

CHILD CARE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Overview

ACF supports low-income working families by providing funding and implementing policies intended to increase access to affordable, quality child care and early education programs serving children birth through age 13.

ACF's [Office of Child Care](#) administers the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), which is authorized under the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG) enacted under the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990. The CCDBG Act was most recently reauthorized in 2014. CCDF made \$8.2 billion available to states, territories, and tribes in fiscal year 2019. CCDF is a block grant to state, territory, and tribal governments that provides support for children and their families with paying for child care that will fit their needs and will support children's development and well-being. CCDF also provides funding to improve the quality of care by supporting efforts such as child care licensing, quality improvement systems to help programs meet higher standards, and training and education for child care workers.

ACF establishes and oversees the implementation of child care policies, and provides guidance and technical assistance to states, tribes, and territories as they administer CCDF programs. ACF supports a number of research and evaluation activities as well as learning from a broad array of other activities such as performance management, technical assistance on research and evaluation of CCDF policies, stakeholder and expert engagement, site monitoring, and continuous quality improvement.

Past Research and Evaluation

A growing body of research on child care and early education has highlighted the benefits of subsidies and investments in the quality of services received by families and children from low-income households. Research has shown positive outcomes of subsidy policies⁵, especially those that promote employment and economic outcomes⁶ and increase the

ACF's Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) performance measures related to Child Care:

Maintain the proportion of children served through Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) child care funding as compared to the number of children in families with income equal to or less than 85% of State Median Income - *Performance Measure 2A* ([p. 92](#))

Increase the number of states that implement Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) that meet high quality benchmarks - *Performance Measure 2B* ([p. 92](#))

Increase the number or percentage of low-income children receiving CCDF subsidies who are enrolled in high quality care settings - *Performance Measure 2C* ([p. 92](#))

Increase the number or percentage of licensed child care providers serving children receiving CCDF subsidies - *Performance Measure 2D* ([p. 93](#))

⁵ Loeb, S., et al. (2003). Child care in poor communities: Early learning effects of type, quality, and stability. *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series* (9954). <http://papers.nber.org/papers/w9954.pdf>; De Schipper, J., et al. (2008). Children's attachment relationships with day care caregivers: Associations with positive caregiving and the child's temperament. *Social Development*, 17(3), 454-470. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.2007.00448.x>

⁶ Forry, N. D. (2007). *The impact of child care subsidies on child care problems, child care-related work disruptions, and mothers' desire to switch care*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Maryland, College Park; Ha, Y., & Meyer, D. R. (2010). Child care subsidy patterns: Are exits related to economic setbacks or economic successes? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32(3), 346-355.



stability of child care subsidy receipt by allowing receipt of subsidy for a longer period of time without the need for eligibility redetermination, as well policies that streamline administrative practices that affect access to subsidies for families who are at-risk.⁷

Research demonstrating the link between subsidies, quality child care and early education, and positive child and family outcomes⁸ has encouraged efforts to enhance early care and education programs through investments of the CCDF quality set aside funds. Quality child care and early education programs are a critical resource for families, support young children’s development in a variety of domains⁹, and assist parents in accessing comprehensive services for their families.¹⁰ Research in this area focuses on early learning standards, improving quality in care settings, innovative interventions, and supporting parental employment through access to high quality care.

Recent studies such as the National Survey of Early Care and Education ([NSECE:2012](#); [NSECE:2019](#)) have contributed to our understanding of the child care and early education system in the United States. The NSECE:2012 provided the first national picture in more than 20 years of the demand for, and supply of, child care and early education, and of the early childhood workforce. This occurred during a time of great expansion in the funding of early childhood programs, federal and state supports for improvements in the quality of those programs, and availability of subsidies for low-income families to access care and education for their children. Data from the NSECE has allowed for analyses of the interactions between the availability of care that meets families’ needs and preferences, and the demand for care of families with young children that will meet their care needs in order to participate in employment and in support of their children’s development and learning. Data from the NSECE: 2019 will permit analyses to track changes in child care and early education availability and use in the seven years between the two survey cohorts.

Projects funded under the child care subsidy policy research portfolio are meant to increase our knowledge about the efficacy of child care subsidy policies and programs in enhancing employment and economic self-sufficiency of low-income families, and in improving quality in child care and early education settings to support learning and development of children from birth through age 13.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2009.10.004>

⁷ Forry, N. D., et al. (2013). *Child care subsidy literature review* (OPRE Report #2013-60). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/subsidy_literature_review.pdf.

