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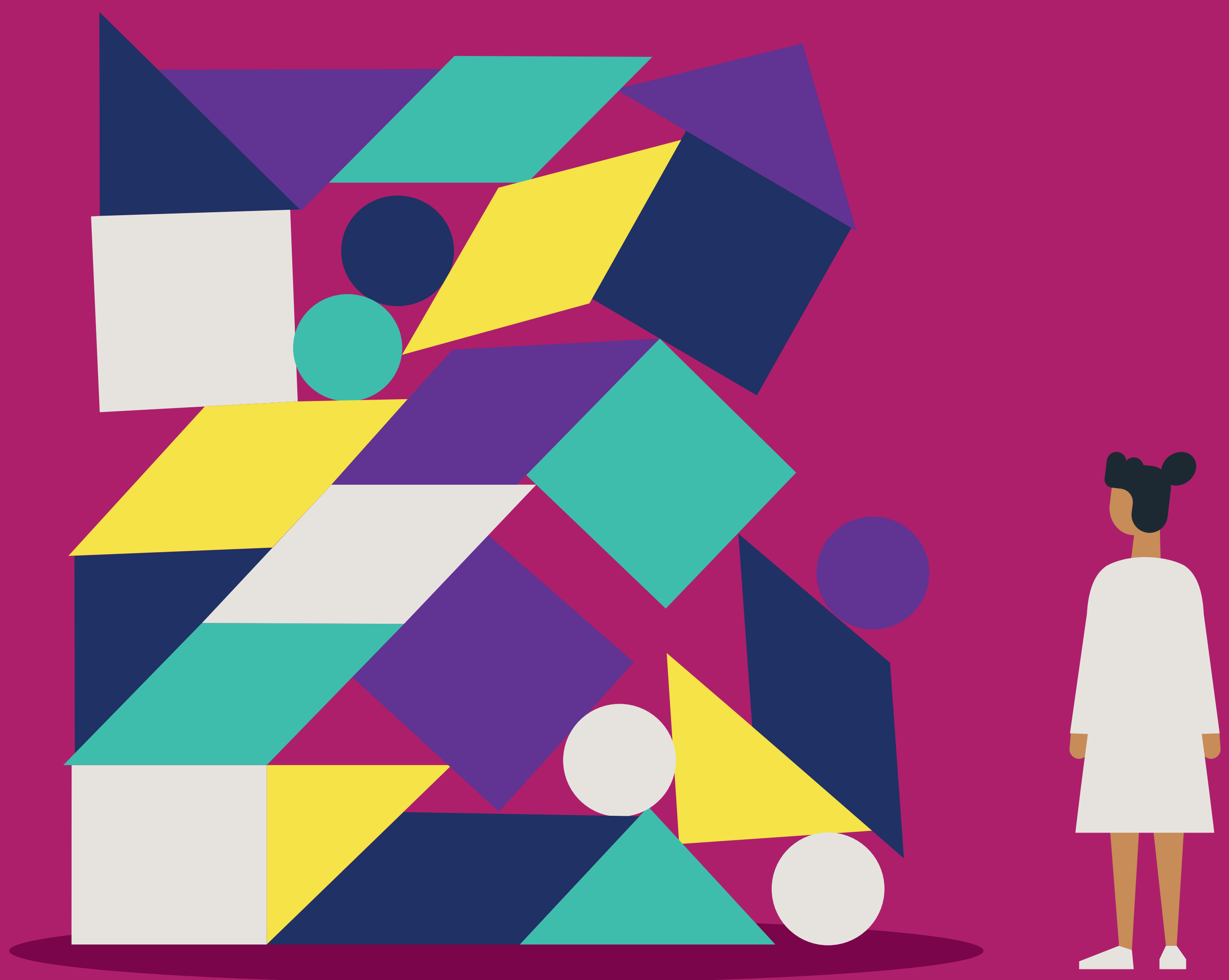
PROGRESS AND SETBACKS:

State Child Care and Early Education Updates 2025



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About This Report

The information in this report was gathered from state child care advocates' emails and other communications, materials available on state child care advocacy organizations' websites, and the National Conference of State Legislatures Early Care and Education Bill Tracking database. A preliminary draft of the report was sent to state child care advocates to review, verify, and update. The authors are very grateful to the state child care advocates who shared and verified the information in this report.

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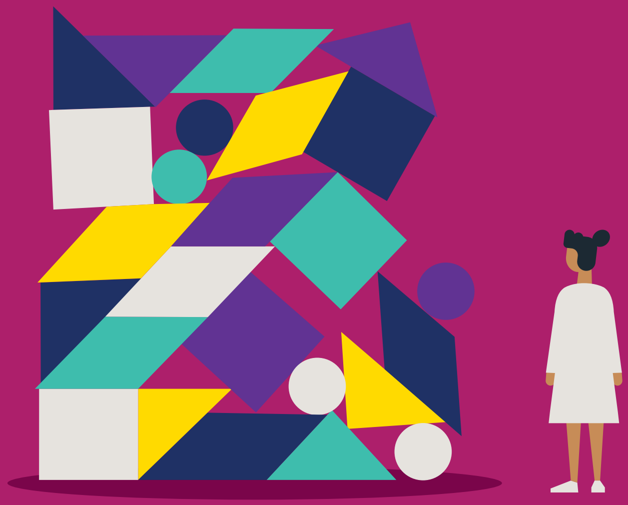

Introduction

Child care and early education are essential for children and families to thrive. Families need affordable and accessible child care to ensure that children can grow and develop and that parents can pursue opportunities for work, education, and training. Child care also supports the current and future workforce, and therefore is crucial to the nation's economic growth and well-being. Yet, despite the benefits that child care brings to children, families, and the workforce, child care is vastly underfunded and undervalued in the United States. As a result, families struggle to access affordable, high-quality child care, while child care workers are left underpaid and overburdened.

