

CHILD CARE

State Early Care and Education Updates 2015

December 2015

In 2015, a number of states took important steps forward to expand access to affordable, high-quality early care and education. However, a few states took steps backward or missed opportunities to make progress. And all states, as well as the federal government, will need to make additional investments to ensure families have the child care and early education that parents need to work and that children need for a strong start.

- **Alabama's** legislature, with strong support from Governor Robert Bentley, increased funding in the Education Trust Fund Budget for the state's voluntary First Class Pre-K program by \$10 million for the 2015-16 school year. This additional funding, together with funding through the federal Preschool Development Grant awarded to the state, supports 202 new classrooms and allows 3,600 more children to participate in the program. The expansion brings total funding for the program to \$48.5 million and increases the percentage of four-year-olds in the state able to participate from 13 percent to 19 percent.¹
- **Arizona's** FY 2016 state budget cut \$4 million in state funding from child care assistance. While federal money will be used to offset this cut, the failure to maintain state funding means that about 1,000 additional children per month will not receive child care assistance.²
- **Arkansas** increased funding for its Arkansas Better Chance prekindergarten program by \$3 million as part of state general improvement fund legislation. It was the first increase in funding for the program since 2008.³
- **California** Governor Jerry Brown signed a budget that includes more than \$300 million in increased investments in early learning and child development. This increase includes an additional \$53 million to provide child care assistance to 6,800 more children; an additional \$46.3 million for 9,530 more preschool slots (7,030 full-day slots and 2,500 part-day preschool slots with a priority for children with exceptional needs); and an additional \$30 million for the Early Education Program for Infants and Toddlers with Exceptional Needs. It also includes \$61 million to increase reimbursement rates for preschool providers by 5 percent; \$44 million to increase reimbursement rates for child care providers by 4.5 percent; \$18 million to increase reimbursement rates for license-exempt child care providers from 60 percent to 65 percent of the rate paid to licensed family child care providers; and \$6 million to increase the part-day preschool program rate by 1 percent (with a requirement for these programs to provide parents with information about local resources for screening and treatment of developmental disabilities, and to provide teachers with training on behavioral strategies and targeted interventions for children). In addition, the budget provides \$24.2 million for quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) grants to improve the quality of programs serving infants and toddlers.⁴ Finally, the budget provides funding to enable the Department of Social Services to increase the frequency of inspections of child care facilities from once every five years to once every three years, beginning in January 2017.⁵

The legislature also passed a bill that would have required, on or before June 30, 2018, all eligible children who were not enrolled in transitional kindergarten to have access to the state preschool program the year before they entered kindergarten, if their parents wished to enroll them.⁶ The governor vetoed the legislation, stating that expansion of state preschool should be addressed through the budget process instead.⁷

- **Colorado** increased funding for its child care assistance program to support the implementation of legislative reforms enacted in 2014. These reforms included establishing a statewide floor for county-set income eligibility limits for assistance; requiring counties that set their income limits to qualify for assistance at or below 185 percent of poverty⁸ to allow families to continue receiving assistance up to a higher exit eligibility limit; increasing the maximum length of time parents can receive child care assistance while searching for a job; extending eligibility for child care assistance to parents in postsecondary education and workforce training; reducing copayments for families with incomes up to 100 percent of poverty; aligning the child care assistance program with other public benefit programs to facilitate eligibility determination; and piloting strategies to mitigate the impact of the “cliff effect,” when families lose child care assistance due to a small increase in income. The reforms also included measures to improve provider reimbursement rates, and the additional child care funding in this year’s budget included \$1.3 million for a 1.7 percent rate increase. Between this year’s funding increase and the increase in the previous legislative session, state child care funding has risen by 115 percent. In addition, the state provided \$338,200 to establish a new micro-loan program designed to increase access to child care in rural and underserved areas; \$250,000 for grants to improve the health, safety, and quality of family, friend, and neighbor care and, ultimately, increase the supply of family child care in underserved communities; \$750,000 to improve the coordination and provision of family support services; and \$3.7 million for early intervention services to address rapidly growing caseload demands.⁹
- **Florida** provided an additional \$13 million for the Early Steps program, which serves infants and toddlers with developmental disabilities or delays. This additional funding was intended to address a shortfall caused by a rising demand for services; earlier in the year, the Department of Health had eliminated 13 administrative jobs at the Early Steps central program office to close a \$6.9 million deficit in the program. Florida’s 2015-16 budget also provides \$560.5 million for the School Readiness (child care assistance) program, which includes an increase of \$5 million to serve children up to age five who are on the waiting list for assistance. In addition, the budget includes \$10.5 million for an early learning performance pilot program to award child care providers for improving quality.¹⁰
- **Illinois** Governor Bruce Rauner’s administration reduced the income eligibility limit to qualify for child care assistance from 185 percent of poverty to 50 percent of poverty in July 2015,¹¹ and increased copayments for parents receiving child care assistance. In November 2015, the administration raised the income limit to qualify for assistance to 162 percent of poverty. However, the House failed to pass a measure that would have fully restored the income limit to its previous level and prevented the governor from making unilateral changes in the future.¹²
- **Indiana** maintained \$10 million in funding for On My Way Pre-K, a program operating in five pilot counties that provides grants to low-income families so that their four-year-old children can attend high-quality prekindergarten. The state also maintained \$2 million in funding for Early Education Matching Grants, which are awarded through a competitive process to early education programs that are at the top two levels of the state’s quality rating and improvement system; programs use the funds to serve low-income four-year-olds.¹³
- **Iowa** Governor Terry Branstad vetoed legislation that would have increased the income eligibility limit for child care assistance from 145 percent to 150 percent of poverty.¹⁴ The governor signed legislation making some changes to the Statewide Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children, including changes to allow children participating in the program to be transported by school districts to activities associated with the program along with other children; specify that community-based providers may pro-rate the costs of transportation involving children participating in the preschool program and other children; increase the proportion of preschool foundation aid that community-based providers may use for administrative costs from 5 percent to 10 percent; and permit administrative funds to be used for outreach activities and rent for facilities not owned by the school district.¹⁵

