) that will serve as program partners and support CPPI classrooms. Priority is given to Gateway cities and rural areas, as well as districts that have identified significant local gaps in preschool access. CPPI classrooms are run in center-based programs, family child care programs, and public schools (which are not considered community-based partners). CPPI grants are awarded to support individual

classrooms, not necessarily an entire center-based program or the entire pre-kindergarten program in a public school.

There are two main types of state CPPI grants, planning grants and implementation grants.

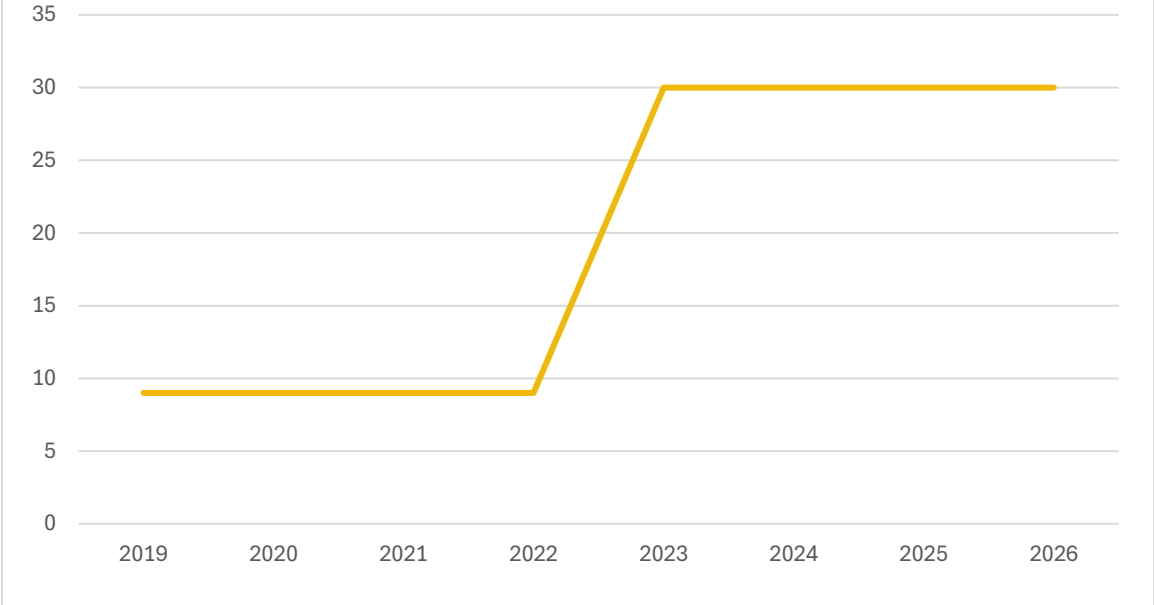
- **Planning grants** are awarded to districts and municipalities that seek to begin a CPPI program in their community. With planning grants, communities can begin to build a leadership team, as well as partnerships with potential community-based organizations, conduct a community needs assessment, and develop a strategic plan for implementation. Due to a nine percent reduction in budget appropriation in Fiscal Year (FY) 2026³, no planning grants were made available to new communities.⁴
- **Implementation grants** are awarded to districts who have previously received planning grants and have demonstrated their capacity to launch a program. Communities who have more recently started receiving implementation grants (referred to as early implementation grants) tend to use these resources to prioritize hiring educators and support staff and developing plans and systems for monitoring quality. After the early implementation phase, communities often use these grants to expand services and refine existing systems.

Which communities have CPPI grants?

