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State Child Care and Early Education Updates 2023: Continuing Progress

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About This Report

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Introduction

Child care and early education is vital to parents' work and educational opportunities, children's development, and the economy's growth. Yet, families struggle to find and access affordable, high-quality child care, and the child care workforce struggles with inadequate compensation. These challenges will likely only worsen with the end of the child care relief funding provided during the pandemic under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)—including $24 billion in child care stabilization grant funding for child care providers that expired at the end of September 2023, and $15 billion in supplemental funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) that is set to expire at the end of September 2024—unless additional long-term federal funding is provided.

While federal investment is crucial to ensure a strong child care system across the country, states can also play an important role in supporting progress on child care through investments and innovative policies. Many states made progress in 2023, adopting policies and/or allocating resources to expand families' access to child care and early learning opportunities and better support the child care workforce. A number of states provided funding to increase early educators' wages, benefits, and professional development opportunities in an effort to boost recruitment and retention. Some states expanded eligibility for child care assistance so that more families could receive help paying for care. Several states expanded their prekindergarten programs to serve more children and enhance quality. A few states were able to either reverse past child care policies that were detrimental to families or block new legislation that would have a negative impact on child care programs and the families they serve.

The new investments and policy changes approved and/or implemented in 2023 are essential to ensuring families, child care programs, and early learning educators have the necessary support to succeed. Although many states improved their child care systems, not all states had success in 2023. Several states missed opportunities to increase funding or pass legislation that would enhance early care and education for their families. Further sustainable, long-term investments and policy improvements across all states are necessary to create a child care system that works for all families, children, and child care providers.

State updates

Alabama lawmakers increased funding for the Alabama First Class Pre-K program in the fiscal year (FY) 2024 Education Trust Fund Budget by $8 million. The state also provided $4 million in one-time funding for First Class Pre-K focused on start-up funding for new prekindergarten classrooms in high-needs areas (areas where poverty rates exceed 30 percent). The Department of Early Childhood Education has identified 37 additional classrooms in these areas that will serve approximately 666 children.[1]

Lawmakers increased funding for Alabama's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) by $30 million for a total of $47.8 million for FY 2024. The $30 million provided in this year's budget will replace the federal dollars that had been used for this purpose and that had expired on September 30, 2023.[2]

Alaska's budget appropriated $7.5 million in one-time funding for wage increases for child care workers. In addition, $3 million was included in the FY 2024 budget (in addition to the $5.7 million in the previous year's budget) to implement the first year of universal, voluntary preschool under the 2022 Alaska Reads Act.[3]

The legislature had approved an additional $5 million for Head Start programs, but the governor used his veto to cut that increase back to $1.5 million. The governor also vetoed $250,000 that the legislature had approved for grants and training for family members, friends, and neighbors looking to start home- and place-based child care businesses.[4]

Alaska established the Governor's Task Force on Child Care within the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council to develop a plan to improve the affordability, availability, and quality of child care; a final report with policy recommendations must be delivered to the governor by July 31, 2024.[5]

ARIZONA increased payment rates to child care providers serving families receiving child care assistance. The state also began offering Arizona Education Workforce Scholarships, which provide child care assistance to eligible employees in the child care workforce, Pre-K-12 public schools, and publicly funded charter schools.[6]

The state's Department of Health Services and Department of Economic Security also created a separate child care license for "out-of-school time" programs. The license broadened the types of after-school, enrichment, and summer programs eligible for licensure and streamlined the process for programs to accept child care assistance.

In addition, a one-time summer child care payment of $500 per child was provided to cover mandatory registration fees required for children involved in the Department of Child Safety (including children in foster care, children in kinship care, and children in families receiving in-home services) who participate in the child care assistance program.[7]

ARKANSAS enacted Senate Bill 52, which appropriated $35 million of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to child care assistance.[8]

The state also approved House Bill 1155/Act 60 requiring local governments to treat family child care providers as residential properties for the purposes of zoning, land use development, fire safety, and sanitation regulations.[9]

Additionally, the LEARNS Act (Senate Bill 294/Act 237), an omnibus education package signed into law by the governor in March, creates "local unified agencies" that will be selected in most counties to assist the administration in identifying current gaps in early childhood education and recommending potential state and local solutions.[10]

CALIFORNIA'S budget eliminated copayments for families with incomes below 75 percent of the state median income (SMI) who receive child care assistance and lowered copayments for families with incomes at or above 75 percent of SMI who receive child care assistance, prohibiting copayments from exceeding 1 percent of families' income. The budget adds $2.832 billion over the next two years to increase child care provider and state preschool payment rates by 20 percent; contributes to providers' retirement and health plans, as outlined in a contract with Child Care Providers United, a joint partnership of SEIU and AFSCME that represents family child care providers and license-exempt family, friend, and neighbor providers; and creates a path to setting child care payment rates using an alternative methodology (cost estimation model) that takes into account the cost of providing care, subject to federal approval, by 2025–2026. The state budget also provides additional funds for training and continuing education for child care educators; extends for another two years its policy of paying child care providers based on children's enrollment rather than attendance; enables child care providers to be paid a full-time rate for 25 hours of care per week; improves the process for determining whether providers qualify to receive the full-time rate, to ensure that providers are paid fairly and the highest amount possible; and allows for families experiencing income fluctuation to provide up to 12 preceding months of income information for determination of income eligibility or copayments for child care services.[11] In addition, the state will not require license-exempt child care providers to submit rate sheets.

