



# Center for Children & Families

## Research Brief State Strategies to Support Early Care and Education Partnerships

by Diane Schilder

State governments' role in determining early care and education policies has increased substantially in recent years.<sup>1-2</sup> The federal government has given states increased authority over child care subsidy decisions and has granted states more flexibility to use welfare funds for child care.<sup>3-4</sup> Furthermore, 46 states now fund prekindergarten (preK) programs.<sup>5</sup> In light of these changes, state leaders are in important positions to make decisions that can affect how early care and education services are delivered.<sup>6-7</sup>

The largest publicly funded early care and education programs are subsidized child care, Head Start, and preK. While these programs serve similar target populations, differences exist in the hours of operation, goals, services provided, and licensing standards.<sup>8-9</sup> Head Start and preK are generally offered on a part-day, part-year basis and are designed to improve children's school readiness. By contrast, subsidized child care is designed to support parents who are working or attending job training. Thus, it is generally available on a full-day, full-year basis. States determine child care licensing standards, which are generally lower in quality than Head Start and preK standards. To address these differences and create seamless high-quality services, many states are now supporting partnerships between child care, Head Start, and preK programs.<sup>10</sup>

To answer questions about early care and education partnerships, researchers at the Center for Children & Families (CC&F) at Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) have engaged in a three-year research project.<sup>11</sup> This brief—one in a series produced from the study—highlights the findings from one aspect of the research. It describes the actions states take to support partnership. (For a detailed description of the study and the findings,



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### Methodology in Brief

To learn about the array of actions state leaders take to support and promote early care and education partnerships, researchers at EDC analyzed data from a dataset representing all 50 states in the country. Researchers interviewed child care administrators, Head Start-state collaboration directors, and state preK directors; analyzed state documents; and confirmed results with state stakeholders. Researchers then analyzed the data to determine how actions vary depending on the state's context, the leader initiating the action, and the goals of the action. The illustrative examples in this brief represent the range of actions taken by all 50 states. The lessons learned represent a synthesis of qualitative interview data with state leaders in which they discussed their state's actions. (see *Early Care and Education Partnerships: State Actions and Local Lessons*.)

### State Strategies

States use a variety of strategies to support early education partnerships. The person who originates the action depends upon the the legal authority granted to administrators in the state. An analysis of qualitative data reveals that governors, legislatures, interagency groups, agencies working together, and, at times, a single state agency or administrator initiates actions to support partnerships.

Most state leaders report that they began their efforts to support partnerships by learning about the range of early education policies, programs, and regulations. The next step states took varies across the states. Some state leaders report that they provided incentives to support partnerships. Other state leaders issued policy guidance. In some cases, different groups within a state concurrently undertook actions. The specific state actions are described in the next section.

## Learn About Existing Programs

"We began by simply sitting down and talking with other state early education leaders and learning more about the array of programs, policies, and practices and how they are similar and different from one another," reports one state child care administrator involved in promoting partnerships between child care and Head Start. This comment represents the perspectives of many state stakeholders.

Many state leaders report that time invested in learning about Head Start, preK, and child care policies and regulations was very valuable. By gaining a complete and accurate understanding of differences in programs' missions, administration of services, eligibility criteria, regulations, and desired outcomes, leaders tailored strategies to the administrative and regulatory structure in the state. Many states began their coordination activities with a series of meetings among key stakeholders. Stakeholders report that these meetings resulted in leaders getting to know one another, building trust, learning about similarities and differences across programs, and dispelling myths.

Lessons learned:

- Engage state leaders with responsibility over the specific programs that are affected by partnership issues.
- Involve outside consultants or technical assistance providers. Such outside assistance can be useful in ensuring all the voices at the table are objectively heard.
- Ensure that each key stakeholder gains an in-depth understanding of the administration, funding, regulation, and oversight of the each early care and education program in the state.
- Ensure that the process allows adequate time for learning about how the different programs operate and for addressing barriers.