The child care sector experienced some relief following the enactment in March 2021 of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which provided $24 billion in stabilization grants for child care programs and $15 billion to supplement the existing federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program,[1] which provides funds to states to help low- and moderate-income families afford child care and invest in the supply and quality of child care. However, with the last of this temporary federal pandemic relief funding expiring as of September 2024, many states have found their budgets stretched thin, pushing them to make cuts to their child care programs. Furthermore, as a result of massive federal funding cuts to programs such as Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) contained in the budget measure enacted in July 2025, states may be forced to shift their resources to fill gaps in these programs. That could further deprive child care of funding, making it even more difficult for families to access the child care they need.

Amid these challenges, many states still made gains in the 2025 legislative session, adopting policies and allocating funding to expand families' access to child care and early learning opportunities and better support the child care workforce, as shown in the state-by-state summaries in this report. Several states provided funding to increase early educators' wages and benefits and/or enable early educators to receive help paying for child care for their own children. A number of states expanded eligibility for child care assistance so that more families can receive help paying for care and/or reduced copayments for those families receiving help. Many states enacted tax credits for employers that provide child care to their employees, while other states expanded their prekindergarten programs. A few states created new funding sources for child care and early education.

However, not every state had success this year, as several missed opportunities to increase funding or approve legislation to better support families, child care programs, and early learning educators—and some states reduced funding for early care and education. Further sustainable, long-term investments and policy improvements across all states, accompanied by significant federal investments, are necessary to create a child care system that works for all families, children, and child care providers.

State updates

Alabama allocated $9.9 billion to the FY 2026 Education Trust Fund Budget, which funds all state education programs, including child care and early learning programs, K-12 schools, and higher education. As a part of the package, the state increased funding for its First Class Pre-K program by $12 million, for a total of $197.45 million for FY 2026.[2] The Start Strong/Strong Finish Program, which supports alignment of instructional practices, assessments, and leadership from First Class Pre-K through third grade, received $4.76 million for FY 2026, a $632,700 increase over FY 2025 that will support 55 new classrooms for the 2025-26 school year in implementing an approach that integrates prekindergarten through third grade.[3] Additionally, the Child Care and After School Program received $91.5 million, a $7.4 million increase from FY 2025; the Alabama Summer and Afterschool Program, for grades Pre-K-12, received $17.29 million, a $14.43 million increase from FY 2025; the Dolly Parton Imagination Library received $2.85 million, a $768,000 increase over FY 2025; and the Montgomery Pre-K Pilot Program received $400,000.[4]

Lastly, the state approved legislation (Senate Bill 199) that provides paid parental leave for eligible public employees, including teachers and state workers.[5]

Alaska approved legislation (Senate Bill 95) that increases the income eligibility limit for child care assistance to 105 percent of state median income—more than doubling the number of families eligible for assistance—and creates a sliding fee scale that caps copayments for families receiving assistance at 7 percent of income. In addition, the legislation introduces tiered payment rates for child care programs that meet the highest quality standards and ties payment rates to regional market rate or cost of care studies. The legislation also prohibits grant-funded providers from denying care based on disability or socioeconomic status. Other provisions of the legislation establish a program to partner with private sector entities to create incentives for employers to develop on-site or near-site child care. The state provided a new $6.1 million annual investment to implement this legislation.[6]

The FY 2026 budget also includes a new annual investment of $5.87 million for child care grants dedicated to operating support for child care providers. These funds will strengthen the existing Child Care Grant program, helping providers cover operating costs and supporting the financial stability of providers across the state. The investment is expected to be aligned with the new tiered payment system and the Governor's Child Care Task Force recommendations, ensuring that operating support rewards providers that meet higher quality standards.[7]

The state approved a measure (Senate Bill 96) that allows employers to claim tax credits for operating a child care facility for employees' children, making cash or equipment contributions to licensed providers that are operated by a nonprofit corporation and attended by employees' children, or providing direct payments to employees to offset child care costs. The credit applies across multiple state taxes including corporate income, fisheries business and landing, mining, and insurance premium taxes.[8]

ARIZONA'S FY 2026 budget allocates almost $50 million in state general funds to support child care. This total includes $44.9 million for the child care assistance program, which is the largest appropriation since 2009, and which was used to serve many of the families on the waiting list for assistance. However, as of November 1, 2025, the state reduced its tiered payment rates for higher-quality child care providers from 50 percent to 40 percent above the base rate and has halted future waiting list releases due to updates of the federal formula for distributing CCDBG funds that lowered the state's allocation by $24 million.[9]

The state funding for child care in the budget also includes $3 million to support an out-of-school grant program for youth ages 5 to 12; 30 percent of the funds for the grant program are reserved for rural communities. In addition, $1.5 million is included to build a child development center in the Town of Taylor, a rural community in northern Arizona.[10]

ARKANSAS aligned the eligibility requirements for two different early childhood programs, Arkansas Better Chance and the Arkansas Better Chance for School Success (House Bill 1733). The Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program was created in 1991 to offer high-quality early education services to children birth to 5 exhibiting developmental and socio-economic risk factors, and the Arkansas Better Chance for School Success was created in 2003 to provide prekindergarten for low-income 3- and 4-year-old children in areas at high risk for academic failure. Under the new legislation, both programs will serve children birth to 5, and the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education at the Arkansas Department of Education is tasked with establishing eligibility criteria that will apply to both the Arkansas Better Chance and Arkansas Better Chance for School Success programs.[11]

Arkansas also approved legislation (Senate Bill 148) that allows early childhood workers to participate in the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System, if their child care facility is licensed and receives state or federal child care funding. (Early childhood educators who work for public school systems in the state were already eligible prior to the new legislation.) Participation is voluntary, and early childhood workers are not entitled to state matching funds or contributions.[12]

Lastly, the state required a legislative study of workforce and social services reform that includes a study of state models for coordinating and fully integrating child care programs, improving outcomes for the child care assistance program, and recommending how child care can better support employment outcomes (Senate Bill 50).[13]

CALIFORNIA'S FY 2025-26 budget includes investments to continue expansion of Transitional Kindergarten (TK), the state-funded preschool program, to make it available to all 4-year-olds. The budget allocates $2.1 billion in ongoing funding for the final year of Universal TK implementation, $1.2 billion ongoing to sustain 10:1 child-staff ratios in TK classrooms, and $10 million in one-time funding to support the use of English language proficiency screeners for multilingual learners in TK (with authorization for the State Superintendent to adopt a screener for 3- and 4-year-olds in TK classrooms).[14]