Under the budget, the state added 3-year-olds as a third priority for enrollment in the part-day and full-day California State Preschool Program, if they are not enrolled in transitional kindergarten. And the transitional kindergarten program expanded so that more children with birthdays in gap months (making them too young for traditional kindergarten) will be able to participate.[12]

Finally, the state enacted legislation mandating timely assessments for toddlers and infants eligible for early intervention services (Assembly Bill 121).[13]

COLORADO renewed the Child Care Contribution Tax Credit (CCTC) for another three years (House Bill 23-1091); the tax credit incentivizes contributions to child care providers.

In the November election, voters approved a ballot measure (Proposition II) allowing the state to retain and spend excess state revenues raised from taxes on tobacco and nicotine products to support the state's preschool program.[14] Colorado voters originally approved the taxes in 2020 under Proposition EE. The approval of Proposition II will allow the state to use that excess revenue, which otherwise would have had to be refunded, to extend preschool programming to more children.

In addition, the state created the Colorado Preschool Program Provider Participation Bonus Program (Senate Bill 23-269). The program provides a one-time bonus payment to all eligible preschool providers in the universal preschool program. The program allows for additional bonus payments to eligible providers that maintain or increase their licensed capacity to serve infants and toddlers between April 1, 2022, and April 1, 2024, as well as bonuses for eligible providers located in low-capacity preschool areas (subject to available appropriations).

The state approved legislation restructuring the state child tax credit so that all low-income taxpayers with incomes below certain thresholds can claim the credit (House Bill 23-1112).[15] The state also enacted a measure requiring employers to notify employees once a year of the federal and state Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit (House Bill 23-1006).

Finally, Colorado expanded the state's paid sick leave law and explicitly added school and place-of-care closures to the list of allowable reasons for an employee to use paid sick leave (Senate Bill 23-017).[16]

CONNECTICUT increased payment rates for child care centers participating in the state's child care assistance program (Care4Kids) by 10 percent and, under an agreement with SEIU/CSEA Local 760, will increase payment rates for family child care providers by 11 percent in each of the next three years.

The state is preparing to allocate $15 million in ARPA funding for child care facility improvements; these funds were appropriated in FY 2022. The budget appropriated the last $35 million of its ARPA funds to provide child care assistance to an additional 8,000 children. However, with the end of the ARPA funding, the state instituted a waiting list for the Care4Kids program in March and expects enrollment in the program to gradually decline from 23,000 children to 17,500.

The state created a protected services category within Care4Kids that allows children in foster care, children who have been adopted in the past year, and homeless children to qualify for child care assistance regardless of other criteria that might disqualify them (such as parental employment or work schedules).

The state's School Readiness preschool program and Child Day Care (CDC) contracted programs were allotted a 2.5 percent cost-of-living increase for employees. In addition, payment levels for School Readiness programs will increase by 16 percent in the second year of the 2024-2025 biennial budget. The budget also included an expansion of the Human Capital Tax Credit for businesses from 5 percent to 25 percent for the construction of child care facilities and subsidies for employee child care. Additionally, the state allocated $5 million to renovation projects to increase contracted capacity for infant/toddler care under the state's CDC program; restored funding for the state's three Even Start programs, which serve infants/toddlers and their parents who have not completed high school; and provided $2 million in each year of the budget for local Early Childhood Collaboratives previously funded through the federal Preschool Development Grant.

The state enacted legislation to expand zoning protections to include group family child care homes able to serve 12 children (House Bill 6590). The group child care homes now have the same protections from local zoning as family child care homes, easing expansion for child care providers.

Finally, the state launched its Baby Bonds program, under which $3,200 is deposited into an account for every baby whose delivery is paid for by HUSKY, the state's Medicaid program. Those funds will grow with interest and, when the child is between ages 18 and 30, can be taken out to pay for college, start a business, or put toward the purchase of a house in Connecticut.[17]

DELAWARE increased provider payment rates in its child care assistance program (Purchase of Care) by 15 percent. In addition, the state's budget increased funding for the state prekindergarten program by 100 percent ($6.1 million), which will allow more children to participate in the program. The state also enacted legislation aligning student-teacher ratios in prekindergarten special education with ratios in K-3 special education.[18]

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S approved budget cuts the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund, which supports salary supplements for the city's child care workforce, by $4.4 million, while protecting the Fund's remaining $69 million.[19] In addition, the budget expanded the income eligibility limit for child care assistance, allowing an estimated 2,200 more families to participate.[20] The budget also increased the allocation for home visiting programs by $300,000 to increase salaries for employees.[21] And, the budget provided $5 million for My Afterschool DC, a pilot program to improve access to out-of-school-time programs;[22] of the $5 million investment, $3.1 million will go directly to free after-school programming in priority elementary and middle schools.[23]

FLORIDA'S budget was approved with an increase of $100 million to the base funding for the child care assistance program (School Readiness) as well as an additional $77 million to sustain School Readiness enrollment levels among working families. The budget also increased the base student allocation for the state's Voluntary Prekindergarten Program by $138 per child. In addition, the state appropriated $315 million for local communities to address regional needs; shifted funding for the T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Scholarship Program, which provides scholarships for credentials and degrees in early childhood education, to recurring dollars; and increased funding for the Help Me Grow program, which promotes early identification of developmental, behavioral, and educational concerns and connects children and families to community-based services and supports, by $4.5 million.

Additionally, the Emergent Literacy Micro-Credential and completion stipends were expanded to include all child care staff in the state, and the state's New Worlds Reading Initiative, which mails free books and reading activities to children, was expanded to include eligible Voluntary Prekindergarten students.[24]

GEORGIA'S final budget included: $20.65 million to increase prekindergarten lead teachers' and assistant teachers' annual salaries by $2,000; $1.05 million to increase the base annual salaries of teachers of preschool-age children with disabilities by $2,000; $14 million to increase the prekindergarten operations budget to cover inflation and support quality; $8 million in lottery funds to support early literacy; $1.05 million to meet the state match for federal CCDBG funds; and $1.7 million to support a home visiting pilot in Northeast and Southeast rural Georgia that integrates medical care into home visits, using community health workers.