## Create State-level Entities

State-level early education entities contribute to greater coordination of services at the state and provider levels, according to some state leaders. Some states have reorganized agencies, some have developed formal coordinating bodies, and others have created ad hoc committees. Currently about half of the state child care administrators in the United States coordinate with the state Department of Education on a preschool or preK initiative. And, nearly all lead child care agencies collaborate with Head Start.<sup>12</sup>

Lessons learned:

- Ensure that the coordinating body focuses on a vision of high-quality, accessible early care and education with comprehensive services. Some stakeholders cautioned that creating a new state entity in the absence of such a vision can hinder rather than help partnerships.
- Create processes to ensure actions are regularly evaluated for effectiveness and adapted to changing policies, decision-makers, and funding levels.
- Engage leaders across state agencies, the federal government, and local providers to ensure that ongoing actions incorporate federal, state, and local perspectives.

## Enact Laws

One of the most important actions to support partnerships is requiring partnerships through legislation, according to many state stakeholders. One state leader notes, "The reason our state has so many partnerships is simple—our state requires partnerships for early education providers to receive state preK funds. It is in the legislation. The governor and the legislature wanted to ensure that all children in this state could have access to services; they also wanted to improve child care quality. So, they mandated partnerships and you can see the results."

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), 36 states have laws aimed at coordinating the child care system with the early education system. NCSL notes that statutes can have a substantial effect on policies, although laws are only one way to affect policy.<sup>13</sup>

State leaders report that funding for newly legislated early education initiatives comes from multiple sources such as state General Revenue funds, tobacco funds, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds, or gaming fees.

Lessons learned:

- Engage strong champions to successfully pass and sustain laws supporting early education partnerships. The support of a legislative leader and the governor, as well as leaders representing child care, preK, and Head Start, is important.
- Spend time educating key policy makers about the benefits of partnership. State stakeholders reported that this effort can be critical in garnering support.
- Leverage multiple funding streams to ensure legislative initiatives are sustained over time.

## Issue New Policies or Policy Guidance

Policies or guidance that clarifies the state or county stance on fiscal issues or quality requirements can support partnerships, according to state child care

administrators and Head Start-state collaboration directors. Some states have issued new guidance to extend the child care subsidy eligibility period for children served through child care/Head Start partnerships. Some states with county-administered services have issued guidance to clarify state policies for county offices. Other states have issued guidance to clarify state positions regarding reimbursement rates or oversight.

The procedure for issuing new policies or policy guidance depends upon each state's laws. In some states, secretaries of agencies issue such clarification after a public hearing process. In other states, an administrator can initiate policy clarifications.

Lessons learned:

- Examine the policy barriers from the local perspectives to ensure that the new policy or guidance addresses issues that are of greatest concern. Some state leaders reported that they issued new policies or guidance to address questions raised by child care, preK, or Head Start providers.
- In states with a county administered child care subsidy system, ensure that county-level child care staff fully understand the new state policy or guidance and create mechanisms to ensure consistency of interpretations across the state.
- Regularly communicate with leaders representing child care, Head Start, and preK. State leaders reported the importance of having providers fully understand state-level decision-making processes, the reasons for decisions, and the guidance or policies that are issued.

## Create Intergovernmental Agreements

Intergovernmental agreements can support and promote partnerships by ensuring stakeholders are in agreement about roles, responsibilities, and specific action steps.

Stakeholders report that the process of developing intergovernmental agreements can be as valuable as the actual documents. In creating the agreements, stakeholders learn about the regulations affecting other early education programs and together determine the specific actions needed.

Intergovernmental agreements address a variety of

issues. Some describe how state agencies plan to coordinate early education training, others describe roles and responsibilities in monitoring programs. Still others create monetary partnership incentives to ensure all providers in partnership meet comparable quality standards. Intergovernmental agreements can ensure that relevant stakeholders at the federal, state, and local levels provide consistent communication about the activities and actions related to partnerships. Most agreements articulate the roles and responsibilities of different agencies in supporting and overseeing early education partnerships.

