

Conclusion and Recommendations

Parents, child care providers and state and federal policymakers share responsibility for the safety and well-being of children while they are in child care settings.

Basic state requirements as well as oversight form the foundation necessary to protect children and promote their healthy development while in child care. The benchmarks selected by Child Care Aware® of America represent basic, minimal criteria. The average score is only 92 points out of a possible score of 150, which equates to 61 percent – a grade of D.

As this report shows, state licensing requirements vary greatly, and few really set policies to ensure that children are safe and in a setting to promote their healthy development.

Child Care Licensing Requirements

Child care licensing should provide minimum protections for children. *At a minimum, child care should do no harm.*

While child care is a work support for millions of parents with young children, with what research shows about brain development, it is also an early learning program. Given that children spend an average of 35 hours per week in child care, it is critical that child care settings promote both safety and healthy development.

There is considerable variation among states in what they include in their child care center licensing requirements. These requirements generally include minimum staff:child ratios and group size,

educational qualifications and training requirements for directors and lead teachers, background checks for center staff, parent involvement as well as monitoring frequency.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends staff:child ratios that are based on best practice for effective interaction and supervision. Only one state (*the District of Columbia*) meets all seven staff:child ratio recommendations for varying ages of young children. Twenty-three states meet two or fewer of the staff:child ratio recommendations (of these, 13 states meet none).

With regard to NAEYC group size limit recommendations for effective staff:child interaction and supervision, no state meets all of the group size limits by age. In fact, 33 states plus *DoD* meet two or fewer standards with regard to group size limits, and 22 of these states meet none.

While there are a variety of factors that affect a child care setting, one of the most important to the quality of care and interaction with children is the training of individuals in the child care workforce.

Put simply, training makes a difference in the quality of care. Quality child care matters for the safety and development of children. Yet, training requirements vary greatly among the states ranging from no training requirements to comprehensive requirements.

Training of the workforce, child:staff ratios and group size limits are all related to the safety and healthy development of children.

The array of benchmarks Child Care Aware® of America selected are key to quality settings.

Program and Oversight Policies Matter

Program *and* oversight benchmarks were selected because licensing requirements are ineffective unless there are oversight systems in place to ensure that the program requirements are carried out.

Weak oversight undermines strong standards since compliance is not effectively monitored. As this report shows, state oversight varies greatly.

Two states (*New York* and *Washington*) plus *DoD* scored high on both program requirements and oversight.

Three states (*Massachusetts*, *New Jersey* and *Rhode Island*) that are on the top 10 list for best program requirements are among the 10 lowest scoring states with regard to oversight.

Two states (*Arkansas* and *South Carolina*) are on the top 10 list for oversight and among the top 10 lowest scoring states for program requirements.

Three states (*California*, *Idaho* and *Nebraska*) are on both lists of the worst 10 states with regard to program requirements and oversight.

Monitoring Effectiveness

Given the state of the economy, many states faced tough budget deficit gaps to close over the last few years. **Compared to our 2011 report, 19 states increased the number of programs covered by licensing office staff.** With the important role effective monitoring plays in promoting child safety and program compliance with licensing, the number of programs that each licensing staff covers needs to be reduced not increased. Since there was not a significant increase in licensed programs, it is likely that staff caseloads increased either through attrition with no replacement or licensing staff budget cuts. The states with the largest percent increase in caseload per licensing office staff were:

- *Oregon* – 80 percent.
- *Kentucky* – 63 percent.

- *New York* – 49 percent.
- *Nevada* – 44 percent.
- *Connecticut* – 24 percent.

Connecting State Licensing to Quality Rating Systems

It is critical that states integrate child care licensing with their state quality rating systems. Yet, only five states (*Michigan*, *New Mexico*, *North Carolina*, *Oklahoma* and *Tennessee*) require licensed programs to participate in their QRIS.

By integrating child care licensing with the state's quality rating system and by requiring accountability for the use of subsidies for low income children to higher quality care (rated as 3, 4 or 5 stars), *North Carolina* has significantly improved the quality of child care available for **all** children (reducing the number of programs rated as 1 or 2 stars from 1,922 in 2011 to about 1,000 in 2013 through a concentrated effort to work with lower quality programs to raise their quality level to 3 stars or higher). As a result, very few programs in *North Carolina* remain at the licensed level – the lowest quality of care allowed by the state.

The Role of State and Federal Policymakers

State licensing varies greatly, in large part, because Congress has not set accountable parameters for states to follow as they spend federal and state money on child care. The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG):

- Does **not** require a background check for child care providers to screen out those who should not be in the business of caring for children.
- Does **not** contain a minimum training requirement for child care providers.
- Does **not** require regular inspections to ensure that child care programs are in compliance with state licensing requirements.

- Does **not** require minimum protections for children so that they are safe and in quality child care settings.

In June of 2011, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee held a hearing entitled, "Getting the Most Bang for the Buck: Quality Early Education and Care." The hearing focused on a comparison of the Military Child Care Act (MCCA) and CCDBG. Unlike CCDBG where funding flows through HHS to states to assist children with any type of child care (licensed or not, poor quality or not, where providers are not screened or trained and inspections are infrequent), the MCCA requires provider background checks, minimum training, quarterly inspections and children to be in quality settings.

In this year's report, *DoD* child care centers ranked first. It is time for Congress to set parameters for the states through CCDBG that parallel the MCCA. It is good news that the children of military families are in quality child care. It would be great news if the rest of the children in America could also be in quality child care. However, as this report shows, more progress needs to be made.