The state enacted the Georgia Early Literacy Act (House Bill 538) requiring the State Board of Education to approve high-quality literacy instructional materials and screeners as well as evidence-based literacy certification courses and training for K-3 teachers. The legislation also includes language requiring child care teachers in licensed programs to receive training on developmentally appropriate evidence-based literacy instruction beginning July 1, 2025. In addition, the state enacted legislation establishing the Georgia Council on Literacy, which will conduct comprehensive reviews of birth to post-secondary programs, state support for these programs, and issues related to improving students' literacy. The act includes an appropriation of $1 million, with $251,000 allocated for personnel and operations for the Georgia Council on Literacy and $749,000 for implementing literacy methods.

The state permanently removed the sunset provision for the Family Care Act, which allows employees to use five days of earned sick leave for the care of immediate family members. The measure originally passed in 2017 with a three-year sunset provision and was extended by the Georgia legislature in 2020.

Finally, the House Working Group on Early Childhood Education was created to work during the interim between the 2023 and 2024 state legislative sessions to develop recommendations for improving access to and the effectiveness of prekindergarten education in Georgia.[25]

HAWAI'I'S legislature passed and the governor signed Senate Bill 239, which requires the development of a program to assist licensed child care providers in gaining accreditation. The measure also appropriated $2.1 million to be used for grants to help child care programs achieve accreditation and extends the deadline for programs participating in the state-funded preschool subsidy program, Preschool Open Doors, to begin the accreditation process.[26]

Additionally, the state increased funding for Preschool Open Doors, from $11.2 million to $50 million annually by July 2024. The state also funded additional public prekindergarten classrooms located in public elementary schools and public charter schools. In increasing funding, the state expanded access to both Preschool Open Doors and public prekindergarten programs to include 3-year-olds.[27]

IDAHO'S legislature approved $28 million from ARPA child care relief dollars to continue monthly child care provider grants and workforce bonuses for early childhood professionals through the end of FY 2023. However, the legislature declined to appropriate over $50 million of ARPA funds designated to support early care and education that could have been used to extend these programs and sent that money back to the federal government.

The legislature approved a proposed rule change to raise the income eligibility limit for child care assistance from 130 percent to 175 percent of the federal poverty level.

The state approved $15 million to continue funding for the Idaho Workforce Development Council's Child Care Expansion Grant program for an additional year. The program provides grants to applicants looking to expand an existing child care program or start a new child care business.

The legislature also amended existing law to increase the individual state tax deduction for dependent care, from $3,000 for one child and $6,000 for two or more children to $12,000 per taxable year.[28]

ILLINOIS invested nearly $300 million in new state funding in early childhood initiatives, including increases of $170 million for the child care system, $75 million for the state's Early Childhood Block Grant (which funds preschool services and services for infants and toddlers), $40 million for the early intervention program, $5 million for home visiting programs, and $5 million to support inclusion of preschoolers with developmental delays and disabilities in early childhood settings.

The administration plans to use $100 million of the state child care appropriation (as well as $30 million in federal ARPA funds) to create a new child care workforce compensation program that will support grants to child care providers for salary increases for teachers and staff. With its early childhood investments, the state also plans to create 5,000 new preschool slots and increase payment rates for early intervention providers by 10 percent.[29]

The budget implementation bill (House Bill 3817) makes permanent the increase in the income eligibility limit for child care assistance—from 200 percent to 225 of the federal poverty level—that initially went into effect in July 2022. In addition, the state enacted measures that require school boards to establish developmentally appropriate full-day kindergarten by the 2027–2028 school year (House Bill 2396); and that take steps to address teacher vacancies in the state, including by continuing to allow early childhood educators to teach in Preschool for All Classes if they have reached a Level 5 on the state's Gateways to Opportunity (professional development) registry and are working to secure their teaching license.[30]

INDIANA removed the expiration date for the state's prekindergarten pilot program, On My Way Pre-K, making the program permanent (House Bill 1591), and increased the income limit for the program from 127 percent to 150 percent of the federal poverty level (House Bill 1001, the biennial budget bill). The state implemented a cost-of-care approach to setting payment rates for the child care assistance program.

The General Assembly also created a tax credit program to incentivize small and medium-sized businesses to establish or expand child care programs for their employees.[31]

Lastly, $25 million was invested in an Employer-Sponsored Child Care Fund. The program will provide seed funding for employers and local communities to expand employer-subsidized child care benefits to address local child care needs.[32]

IOWA raised payment rates for child care providers serving families receiving child care assistance. The state also increased the income eligibility limit for child care assistance from 145 percent to 160 percent of the federal poverty level. However, the state also increased the number of hours parents are required to work to qualify for assistance, from 28 to 32 hours a week on average.[33]

KANSAS' legislature passed a bill (Senate substitute for House Bill 2344) that would have significantly weakened the state's child care safety regulations—for example, by increasing child-staff ratios and decreasing annual training requirements for child care teachers—and cemented those changes into law, but the governor vetoed the bill and the House was unable to override the veto.[34]

KENTUCKY was the first state to make teachers and other staff members working in licensed or certified child care programs categorically eligible for child care assistance to cover child care costs for their own children. A statutory provision puts child care workers in a protected status by exempting their household income from eligibility calculations. In the year since its enactment, 3,200 parents employed in the child care sector, and 5,600 children, have begun to benefit from this program.