The individuals who sign the agreements represent those with decision-making authority over the services being coordinated. Intergovernmental agreements from states with devolved decision making often include county administrators.

Lessons learned:

- Use interagency agreements as a tool for articulating the roles and responsibilities of early education leaders in supporting partnerships.
- Include officials with authority for early care and education decisions. Some agreements are signed by both federal and state officials, others are between state agencies, and still others are between state agencies and state associations.

## Provide Incentives to Partnering Programs

The incentives states provide to programs can encourage and sustain partnership efforts, according to state leaders. Incentives are often created by legislation, articulated through administrative rules, or established through intergovernmental agreements. State leaders describe the following examples of financial incentives and support.

Multiple state leaders have created a grant system to encourage programs to partner. Partnering programs can apply for state grant funds to support their partnership efforts. In some states grant funds may also cover the



cost of child care for a designated number of children, in others, the grants offer startup funds for new equipment and supplies or facility improvement. Some states offer both.

Several states have issued requests for proposals (RFPs) and specified in the solicitation that applicants receive additional points for partnering. Several states have created new programs that strongly encourage or even require partnering to participate. These programs are largely a result of legislation.

Some states have increased reimbursement rates for partnering providers that meet heightened quality standards. Leaders in states with tiered reimbursement rates report that child care providers view the increased reimbursement rates as an incentive to partnering. They also view the partnerships as assisting them in meeting higher quality standards. Some states also designate child care subsidy slots to be used for children in partnerships, by developing contracts with Head Start to receive state child care subsidies. States also have developed sample contracts that can be used by providers in partnerships.

Incentive funding for early education partners can offset the costs providers incur in meeting Head Start performance standards. State leaders report that such funding can motivate providers to engage in partnerships, and can enhance the quality of services.

The creation or oversight of the incentives depends upon the nature of the incentives and the administration of services in the state. In some states, the legislature has enacted laws that provide incentives. In others a single administrator has issued policy guidance that creates an incentive.

Lesson learned:

- View incentives as a way to stimulate the creation, maintenance, and growth of partnerships. Incentives can

encourage child care, Head Start, and preK providers to invest time and energy in building strong partnerships.

- Ensure that incentives address state-specific barriers to partnership. Leaders in states with different eligibility requirements for programs reported that extending eligibility for children in partnerships provides an incentive by ensuring that children can maintain enrollment in a program for a longer period of time. Several state leaders reported that monetary incentives can enable child care providers to meet Head Start's more rigorous standards, thereby improving the quality of services children and families receive.

## Align Professional Development Efforts

Aligning professional development requirements can minimize differences in qualifications between child care, Head Start, and preK teachers. Many states are exploring ways to coordinate professional development requirements thereby making partnering easier for providers. Some state leaders reported that differences in requirements can create barriers to providers' attempts to partner.

To address these challenges, some states are seeking to align staff requirements to be used across early childhood programs. Another strategy states are using is to engage higher education leaders in discussions about effective teacher preparation programs. Some are encouraging higher education to offer courses that integrate their state's early childhood education guidelines/standards.

Lessons learned:

- Bring state early education leaders together with higher education to examine programs.
- Collaboratively apply for federal professional development funding to advance teacher preparation.
- Launch professional development incentives that engage preK, Head Start, and child care.
- Examine staff qualifications and regulations across programs and seek to align them.

## Support and Access Training and Technical Assistance

Training and technical assistance (T/TA) services and resources can help partnerships develop and grow. Some state leaders reported that they are using existing T/TA services to support partnerships such as those provided by child care resource and referral agencies and networks, and state and regional T/TA providers. Others develop new services to ensure that providers understand



the mechanics of partnerships. And, other states access and disseminate materials produced by existing T/TA providers.