The budget requires that all state-funded child care providers continue to be paid based on enrollment, rather than children's attendance, through July 1, 2028,[15] and includes funding for California to start paying providers in advance of the delivery of child care services ("prospective pay"). While the state law does not include a start date to implement prospective pay, the federal Administration for Children and Families approved California's temporary waiver through August 1, 2026, to implement this federal requirement.[16]

The budget also reaffirms the state's commitment to implementing an alternative methodology for setting provider payment rates for the child care assistance program that reflects the cost of providing child care and extends required quarterly progress updates through July 1, 2027.[17] In addition, the budget provides an increase to all child care providers' supplemental monthly payments in lieu of the statutory cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to increase rates; a new COLA for all child care providers that participate in publicly funded child care programs will begin in July 1, 2026.[18]

The state enacted a measure (Senate Bill 271) that requires California's public higher education institutions to provide information and support to access the full scope of support and resources whenever a student parent seeks financial aid, child care, or basic needs support on campus. The measure also requires basic needs centers to inform student parents of local child care resource and referral agencies that can assist them with child care needs.[19]

California approved a law (Assembly Bill 753) authorizing the Commission on Teacher Credentialing to issue an assistant teacher permit to individuals with at least 6 units that allows the permitholder to assist with the supervision of children up to two hours a day while the supervising employee leaves the classroom for purposes of offering flexibility for classroom support, or during breaks, or while escorting children outside of the classroom. Teachers can hold this permit for up to two years while they work to meet the 12 units required for an Associate Teacher Permit.[20]

Child Care Providers United, which represents home-based child care and family, friend, and neighbor providers, reached a three-year contract agreement with the state on September 22, 2025. The agreement includes $37.7 million ongoing, per year for cost-of-living adjustments and $91.7 million for one-time stabilization payments and restores up to $80 million ongoing, per year in retirement funding (dependent on provider enrollment), up to $100 million ongoing, per year in health care funding (dependent on provider enrollment), and up to $15 million ongoing, per year for training and continuing education. The agreement also ensures the ability to renegotiate rate increases if the legislature allocates more money in future budgets; significant progress on payment rate reform and a commitment to move to prospective pay; and continuing payment based on enrollment.[21]

Lastly, following the Los Angeles wildfires that occurred in early 2025, the Governor issued an Executive Order for the Department of Social Services, in collaboration with the California Employment Development Department (EDD), to individually contact child care programs or providers that had not reopened in the wake of the wildfires and make them aware of their potential eligibility for Disaster Unemployment Assistance. The Executive Order also directed the agencies to support providers in applying for that assistance.[22]

COLORADO approved an increase in funding for its Universal Preschool Program (UPK), which will allow for higher provider payment rates, support for Local Coordinating Organizations that facilitate the implementation of the UPK program, and expansion of the program's capacity. The state also maintained funding for the child care assistance program.[23]

Colorado enacted legislation (Senate Bill 25-004) that requires private child care centers to provide families with a transparent fee schedule upon registration, when joining a wait list, or at the request of the family. The law also requires application or waitlist fees to be refundable after six months if the child is not admitted and remains on the wait list.[24]

In addition, the state enacted a measure (Senate Bill 154) to make it easier for teachers to become certified in high-need areas such as early childhood education; under the legislation, a currently licensed Colorado teacher seeking to add an endorsement in early childhood education, early childhood special education, elementary education, or special education generalist can demonstrate professional competencies by submitting evidence of achieving sufficiently high grades on coursework aligned with relevant standards as approved by the Department of Education.[25]

The state extended the Early Childhood Leadership Commission, a state advisory council that offers guidance on improving the alignment, coordination, and efficiency of programs and services for children birth to age 8 and their families, until 2030 (Senate Bill 177); originally, the commission was scheduled to sunset in 2025.[26] The state also made a tax credit for investments in licensed child care programs available through tax years commencing prior to 2029, an extension from years prior to 2026 (House Bill 1296).[27]

Colorado approved a measure (Senate Bill 144)[28] that extends its Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) program for an additional 12 weeks for a parent who has a child receiving inpatient care in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). The legislation also changes the rate of premiums financing the program to ensure the future solvency of the fund.[29]

CONNECTICUT established a state-managed Early Childhood Education Endowment as of July 1, 2025, that will initially be funded with up to $300 million in unappropriated surplus from the FY 2025 budget and is expected to grow with future surpluses and investments (Senate Bill 1).[30] The endowment will support the expansion of the Early Start program, a new state-funded early care and education program that combined three existing programs (Child Day Care Contracts, School Readiness Grants, and State Head Start Supplement Grants).[31] The endowment funds will be used to create an additional 20,000 subsidized slots for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers; eliminate copayments for families with incomes below $100,000 and cap costs at 7 percent of income for families with higher incomes; raise wages for early educators by ensuring that providers receive pay parity with public schools in their municipality; and (starting in FY 2027) provide health insurance subsidies for early educators.[32]

Additionally, Connecticut created the Early Care and Education Program Portal, through which parents will be able to access real-time information about available child care slots and apply for child care subsidies and other assistance, the Office of Early Childhood will be able to manage payments to early childhood programs, and early care and education programs will be able to enter slot availability and enrollment information (House Bill 5003).[33]

The state's annual bond bill (House Bill 7288) will fund $80 million in bonds to support the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood in establishing the Child Care Facilities Grant Program for Construction and Renovation. The program will offer financial assistance for facility improvements for licensed child care centers, group child care homes, and family child care homes.[34]

Delaware's FY 2026 budget increased the exit eligibility limit for the child care assistance (Purchase of Care) program—the income limit up to which families already receiving assistance can continue receiving it—from 215 percent to 300 percent of the federal poverty level. (The income limit to initially qualify for assistance remains at 200 percent of the federal poverty level.) The state also increased the income limit to qualify for its state-funded prekindergarten program from 150 percent to 200 percent of the federal poverty level and committed to using existing funding sources to add 100 seats to the program. In addition, the state allocated $1.7 million to build a data system for an early childhood licensing and professional registry.[35]

District of Columbia's FY 2026 budget reduced the budget for the child care assistance program by $10 million even as enrollment significantly increased over the last year, leaving the program with a shortfall in the funding necessary to maintain the current caseload. As a result, the Office of the State Superintendent for Education is considering establishing a waiting list for child care assistance for the first time in decades and has developed a waiting list policy in case it has to do so.

The Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund, which supports wage supplements for early educators, was level-funded, despite growth in the District's early childhood workforce and an increase in the number of early educators attaining higher credentials (and thus eligible for higher wage supplements). Consequently, the DC Council has introduced legislation to reduce educator minimum salaries mandated by the program to accommodate insufficient funding. The Council approved an amendment stating that, should additional revenue become available, child care assistance and the pay equity fund would be prioritized for funding.[36]

FLORIDA'S FY 2026 budget provides $1.6 billion in early learning funding, a decrease of nearly 6 percent. This funding total includes $1.1 billion for the state's School Readiness (child care assistance) program, a decrease of $80.5 million, and $434 million for Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK), a decrease of $3.9 million; however, the base student allocation (BSA) for VPK was unchanged, at $3,029 per student.[37]

Florida enacted legislation (House Bill 1255) that changes the income eligibility limit for the School Readiness program from 150 percent of the federal poverty level to 55 percent of state median income.[38] The state also approved legislation that revises the criteria for children with special needs to receive priority for child care assistance and enables providers serving children with disabilities who require extra accommodations to receive increased special needs differential funding (Senate Bill 1102).[39]

In addition, the state approved a measure that updates licensing and safety standards for child care providers (Senate Bill 738). Among other provisions, the legislation ensures the Department of Children and Families (DCF) offers the initial training required of early educators online and for free; establishes a 45-day provisional background screening, so that educators can begin to work—with supervision—if their screening is delayed more than three days; and allows DCF to create a new, abbreviated inspection plan for licensed centers and programs that have not had multiple instances of violations, are not actively being investigated, and that have already been recently inspected.[40]

GEORGIA'S FY 2026 budget includes $3.9 million for the child care assistance program (Childcare and Parent Services, or CAPS) to serve 500 additional children; $1.5 million for CAPS to increase payment rates for child care providers to the 60th percentile of market rates; and $14 million for the second year of a four-year plan to reduce the size of state-funded prekindergarten classes from 22 to 20 students. The budget also includes $2.9 million to expand a home visiting pilot program; $550,895 to increase payment rates for special instructors and service coordinators working for Babies Can't Wait, the state's early intervention program for young children with disabilities and developmental delays (the first rate increase for these professionals since the 1990s); and $50,000 for Reach Out and Read Georgia to provide children with books during well-visit appointments.

The state approved a tax credit package (House Bill 136) that establishes a $250 nonrefundable child tax credit (CTC) for families with children under age 6; increases Georgia's Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) from 30 percent to 50 percent of the federal credit; and offers tax benefits to employers that make direct payments to child care programs to cover a portion of employees' child care costs.[41]

Hawai'i

Hawai'i expanded access to the Preschool Open Doors Program (POD) by extending eligibility to 2-year-olds beginning in January 2026, as the program previously only served 3- and 4-year-olds (House Bill 692). The measure also removed the accreditation requirement for POD providers to increase access to the program in rural areas. In addition, the legislation allows families to be eligible for continuous enrollment through kindergarten entry (without having to reapply each year) and allows the program to eliminate copayments for some families. Meanwhile, through a rule change, Hawai'i's Department of Human Services increased income eligibility for POD from 300 percent to 500 percent of the federal poverty level effective July 2025.[42]

Hawai'i approved legislation (House Bill 329) that allows the School Facilities Authority to work with public and private entities to develop prekindergarten, preschool, and child care facilities.[43] The FY 2026 budget provides funds to the Executive Office of Early Learning, as well as the School Facilities Authority, to continue expanding access to early learning throughout the state.[44]

The state approved a measure (Senate Bill 423) that requires one voting member of the Early Learning Board to have experience as a provider of early childhood education, adds the Director of the Hawai'i Head Start State Collaboration Office as an ex officio, nonvoting member, and requires the Early Learning Board to invite the President of the Head Start Association of Hawai'i, or their designee, to serve as an ex officio, nonvoting member.[45] Finally, the state approved legislation (Senate Bill 1202) that allows political campaign funds to be used for a candidate's child care.[46]

Idaho

Idaho approved legislation (House Bill 243) that allows higher child-staff ratios in child care programs as of July 2025. The legislation also prohibits local governments from creating stricter child-staff ratios than the state. (The original bill would have eliminated child-staff ratio requirements altogether; the measure was amended before final passage so that child care programs must still meet child-staff ratio requirements, but the requirements allow more children per staff member than previously permitted.)[47]

Illinois' FY 2026 budget provides an additional $175 million to the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) for child care, including a $90 million increase for Smart Start Workforce Grants to maintain higher wages for the child care workforce and support stability for the child care sector and an $85 million increase for the child care assistance program. The budget also provides $7.5 million in additional funding to the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) to support staffing, operations, data and technology infrastructure, program redesign, and communication and engagement efforts. However, the state flat-funded the Early Childhood Block Grant, which supports Preschool for All, Preschool for All Expansion, and Prevention Initiative programs for young children; the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) scholarship program, which supports early childhood educators pursuing degrees and credentials; Early Intervention for infants and toddlers with developmental disabilities and delays and their families (although a rate increase will be supported with federal Medicaid funds); and home visiting programs.[48]

The state approved legislation (House Bill 3439)[49] that extends the background check renewal period from three to five years to align with federal guidelines and reduce administrative burdens. The legislation also codifies existing Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) guidance allowing child care programs to hire staff on a probationary basis while waiting for full clearance of all required background checks if they have completed FBI or Illinois State Police fingerprint checks and are supervised by staff with cleared background checks.[50] In addition, the legislature approved a measure (Senate Bill 406)[51] that requires IDEC to establish an Early Childhood Integrated Data System that will be used to make equity driven, inclusive, and data-informed decisions within the early childhood system as well as another measure (House Bill 3446)[52] that requires IDEC to publish and update annually a comprehensive list of college early childhood courses child care teacher and director candidates can take to meet required qualifications.[53]