⁸ Danziger, S. K., et al. (2003). Childcare subsidies and the transition from welfare to work. *National Poverty Center Working Paper Series* (03-11).

http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/working_papers/paper11/03-11.pdf; Brooks, F., et al. (2002). Impacts of child care subsidies on family and child well-being. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 17, 498-511. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.07.005>; Michalopoulos, C. (2010). *Effects of reducing child care subsidy copayments in Washington State: Final report* (OPRE Report #2011-2). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/cc/ccs_strategies/reports/washington/ccse_washington.pdf; Michalopoulos, C., et al. (2010). *The effect of child care subsidies for moderate-income families in Cook County, Illinois: Final report* (OPRE Report #2011-3). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/cc/ccs_strategies/reports/cook_county_illinois/cook_county.pdf.

⁹ Burchinal, M., et al. (2016). Quality thresholds, features, and dosage in early care and education: Secondary data analyses of child outcomes [Special issue]. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 81(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/mono.12248>

¹⁰ National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team. (2015). *Measuring predictors of quality in early care and education settings in the National Survey of Early Care and Education* (OPRE Report #2015-93). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/measuring_predictors_of_quality_mpoq_in_the_nsece_final_092315_b508.pdf.



Research and Evaluation Stakeholders

In setting CCDF research and evaluation priorities, ACF takes into account legislative requirements and Congressional interests; the interest and needs of ACF, HHS, and Administration leadership; program office staff and leadership; ACF partners; the populations served; researchers; and other stakeholders. ACF routinely interacts with these stakeholders through a variety of engagement activities. These activities inform our ongoing research and evaluation planning processes.

Who

- State, territory, tribal, local, and non-profit CCDF administrators and staff
- CCDF training and technical assistance providers
- The child care and early education workforce and providers in multiple settings (e.g., center- and home-based providers)
- Children and families served by CCDF
- Federal partners in HHS and other agencies, such as the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Institute of Education Sciences at the Department of Education (ED/IES)
- Researchers and policy experts
- National organizations, such as the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Child Care Aware of America (CCA), the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) National Learning Network, the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA), Ascend at the Aspen Institute, and the Society for Research on Child Development (SRCD)
- Partners in the fields of early care and education, education, child development, economics, demography, social work, and other related fields

How

- Conferences and meetings, such as the National Research Conference on Early Childhood (NRCEC) and the Child Care and Early Education Policy Research Consortium (CCEEPRC) Annual Meeting
- CCDF State and Territory Administrators Meeting (STAM) and other meetings with grantees (CCDBG Implementation Grants; Child Care Policy Research Partnerships; Child Care Dissertation Grants)
- Engagement with CCDF training and technical assistance networks
- Surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other activities conducted as part of research and evaluation studies
- Structured mechanisms for broad stakeholder engagement, such as roundtables and technical work groups

Examples of Broad Questions

1. What are the effects of implementing the changes introduced by the 2014 CCDBG reauthorization?
2. How is the CCDF program supporting quality improvements in child care?



3. What policy and programmatic levers are most related to program supply and access? And quality?
4. What are effective approaches to supporting the early childhood workforce and their professional development in order to deliver better quality teaching and caregiving?
5. How is the licensing system supporting early care and education quality and positive outcomes for children, families, and key stakeholders (e.g. providers, licensing agencies)?

Examples of Recent and Ongoing Research and Evaluation Activities

	Broad Question				
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
CCDBG Implementation Research and Evaluation Grants	X		X		
CCDF Policies Database	X				
Child Care and Early Education Policy and Research Analysis (CCEPRA)	X	X	X	X	X
Child Care Policy Research Partnership Grants	X		X		
Culture of Continuous Learning (CCL)				X	
Home-based Child Care Supply and Quality			X	X	
Infants and Toddlers Teacher and Caregiver Competencies (ITTC)				X	
Initial Effects of CCDBG Reauthorization		X			
National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)			X		
Study of Coaching Practices in ECE Settings (SCOPE)				X	
Understanding the Role of Licensing in ECE (TRLECE)					X
Variations in Implementation of Quality Interventions (VIQI)				X	
We Grow Together				X	

- **[CCDBG Implementation Research and Evaluation Grants](#)**: provide CCDF Lead Agencies the opportunity to plan for and evaluate the initiatives and policies that they are implementing in response to the goals of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014 (#1), including how new policies are affecting access to programs by families who have low incomes and receive subsidies. b. (#3)
- **[CCDF Policies Database](#)**: develops data files annually of CCDF policies in all states and territories and makes these accessible to analysts and researchers for secondary analyses and linking with state administrative data. Analysts and researchers can explore the relationships between policies and outcomes related to children, families, and child care and early education providers. (#1)
- **[Child Care and Early Education Policy and Research Analysis \(CCEPRA\) Project](#)**: supports research activities that address high-priority early care and education issues and questions while also building the capacity for new research and evaluation efforts. Recent CCEPRA research activities include:
 - Developing a literature review of research on subsidy stability and the relationship to key outcomes for families who are low-income. (#1)
 - Describing state quality improvement efforts, including refinements to states’ Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) and engagement of home-based providers in quality improvement initiatives. (#2)