The state established the Employee Child Care Assistance Partnership program, which provides a state match for an employer contribution to an employee's child care costs (House Bill 499). In addition, the state designated $50 million in state funds to extend child care stabilization benefits to providers (which had been supported by federal ARPA funding that expired in September 2023) until March 2024.[35]

LOUISIANA allotted $52 million in funding toward early child care and education, the largest investment of state dollars in over a decade. The funding will help save an estimated 4,000 child care seats that would have been lost with the expiration of federal ARPA dollars in September 2023.[36] The state also enacted legislation altering the duties of the Early Childhood and Education Commission to require it to study and propose a funding formula for the early child care and education system, similar to how the state establishes its annual K-12 funding (House Bill 338).[37] In addition, the legislature approved a resolution encouraging the state Department of Education to update its early child care and education data management system to make it easier to navigate for parents and child care providers.[38]

MAINE increased the income limit for its child care assistance program from 85 percent to 125 percent of state median income, effective as of January 2024. The state also provided funding to give child care staff access to the child care assistance program, and doubled its investment in salary stipends for child care workers from $15 million to $30 million annually.

The state provided one-time funding to create a cost-of-care tool that will estimate the cost of quality child care, as well as one-time funding to develop an implementation plan to limit child care costs for families by 2030. In addition, the state approved funding to expand Head Start services to families with incomes up to 185 percent of the federal poverty level. Additional funding was also provided to increase the number of preschool programs available to serve children with disabilities.[39]

The state made the Dependent Exemption Tax Credit (an amount of $300) refundable for tax years beginning on or before January 1, 2024, and indexed the credit to inflation beginning on January 1, 2025. It also established a new paid family and medical leave program and provided $25 million in one-time start-up funding; benefits will be available as of May 1, 2026.[40]

Maryland

Maryland enacted legislation to ensure that improvements to the child care assistance (Child Care Scholarship) program implemented in 2022—increased income eligibility limits, higher provider payment rates, and reduced family copayments—are maintained (at a minimum), even after the expiration of ARPA funds (House Bill 495/Senate Bill 350). The legislation also requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to give the General Assembly advance notice of any cost-cutting measures, such as an enrollment freeze, with sufficient time for the General Assembly to review and take corrective action to avoid such measures.

In addition, the state enacted legislation requiring MSDE, in cooperation with institutions of higher education and other stakeholders, to establish a viable alternative pathway to teaching certification that includes standards for the evaluation of prior learning, knowledge, and skills that child care professionals have developed during their careers; the legislation also extends the timeline for meeting certification requirements from the 2025–2026 school year to 2027–2028 (House Bill 1219/Senate Bill 893). By making it easier for child care professionals to achieve the certification required by the state's prekindergarten program, the legislation aims to reduce barriers to community-based child care programs' participation in the program.

The state approved the Family Prosperity Act, which made permanent the changes to the state's Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) that had been enacted, on a temporary basis, in 2021. Those changes increased the value of the state EITC from 28 percent to 45 percent of the federal credit and extended eligibility to those taxpayers (typically immigrants) who file using an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number in lieu of a Social Security Number. The Family Prosperity Act also makes permanent the state's refundable Child Tax Credit (CTC)—which allows eligible families to claim a $500 credit for children under age 6 and for older children with disabilities—and expands the income eligibility limit for the credit from $6,000 to $15,000 per year.[41]

Massachusetts

Massachusetts approved a budget for FY 2024 that increases early care and education funding by $268 million (22 percent) over FY 2023 appropriations. The budget includes $475 million for Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) Stabilization Grants, enabling the state to continue the stabilization grants after federal ARPA dollars expired in September 2023.[42]

Additionally, the state expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit and created a new Child and Family Tax Credit. The new tax credit will provide $310 per dependent in 2023 and will increase to $440 per dependent in 2024.[43]

MICHIGAN'S FY 2024 budget includes new investments in the state-funded prekindergarten program, Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), including $90.8 million in state funds to increase the per-pupil grant for GSRP from $9,150 to $9,608 for full-day and $4,808 for part-day classes, and to raise the income eligibility limit for the program from 250 percent to 300 percent of the federal poverty level, and to 400 percent of the federal poverty level in select areas; $35 million in one-time state funds to start up new GSRP classrooms and expand existing classrooms; $18 million in new funds for expanded GSRP transportation; and $15.8 million in new state funds for piloting additional sites for GSRP for 3-year-olds.[44]

The budget also includes $30 million in one-time federal funds for projects to strengthen early childhood workforce training, recruitment, and retention; a funding increase of $1.1 million for Early On, Michigan's early intervention program for children ages zero to 3; an increase of $2 million in School Aid Funds for home visiting programs; and $50 million in School Aid Funds for before-school, after-school, and summer learning programs.[45] However, the state did not provide additional funding for the child care assistance program.[46, 47]

MINNESOTA provided $750 million in new funding for child care and early learning programs. This funding will support 1,000 new slots in child care and early learning programs, an increase in provider payment rates for the child care assistance program, reduced copayments for families receiving child care assistance, and retention payments to child care providers.[48] As part of its new investments, the state also established and provided ongoing funding for a family, friend, and neighbor grant program ($3 million for FY 2025 and $2.5 million each year for FY 2026 and FY 2027). In addition, the new funding for child care and early learning includes an additional $252 million over the FY 2024–2025 biennium for the state's Early Learning Scholarship Program to expand eligibility to all children under age 5 (previously, only children ages 3 and 4 and children under age 3 who met certain criteria were eligible) and to add new priority groups.[49]

The state approved the Omnibus Education Bill (Minnesota House File 2497), which includes provisions making expiring Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) seats permanent, increasing the number of children eligible for the program, and prohibiting the dismissal of children enrolled in early learning, child care, and prekindergarten programs.[50]