Indiana's early care and education programs have been impacted by a requirement that every state agency make a 5 percent cut to its budget and hold back an additional 5 percent in reserve due to a shortfall in the budget projection. While the biennial budget for 2025-27 includes $147 million in "hold harmless" funding for families currently receiving child care assistance that will allow them to continue receiving assistance, the state's match for federal CCDBG funding was cut from $40.1 million to $39.4 million annually. As of October 2025, the state reduced payment rates for the child care assistance program by 10 percent for care for infants and toddlers, 15 percent for care for preschool-age children, and 35 percent for school-age care. Funding for the On My Way Pre-K (OMWPK) program was cut from $27.4 million to $26 million annually.[54] The state is reducing enrollment in OMWPK from 6,000 to 2,500 children; has lowered the income eligibility limit from 150 percent to 140 percent of the federal poverty level; and now requires the child's parent to be working, in school, or in job training to qualify, no longer allowing children to qualify if their parents are searching for a job.[55] There were also cuts to the School Aged Child Care Grant and the line item for Visually Impaired Preschool Services.[56]

Indiana enacted legislation (Senate Bill 463)[57] that extends the employer child care tax credit for another two years and another measure (House Bill 1427)[58] that creates a new partial property tax exemption for employers that provide on-site child care for their employees. Under SB 463, the state's Early Learning Advisory Committee was expanded to include a representative of an out-of-school-time program and a representative of an organization with an interest in training individuals in the out-of-school time field; both new members are appointed by the governor.[59] Additionally, the state approved legislation (House Bill 1253)[60] that makes it easier for child care providers to operate in more than one location by creating a multi-site licensure category. The state also approved a measure (House Bill 1102)[61] allowing public school corporations to enter into agreements with religious nonprofits to provide prekindergarten services (previously allowed for school-age care programs).[62] Finally, the state enacted legislation (House Bill 1248) allowing foster parents to be eligible for child care assistance if they meet the income criteria and requiring the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration to reserve 200 vouchers specifically for children placed with licensed foster parents.[63]

Iowa

Iowa made available Early Childhood Continuum of Care grants of up to $300,000 over three years to support partnerships between Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program sites and licensed child care centers to offer full-day early care and education for 4-year-olds; the initiative will be funded by federal child care dollars. The state also extended a pilot program that allows individuals who work in direct care at child care programs to qualify for child care assistance regardless of family income. In addition, the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services partnered with the Iowa Economic Development Authority to launch the Statewide Solutions Fund, which will allow individuals and Iowa businesses to contribute toward boosting child care workforce wages.[64]

The state approved legislation that provides four weeks of paid leave to state employees giving birth to a child and one week of paid leave to the parent not giving birth as well as four weeks of paid leave for state employees who adopt a child.[65]

Iowa repealed its employer child care tax credit (Senate File 657).[66] In addition, the state approved legislation that requires child care providers to provide families with information about official vaccine exemptions whenever they have communications about the state's immunization requirements (House File 299).[67]

KANSAS enacted legislation (House Bill 2045) that establishes the Office of Early Childhood, which will house child care licensing, child care assistance, home visiting, and other early care and education programs. The measure also creates the position of an ombudsman to address concerns from providers and families. Starting in January 2026, the Director of Early Childhood will be required to submit a report each year to the Senate and House Commerce Committees that includes an explanation of program funding, metrics and measurements of programs, changes to rules and regulations, and current or expected pilot programs. The transition to the new office is scheduled to be completed by July 1, 2026.[68]

The legislation adds safe sleep practices for infants younger than 12 months old and creates a certification process for licensing specialists to promote consistency during inspections, effective July 1, 2026. However, the legislation also expands exemptions from child care licensure, allowing an unlicensed provider to care for up to four unrelated children (two of which can be infants), for up to 35 hours per child each week; previously, an unlicensed provider could provide no more than 20 cumulative hours of care for up to two children each week. The measure allows the exemptions to be widened even further through the rules and regulations process. In addition, as of July 1, 2025, the legislation makes it easier for parents to opt their children out of vaccination requirements for child care settings; reduces annual education requirements for providers from 16 hours to 10 hours of training; updates professional requirements for the director and other staff within a child care facility, including adjusting and reducing required levels of education; and reduces inside and outside square footage required per child in centers.[69]

The legislation changes the membership of the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund Board. The board oversees and provides guidance on the use of the Children's Initiatives Fund, which was established in 1999 using funding from the settlement with tobacco companies and which supports early childhood, health, and child welfare programs and services. As of July 2025, the majority of the voting members of the board—six of 11 voting members—will be appointed by the legislature, with the remaining five voting members appointed by the governor; previously, the board consisted of nine members and the governor appointed the majority—five voting members—and the legislature appointed the remaining four voting members. The governors' appointees will continue to be members of the public with knowledge of the needs of children and families, but under the new legislation, the legislative appointments now must be members of the legislature. The legislation also changed the non-voting membership by adding the Director of Early Childhood and replacing the Commissioner of Juvenile Justice appointee with the Secretary of Corrections. (Other non-voting members continue to include appointees of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the Department for Children and Families, the Kansas Board of Regents, the Commissioner of Education, and a member of the Kansas Supreme Court.)[70]

In another measure that expands the legislature's control over early care and education programs, the state approved legislation (House Bill 2240) that puts the legislature fully in charge of approving changes to child care assistance programs that expand eligibility or increase costs to the state. In addition, the state enacted a measure (House Bill 2217) that expands the authority of the Medicaid Inspector General's Office to investigate fraud in child care assistance programs.[71]

The budget includes $2.5 million for FY 2025 to maintain funding that had already been committed to a state partnership with Blue Cross Blue Shield to open a licensed child care center in Topeka that will serve both state and Blue Cross Blue Shield employees.[72] The budget also adds $1.25 million for a public-private partnership, under the purview of the Children's Cabinet, for child care facility operations in southwestern Kansas for FY 2026.[73]

