

Answering Policy Questions with Research Connections

This guide explains how you can use Research Connections to explore child care and early education research and resources and use those resources to find answers to your policy questions.

Introduction

Child Care and Early Education Research Connections (Research Connections) is an extensive online library that allows you to search for policy-relevant child care and early education research. Whether you're looking for research on topics related to the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), checking out what other states are doing related to equity or quality, or keeping up to date with the latest research from the field, you've come to the right place—our librarians review every publication on Research Connections to ensure it is relevant to child care and early education (CCEE).

The Research Connections library is unique because its contents are specifically curated for CCEE. The library pulls together a wide variety of resources, from peer-reviewed literature to government publications and interactive tools.



Table of Contents

- [Using the Library](#)
 - [Filtering Searches](#)
 - [Searching by Topic](#)
 - [Finding State-by-State Information](#)
- [Helpful Starting Points](#)
 - [Hot Topics](#)
 - [Resources with Data from All States](#)
 - [Short Reads](#)
- [Child Care and Development Fund Connections](#)
- [Resource Types](#)
 - [Fact Sheets and Briefs](#)
 - [Executive Summaries](#)
 - [Interactive Tools](#)
 - [Literature Reviews](#)
 - [Reports and Papers](#)
- [Ask a Librarian](#)

Using the Library

Research Connections is designed specifically for child care and early education, which means that all search results will be relevant to the work of child care and early education policymakers, consultants, researchers, and other CCEE professionals.

The library search finds resources that contain all your keywords. It checks every field of the resource record (title, author, topic, etc.), including the full text if available.

Important note: Research Connections does not evaluate study designs, methods, or findings. Users are responsible for evaluating the quality of research they find on the site.

Filtering Searches

You can narrow your search results by applying filters, located on the left of the “Search Results” page, shown in figure 1. Filter by *keyword*, *date*, *resource type*, *topic*, *location* (state in which the data were collected), grant (federally funded grant that supported the research), *publisher*, *funder*, and *author*. You can also indicate whether to include state-by-state information (resources with data from all states), full text, and peer-reviewed research.

The screenshot displays the search results interface. On the left, a sidebar contains a 'Clear all filters and search terms' button and a list of filter categories, each with a plus sign: Publication Date, Full Text Availability, Peer Reviewed, Resource Type, Topical Classification, Location, Grant, Author(s), State-By-State Info, Publisher(s), and Funder(s). The main search area at the top shows the query 'Summer Camps, "Covid-19"' and a 'Search' button. Below the search bar, there is a 'Sort by' dropdown set to 'Pub Date (newest)' and a 'View' dropdown set to '15'. A message indicates 'Displaying 1 - 15 out of 1068 results'. The search results are listed below, starting with a link to 'Physical, mental, and financial stress impacts of COVID-19 on early childhood educators' by Swigonski Nancy L., James Brandy, Wynns Whitley, Casavan Kara, September 2021, categorized as 'Reports & Papers' and 'Peer Reviewed'. A snippet of the abstract is visible: 'This study sought to measure early childhood educators' personal physical, emotional and financial stress impact related to the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic in Indiana. More research on early childhood educator stress and well-being is...'. Below this is a link to 'COVID-19 & Arkansas's early education workforce: Summarizing surveys on the effects of the pandemic' by McKelvey Lorraine, Forsman J. Andrew, July 2021, also categorized as 'Reports & Papers'.

Figure 1. Sample Search Results Page

Searching by Topic

One way to jumpstart your search is to search by topic using the “Topical Classification” filter (see figure 1). You can also start your search by clicking on “[Explore Our Topics](#)” under the “Research Library” tab along the top navigation bar shown in figure 2. This will bring you to a list of all available topics and subtopics.

There are 14 primary topics, such as “Parents & Families,” “Financing & Funding,” and “Child Care & Early Education Quality.” Starting with broad topics can be useful when you are unsure about which keywords to use or would like to explore publications in your specific area of interest.



A number of topics in the library connect with key themes of the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan. You will find some examples and starting points in the [CCDF Connections](#) section of this guide.