Child Care Aware® of America Recommends Congress:

Reauthorize the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) in the 113th Congress and appropriate sufficient funding to ensure that eligible children are able to receive assistance and that states can meet quality improvement goals.

Protect children's safety

- Require comprehensive background checks for licensed child care providers who regularly care for unrelated children and for unlicensed individuals who receive federal funds to care for children.
- Require minimum health and safety protections for children (including safe sleep practices for infants) for receipt of federal subsidies.

- Require states to share with Child Care Resource and Referral agencies in a timely manner information about license revocations and suspensions and other information that will help parents select safe, quality child care for their children.
- Require states to include child care in disaster planning, response and recovery efforts.
- Include a specific set-aside for licensing related activities to promote the safety and healthy development of children.
- Require licensed child care programs to disclose to parents whether they carry liability insurance.

Promote accountability

- Require regular unannounced inspections of licensed programs (the same standard Congress required of the military child care system) and require inspection reports to be posted on the internet to assist parents in making informed child care choices.
- Require a child care community needs assessment as part of the CCDBG state plan, which includes the availability of licensed care by setting, by age, and by hours of operation, and compare such data to the needs of working parents in the community for such types of child care.
- Require deaths in child care programs to be reported to the state licensing agency and the state child care administrator and for those agencies to aggregate the data and report it to the Department of Health and Human Services to identify trends and recommend policies to prevent such tragedies where possible.
- Require states accepting federal funds for child care to provide an evidence-based rationale for each category of license-exempt care and to disclose such information on the Internet.
- Include a specific set-aside for licensing-related activities to promote the safety and healthy development of children, including safe sleep practices for infants.

- Require the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to review state Child Care and Development Fund biennial plans and impose penalties when state plans fail to meet minimum protections for children, including ineffective state monitoring practices.

Promote quality child care

- Establish quality child care as a goal for any use of related federal funding (*i.e., funds used for child care through CCDBG, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF] program, and the Social Services Block Grant [SSBG]*).
- Set clear expectations about what quality means and establish a floor for what is minimally acceptable.
- Require all paid individuals in the child care workforce (who care for unrelated children on a regular basis) to complete 40 hours of initial training in child development and behavior guidance, learning activities, first aid/CPR, recognizing and reporting child abuse, and basic health and safety practices as well as 24 hours of annual training.
- Require community-based training that is intentional, sequential, competency-based, tied with coaching and tied to outcomes.
- Encourage states to expand online training opportunities, training to better address children with special needs and training in working with children whose first language is not English.
- Expand training in other languages where a community needs assessment shows the need for languages other than English to better meet the needs of a diverse array of providers.
- Require CCDBG quality funds to be linked to measurable program outcomes, especially training and preparation of the workforce.
- Require states to encourage healthy development in child care by promoting nutritious meals and snacks, offering daily physical activity, and limiting screen time

- Require states to create or strengthen Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) to tier provider payment rates based on objective quality measures and to ensure that low-income children have access to high quality care.
- Authorize funds for pilots in high poverty rural communities to explore strategies that braid multiple funding sources to better meet the child care needs of working parents (meeting the criteria of the strongest funding stream to ensure safe, quality care for children).
- Increase the CCDBG quality set-aside immediately to 12 percent of the basic block grant, moving it to 25 percent, on par with Head Start.

Child Care Aware® of America Recommends States:

Strengthen state program requirements and oversight.

Protect children's safety

- Require comprehensive background checks for child care providers and those receiving subsidies to care for unrelated children.
- Require all child care center teachers to keep current certification in first aid and CPR.
- Require child care centers to follow the 10 recommended basic health practices and the 10 recommended basic safety practices.
- Require all child care centers to be licensed.
- Inspect child care programs regularly and post inspection reports on the Internet.
- Share suspension and violation information with CCR&Rs so that agencies do not make referrals to programs that may not be safe.
- Require deaths in child care programs to be reported to the state licensing agency.

Promote accountability

- Conduct regular inspections to ensure compliance with state requirements. At least some of these inspections should be unannounced.
- Post routine inspection reports and substantiated complaints on the Internet.
- Ensure adequate oversight by reducing licensing staff caseloads to a ratio of no more than 50:1 to improve accountability for meeting state requirements.

Promote quality child care

- Require child care center directors to have a bachelor's degree or higher in early childhood education or a related field.
- Require lead teachers to have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, college courses in early childhood education or an associate degree in early childhood education or a related field.
- Require child care centers to provide an orientation and initial training in child development, child guidance, child abuse prevention, emergency preparation, licensing regulations, learning activities, health and safety, safe sleep, shaken baby prevention, CPR and first aid.
- Require child care center staff to have 24 hours or more of annual training in child development, child guidance, child abuse prevention, emergency preparation, licensing regulations, learning activities, health and safety, safe sleep, shaken baby prevention, CPR and first aid.
- Require community-based training that is intentional, sequential, competency-based, tied with coaching and tied to outcomes.
- Create and expand more online training opportunities, training to better address children with special needs and training in working with children whose first language is not English.

- Expand training in other languages where a community needs assessment shows the need for languages other than English to better meet the needs of a diverse array of providers.
- Require child care centers to plan learning activities that address language/literacy, dramatic play, active play, cognitive development/ math, self-help skills, creative activities, limited screen time, social development, emotional development and culturally sensitive activities.
- Require child care centers to encourage parent involvement, communicate regularly with parents, allow parents access to the center and share written policies with parents.
- Require licensing staff to have a bachelor's degree or higher in early childhood education or a related field.