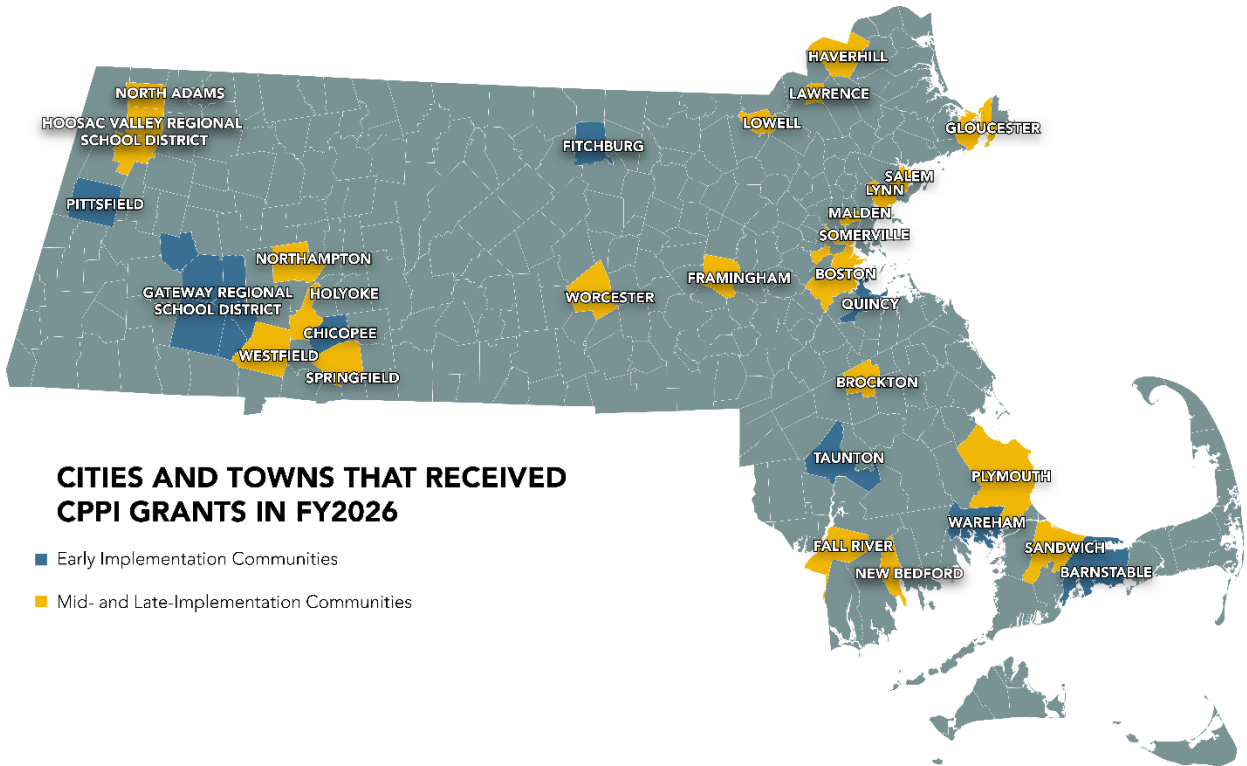
There are CPPI programs in [30 communities](#) across Massachusetts (Figure 1). The number of communities participating in CPPI grew from five in FY 2018 to 30 from FY 2023 through FY 2026. Over two-thirds (19) of CPPI communities are Gateway cities (Figure 2). Governor Maura Healey's [Gateway to Pre-K initiative](#), launched early in 2024, set the goal of establishing universal preschool programs in every Gateway city by 2026. As of FY 2026, there are seven Gateway cities that currently do not receive CPPI grants. Rural communities represent 11 CPPI grantees.

CPPI Participation Has Grown Rapidly with Consistent State-Level Funding

Number of Communities Receiving CPPI Grant by Fiscal Year



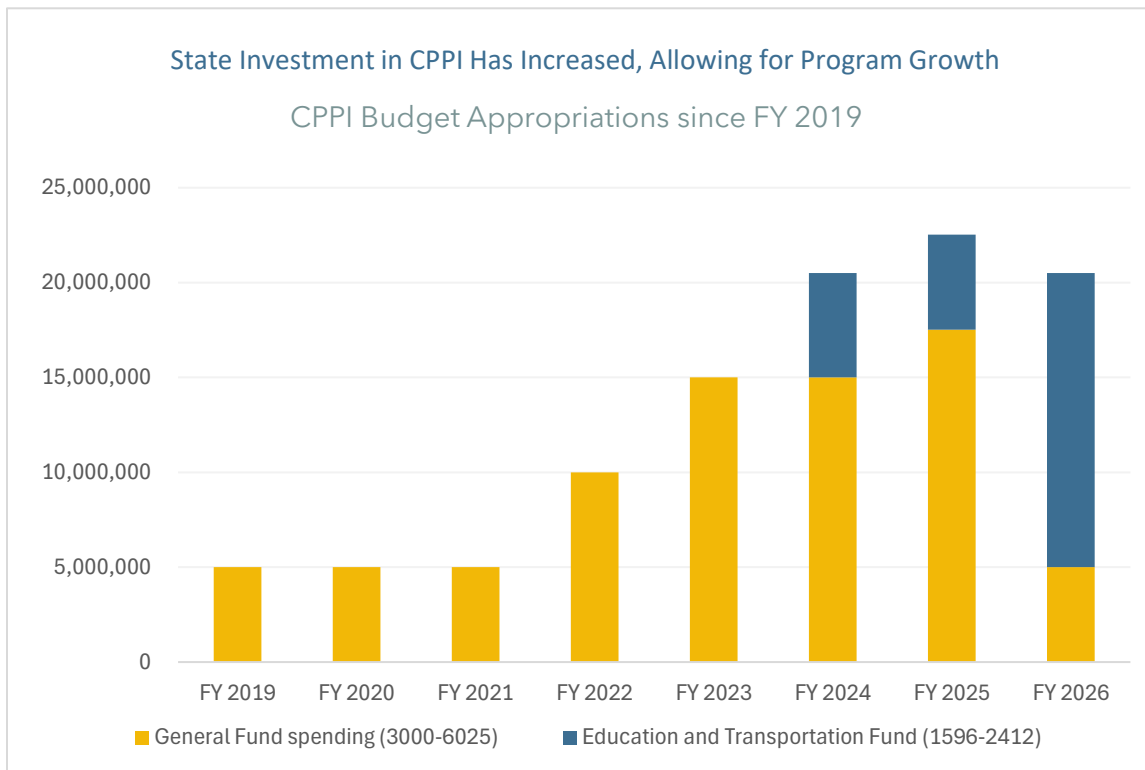
Majority of CPPI Communities are Gateway Cities



How is CPPI funded?