Individuals involved in sponsoring and/or providing T/TA about partnerships include: the Head Start-state collaboration director, state administrators such as child care administrator or director of the agency that oversees child care, the president of the Head Start Association, the PreK director, or chief state school officer, resource and referral agencies, and other existing technical assistance providers as well as federal staff.

Lessons learned:

- Secure T/TA to build the capacity of state and local administrators and providers engaged in partnerships around issues of planning, managing, and financing.
- For states with devolved decision making, involve community representatives in T/TA regarding partnerships.

## Sponsor and Use Research

Partnership research and materials can inform states' efforts to support partnerships and influence their development and implementation. Some states have commissioned studies and surveys and reviewed practices at the community level to determine how they can best support partnerships. Through this work, the states are identifying barriers to partnership, examining the ways in which partnerships work best, and devising strategies to address challenges. Other states have produced documents about how child care, Head Start, and preK can all provide comprehensive, high quality services. Still other states regularly disseminate information about partnerships.

For many states, Head Start-state collaboration directors have been responsible for overseeing the research and dissemination activities. As such, Head Start collaboration grant funds have also played a key role in research and dissemination activities. In other states, Child Care Bureau research grants are used to support the research activities. In most states, representatives from the broader early education community have been involved in designing and/or disseminating the research and materials.

Lessons learned:

- Conduct or sponsor research on state actions and use the findings to tailor state strategies to the unique state and community contexts and existing needs.

- Disseminate research findings and materials regularly to stakeholders at all levels to ensure those engaged in partnerships learn about partnership issues and actions.
- Translate research findings into strategies that local providers can use.

## Conclusion

The range of actions indicates that there is no set blueprint that states follow in supporting early care and education partnerships. Implemented in accordance with a state's current context and needs, each action provides an example of how states are working to address fragmentation of services and support early education partnerships.

## End Notes

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## Selected Organizations Providing State Early Care and Education Information

**Kids Count**—a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children in the U.S. Provides state-by-state statistics on economic, educational, and social well-being of children in the US. Contact information: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 410-547-6600, Address: 4701 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202. Website: <http://www.aecf.org/kidscount>

**Center for Law and Social Policy**—a national nonprofit organization conducts research, policy analysis, and technical assistance on issues related to economic security for low-income families with children. Lead contact on state early education policy issues: Rachel Schumacher, 202-906-8000, Address: The Center for Law and Social Policy, 1015 15th Street, NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20005. Website: [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org)

**Council of Chief State School Officers**—a national nonprofit organization composed of public officials who lead the departments responsible for elementary and secondary education. In representing the chief education officers, CCSSO works on behalf of the state agencies that serve pre-K—12 students throughout the nation. Contact information: Jana Martella, 202-336-7057, Address: One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001-1431. Website: [www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org)

**Education Commission of the States (ECS)**—an interstate compact created to improve public education by facilitating the exchange of information, ideas, and experiences among state policymakers and education leaders. ECS disseminates news and information, conducts policy research, sponsors policy conferences, and provides technical assistance. Contact information: Education Commission of the States, 303-299-3600, Address: 700 Broadway, #1200, Denver, Colorado 80203-3460. Website: [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org)

**Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC)**—a national nonprofit organization with many decades of experience providing state-level consultation, training and technical assistance to state leaders, and conducting research on early care and education issues. Lead contact: Sheila Skiffington, Center for Children & Families, 617-618-2347. Email: [sskiffington@edc.org](mailto:sskiffington@edc.org), Address: Center for Children & Families, Education Development Center, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02458-1060. Website: [www.ccf.edc.org](http://www.ccf.edc.org)

**National Center for Children in Poverty**—The National Center for Children in Poverty identifies and promotes strategies that prevent child poverty in the United States and that improve the lives of low-income children and their families. NCCP is part of the Mailman School at Columbia University. Contact information: National Center

for Children in Poverty, 646-284-9600, Address: 215 W. 125th Street, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10027. Website: [www.nccp.org](http://www.nccp.org)