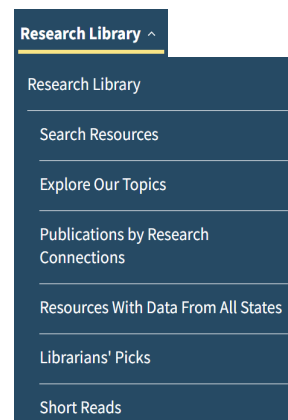


Figure 2. Research Library Tab

Finding State-by-State Information

Some publications compile information on all states including the District of Columbia and, in some cases, United States territories. State-by-state information may appear as data tables, state rankings, state profiles, and maps.

These resources provide insight into what other states are doing regarding child care and early education policy; they also offer a national picture of key areas of interest, such as data on the early childhood workforce across the United States.

Resources with state-by-state information can be accessed by clicking on “[Resources with Data from All States](#)” under the “Research Library” tab (figure 2). You can also search for data from individual states with the “Location” filter (figure 1).



Try filtering by “[Interactive Tools](#)” under “Resource Type” (figure 1)—these resources are often visual representations of data and often in the form of a map with clickable geographic regions.

How Can Research Connections Help You Explore Policy Topics?

Research Connections pulls together child care and early education research published in journals as well as non-journal research publications—such as government or nonprofit reports, white papers, and briefs—to help form a bigger picture of policy topics.

For resources related to the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) check out the [CCDF Connections](#) section of this guide.

Helpful Starting Points

When in doubt, **try choosing a topic**. You can find our full list of topics under the “[Explore Our Topics](#)” tab. Each topic is also broken into subtopics. Click on the topic or subtopic to link directly to a pre-filtered search. Like going to the right shelf in a physical library, using a topic can be a helpful starting point to narrow your search.

Hot Topics

The following topics and subtopics touch on current conversations in the CCEE field:

- [The CCEE Workforce](#)
 - [CCEE Workforce Physical and Mental Health](#)
 - [CCEE Workforce Wages, Benefits, and Job Satisfaction](#)
- [Children’s Mental Health](#)
- [Child Care Subsidies](#)
- [Equity in CCEE](#)
- [Quality Ratings and Improvement](#)

Resources with Data from All States

[Resources with data from all states](#) can be helpful starting points to get a good understanding of the national landscape and what other states are doing in a given area. To narrow your search further, use the search bar or the filters on the left side of the screen (figure 1).

You may also filter for these resources by clicking “Yes” under the “State-By-State Info” filter on the left of the “Search Results” page (figure 3).

Note: If you are looking for data from a particular state or states, first try searching for the state in the search bar or by clicking those states in the “Location” tab on the left side of the screen (figure 1).

Resource Type	+
Topical Classification	+
Location	+
Grant	+
Author(s)	+
Has translation?	+
State-By-State Info	–
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (551)	
<input type="checkbox"/> No (38777)	
Publisher(s)	+
Funder(s)	+

Figure 3. Filter list with State-By-State Info tab highlighted.

Short Reads

The resources in the library’s “Short Reads” collection translate research findings into short, easy-to-use formats and are designed for child care and early education leaders and their teams.

When you are looking for answers to a policy question, it may be helpful to see if any [Short Reads resources](#) address the issue. Our librarians add new resources through the year.¹

1. Short Reads are produced through the Child Care and Early Education Research and Policy Analysis (CCEEPRA) project funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Child Care and Development Fund Connections

The library contains many resources relevant to state and territory CCDF Plans. The links below match some Research Connections topical searches to key themes of CCDF Plan requirements and may be helpful starting points in your search:

Section 1: Define Leadership and Coordination with Relevant Systems and Funding Sources

- Resources that may inform required [coordination and collaboration](#) processes between Lead Agencies and relevant systems and funding sources to expand accessibility and continuity of care:
 - [Service delivery](#) resources cover the delivery of CCEE and other related services and include resources about CCEE data systems.
 - [Financing and funding](#) resources provide information on CCEE financing and funding, including funded areas, funding mechanisms, and sources of funding.
 - [School readiness](#) resources discuss the readiness of parents, schools, and communities for formal schooling and the transition from CCEE programs to formal schooling.

Section 2: Promote Family Engagement through Outreach and Consumer Education

- Resources on how parents [select child care arrangements](#) may help inform consumer education outreach. Resources include helpful information on maintaining and enhancing consumer education websites.
 - [Child characteristics](#) resources cover children’s demographic characteristics, child development processes and outcomes, and influencing factors.
 - [Child development and school readiness](#) resources address aspects of children’s development and its measurement as they relate to CCEE, including resources that relate children’s development to their readiness for school.
 - [Parents and child development](#) resources cover parents and families using CCEE services.