- Analyzing CCDF State and Territory Plans, [ACF-801 Child Care Monthly Case Record Data](#), and [ACF-218 Annual Quality Progress Reports](#), focusing on understanding the interactions between the level of generosity of child care subsidy policies and outcomes related to children, families, and providers. This effort also produced a review of the research literature on access to child care and early education using a family-focused definition of access. (#3)
 - Examining professional development systems for the child care and early education workforce and how these are built to increase competencies of workers and create career pathways. (#4)
 - Developing a conceptual framework of licensing as a support for quality in child care and early education programs and to identify relevant research questions. (#5)
- **[Child Care Policy Research Partnership Grants](#)**: support research on child care policy issues conducted by state agencies, researchers, and other partner organizations in.¹¹ (#1) Some of these grants study how specific policies are related to the supply of quality child care and early education and access to those programs by families receiving subsidies. For example, one study examines policies related to provider reimbursement rates that vary by the level of quality of the program. (#3)
 - **[Culture of Continuous Learning \(CCL\)](#)**: used the Breakthrough Series Collaborative model to test the feasibility of implementation of this model to create a culture of continuous learning in child care and Head Start programs. (#4)
 - **[Home-based Child Care Supply and Quality](#)**: seeks to identify and better understand the key components of quality and supply in home-based child care, including research on the decrease of home-based care supply and the factors associated with programs leaving the care market. (#3) This project also looks at models of engagement of home-based providers in professional development and quality improvement initiatives, and examines which approaches are most successful in increasing qualifications and retention of these providers. (#4)
 - **[Infants and Toddlers Teacher and Caregiver Competencies \(ITTCC\)](#)**: explores approaches to the implementation and assessment of competencies and builds a conceptual foundation for measurement, research, and evaluation in order to support ACF's efforts to improve the quality of care for infants and toddlers in community-based child care and Early Head Start. (#4)
 - **[Initial Effects of CCDBG Reauthorization](#)**: conducted an analysis of CCDF administrative data, CCDF State and Territories' plans, and Quality Performance Reports to assess how states are investing their quality set-aside dollars to improve quality. (#2)
 - **[National Survey of Early Care and Education \(NSECE\)](#)**: documents the nation's utilization and availability of early care and education (as well as school-age care) in order to deepen the understanding of the extent to which families' needs and preferences coordinate well with provider's offerings and constraints. Analyses of NSECE data are creating profiles of child care and early education supply in communities and the demand for programs based on characteristics of households in those communities. (#3)

¹¹ Partnerships must include the CCDF State Lead Agency and at least one research group.



- **[Study of Coaching Practices in ECE Settings \(SCOPE\)](#)**: studies how coaching practices are implemented in early care and education (ECE) classrooms serving children supported by Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidies or Head Start grants, how core features of coaching vary by key contextual factors, and which core coaching features are ripe for more rigorous evaluation. (#4)
- **[Understanding the Role of Licensing in ECE \(TRLECE\)](#)**: looks at the relationship between licensing standards, monitoring, and administrative practices and its impact on the effectiveness of licensing systems in supporting quality of child care and early education. Work includes secondary analyses of licensing data, case studies, and formative data collection to identify questions of interest to licensing agencies in need of new research to improve the licensing systems across states and localities. (#5)
- **[Variations in Implementation of Quality Interventions \(VIQI\)](#)**: tests how different levels and features of classroom quality relate to children’s developmental outcomes. The study looks at the relationship of initial child care and early education classroom quality to changes in observed quality and children’s outcomes through a rigorous experimental design. The study is testing the implementation of a quality initiative encompassing training of teachers and caregivers in curricula that address the key features of instructional quality hypothesized to affect children’s outcomes. (#4)
- **[We Grow Together](#)**: seeks to develop and test a professional development model aimed at improving teachers’ responsiveness and support for infant/toddler development, based on the Quality of Caregiver-Child Interactions for Infants and Toddlers (Q-CCIIT) measure. (#4)

Future Directions for Research and Evaluation

The broad questions listed above will continue to drive much of ACF’s research and evaluation activity in this area. Future activities will also be informed by emerging findings from ongoing research and evaluation activities, other learning activities, and continued engagement with CCDF stakeholders.

Examples of activities planned for the next few years include:

- Conducting follow-up surveys with the child care and early education providers (center- and home-based) and the workforce who participated in the NSECE 2019 study on their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath
- Analyzing data from the NSECE 2012 and 2019 surveys to track changes in demand for care, supply of care, and access to care to support parents’ and children’s needs
- Identifying and evaluating strategies to retain the early childhood workforce working in center- and home-based settings
- Documenting and evaluating consumer education efforts in states and localities to better understand parents’ use of information to make choices about care for their children
- Synthesizing the evidence from ongoing descriptive and evaluation studies on changes in subsidy policies and new investments in quality initiatives and related outcomes for families, children and care providers