KENTUCKY'S 2025 legislative session was a non-budget year. The state approved legislation (Senate Bill 9) requiring all public school districts to provide up to 30 days of paid maternity leave to employees who give birth; the measure also allows districts to offer benefits beyond this statewide minimum standard. Additionally, the governor issued new regulations granting state workers up to 6 weeks of paid parental leave every 10 years for the birth, adoption, or foster placement of a child.[74]

Kentucky enacted a measure (House Bill 240) requiring universal literacy screening for kindergarten and first-grade students. The law includes provisions for retention if students do not make adequate progress, with schools required to revise reading improvement plans and reassess readiness before advancement.[75]

LOUISIANA'S FY 2026 budget includes $78 million, level funding, for the child care assistance program. Additionally, the state approved legislation to create the Early Childhood Education Stability Fund, allocating $11 million annually to it. This fund is intended to compensate for the potential impact on prekindergarten programs in school districts if two current prekindergarten funding sources (the Education Excellence Fund and Education Quality Trust Fund) are eliminated under a ballot measure that will be considered by voters in April 2026. If the ballot initiative passes, the Stability Fund will go into effect in FY 2027. (The ballot measure would amend the constitution to repeal those two education funds, along with the Quality Education Support Fund, and apply the money in those funds to the Teachers' Retirement System.)[76]

The state also enacted legislation (House Bill 639) that increases the revenue stream for the Louisiana Early Childhood Education Fund, which matches local investments in early education for children birth through age 3, by increasing the tax rate for online sports wagering—a dedicated revenue stream for the fund—from 15 percent to 21.5 percent.[77] The increased revenues are projected to exceed the current $20 million annual cap on the amount of revenue from sports wagering that can be allocated to the Louisiana Early Childhood Education Fund.[78]

Lastly, Louisiana approved legislation (Senate Bill 233) amending its refundable employer child care tax credits (previously named School Readiness Tax Credits and renamed by the measure Workforce Child Care Tax Credits) to increase the amount of eligible child care expenses that businesses can claim and to include a $1 million cap, which can grow in future years up to a maximum of $5 million, based on tax credit utilization.[79]

MAINE'S biennial budget preserves $39.2 million in state funding for early childhood, including $30 million for child care workforce compensation; $7.2 million for Head Start to supplement federal funding for the program; and $2.5 million for the Child Care Employment Award, which enables child care professionals to have categorical eligibility for child care assistance for their own children (Legislative Document 210).[80]

Maine enacted legislation (Legislative Document 202) that increases the number of children a family child care provider may care for without having to be licensed from two children to three children, or four children if at least two of the children are siblings.[81] The state enacted another measure (Legislative Document 388) that exempts a child care provider on a military installation or a facility licensed or certified as a family child care provider by the U.S. Department of Defense from Maine regulations.[82] In addition, the state approved a measure (Legislative Document 1428) that allows child care facilities and family child care providers to operate without an outdoor recreational space if the operation is within one-quarter of a mile of an outdoor public recreational space; requires municipalities to allow child care facilities and family child care providers to operate in an area that is zoned for residential purposes; and requires the Maine State Housing Authority to amend its rules governing low-income housing tax credits to allow the community rooms that are required as part of the projects built using the credits to be used as child care facilities or for family child care.[83]

Maine enacted legislation (Legislative Document 1736) that requires the state's Office of Child and Family Services to enter into direct contracts with child care providers for slots for children under 3 years of age, children with disabilities, and children in underserved geographic areas, and authorizes the office to use direct contracts to provide child care slots for other categories of children identified as priorities.[84]

The state approved a measure (Legislative Document 1469) specifying that a child care provider accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association for Family Child Care, or the Council on Accreditation or a Head Start program that meets national Head Start standards must receive the highest rating under the state's child care quality rating system.[85]

MARYLAND'S FY 2025-26 budget includes nearly $500 million in funding for the child care assistance program, an increase of approximately $171.5 million from the previous year, helping to cover increased enrollment and higher payment rates for child care providers that better reflect market prices. However, the funding still does not meet existing needs, so the state has capped enrollment for the child care assistance program at approximately 40,000 slots and has frozen intake since May 2025.[86]

Maryland enacted legislation (House Bill 389/Senate Bill 516) that exempts personal property used in connection with certain large family child care homes from valuation and taxation, an exemption that had previously only been available to family child care homes; repeals a requirement that certain real property improvements to child care centers be completed after certain dates in order to be eligible for certain property tax credits; increases the maximum property tax credit that local jurisdictions can offer child care centers and homes from $3,000 to $10,000; and makes the property tax credit available to large family child care homes.[87] Additionally, the state approved legislation (House Bill 785) to ensure that family child care programs are considered a residential permitted activity and prohibit local jurisdictions from limiting the number of children in a program below the number authorized by the state.[88]

The state enacted legislation (House Bill 859) requiring the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange to promote access to health insurance for child care professionals and to conduct a survey, in consultation with the state's Department of Education and relevant nonprofit organizations, to assess current levels of health care access across the child care community.[89] Another measure signed into law (House Bill 1121) assists youth transitioning from foster placement to an adulthood program in applying for and accessing child care assistance for their children.[90]

The state approved a measure (Senate Bill 359/House Bill 185) extending a mandate for $3.7 million in annual funding for FY 2027 through FY 2029 for the Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program, after the original mandate had expired after FY 2025. The program supports grants to providers that specialize in child care and early education for children under age 6 with disabilities and developmental delays.[91]

Finally, the state approved measures requiring the Department of Education to conduct a comprehensive review of child care regulations (House Bill 477);[92] the Department of Education to conduct an analysis of the mixed delivery publicly funded prekindergarten system (House Bill 1475);[93] and the Department of General Services to conduct an assessment of facilities owned by the state to evaluate whether the facility or a portion of the facility would be suitable to lease to a child care center (House Bill 1344).[94]