Section 3: Provide Stable Child Care Financial Assistance to Families

- [Subsidy](#) resources address descriptions of policies covering families who receive subsidies and providers who accept subsidy payments.

Section 4: Ensure Equal Access to Child Care for Low-Income Children

- [CCEE market rate](#) resources provide information on child care market rate surveys and the price of child care to consumers.
- [Access and coverage](#) resources provide information on aspects of CCEE policies related to access and coverage.

Section 5: Establish Standards and Monitoring Processes to Ensure the Health and Safety of Child Care Settings

- [CCEE policy](#) resources discuss various CCEE policies, including those about licensing, regulation, and standards, as well as economic and social policies as the policy context:
 - [Licensing and regulation](#) resources cover CCEE licensing and regulation policies and include resources on state policy descriptions and the effects of policies on providers. This section may help inform policies for licensing and monitoring providers. It also contains resources on comprehensive background checks.
 - [Standards](#) resources address CCEE policies about CCEE standards, including states' early learning standards and professional development standards.
 - [Equality and equity](#) resources cover policies to reduce disparities in access to and quality of CCEE and other services.
 - [Physical and mental health and safety](#) resources discuss health, mental health, and safety policies as they relate to CCEE. These resources may help inform professional development opportunities related to health and safety standards.

Section 6: Recruit and Retain a Qualified and Effective Child Care Workforce

- **Professional development** resources may inform Lead Agencies in refining their professional development framework and investments to improve program quality:
 - [Early education workforce](#) resources address providers as individuals in the CCEE workforce.

Section 7: Support Continuous Quality Improvement

- **Quality investment indicators** resources may help inform the measurable indicators of progress developed for quality investments:
 - [Programs, interventions, and curricula](#) resources provide information on various aspects of CCEE within program, intervention, or curricular settings.
 - [CCEE quality](#) resources describe and measure the quality of CCEE caregiving and teaching practices, settings, providers, and programs.
 - [Research and evaluation method](#) resources address methods and/or processes to conduct research and evaluate programs in the CCEE field.

Resource Types

The library categorizes all its contents by resource type. These types can vary from traditional research resources (reports and papers, executive summaries, etc.) to “grey literature,” or less traditional resources, such as memos, interactive tools, fact sheets, and white papers. When answering policy questions, you may find it helpful to look for resources in one of the following categories.



Consider the **quality** of the resource you're looking at. Who published it? Has it been peer reviewed? Does it draw from a small sample size or have any potential bias?

Check out our research tool [Assessing Research Quality](#) for a more detailed guide.

Fact Sheets and Briefs

These resources are available to the public and do not require a login or subscription to access. They typically highlight a few key facts and are often written with a general audience in mind (i.e., contain less jargon). These resources also frequently contain helpful graphs and figures.

Executive Summaries

Executive summaries highlight and link to key findings and high-level research and can help you quickly understand important takeaways from longer documents.

Interactive Tools

Interactive tools may present data visually and allow you to compare data across states. These resources are web based, offer individualized access to statistical or policy data, and often provide data in the form of a map with clickable geographic regions.

Literature Reviews

These resources often provide helpful overviews of existing research in a given field and can be especially helpful for broadening your base knowledge of a topic. When looking for answers to a broad policy question, literature reviews can help you narrow your search to find more specific answers.

Reports and Papers

The resources in this category are often longer and may require additional steps to access (i.e., a subscription or purchase). These frequently report on studies and will contain the hypothesis, describe the methodology, and discuss the results. When searching in this category, it may be helpful to also filter for reports and papers that have been peer reviewed.

- » A **peer-reviewed resource** has been reviewed by experts in the field to ensure the report's findings and methodology are sound.

Ask a Librarian

If you are struggling with a research question or need help navigating the Research Connections library, you are welcome to reach out to one of our librarians for assistance.

Email the team at ResearchConnections@icf.com, and we will do our best to help you with your search.

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Child Care & Early Education
RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

Promoting high-quality child care and early education research
and informing policy through free access to thousands of publications