- **Kentucky** Governor Steve Beshear signed legislation that expands Kentucky All STARS, the state's quality rating and improvement system for early care and education programs. Under the legislation, all school-based and private early care and education programs will be rated; previously, only licensed child care programs had to participate in the rating system. The legislation also requires that programs be rated based on classroom and instructional quality, administrative and leadership practices, staff qualifications and professional learning, and family and community engagement; previously, ratings were based on a narrower set of criteria (child-to-caregiver ratios, child care staff training, program curriculum, and regulatory compliance). The redesign of the rating system is funded by the federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant awarded to the state in 2013.¹⁶
- **Louisiana's** Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved an increase in reimbursement rates for providers that serve families receiving child care assistance. For example, the rate for center-based care for infants and toddlers will increase from \$18.50 to \$22.50 per day, and the rate for center-based care for preschool-age children will increase from \$17.50 to \$21.50 per day. The boost in rates will be funded using federal child care funds that were left unspent due to a tightening of eligibility criteria and subsequent drop in enrollment in the child care assistance program.¹⁷
- **Maine's** legislature failed to pass a measure that would have provided \$2 million in state Head Start funding, but the final state budget did include \$575,000 in new funds for the program. Legislation that would have provided state funding for child care assistance to fully match and draw down all available federal child care funds passed the House, but failed in the Senate by one vote. A bill to provide \$2.2 million for home visiting services to new parents was held over until next session.¹⁸
- **Massachusetts** Governor Charlie Baker, applying his line-item veto to the FY 2016 budget, tried to cut \$2 million, out of a total of \$12 million, targeted at reducing the waiting list for child care assistance; \$17.6 million, out of a total of \$18.6 million, for full-day kindergarten expansion grants; \$300,000, out of a total of \$1 million, for Reach Out and Read (which partners with medical professionals to give books to children and advice to parents about the importance of reading with their children); the entire \$500,000 for the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (which funds competitive grants to support planning activities in cities, towns, regional school districts, and educational collaboratives to expand preschool opportunities); and the entire \$300,000 for research and assessment of the early education and care subsidy system. The legislature overrode these vetoes and restored funding to the levels in the FY 2016 conference committee budget approved by legislature.¹⁹
- **Michigan's** final FY 2016 budget, which was passed by the legislature and signed by Governor Rick Snyder, maintains the expansion of the state's preschool program (Great Start Readiness Program), by providing \$239.3 million to support 63,000 half-day preschool slots for four-year-olds at a funding level of \$3,625 per slot. The Senate's recommendation to allow programs to serve eligible three-year-olds was not included in the final budget. In addition, the budget includes a \$2.5 million increase for the Early Childhood Block Grant, with the additional funding targeted for home visits to at-risk children and their families; \$1 million for new pilot parent education programs for parents of children ages zero to three; \$1 million in increased funding to support public libraries in expanding their early literacy programming; and \$1.6 million to field test a kindergarten entry assessment. The budget also appropriates \$5.7 million in unspent federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds to hire 39 additional licensing consultants and staff for a total of 105 consultants, which will reduce average caseloads from 150 to 98 child care programs per consultant. Other uses of unspent federal CCDBG funds were approved in the mid-year supplemental to the FY 2015 budget. These uses include \$8 million to allow families to remain continuously eligible for child care assistance for 12 months; \$764,000 to allow families, who can qualify for assistance with incomes up to 120 percent of poverty, to remain eligible at recertification with incomes up to 250 percent of poverty; and \$3.1 million to increase tiered reimbursement rates for higher-quality programs (including an increase in the hourly base rate of \$0.25 for programs with a two-star rating under the state's Great Start to Quality rating and improvement system, \$0.50 for three-star programs, \$0.75 for four-star programs, and \$1.00 for five-star programs). However, the FY 2016 budget reduces state general funds for child care by \$6.2 million, reflecting a continued decline in caseload.²⁰