MASSACHUSETTS' FY 2026 budget invests $1.7 billion in early education and child care programs, which is an increase of approximately 10 percent from the prior year. This total includes $1.06 billion for the child care assistance program, which will allow the program to maintain its current caseload of nearly 68,000 children; $475 million for the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) grants, non-competitive grants to support licensed early care and education providers' operational and workforce costs; $20 million to increase payment rates for providers that serve families receiving child care assistance; $8 million to enable early educators to receive child care assistance for their own children; $7.5 million for early educator loan forgiveness; $5 million for early educator higher education scholarships; $20 million in state funds to supplement federal Head Start funds; and $20.5 million for the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative program, which supports access to high-quality early education through partnerships between school districts and child care programs (a 27 percent decrease from FY 2025 funding after adjusting for inflation).[95]

In addition, the supplemental budget, which allocates surplus revenue from the Fair Share surtax to education and transportation initiatives beyond what is included in the FY 2026 operating budget, includes $45.5 million for early education and care.[96]

The governor of Massachusetts, using capital funds from the FY 2024 budget, awarded $2.7 million to over 150 family child care providers through the new Family Child Care Capital Grant Program; grantees received between $500 and $25,000 to expand and improve their space through indoor and outdoor infrastructure upgrades, energy efficiency measures, emergency repairs, accessibility improvements, and other projects.[97]

MICHIGAN'S FY 2025-26 budget includes $3.4 million for the Tri-Share Child Care program—a program through which the cost of an employee's child care is shared among the employer, the employee, and the state; this funding level will cover regional facilitator recruitment hubs to support expansion and effective implementation. The budget also provides $656.6 million for the continued expansion of PreK for All with increases in the per-child daily rates and the elimination of income eligibility requirements, although providers must still prioritize children in households with lower incomes or other identified risk factors; $10 million in start-up grants for new or expanded programs; $25 million to expand the pilot program for 3-year-olds; and $28 million to support transportation for children to and from prekindergarten programs, including by offsetting the cost of transportation by parents. Additionally, the state provided $2.3 million for its new Michigan National Guard Child Care Assistance Program to help eligible members of Michigan's National Guard afford child care.[98]

The budget increases funding for the state's child care assistance program by $44.3 million to reflect increased caseload costs. The budget also includes $3.5 million in one-time funds to develop a prospective payment system for providers serving children receiving child care assistance. However, funding was not provided to increase provider payment rates, which remain below pandemic-era levels despite the rising cost of care.

The budget eliminates $19.4 million for Early Childhood Block Grants, which for nearly two decades provided funds for early childhood programs for children birth to age 8. The loss of funding jeopardizes 54 local Great Start Collaboratives and Family Coalitions across the state, home visiting services for at-risk children and their families, and early literacy programs.[99]

MINNESOTA'S FY 2026-27 biennial budget provides the Early Learning Scholarships program, which supports high-quality early education for children birth to age 4 with the highest needs, with $99.99 million per year; however, the budget does not compensate for the expiration of $193 million in one-time funding provided for the program for FY 2024-25. The budget also provides $130 million for Great Start Compensation Payments, which supplement early educators' wages. In addition, the budget allocates funds to improve technology and infrastructure for early childhood education, including $174,000 for technology grants through 2029; $300,000 for child care improvement grants; and over $7 million to build an electronic attendance and record-keeping system for the child care assistance program. The state provided $24.4 million in state funding to supplement federal Head Start funding as well.[100]

Under the Workforce Omnibus budget measure, the state provided $250,000 per year for WomenVenture for its work supporting child care businesses; $1.5 million per year in local grants to increase the number of child care providers; $500,000 to strengthen the Office of Child Care Community Partnerships; $1 million to the Minnesota Initiative Foundation to engage private sector support for local child care in economic development; and $466,000 per year to Greater Twin Cities United Way to help subsidize child care for providers not covered by the Early Learning Scholarships or child care assistance programs.[101]

Under the Agriculture Omnibus budget legislation, the state provided $1.594 million in FY 2026 and $1.544 million in FY 2027 for the Farm-to-School Program, expanding its reach into early childhood settings to ensure that children in early childhood programs have access to fresh, local food.[102]

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development awarded a total of $6.1 million in Child Care Economic Development Grants to 25 organizations with the aim of adding 1,400 child care slots statewide. The grants will be used to support new or existing child care providers in becoming licensed, improving facilities, attracting and retaining early educators, training early educators, and/or other taking other steps to expand capacity.[103]

Finally, the state created a new Office of the Ombudsperson for Family Child Care.[104]

Mississippi

Mississippi invested $15 million of state funds into the child care assistance program—the first time the state had appropriated its own funds above the required match for CCDBG.[105] Despite this state investment, the state still had to cut 9,000 children from the child care assistance program and had a waiting list of over 17,000 children as of September 2025.[106]

The state maintained funding for its Early Learning Collaborative Program—the primary state prekindergarten program, which offers prekindergarten through partnerships among schools, Head Start programs, child care providers, and/or other community-based organizations—at $29 million and maintained funding for prekindergarten coaches at $3.25 million. Similarly, the state provided level funding, $13 million, for the State Invested Pre-K Program (SIP)—which, unlike the Early Collaborative Program, has no requirement for schools to partner with other early learning programs, no local match, and no quality requirements.[107]

The state approved legislation that, as of January 2026, provides state employees who are primary caregivers of a child with six weeks of paid family medical leave that can be used after the birth or adoption of the child. The legislation allows, but does not require, school boards to pass their own policies providing paid parental leave for employees.[108]

Missouri's

Missouri's FY 2026 budget includes $366 million for the child care assistance program. The budget also includes $2.5 million for a child care tri-share program, where the cost of child care is shared by the employer, the employee, and the state. In addition, the state allocated $900,000 for the development and implementation of community plans to improve access to quality child care and early education programs.[109]

On July 1, 2025, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education announced it will implement changes to the child care assistance program once technical updates to its child care data system are complete in an estimated six months. These changes include paying child care providers prospectively and based on authorized enrollment.[110]

