



THE INFORMATION IN THIS RESEARCH BRIEF HAS BEEN REVIEWED AS OF FEBRUARY 2016, AND NO CHANGES HAVE BEEN MADE.

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RESEARCH BRIEF ON

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

BACKGROUND

Recent years have seen an increased focus on early childhood education policies at both the federal and state levels. Though the research is somewhat mixed, multiple studies have reported the positive effects of high quality early education on the academic and economic performance of America's students. For more information, see the links below.

- <http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/brain-matters.aspx>
- <http://www.ecs.org/?s=early+childhood>
- <http://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/>

As a result, recent federal budgets devoted a portion of "Race to the Top" funding to develop state early education programs. In addition, legislation has been introduced in both the United States Senate and House of Representatives that would establish a universal preschool program funded through federal-state matching grants.

Even before these federal proposals, some states pursued their own early education initiatives. Florida, Georgia, and Oklahoma have universal preschool programs. Other states are beginning to create such programs through pilot projects with the intent of expanding those programs over time.

In 2014, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation convened the Commission to Build a Healthier America—a national, nonpartisan group of leaders from both the public and private sectors—to offer specific recommendations for high-impact early

childhood programs. The Commission encouraged policymakers to:

- Create stronger standards for early childhood development programs, link funding to program quality, and guarantee access by funding enrollment for low-income children under age 5;
- Help parents who struggle to provide healthy, nurturing experiences for their children; and
- Invest in innovation and research to ensure that all early childhood programs are based upon the best available evidence and to catalyze the design and testing of new intervention strategies to achieve substantially greater impacts than current best practices.

TYPES OF SERVICES

There are a variety of early childhood services available. This brief focuses on the following:

- **Home Visiting**—a strategy to support pregnant women and new mothers in ensuring healthy child development, preventing child abuse and neglect, and connecting families to resources.
- **Child Care Subsidy**—a long-standing public program for low-income working families, which in recent years has been used to encourage early learning and development. Federal law governing the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) establishes basic health and safety requirements, and state lawmakers have decision-making authority over program eligibility.
- **Pre-Kindergarten Education**—public and private preschool programs designed to promote a child’s intellectual, social, and emotional development before they enter kindergarten.
- **Head Start**—federally funded Head Start and Early Head Start programs promote school readiness for economically

disadvantaged children by enhancing their social and cognitive development through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services.

HOME VISITING

The federal Health Resources and Services Administration provides funding for states to develop and implement home visiting programs. Each state chooses the operational models best meeting the needs of local communities and supports local agencies in providing services. Families electing to participate in a voluntary home visiting program receive advice, guidance, and other help from a variety of professionals, and parents learn how to improve their family’s health and provide better opportunities for their children.

Until recently, Nevada was one of a few states with no home visitation program. However, under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, the Division of Public and Behavioral Health, Department of Health and Human Services, began receiving annual grants to develop and operate a program.

CHILD CARE SUBSIDY

According to the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, the average cost of full-time infant child care ranges from approximately \$4,900 to \$16,400 per year, depending on where a family lives, the type of care received, and the age of the child.

To assist low-income working families with these costs, all states offer a program under the federal CCDBG. As of 2013, the National Women’s Law Center reports the following data for state CCDBG programs:

Income eligibility

A family’s access to child care assistance depends upon the respective state’s income

eligibility limit. The family's ability to obtain assistance is affected not only by a state's income limit in a given year, but also by whether the state adjusts the limit annually for inflation (so the family does not become ineligible for assistance simply because its income has kept pace with inflation).

Between 2001 and 2013, Nevada's income eligibility ceiling for a family of three increased by \$10,176—an 8 percent greater increase, than the State's median income. Just eight other states had a greater dollar increase, and only three had a greater percentage increase.

Waiting lists

As of 2013, 32 states did not have a waiting list for services. Those states with a waiting list ranged from Florida with over 60,000 children waiting to Colorado with only 75. Nevada had 1,748 children waiting. In Nevada, families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and those with foster care or child protective services placements are served without being placed on the waiting list.