The state enacted the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act, allowing 12 weeks of paid family leave and 12 weeks of medical leave (with a limit of 20 cumulative weeks). The leave is funded by a 0.7 percent payroll tax premium paid for by both the employer and employee. Weekly partial wage replacement is based on income levels and the average earnings of a typical work week.[51]

Lastly, the state established a refundable child tax credit that provides up to $1,725 per dependent. The phase-out for the credit begins at $35,000 for married filers and $29,500 for single filers. The credit is permanent, will be adjusted for inflation, and includes families using Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers.[52]

MISSISSIPPI eliminated a requirement that parents comply with child support enforcement in order to qualify for child care assistance. This requirement had prevented many families, especially those headed by single mothers, from receiving assistance, and advocates had worked for nearly 20 years to change the policy. The state lead agency announced that since May, when the child support requirement was eliminated, 3,500 mothers who were not eligible prior to the change have received child care.[53]

The state made permanent a change to its child care assistance program to pay child care providers based on children's enrollment rather than attendance; this change started on a temporary basis during the COVID pandemic. In addition, the state enacted new payment rates that are lower than the emergency rates put in place during the pandemic, but higher than the rates before the pandemic. The state is also now using separate payment rates for metro and rural areas, rather than statewide rates, for the first time.

Finally, the state lead agency announced it will be transferring 30 percent of Mississippi's TANF grant to CCDBG.[54]

MISSOURI increased funding for child care assistance by $78.5 million. The additional funding is being used to increase provider payment rates, which had been at the 25th percentile of market rates on average for infants and even lower for other age groups, to the 58th percentile of market rates. The state also provided an additional $82 million to expand the state-funded prekindergarten program, which is targeted at low-income 4-year-olds; $55 million of that funding will go to school districts and charter schools and $26 million will go to community-based child care providers to offer prekindergarten.[55]

MONTANA approved legislation that provides $14 million over two years to increase the income limit for the child care assistance (Best Beginnings Scholarship) program from 150 percent to 185 percent of the federal poverty level (House Bill 648). The measure also reduces copayments for families participating in the program, from as high as 20 percent of family income to a maximum of 9 percent of family income, and establishes that providers serving families receiving child care assistance will be paid based on a child's enrollment (rather than attendance).[56]

In addition, the state enacted legislation establishing that child care is a residential use of property (House Bill 187). The measure is intended to help make it easier for family child care homes to open and operate.[57] The state also established an Indian language preservation program and recognized early learning providers as partners in a tribe's long-term strategy in dual language development (House Bill 287).[58]

Nebraska

Nebraska approved legislation establishing the Child Care Tax Credit Act and reinstating and enhancing the School Readiness Tax Credit Act (Legislative Bill 754). The Child Care Tax Credit Act offers tiered, refundable tax credits to qualifying families with children in licensed child care. Families with incomes of $75,000 or less can qualify for a $2,000 tax credit for each child in care, and families with incomes between $75,000 and $150,000 can qualify for a $1,000 credit per child. Under the Child Care Tax Credit Act, individuals or businesses can also receive a nonrefundable credit when they make a qualifying contribution to improve local child care infrastructure; the credit is designed to particularly incentivize investments in child care programs located in Nebraska Opportunity Zones (communities facing the greatest economic challenges) and/or serving families receiving child care assistance. The School Readiness Tax Credit Act offers child care professionals a refundable credit of between $2,300 and $3,500 (depending on their professional training and work history) and provides a nonrefundable tax credit for programs serving families receiving child care assistance.[59]

In addition, the state approved legislation that maintains until October 2026 an increase in the income eligibility limit for child care assistance—from 130 percent to 185 percent of the federal poverty level—that had been enacted in 2021 and was originally set to expire in October 2023.[60]

Nevada

Nevada established the Early Childhood Innovative Literacy Program and allocated $70 million for the new initiative. The initiative supports grants for existing or new Nevada Ready! State Prekindergarten (NR!PK) programs to expand access to prekindergarten. The initiative also offers grants for early literacy programs that support children under age 6, their families, and early childhood professionals; the funds can be used to establish innovative new programs or expand existing programs. School districts, sponsor or charter schools, and nonprofit organizations are eligible to apply for grants.[61]

The state enacted legislation broadening membership of the Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council, which works to strengthen state coordination and collaboration with early childhood programs (Assembly Bill 114). The measure expands the Council's membership to now include a representative of the Division of Public and Behavioral Health, a representative of the Child Care and Development program, a representative of a tribal organization, a representative of a public school who works in elementary school, and at least one parent or guardian who has participated in an early childhood program with a child under age 8.[62]

NEW HAMPSHIRE'S approved budget for FY 2024–2025 includes $45.5 million for the child care assistance program (New Hampshire Child Care Scholarship Program), a 54.7 percent increase over the FY 2022–2023 budget. This increased funding will be used to expand eligibility for assistance to families with incomes up to 85 percent of state median income, raise provider payment rates, move from paying providers based on children's attendance to paying based on enrollment, and make other improvements to the program.[63] The budget also includes $15 million to support child care workforce recruitment and retention and scholarships for early childhood professionals.[64]

NEW JERSEY'S budget provides funding to maintain improvements to the child care assistance program that had previously gone into effect, including a provider payment rate add-on of $300 per month, payment to providers based on children's enrollment (rather than attendance), and the waiving of copayments for families receiving assistance.

The state invested $116 million for Preschool Education Aid, $40 million of which will be used to expand public preschool into new districts; this amount brings total state funding for preschool to more than $1 billion. The legislature required all new districts receiving Preschool Education Aid to demonstrate an effort to partner with licensed child care and Head Start programs (if they agree to meet preschool standards) to offer preschool programs.