- **Minnesota's** final budget includes an additional \$48 million for early learning scholarships, bringing total funding to \$104 million for FY 2016-17. Early learning scholarships are awarded to low-income families with three- and four-year-old children, and these families then select a school- or community-based child care or preschool program that participates in the state's quality rating and improvement system, Parent Aware. The additional funding for the scholarships will enable more children to participate and allow an increase in the maximum payment amount for providers who are at the top quality rating level from \$5,000 to \$7,500 per child per year. The final budget also included \$3.5 million for Parent Aware to allow it to expand to more providers and an additional \$10 million for Head Start. In addition, the legislature increased funding for the child care assistance program by \$10.8 million with the aim of reducing the waiting list for assistance by about 1,000 children.²¹ The governor had proposed investing \$343 million in a new prekindergarten program that would have been available to all four-year-olds and would have provided funds through the public schools, which could have contracted with community-based providers to offer prekindergarten. The legislature rejected the governor's proposal and instead increased funding for the early learning scholarships program and provided an additional \$346 million for K-12 schools to increase per-pupil funding.
- **Montana's** legislature provided \$2.4 million in one-time funding to support the state's quality rating and improvement system (STARS to Quality). In addition, the state's policy for its child care assistance program was amended in August to allow families to continue receiving child care assistance for 12 months without having to renew their eligibility.²²
- **Nebraska** Governor Pete Ricketts signed legislation allowing families whose incomes exceed the initial income eligibility limit for child care assistance of 130 percent of poverty at redetermination to continue receiving assistance for up to 24 consecutive months or until their income exceeds 185 percent of poverty.²³ The governor also approved legislation that allocates the increased CCDBG quality set-aside—which under the CCDBG Act of 2014 is raised from 4 percent to 7 percent in FY 2015-16 and FY 2016-17, to 8 percent in FY 2017-18 and FY 2018-19, and to 9 percent in FY2019-20 and subsequent years—and the new 3 percent set-aside for infant/toddler care to the Early Childhood Education Endowment Cash Fund (Sixpence), which supports partnerships between schools and child care providers to improve the quality of care for at-risk infants and toddlers. By reserving the new set-asides for Sixpence, the legislation directs \$2 million to the program.²⁴ In addition, the final budget stabilized funding for Sixpence, which had \$1 million of its funding scheduled to sunset in 2016, and increased funding for incentives and bonuses in the state's child care quality rating and improvement system, Step Up to Quality.²⁵
- **Nevada** provided \$10 million in state matching funds for the federal Preschool Development Grant and \$36.5 million in additional funding to expand full-day kindergarten. The state also made new investments in several education programs that include funding and support for the state preschool program: \$27.2 million in new funding to implement a Read By Grade Three initiative; \$50 million in new funding for Zoom Schools to provide intensive services to more than 17,000 English language learners; and \$50 million in funding for the newly created Victory Schools program, which provides additional wrap-around, family engagement, and other services to underperforming schools in the 20 poorest zip codes in the state. The state established additional regulations on physical activity in child care facilities as well.²⁶
- **New York's** final budget provides small increases for several child care and early education programs, including an additional \$30 million for prekindergarten for three- and four-year-olds (school districts can only create a program for three-year-olds when there is already a program for four-year-olds); \$5 million for the primary state child care assistance program and \$9.2 million for a separate facilitated enrollment child care assistance program; \$3 million for the state's child care quality rating and improvement system; \$4 million for the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) home visiting program; and \$1.5 million for the Advantage After School program.²⁷