Copayments

Most states require families receiving child care assistance to contribute toward the cost, based upon a sliding fee scale. Some states also take into account the family's cost of care in determining the copayment. Copayment levels are important because if they are too high, families may be discouraged from participating.

Between 2001 and 2013, Nevada's copayment was reduced significantly, while most other states increased their required copayments. Nevada's copayment reduction was the second largest in the nation.

Other notes on Nevada's program

The State began implementing its Silver Stars quality rating and improvement system

in July 2012 for Clark County and July 2013 for the remainder of the State. The system has five quality levels but only four separate reimbursement rates (the lowest two levels receive the same base rate). Previously, the State had two separate rates, a base rate and a rate for accredited centers, which was 15 percent above the base rate. There is no longer a separate rate for accredited centers.

Parents can receive child care assistance while searching for a job for up to two weeks in a 12-month calendar year. If child care assistance is provided for at least one day, the entire week is counted toward this limit. Job search child care assistance is only provided for a child who is not attending school.

PRE-KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION

According to the National Institute for Early Education Research's (NIEER) most recent *State of Preschool 2013* report, 40 states operate state funded preschool programs. These programs vary widely in funding, the number of students served, and eligibility requirements.

Enrollment

In Florida and Oklahoma, more than 70 percent of 4-year-olds are enrolled in a state-run preschool, while ten states have no program at all. The average state enrollment is 28 percent, and Nevada's enrollment is 2.7 percent.

Spending

According to NIEER, aggregate state-level spending on early education fell by \$548 million from School Year (SY) 2010–2011 to SY 2011–2012. A factor in this decrease was state reliance on funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which expired in 2011. As of 2013, New Jersey spent \$12,070 for each 4-year-old enrolled in early childhood education, ranking first nationally.

The national average is \$4,026, and Nevada's state-level expenditures are \$2,397.

HEAD START

Head Start is a federal program that promotes the school readiness of children from low-income families, birth to age 5, by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Early Head Start serves pregnant women and children, birth to age 3, and their families. Federal grants are provided directly to community-based agencies.

In Fiscal Year 2013, Nevada's Head Start and Early Head Start programs served 4,649 children and received approximately \$30 million in funding. Roughly 8 percent of Nevada's eligible children received services. More than 12 percent of children served during 2013 were homeless, and 13 percent had a disability or special need.

On October 10, 2013, Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval signed Executive Order No. 2013-16, authorizing the relocation of the Head Start State Collaboration and Early Childhood Systems Office (Office) to Nevada's Department of Education. The Office supports the work of the Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council (Council) and receives grant funding to improve early childhood systems and partnerships at the State and local level. The Office does not regulate or oversee Head Start programs.

OTHER EFFORTS IN NEVADA

Through Senate Bill 486 (Chapter 522, *Statutes of Nevada 2013*), the Nevada Legislature allocated \$1.5 million to pilot the Silver State KIDS program to provide developmental assessments at kindergarten entry for children served by publicly funded early childhood education programs.

A first-ever statewide assessment of the availability of quality early care and education was completed by the Office in 2014 and is available at <http://www.doe.nv.gov/HeadStart/>. The Council's Early Childhood Comprehensive System Strategic Plan was also drafted in 2014 and can be found at <http://nvecac.com/>.

VITAL ELEMENTS

Research indicates a number of elements are essential to building a high impact early childhood education and development system, such as the list below.

- The primary focus should be on the quality of services, because not all programs have a lasting impact.
- Educator effectiveness is vital to program quality.
- Program content should emphasize the child's development of executive functioning.
- Quality Rating and Improvement Systems should be limited to program elements with a strong connection to student learning.
- Result-based financing with a strong longitudinal evaluation component can improve program accountability.

As Nevada's policymakers further explore strategies to strengthen the State's early childhood education system, it will be helpful to consider these system elements.