The state provided $20 million to create the Social Impact Investment Fund, which will provide below-market loans for socially conscious projects in distressed communities, such as child care facilities.

Lastly, the budget doubled the maximum amount of the state's refundable child tax credit from $500 to $1,000 for families with annual incomes of $80,000 or less and with children under age 6.[65]

NEW MEXICO'S budget significantly increased funding for early care and education programs, providing $97.8 million for child care assistance, $109 million for the state prekindergarten program, and $8 million for home visiting. The state also ensured that the Early Childhood Trust Fund remained targeted on early care and education programs (HB 191); the budget for the Trust Fund increased from $30 million to $150 million for FY 2024. In addition, the state increased its refundable child tax credit, to a maximum of $600 per child (House Bill 547).[66]

NEW YORK made $500 million in underutilized federal funds available for grants to qualified child care programs under the newly created Workforce Retention Grant Program. Programs can use the grant funding to recruit staff, offer sign-on bonuses, and provide bonus payments to child care workers ranging from $2,300 to $3,000.

The budget invests another $4.8 million in the Employer-Sponsored Child Care Pilot Program, which will help families with incomes between 85 percent and 100 percent of state median income afford care by splitting the cost amongst the state, participating employers, and employees; the pilot will operate in three regions of the state. In addition, the state allocated $25 million for a new Employer Child Care Tax Credit that will be available to businesses that create new child care seats for employees. The state also invested $1 million to establish a business navigator program to help businesses identify various child care supports for their employees.

The state expanded its refundable Empire State Tax Credit to include children under 4, who had previously been excluded. The expansion is expected to result in the inclusion of nearly 630,000 additional children and an additional average benefit of $340 per affected taxpayer and $284 per newly included child.[67]

The state legislature also approved a bill that would have allowed families to receive child care assistance to cover child care hours beyond the hours parents were working or in school (Senate Bill 5327A/Assembly Bill 4986A); currently, families receiving child care assistance can only have their child care costs covered for the exact hours the parents are participating in work or education activities.[68] However, the governor vetoed the measure.[69]

Lastly, the state increased the number of absences that the child care assistance program must cover from 24 to 80 absences per child and provider, and required that local districts, which previously were not required to cover any program closures, cover up to 20 program closures each state fiscal year.[70]

NORTH CAROLINA'S budget for the 2023–2025 biennium instructed the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) to use any remaining ARPA funds to extend the portion of stabilization grants used to support workforce compensation. The amount remaining is estimated to be approximately $100 million, which will extend the grants for an additional six months until June 2024. Additionally, the state enacted legislation allocating $74 million in ARPA funds to make permanent a 2021 increase in provider payment rates for the child care assistance program and allowing providers to receive the full payment rate for serving children receiving assistance even if the fee the provider charges to private-paying parents is lower.

The budget also included $900,000 (in non-recurring funds) for each year of the biennium to establish a Tri-Share child care pilot program for a maximum of three counties. The pilot program creates a public-private partnership to share the cost of child care among employers, eligible employees, and the state. In addition, the budget contained $525,000 (in non-recurring funds) for each year of the biennium to establish a pilot program that provides business and financial assistance in creating and sustaining family child care home programs; and $1.2 million (in recurring funds) for each year of the biennium to provide child care support for parents who are enrolled in community colleges.[71]

Lastly, the state approved legislation requiring the North Carolina Child Care Commission to complete recommendations for revising the state's child care quality rating and improvement system by March 31, 2024, and to submit those recommendations to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services before the 2024 legislative session begins (Senate Bill 291).[72]

NORTH DAKOTA invested $65.6 million to expand access to affordable child care (House Bill 1540). That funding includes $22 million to expand child care assistance for families with incomes below 75 percent of state medium income, allowing approximately 1,800 more children to receive assistance over the two-year budget cycle; $2.3 million to eliminate copayments for families with incomes below 30 percent of state median income who receive child care assistance; $15 million to incentivize child care providers to enroll more infants and toddlers; $15 million to support training for child care workers and incentives for child care providers to start up new child care businesses; $5 million to match private employers' contributions for their workers' child care costs; and $3 million to cover matching costs for child care for state employees.[73]

OHIO'S biennial budget for FY 2024–2025 secured $287 million in new investments for young children and families, including: $30 million for child care infrastructure grants to increase infant and toddler child care capacity in communities with high mortality rates; an increase in the income limit for child care assistance from 142 percent to 145 percent of the federal poverty level; and $124 million for the state preschool program, which will allow the program to serve an additional 11,525 low-income 3- and 4-year-olds in community-based settings (child care centers and family child care home programs) and school-based settings. The investment also allowed for an increase in the individual grant amount and piloting of preschool for special populations. Additionally, the governor used his line-item veto to strike a provision that would have exempted more licensed child care programs from meeting requirements under the state's quality rating and improvement system (Step Up to Quality).[74]

The budget created a new Department of Children and Youth to oversee all early childhood programs except for Medicaid. In the Department's first 90 days, it implemented the new preschool investment, created a grant program to administer the child care infrastructure grants, and is creating a holistic regulatory and financing strategy for Step Up to Quality and publicly funded child care and aligning licensing of child care and preschool. The Department also announced a new Professional Early Childhood Inclusion Credential to increase the capacity of early childhood professionals to meet the needs of children with disabilities and their families; the credential was created under the PROMISE (Promote Resources, Opportunities, and Meaningful Inclusion through Support and Education) program, a new initiative focused on increasing access to quality child care and support services for children with special needs.[75]

OKLAHOMA enacted legislation to streamline the state's regulations pertaining to the licensing of child care facilities, allowing Department of Human Services-licensed family child care homes to operate at licensed capacity without local municipal oversight (House Bill 2452).