- North Carolina's** final budget increased the child care assistance program's reimbursement rates for children birth through age two attending three-, four-, and five-star child care centers and family child care homes in certain counties. The budget also set the copayment for families using part-time care at 75 percent of the copayment for full-time care, partially reversing a 2014 policy change that eliminated pro-rated copayments for part-time care. In addition, the legislature restored the definition of "income unit" that had been in place prior to 2014 so that it once again excludes a nonparent relative caretaker, allowing children living with grandparents and other relative caregivers to continue receiving child care assistance. However, the legislature did not reverse the reduction in the income eligibility limit for child care assistance enacted in 2014, so the income limit remains at 200 percent of poverty for families with children birth through age five and children with special needs and 133 percent of poverty for families with children ages six to 13. In addition, the legislature replaced \$5.2 million in state general funds for child care in FY 2015-16 and \$2.8 million in state general funds in FY 2016-17 with federal TANF funds. The legislature fully funded the \$5 million expansion for the state prekindergarten program authorized by Governor Pat McCrory for FY 2014-15, but it replaced \$16.8 million of state general funds for the program in FY 2015-16 and \$12.3 million in state general funds in FY 2016-17 with federal TANF funds. The state increased funding for the Nurse Family Partnership home visiting program by \$900,000, to a total of \$1.4 million. Finally, the legislature increased the match requirement for Smart Start Local Partnerships from 15 percent (at least 11 percent cash and up to 4 percent in-kind) in FY 2014-15 to 17 percent (at least 12 percent cash and up to 5 percent in-kind) in FY 2015-16 and to 19 percent (at least 13 percent cash and up to 6 percent in-kind) in FY 2016-17.²⁸
- North Dakota** created a voluntary preschool program and appropriated \$3 million over the 2015-17 biennium to fund it.²⁹ The program provides a grant amount of \$2,000 for a four-year-old who qualifies for free school lunches and \$1,000 for a four-year-old who qualifies for reduced-price meals to help cover the cost of early childhood education. The legislation requires school district superintendents to organize a meeting of local public and private early childhood education providers to identify options for providing early education services, coordinating services, and forming a coalition of providers. Early education providers are eligible to receive a grant through the program if they employ teachers who are licensed or approved to teach early childhood education by the education standards and practices board; follow educational standards approved by the superintendent of public instruction; and are in compliance with all municipal and state health, fire, and safety requirements. Grants will be awarded beginning in July 2016.³⁰ The legislature also appropriated \$4,900 for Head Start grants; the original bill would have dedicated \$5 million in state funds to Head Start, but the amount was reduced so that it would fall below the threshold (\$5,000) that would have required it to go through the appropriations process in the Senate.³¹ In addition, the state approved a measure that redefines group child care as caring for eight to 30 children and child care centers as caring for more than 30 children; both group child care and child care centers are required to obtain state licenses.³²
- Ohio's** new investments in child care and early education total nearly \$113 million over the 2016-17 biennium. This amount includes \$40 million to expand the state preschool program by 3,675 slots in 2016 and an additional 2,450 slots in 2017. The funds are targeted to serve children in families with incomes below 200 percent of poverty. (In 2016, both three- and four-year-olds will be eligible for the program, but starting in 2017, only four-year-olds will be eligible.) The preschool program only covers part-day, part-year slots, but the state's final budget included a change to allow families participating in the program to receive child care assistance as well so that they can have full-day, full-year services or care during nontraditional hours. In addition, the budget allocated \$7.8 million to increase the income eligibility limit to qualify for child care assistance from 125 percent to 130 percent of poverty, and to increase the exit eligibility limit (the income limit up to which families already receiving assistance can continue to receive it) from 200 percent to 300 percent of poverty. In another policy change, the state eliminated copayments for families with incomes under 100 percent of poverty that participate in the preschool and/or child care assistance program. The new child care and early education investments also included \$40 million for the state's quality rating and improvement system, Step Up to Quality, with funds targeted to early care and education programs in smaller communities and rural areas and those with ratings at the three-star level or higher. Finally, the state allocated \$5 million to support mental health counselors in early education programs.³³

