



The State of Early Childhood Programs: 2014

In 2011, more than 12.4 million or 61.3% of American children under the age of 5 were in some type of regular childcare arrangement.¹ For many families, both parents must work to make ends meet and child care is a critical support for these working families. High quality, safe, affordable child care allows parents to work, and promotes children's healthy growth and school readiness.²

Background

Enriching experiences in the context of high quality early childhood programs give children an enhanced chance at success in school.³ Low income children, who are particularly at risk for academic failure, can benefit greatly from early childhood programs that include not only education, but other wide-ranging services for themselves and their families. The impact of early childhood experiences has been found to extend far beyond the young years. In 2010, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development studied 15-year-old children who had been enrolled in high and low-quality early childhood programs and found that children from high-quality programs scored better on academic and cognitive measures and were less likely to misbehave in school than their peers.⁴

Quality of Early Childhood Programs

- Child outcomes are more positive when children are in higher quality child care, compared to lower quality child care. However the quality of most child care is “mediocre” and, as a result, children’s healthy development and well-being are threatened.⁵
- For the future economic prosperity of America, it is critical that children receive quality, age-appropriate care. However, many working parents struggle to find quality child care that they can also afford.⁶
 - In 2013, only 11% of all child care centers and 1% of all family child care homes were accredited, which means these programs met a national standard of care and quality education.⁶
- The most vulnerable of children, including infants, toddlers, special needs children and children from low-income families, tend to be in family child care homes.⁷ Vulnerable children also tend to be in the poorest quality care settings, with the exception of those in Early Head Start and Head Start.⁸
 - Only 14% of 3 year olds and 39% of 4 year olds were in state-funded pre-kindergarten programs, Head Start or special education in 2009.⁸
- Strong relationships between child care program staff, parents and their children have a great influence on a program’s ability to engage parents about the educational and non-educational needs of their children.⁹
- A striking demographic pattern exists in educational attainment among early childhood education teachers. The younger a teacher or administrator, the *less* likely they are to have a college degree. Only 25% of those aged 24-39 have college degrees compared with 36% of those aged 40-50 and 43% of teachers over age 50.¹⁰
- In 2013, 20% of child care center teachers and 44% of family child care providers had a high school diploma or less.⁶
 - Although teacher education tends to be low across the early childhood field, research indicates a positive relationship between teacher education levels, program quality, and positive outcomes for children.¹¹

Cost of Early Childhood Programs

- In today’s economy, the number of parents losing jobs, working part time, taking pay cuts, or working two or more jobs is rising. Parents are forced to make difficult decisions about the care of their children. The high cost of child care causes many parents to remove their children from organized child care and make do with whatever arrangements they can find and/or afford.²
- In 2013, state average child care fees for an infant in center care ranged from \$4,863 to \$16,430 a year; the fees for full-time center-based care for a 4-year-old ranged from \$4,312 to \$12,355 a year; and the fees for a school-age child in part-time center care ranged from \$1,070 to \$11,690 a year.²
- In 2013, the cost of child care grew at up to eight times the rate of family income, placing a larger burden upon working families.²
- Ironically, in a weakened economy the stress placed on families makes high-quality child care settings even more important to the healthy development of children.⁶

Early Childhood Program Cost Comparisons

- Families paid more for childcare in 2012 than in previous years.²
 - The average cost of center care increased 2.7 percent for infants and 2.6 percent for 4-year-olds.²
 - The average cost of care in a family child care home increased 3.7 percent for infants and 4.8% for 4-year-olds.²

- Annual center-based infant care fees exceeded 10% of the state’s median income for two-parent families in 38 states.²

Subsidized Early Childhood Programs

- During the 2011-12 program year, Head Start collectively served 1,142,000 children ages birth to 5 and pregnant women.¹²
- In 14 states in 2012, families with incomes of 150 percent of the federal poverty line (FPL) (\$28,635 a year for a family of 3 in 2012) did not qualify for child care assistance. Families with an income of 200 percent of the FPL (\$38,180 a year for a family of 3 in 2012) did not qualify for child care assistance in 37 states.¹⁴
- Under the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) law, states can use funds to help make child care more affordable for families. However, the states *are not required* to use funding for licensed care.²
 - Unregulated settings do not have to meet state sanitation and health standards and are not subject to state inspections. Also, providers are not required to receive training that licensed providers must meet. Children receive government assistance to be in these unregulated settings, but their quality of care is left to chance.²
 - In May 2013, the Office of Child Care in the Administration for Children and Families proposed amending the regulations in the CCDBG. The proposed regulations would strengthen health and safety requirements, improve quality and expand accountability in programs that accept children funded through CCDBG.⁶
 - In 2010, non-regulated child care accounted for 19% of the federal dollars paid out through the CCDBG law. Nationally, 277,174 children received child care subsidies for this form of child care.^{15,16}

Choice in Selection of Early Childhood and After-School Programs

- Determining how many families use child care is difficult as some families frequently change programs or use multiple child care settings (including non-regulated care).¹⁷ Consider the following statistics:
 - In 2011, 61.3% of children under the age of five participated in a regular child care arrangement including licensed center-based or in-home child care, as well as non-licensed care and relative care.¹
 - In 2011, among children under age 5 living with their mothers, 18.3% of children were in more than one type of child care arrangement and 39.3% of children had no regular child care arrangement.¹
- The selection of non-regulated care is due to a variety of reasons including cost constraints, preference for relative care, or the need for care during non-traditional work hours.⁵ The quality of many family child care homes is unknown because many providers are unlicensed.⁶
 - For instance, in Missouri a person may care for 4 unrelated children of any age in his or her home without being licensed.¹⁸ These unlicensed homes are exempt from annual Missouri fire and sanitation inspections and bi-annual licensing inspections.
 - Researchers estimate that the non-regulated care providers may serve as many as one-third of all children who are in family child care arrangements.¹⁹
- In 2011, there were 4.2 million “latchkey” children across the nation.¹ These are school-age children between the ages of 5 and 14 who return to empty homes after school because their parents work (“self care”).

Teachers in Early Childhood Programs

- In 2012, the average salary for a child care worker was \$10.25 per hour (\$21,310 annually)²⁰, while the average salary for a preschool teacher was \$14.79 per hour (\$30,750 annually).¹³
- Nationally, 1.7% of early childhood educators (ECE) work in school-based early childhood education programs, while 37% of the ECE work in Child Day Care Services which includes center-based and home-based programs. The remaining ECE workforce are employed in other religious, civic, social or residential early childhood settings.²⁰
- All states that license child care facilities have minimum qualifications for licensing staff members.¹⁸ 18 states require center directors to have at least a Child Development Associate (CDA), while 30 states require teachers to have a high school diploma or a GED.²¹

Child-to-Staff Ratios

- The most common infant-to-staff ratio across the U.S. is 4:1 and 5 states allow a ratio of 6:1.²¹ For highest quality care, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) advises a 3:1 ratio.²²
- Although the most common toddler-to-staff ratio across the U.S. is 6:1, 10 states allow a ratio of 8:1.²¹ For the highest quality care, NAEYC recommends a ratio of 4:1.²²
- 10 states do not regulate infant-to-staff ratios and 17 states do not regulate toddler-to-staff ratios.²¹

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December 2013

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The Center for Family Policy & Research is housed in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Missouri. The Center's mission is to create and disseminate research-based analyses to promote the well-being of families through informed public policy and program development.

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