Oklahoma approved two pieces of legislation providing paid maternity leave for state employees (Senate Bill 16X) and full-time public-school employees, including teachers at career techs, rehabilitation centers, and juvenile detention centers (Senate Bill 1121). Both measures provide six weeks of paid maternity leave for full-time employees following the birth or adoption of a child. Employees would not be required to use their accrued leave for the initial six-week period but could request to use such leave for any additional time of needed up to 12 weeks provided under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). State employees are eligible for this benefit after two years of service, and public-school employees are eligible for this benefit after one year.[76]

OREGON allocated $15 million to increase payment rates for child care providers serving families receiving child care assistance, and $8 million to support the increased number of families receiving child care assistance.

The state created a child care infrastructure fund (House Bill 3005) and seeded the fund with $50 million in lottery-backed revenue bonds, while allocating $5 million to the Department of Early Learning and Care for technical support to aid child care providers in accessing the infrastructure fund and distributing over $11 million to early childhood projects. The state also approved a measure allocating $225,000 to the Department of Land Conservation and Development to arrange work groups to examine strategies, identify challenges, and make recommendations for expanding the state's early learning and child care facilities (House Bill 2727). In addition, the state enacted legislation requiring landlords to allow rental homes to be used for child care (Senate Bill 599).

The Department of Early Learning and Care received funding to support increases in compensation for the early care and education workforce, including $1.7 million for the Early Childhood Equity Fund to increase funding for existing child care providers; $1.6 million for Relief Nurseries (which provide early childhood therapeutic and family support services to prevent child abuse and neglect) to continue wage increases first funded in 2022; $2.8 million for the Healthy Families Oregon home visiting program to continue wage increases first funded in 2022; a 7 percent increase per child for the Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten early education program; and a 9 percent increase per child for Preschool Promise (the state-funded preschool program). In addition, the state provided $300,000 to the Department of Early Learning and Care for community partners to gather input and craft recommendations on workforce pathway improvements (House Bill 2991).

Finally, the state allocated $5.9 million to expand the Family Connects home visiting program and offer it to all new parents statewide.[77]

PENNSYLVANIA'S budget increased funding for child care services by $90.3 million, of which $66.7 million will be directed to maintaining provider payment rates for the child care assistance program at the 60th percentile of market rates and updating the rates for the 2022 market rate survey, which showed an increase in child care prices. In addition, the budget increased funding for the child care assistance program (Child Care Works) by $13.3 million to allow families already receiving child care assistance to continue receiving it up to an exit eligibility limit of 300 percent of the federal poverty level. (The entrance eligibility limit for families to qualify for assistance is 200 percent of poverty.)[78] The budget also includes an increase of $15.4 million for the Infant and Toddler (Part C) Early Intervention program and an increase of $10.4 million for the Preschool (Part B) Early Intervention program.[79] However, for the first time in several years, no additional funds were allocated to the state's preschool program, Pre-K Counts, or the state's Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program.[80]

RHODE ISLAND'S budget includes $7 million in state funding to sustain 40 prekindergarten classrooms serving 800 children that would otherwise close with the expiration of federal funding. In addition, the state used $3 million of its federal TANF funds to supplement federal Head Start funds so that Head Start and Early Head Start educators in the state could receive more competitive compensation. The increased compensation will help attract the teachers needed to reopen some of the classrooms that were closed in the 2022–2023 school year due to insufficient staffing.[81]

The state also targeted $2 million of its federal Preschool Development Grant to launch the Child Care WAGE$ model in the state, with a focus on retaining qualified and effective infant and toddler care educators in centers and family child care homes; the WAGE$ model supports salary supplements for child care educators that have attained certain teaching credentials. Lastly, $4 million of federal CCDBG funding was allocated to launch a pilot program to offer free child care to child care educators with incomes under 300 percent of the federal poverty level.[82]

SOUTH CAROLINA'S FY 2023–2024 budget included an increase totaling $16.7 million for the Child Early Reading and Development Program (CERDEP), the state's publicly funded, mixed-delivery prekindergarten program for 4-year-olds.[83] Additionally, in September, the Senate President and House Speaker announced the formation of a new Special Joint Committee on child care to review the availability of affordable and accessible quality child care options and to further the state's efforts on workforce development.[84]

SOUTH DAKOTA has convened a bipartisan Child Care Task Force. The group is tasked with reviewing access, affordability, and quality of child care options within the state and creating recommendations to improve the options for families. The work has four key goals: to identify and map the state's early childhood governance and assets; to examine the regulatory environment for child care providers; to identify early childhood financial and workforce stability issues; and to pinpoint barriers for businesses operating or partnering with child care providers.[85]

TENNESSEE enacted legislation creating a Preschool Commission (House Bill 1150/Senate Bill 355). The work group is tasked with analyzing the gap between the demand for preschool and the availability of quality preschool education and developing a strategic plan for accessible preschool. The state also established the Child Care Improvement Fund, which will distribute $15 million in grants to nonprofit organizations that improve child care facilities or create new child care slots (House Bill 634/Senate Bill 543). In addition, the state approved six weeks of paid parental leave upon the birth or adoption of a child for teachers, principals and other school personnel (House Bill 983/Senate Bill 1458) as well as for all state employees other than legislative staff (House Bill 234/Senate Bill 276).[86]

TEXAS voters approved a constitutional amendment creating targeted property tax cuts for child care centers in the November election (Proposition 2).[87] The measure gives cities and counties the option of cutting child care centers' property taxes by 50 to 100 percent. To be eligible, a center must participate in the state's quality rating and improvement system (Texas Rising Star) and 20 percent of the children enrolled by the center must be receiving child care assistance. (The measure does not apply to property taxes collected by school districts or to home-based child care providers that already have a homestead exemption.)[88]

The legislature enacted a measure codifying the Texas Workforce Commission's Prekindergarten Partnership program, which supports partnerships between school districts and child care providers to assist child care programs in offering state-funded prekindergarten. The measure will also add a representative of the child care workforce to Local Workforce Development Boards, which supervise child care policy.[89]

Lastly, the state enacted legislation allowing child care center directors to begin serving in their role if they meet all qualifications except the educational requirements; the candidate may operate as an interim director with a 12-month grace period to complete the necessary education requirements.[90]

UTAH enacted legislation implementing full-day kindergarten across the state (House Bill 477). The measure allows full-day kindergarten to be funded in the same way as grades 1-12, providing greater stability in funding than the various grant programs that had previously been supporting full-day kindergarten.