CPPI was established in the FY 2016 state budget, following the successful implementation of the federally funded [Preschool Expansion Grant \(PEG\) program](#) in FY 2015⁵. The federal PEG grant ended in 2019, at which point funding was replaced by state revenue. In the earliest years of the program, EEC awarded planning grants to a small number of Massachusetts communities, ranging from \$22,000 to \$40,000 each. Prior to FY 2024, the program was funded exclusively from the state’s General Fund. Since FY 2024, CPPI has been funded by a combination of general funds and revenue from the Fair Share Amendment surtax (The Education and Transportation Fund in Figure 2).

In FY 2026, communities that had received early implementation grants received \$250,000 each, while implementation communities received grants between \$316,000 and \$1,000,000 each.



How does CPPI advance equity in early education?

CPPI is driven by three core priorities:

1. Expanding access to affordable preschool
2. Delivering high-quality care and education in a variety of care settings through community partnerships
3. Supporting all students, including those with special education needs

EEC pursues these priorities by focusing on the growth of CPPI in under-resourced communities. The [Child Opportunity Index](#) (COI) is used to measure a community’s capacity to support children based on

currently available resources and services. Communities with a high COI tend to have families with higher incomes/more wealth and better resourced schools. Communities with a low COI tend to have lower incomes/less wealth and fewer resources. Nearly 60 percent of CPPI programs operate in communities with a low or very low COI, and more than 60 percent of children enrolled in these programs identify as BIPOC⁶. Furthermore, a fifth of children in these classrooms have received early intervention or special education services, which are critical for ensuring that children are able to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

Can expanding CPPI play a role in achieving universal preschool in Massachusetts?

CPPI is an important piece of Massachusetts's complex and diverse early education and care system. Even though CPPI operates in fewer than 10 percent of Massachusetts cities and towns, its design and implementation offer important lessons for equitably expanding access to high-quality early learning experiences to every child in the Commonwealth. The Initiative:

- **Leverages the capacity and expertise of local districts.** This includes use of physical space as well as administrative capacity, like coordinating special education services.
- **Expands access to high-quality early education and care.** Through CPPI, participating communities can open new classrooms and increase the availability of care. In 2025, over 3,000 children were enrolled in a CPPI classroom, nearly four times as many children as were enrolled in 2022. New classrooms are opened with quality as a key priority. CPPI helps communities to implement high-quality curricula and to support educators in their professional development.
- **Promotes intracommunity collaboration.** Identifying community-based partner organizations is a prerequisite for obtaining a planning grant. Communities can partner with center-based programs and family child care programs, creating a diversity of learning settings that families can access. Successfully implementing this program also requires financial collaboration and coordination. The overwhelming majority of CPPI communities combine public resources, including district funds and program-level operational grants, and municipal funds to administer CPPI.
- **Builds equity and inclusion for learners with special needs into the program model.** Inclusion is a core principle of CPPI. CPPI communities design early intervention and special education systems that reflect the unique needs of their communities during the planning stages. Instead of simply accommodating differently-abled learners, CPPI programs create curricula and systems that prioritize these learners. Over the course of the program, administrators continue to refine these systems to meet the needs and ensure the success of the children they serve.

CPPI represents the kind of sector-wide collaboration that will be critical for expanding access to high-quality early education and care for all Massachusetts families. To scale this type of program, the Commonwealth and individual districts will need to make increased investments in these partnerships and continue to refine implementation to make CPPI sustainable and effective long-term.

Endnotes

¹ Meeting of the Massachusetts Board of Early Education and Care, May 2025.

² According to the [Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#), students are considered “high needs” if their family is low-income, they are an English Language Learner, or if they have a disability.

³ Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center analysis of Massachusetts [fiscal year 2025](#) and [fiscal year 2026](#) final budgets. Overall CPPI appropriation was reduced from \$22,523,127 in the fiscal year 2025 budget to \$20,500,000 in the fiscal year 2026 budget.

⁴ [Press release](#) from Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, August 2025.

⁵ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services sponsors the administration of Preschool Development Grants, which support states in expanding access to high-quality early education experiences for children from low- and moderate-income families. The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care received one of these grants in 2015 and subsequently created the Preschool Expansion Grant program.

⁶ CPPI Data Brief from Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, May 2025.