- **Oregon** Governor Kate Brown approved a budget for the 2015-17 biennium that includes \$45 million in additional child care funding to support program changes consistent with the federal CCDBG reauthorization law and reflected in state legislation—changes that allow families to remain continuously eligible for child care assistance for 12 months, permit working student parents and self-employed parents to receive child care assistance, and increase the income limit up to which families already receiving assistance can continue receiving it from 185 percent to 250 percent of poverty—as well as to increase provider reimbursement rates and provide assistance to approximately 800 more families.³⁴ The budget also includes \$27 million in additional preschool funding; \$10.3 million in additional funding for Early Learning Hubs, which operate in communities across the state to identify underserved children, evaluate the needs of those children and their families, and connect them to programs and services to meet their needs; \$4 million for the early intervention/early childhood special education program; and funding to support the implementation of full-day kindergarten.³⁵ In addition, the governor signed legislation that aims to expand preschool options available in the state. Under this legislation, Early Learning Hubs will coordinate the preschool program for their region and contract with preschool providers, which can include private preschools, public schools, child care providers, Head Start programs, and other community-based providers. To be eligible for funding, providers must establish a new program or expand their program; offer the same number of instructional hours as full-day kindergarten; consider the scheduling needs of families; serve children ages three to five in families with incomes below 200 percent of poverty; provide services from infant to early elementary grades; have lead teachers with at least a bachelor's degree or a plan to get the degree; meet other quality criteria; and provide additional supports for children and their families.³⁶
- **Rhode Island's** FY 2016 budget increased funding for the state prekindergarten program (through the education funding formula) by \$1 million, to \$4 million, which—together with new federal grant funding—will allow the program to expand enrollment from 306 children in September 2014 to 558 children in September 2015. State Head Start funding was maintained at \$1 million, allowing 130 children to continue to participate in the program. In addition, the state increased reimbursement rates for providers serving families receiving child care assistance by 3 percent, with an additional \$10-per-week increase for family child care providers serving infants and toddlers; these were the first rate increases since 2008. The state also made permanent a provision that allows parents in approved job training to receive child care assistance. Finally, the state allocated \$1.4 million to the seven school districts in the state not yet offering full-day kindergarten to all students to help the districts meet the requirement that they all have universal full-day kindergarten beginning in the 2016-17 school year.³⁷
- **Texas** Governor Greg Abbott signed legislation as part of his emergency education initiative that adds \$130 million to early education programming. This increase partially offsets a cut of \$300 million made in 2011.³⁸ The new law will allow grants of up to \$1,500 per student to school districts that improve their prekindergarten programs, which target low-income, non-English speaking, military, and foster families. In order to receive a grant, programs must meet curriculum and teacher training requirements as well as increase parent engagement. School districts participating in the grant program must report student-teacher ratios, curricula, assessment results (if used), and reading proficiency rates to the state.³⁹
- **Vermont** Governor Peter Shumlin proposed to eliminate funding for the Early Education Initiative (EEI) grant program, which provides competitive grants to early education providers serving at-risk three- and four-year-olds and which in recent years had been budgeted for over \$1 million. While the final budget did not completely eliminate funding for the program, only \$200,000 was allocated for it and it will be terminated at the end of the current fiscal year.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, implementation of the state's new prekindergarten program, which requires publicly funded prekindergarten (for at least 10 hours per week for 35 weeks per year) to be available in all school districts for each child ages three to five whose parents want them to enroll, was phased in over two years. Districts were initially required to implement the program by July 1, 2015, but they now have until the 2016-17 school year, allowing school boards more time to plan.⁴¹

- **Virginia** Governor Terry McAuliffe signed legislation aimed at increasing the safety of child care. The legislation requires licensed child care providers to have fingerprint-based background checks as of July 2017, and reduces the licensing threshold for family child care providers from six unrelated children to five unrelated children as of July 2016.⁴² The legislation also requires that the Local Commissioners of Revenue report local business licenses to the Department of Social Services every six months, that unlicensed providers notify parents about their status, and that the Department of Social Services maintain a website explaining the differences between licensed and unlicensed care. The state reserved \$17 million in federal CCDBG funds to implement these changes.⁴³
- **Washington** Governor Jay Inslee signed the Early Start Act, which requires licensed child care providers receiving funds from the state to participate in the state's quality rating and improvement system and funds training and technical assistance to help providers achieve higher quality ratings. The legislation also allows children to continue to receive child care assistance for 12 months even if their family's income increases.⁴⁴ The Early Start Act calls for \$98 million to implement these improvements. An additional \$60 million was included in the final budget for continued expansion of the state's prekindergarten program and for other early learning programs.⁴⁵
- **District of Columbia** Mayor Muriel Bowser, Superintendent of Education Hanseul Kang, and Deputy Mayor for Education Jennie Niles launched the Early Learning Quality Improvement Network to support improvements in care for infants and toddlers. Under this initiative, three large centers—United Planning Organization, CentroNIA, and Mary's Center—were selected through a competitive process to serve as early learning hubs that will support other child development centers and homes and help them meet Early Head Start standards. The initiative is supported with \$1.8 million in city funding and \$900,000 in federal Head Start funding.⁴⁶

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