**National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCEDL)**—NCEDL is a national early childhood research project supported by the US Department of Education's Institute for Educational Sciences (IES). The Center's research focuses on enhancing the development of children from birth through age eight. Contact information: National Center for Early Development & Learning, Address: FPG Child Development Institute, CB #8185 UNC-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-8185. Website: [www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl)

**The National Conference of State Legislatures**—a bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of the nation's 50 states, its commonwealths, and territories. NCSL provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues. NCSL produces research reports on early care and education partnerships. Contact information: National Conference of State Legislatures, Address: 7700 East First Place, Denver, CO 80230. Tel: 303-364-7700. Website: [www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org)

**The National Child Care Information Center**—a project of the Child Care Bureau, is a national resource that links information and people to complement, enhance, and promote the child care delivery system, working to ensure that all children and families have access to high-quality comprehensive services. Contact information: National Child Care Information Center, 243 Church Street, NW, 2nd Floor, Vienna, VA 22180. Website: [www.nccic.org](http://www.nccic.org)

**The National Institute for Early Education Research**—supports early childhood education initiatives by providing objective, nonpartisan information based on research. The Institute seeks to provide policy makers with timely information addressing the practical problems they face. Contact information: National Institute for Early Education Research, 732-932-4350, Address: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 120 Albany Street, Suite 500, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901. Website: [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org)

**The Trust for Early Education (TEE)**—provides a strong advocacy voice for high quality, voluntary pre-K for all three- and four-year olds. TEE works at the state and federal levels to educate policy makers, the media, and the general public about the potential that preschool offers to improve outcomes for America's young children. Contact information: The Trust for Early Education, 202-293-1245, Address: 1725 K Street, Suite 212, Washington, DC 20006. Website: [www.trustforearlyed.org](http://www.trustforearlyed.org)

## Actions Taken by States to Promote Partnerships

What Action?	Who Initiates?	Why?
Learn about existing programs	State leaders with decision-making authority over early education programs such as administrators or agency leaders	To develop action-oriented strategies tailored to the unique needs of the state's early education providers
Create state-level entities	State legislature and governor enact mandated reorganizations. State decision makers at various levels can create and participate in formal or informal coordinating bodies	To ensure that information about early education programs is effective, coordinated, and consistent across programs
Enact laws	Legislature and governor with support of key early education stakeholders throughout the state	To provide incentives for wide-scale adoption of partnerships
Issue new policies or policy guidance	Depends upon state context, generally state agency directors	To provide guidance across programs that minimizes program differences and clarifies requirements
Create intergovernmental agreements	Individuals with legal authority over programs	To ensure stakeholder agreement about roles, responsibilities, and actions
Provide incentives to partnering programs	Ranges from legislatures to individual decision-makers depending upon the specific incentives and state context	To stimulate creation and growth of partnerships and to improve the quality of partnership services
Align professional development efforts	Higher education agency leaders and other state leaders	To eliminate differences in professional development requirements across programs
Support and access Training/Technical Assistance (T/TA)	State administrators and federal and state T/TA providers	To provide training and consultation about effective strategies to support, develop, and maintain partnerships
Sponsor or use research	State administrators, state early education associations, universities, and other eligible organizations with support from funding agencies	To learn about barriers and effective practices to improve quality and access

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## About the brief

This brief on early care and education partnerships is the third in a series produced by the Center for Children & Families (CC&F). Diane Schilder wrote the brief. Dr. Schilder serves as a senior research associate and Principal Investigator of early care and education studies at the Center for Children & Families. The research is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Child Care Bureau (Grant Number 90YE037). Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders.

CC&F briefs provide information on a range of issues affecting young children and their families. CC&F seeks to strengthen programs by bringing together research and practice with the aim of improving the lives of children and families. Our briefs serve as a vehicle for informing research and practice.

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