

Deregulation Won't Solve Child Care . . . But It Will Decrease Safety and Supply

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Increasing child care access, quality, and affordability must be a national, state, and local priority. Decades of research, data, and experience make clear, however, that the solution to growing the supply of quality child care supply is not through deregulation that lowers health, safety, staffing, and qualification requirements. The solution, rather, is through significant investments—in the education and compensation of the early childhood workforce, facilities, and family supports.

No Correlation Between Regulations and Child Care Supply

Regulations are often scapegoated for the high price and limited availability of licensed child care. However, previous [analysis](#) has found no correlation between the strictness of state regulations and state levels of child care supply, indicating that more stringent regulation is unlikely to have a large impact on child care supply.

Prior to the pandemic, [researchers examined how state regulations correlate with supply shortages](#) by scoring the following regulations in each state:

- › Teacher-to-child ratios
- › Group sizes
- › Minimum number of children at which point licensing is mandatory
- › Teacher and director qualification requirements

The stricter a regulation, the higher its score. When overlaid with data on child care supply, however, the analysis found no correlation between the state regulations examined and child care supply. Further, none of the individual factors that contributed to the overall regulation score were shown to have a statistically significant impact on the supply of child care slots. While a wide array of factors affect child care supply, these results indicate that more stringent regulations aren't driving the problem.

Ratios and Group Sizes are Necessary for Safety and Quality—and Prevent Educator Burnout and Turnover

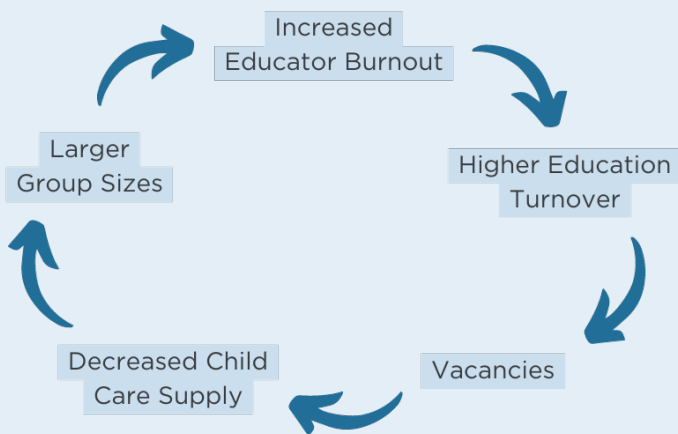
Regulations provide [important safety protections](#) for children and uphold the [quality](#) of early education and care. Regulations such as staff to child ratios and maximum group sizes ensure adequate supervision and interaction with children to keep them safe and engaged in learning, while requirements regarding qualifications and professional development recognize and uplift the depth of knowledge, skills, and competencies it takes to deliver on the complex science of early learning in the early years.

Recommended [developmentally appropriate maximum group sizes and staff to child ratios](#) in center- or school-based settings:

Age	Ratio	Max. Class Size
Infant (Birth-15 months)	1:4	8
Toddler/Two (12-36 months)	1:6	12
Preschool (30 months-5 years)	1:10	20

Maintaining low ratios and group sizes are also key to early childhood educator success and well-being. During the early stages of the pandemic, when classrooms were capped at much smaller group sizes to promote health and safety, [anecdotal evidence](#) suggests educators saw positive changes regarding interactions with children and were feeling less burnt out at the end of the day.

Lower ratios and smaller group sizes are necessary to keep children safe – but they also keep educators in their programs by limiting staff burnout, turnover, and staffing shortages. Efforts to loosen regulations, driven by a goal of increasing supply and program revenue, will actually have the opposite effect by driving educator burnout and turnover even higher.



“Having worked in settings with different ratios, I can assure you that the lower the ratio, the better the quality of care. To increase ratios would not only be detrimental to the developing child, it would increase burnout rates for a workforce that already carries a heavy load for minimal pay and benefits.” – Jenn Boisvert, Early Childhood Educator from Westbrook, Maine

Solutions Require Public Investment

While there are opportunities to streamline and lessen paperwork burdens, and target the revision of regulations that undermine the expertise and autonomy of early childhood educators, policies that make child care less

attractive to educators by making their jobs harder (via increased ratios and group sizes) will worsen the supply problem those policies are trying to solve.

The foundational problem underlying the child care crisis is the lack of adequate public funding; without substantial and sustainable investments, our nation will continue to struggle to address the scale and urgency of the challenges of [high child care prices](#), [child care deserts](#), and [low compensation](#). Quality child care is resource-intensive, but unlike in the K-12 education system or the ECE system in many other countries, parents in the U.S. must shoulder the brunt of the cost, along with the educators who subsidize the system through their own low wages. Unfortunately, this cost is more than most working families can afford, and far beyond what most states pay providers who participate in the child care subsidy system.

This is especially true for infant and toddler care, where the science of early learning is just as complex as in the older years, and where parents expect and educators need low ratios and group sizes to keep children safe and thriving.

- On average, and even before the pandemic, infant care cost 60% more to provide than pre-K, yet subsidy rates were just **27% higher**.
- At the same time, provider compensation accounts for **almost 70%** of the cost of providing child care for infants, yet early childhood educators working with infants are earning disproportionately low wages within an already underpaid field.

The solution is to increase public investment in child care to cover the cost of providing quality care. This by definition must include competitive compensation that recognizes the skill, competency, and value of early childhood educators, and allows for the recommended ratios and group sizes that are needed for educators to want to do their jobs, and to do them safely and well.

As states attempt to address critical child care supply issues, policymakers must remember that regulations promote safety and quality in child care providers, and efforts to undermine them won't solve the supply problem—but will cause harm. Solving our child care crisis will require a large-scale public investment that allows providers to meet regulations based on best practices and do right by children and families.