

# High-Quality Child Care Helps Families Work and Children Learn

High-quality child care fulfills two important national goals: keeping children safe while their parents work and nurturing and developing children in ways that prepare them for school and beyond. The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) provides formula-based grants to states to help low-income working families afford child care. States are required to use at least four percent of the grant to help providers improve child care and after school programs for eligible children from birth through age twelve.

Since the last reauthorization by Congress in 1996, much has been learned about child development and the importance of quality experiences for children starting at birth. In addition, states have used the CCDBG grants to build stronger systems of quality, such as quality rating and improvement systems and professional development systems, which support the range of settings providing early childhood education.

Yet too many children and families lack assistance to child care. Approximately 260,000 fewer children received assistance for child care affordability in 2012 than did in 2006. Funding for CCDBG, despite some increases of late, remains below the total funding levels during the period of the stimulus.

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## Recommendations for the CCDBG Reauthorization:

- **Access and quality:** Access and quality policies are linked and both need attention in this reauthorization.
  - **Health and safety:** Ensuring health and safety of children is a critical foundation for providing nurturing learning environments for young children. States should be required to conduct regular health and safety inspections, criminal background checks (with due process protections) as well as monitoring and assistance for quality improvement.
  - **State coordinated systems of quality:** States should be encouraged to implement or build on their quality rating and improvement systems that provide support for providers of early childhood programs to meet rising benchmarks of quality, with financing to sustain those higher quality levels including staff compensation, that result in meeting national accreditation standards. States should describe how they will coordinate CCDBG funds with other federal and state funds (for example, early intervention and TANF) to create effective systems of access and quality for children and families.
  - **Professional knowledge and compensation:** Integrated professional development systems are an essential element to state system building. We recommend using the NAEYC Professional Preparation standards as a framework for standards and competencies, career pathways, articulation/transfer of professional credentials, as well as scholarships and release time so that educators can meet higher degree and credential requirements. It is critical for staff to receive ongoing professional development in how to use developmentally appropriate curricula and practices as well as health and safety.
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- **Affordable access and continuity of care:** Continuity and consistency of care is crucial to young children, families, and providers. Twelve months of continuous care, regardless of changes in employment or income, before having to re-determine their eligibility for assistance, is necessary for the health and development of young children. Timely payments to providers and use of a market rate survey to set reimbursement rates that recognizes the higher costs of quality are essential to programmatic success. States describe in their plan how they will implement strategies to increase the supply of quality child care in underserved areas, such as low-income and rural areas, and for underserved populations, including infants and toddlers, school-age children, children with disabilities and other special needs, children in families with limited English proficiency, and families with non-standard working hours.
- **Infants and toddlers:** Brain research underscores the importance of high-quality child care with infants and toddlers. Without paid family leave, many children need child care as infants so their families can work. A portion of the quality set aside should be required to focus on high-quality services for infants and toddlers, such as family child care networks, infant-toddler specialists, and professional development for infant-toddler staff.
- **Diversity of children and families:** The range of languages and cultures of children in America is growing. High-quality child care respects and supports diversity of family cultures and home language because of the importance of families as children's first teachers and because such support creates better opportunities for learning. State plans should describe how outreach will be conducted to diverse families about the availability of child care assistance and child care choices, and support child care providers with professional development and ability to hire and retain a high-quality, diverse early childhood staff.
- **Special needs:** Children who receive early intervention and special education will be better prepared for success with their non-special needs peers in schools. States should describe how they will coordinate CCDBG with IDEA Part C early intervention, IDEA 619 preschool special education, and other funding streams that provide special needs services for children who need them.
- **Financing access and quality:** Child care mandatory and discretionary funds should be significantly increased to address serious gaps in access and quality for children. With higher funding levels, states will be able to serve more eligible children, raise reimbursement rates to reflect the costs of quality, and enhance their efforts to raise the quality of child care and afterschool care.