The legislature approved a new child tax credit that will be applied on a sliding income-based scale (House Bill 170). The phase-out for the credit begins at $54,000 for married filers and $43,000 for head-of-household/single filers.[91] Families eligible for the credit can receive up to $1,000 per child ages 1 to 3 each year starting in 2024, although the credit will not take effect until families file their 2024 taxes in 2025.[92] The tax credit is nonrefundable.[93]

VERMONT'S legislature overrode the governor's veto to enact House Bill 217 (now Act 76), known as the 2023 Child Care Bill. Once fully enacted, Act 76 will invest $125 million annually into the child care sector, supported by a 0.44 percent payroll tax split between employers and employees.

To help more families access care, the legislation substantially expands the income eligibility limit for the state's child care assistance program, known as the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP), from 350 percent to 575 percent of the federal poverty level by the end of 2024. Act 76 also provides assistance to cover 100 percent of families' full child care fees for families with incomes up to 175 percent of the federal poverty level; previously, only families with incomes up to 150 percent of the federal poverty level had their full fees covered. In addition, under the legislation, the state will use its own funds to serve families who are not citizens but meet the other program eligibility criteria; enhanced privacy protections and accessibility measures are provided for these families.[94]

To support child care affordability, the legislation increases CCFAP child care provider payment rates by 35 percent, with additional increases for family child care homes. The legislation also includes a $20 million one-time investment to help child care programs to prepare for the expansion of the child care assistance system, support and sustain the early childhood education workforce, improve facilities, and address other priority needs. The legislation creates an ongoing child care quality and capacity incentive program and signals the legislature's intent to provide $10 million annually for this purpose starting in July 2024.

The act also signals the intent of the legislature that the state may establish minimum wage rates for child care providers in alignment with recommendations from the early childhood education field. Minimum wage rates would not take effect until the state is paying child care programs based on the full cost of care established by a 2021 legislative report.[95]

In addition, a committee was created to examine how to expand the state's universal prekindergarten program, which currently provides only 10 hours of programming a week, to a full-school-day program.[96]

VIRGINIA approved legislation changing the name of the School Readiness Committee to the Commission on Early Childhood Care and Education and adjusting the commission's purpose to expanding access to child care and examining opportunities to finance early care and education programs (Senate Bill 1404).[97]

WASHINGTON'S Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the capital gains tax that was created by the 2021 Fair Start for Kids Act (FSK) and that was initially expected to generate $500 million in new funding for affordable, high-quality child care and early learning.[98] The receipts and anticipated revenue are now estimated to be closer to $1.8 billion.[99]

The state enacted legislation establishing the statewide Transition to Kindergarten program for children who are at least 4 years old (House Bill 1550). The program is designed to ensure children will have a successful start to K-12 learning by using a screening process to identify eligible children who need additional preparation.

The state also approved a measure expanding eligibility for the child care assistance program to include child care employees, mixed-status immigrant families, and families in therapeutic court (Senate Bill 5225). Lastly, the state approved legislation waiving background check fees for early learning educators (Senate Bill 5316).[100]

WEST VIRGINIA'S Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) announced on April 20, 2023, that additional funding had been allocated for the child care assistance program to allow child care providers to continue being paid based on enrollment (rather than attendance) through August 2024. This policy, put in place during the COVID pandemic, had been slated to end in September 2023. DHHR stepped in to extend the policy when legislation to establish payment based on enrollment did not make it to the finish line this past session.[101]

WISCONSIN'S budget for the FY 2023–2025 biennium did not include the $340 million proposed by the governor for Child Care Counts, the child care stabilization grant program that had been funded by federal ARPA dollars. The legislature set aside $15 million in one-time funds in the legislature's supplemental appropriation for a child care revolving loan fund. The governor used his veto authority to remove the loan requirement for the funds. However, funding cannot be utilized until a separate trailer bill is passed by the legislature.[102] Despite the governor's veto, the legislation established a revolving loan fund at the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) and limits the fund for capital expenditures.

Additionally, in October, the governor announced the allocation of $170 million in leftover pandemic funds to continue the Child Care Counts program through June 2025.[103]

WYOMING'S Joint Education Committee planned to conduct a study of early care and education during the interim period between legislative sessions. The Committee will examine child care development centers, child care infrastructure, the governance structure, and state agencies involved in early childhood programs to gain an understanding of the extent to which students are prepared for kindergarten.[104]

The 2023 legislative session in Wyoming brought forth several bills to address early care. While none of the bills passed, the issues around access and affordability of child care were acknowledged by legislators as an issue. In the meantime, the Department of Family Services has begun implementing improvements in the following four areas of its early care and education policies: permanently increasing child care assistance payment rates to the 50th percentile of market rates; paying child care providers in the child care assistance program based on children's enrollment rather than attendance; permanently allowing for sleep time and initial job search as eligible activities for which families can receive child care assistance to cover their child care costs; and piloting initiatives to increase access to infant care.[105]

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