Montana

Montana established the Montana Early Childhood Special Revenue Account (House Bill 924),[111] a state fund dedicated to supporting early childhood programs, services, and initiatives. The fund will receive a one-time $10 million public investment in 2025 and will grow over time as it receives a portion of the interest earned on the new Growth and Opportunities Trust,[112] which was created to support Montana's infrastructure and economic development. The Early Childhood Special Revenue Account is also authorized to accept private donations, grants, or gifts. The Montana Early Childhood Account Board, which includes representatives from public agencies, child care providers, a parent representative, and early childhood organizations, will determine how funds are allocated. The funds can be used for purposes such as technical assistance grants to help start or expand child care businesses; grants for early childhood postsecondary education, certifications, apprenticeship, training, and continuing education; recruitment and retention grants to provide workforce benefits, stipends, or supplements; accreditation support; curriculum development; safety upgrades; supports for infants, toddlers, and children with special needs; expansion of licensed before-school and after-school care; expansion of the child care assistance program; temporary child care assistance programs for families facing sudden financial hardship; early learning and early childhood intervention access programs; and/or emergency assistance and disaster relief programs for impacted child care programs.[113]

Montana enacted legislation (House Bill 381)[114] that allows 11th and 12th graders to earn up to two education credits when they volunteer in certain care settings including a child care facility. The state also enacted legislation (House Bill 168)[115] that ensures 3- and 4-year-olds with disabilities enrolled in school district special education programs are included in Average Number Belonging (ANB) calculations used to determine school funding received from the state. Other legislation (Senate Bill 35/House Bill 338)[116] made minor modifications to the early targeted intervention program offered at public schools for prekindergarten to third grade. Changes included clarifying that out-of-district children can participate in the early literacy jumpstart program and school districts should receive ANB funding for these children and expanding eligibility to include children at risk of falling behind in math proficiency.[117]

The state implemented a new package of child care licensing rules. Among other changes, the rules establish a license category for school-age programs, easing the way for these programs to become licensed.[118]

NEBRASKA'S biennial budget preserves several early childhood initiatives that had been at risk of cuts. The budget protects $3.25 million in funding for the Early Childhood Education Endowment Cash Fund (Sixpence), which offers funds and technical guidance to high-quality early childhood programs that serve children birth to age 3, with a focus on at-risk infants and toddlers. The budget also provides funding to pilot the Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS).[119]

Nebraska enacted legislation (Legislative Bill 182)[120] that makes banks and insurance companies eligible for a nonrefundable tax credit under the Child Care Tax Credit Act when they provide a qualifying contribution to the child care industry. The state also enacted legislation (Legislative Bill 248)[121] that exempts child care programs located on military bases or federal property and those licensed by the military as family child care providers from state licensing requirements; legislation (Legislative Bill 257)[122] that gives licensed child care programs three business days to obtain liability insurance if a lapse is discovered at inspection and stipulates suspension of the license if coverage cannot be obtained; and legislation (Legislative Bill 51)[123] that signs Nebraska onto the National Crime Prevention and Privacy Compact, which facilitates federal and interstate background checks, making the process more efficient for professions with background check requirements, including child care.[124]

NEVADA enacted a comprehensive education bill (Senate Bill 460) that includes provisions expanding the state prekindergarten program. Under the measure, eligibility for the program, which serves 4-year-olds, is extended to children whose household incomes are at or below 250 percent of the federal poverty level, who have an individualized educational program, whose primary language is not English, or who are members of vulnerable and historically underserved populations; previously, eligibility was limited to children in households with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The legislation also expands the types of entities that can receive grants to offer the prekindergarten programs to include institutions within the Nevada System of Higher Education. The measure allocates $4 million in FY 2025-26 and $5 million in FY 2026-27 to support increased access to free or low-cost prekindergarten in underserved communities. It also appropriates $12 million in FY 2026-27 to the Early Childhood Literacy and Readiness Account for grants supporting early childhood literacy and readiness.[125]

Nevada enacted legislation (Assembly Bill 212)[126] that extends the Virtual Early Childhood Family Engagement Program, which aims to provide training and coaching to empower parents in the education of their young children and increase children's readiness for kindergarten throughout the state, and that appropriates $1 million each year for FY 2025-26 and FY 2026-27 for the program.[127]

NEW HAMPSHIRE'S FY 2026-27 biennial budget includes $15 million for the state's Child Care Workforce Retention and Recruitment Grants, with the intent to draw from federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) reserve funds.[128] However, since federal approval is still pending, the continuation of this funding remains uncertain.[129]

The budget also authorizes the Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services to use available federal TANF funds to avoid a waiting list for the child care assistance (Child Care Scholarship) program.

In addition, the budget includes changes to the Child Care Scholarship program to make it work better for families and child care providers. The Department of Health and Human Services is directed to adopt administrative rules to eliminate any requirements for providers receiving child care assistance payments to report hourly attendance; to implement prospective payment for the child care assistance program by December 2025; and to develop and implement a presumptive eligibility pilot program allowing applicants who meet initial screening requirements to receive child care assistance for up to 60 days while a final eligibility determination is made. The budget includes $100,000 to support these changes.[130]

New Jersey's

FY 2026 budget includes $565.8 million for the state's child care assistance program, an increase of approximately $80 million; $34.6 million in new funding to expand free, universal prekindergarten, of which $10 million is to launch new preschool programs; and nearly $13 million to expand Family Connects NJ, which offers free home visits for postpartum mothers and newborns.[131]

The state enacted legislation (Senate Bill 3910) codifying New Jersey's preschool funding formula into statute. The measure aims to help build and sustain universal access to high-quality state-funded preschool programs by requiring the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) to provide annual preschool expansion grants; establishing a three-year Preschool Cost-Sharing Pilot Program; establishing a Universal Preschool Implementation Steering Committee, which will be composed of representatives of various state agencies and the state legislature; requiring the DOE, Department of Children and Families (DCF), and Department of Human Services (DHS) to annually submit a report to the legislature on the status of preschool education in the state and the efficacy of mixed delivery of preschool programs; and requiring state agencies to publish guidance on a variety of topics related to expanding access to high-quality preschool education in areas of greatest need.[132]

New Mexico

enacted legislation (House Bill 71)[133] that increases the minimum annual distribution from the Early Childhood Trust Fund (ECTF) from $250 million to $500 million or 5 percent of the fund's three-year average balance, whichever is greater. The increased distribution is expected to add $202 million to early childhood education funding in FY 2026. This step will benefit more than 85,000 children from birth to age 5 and ensure continued access to essential programs, such as home visiting, early intervention for infants and toddlers with disabilities and developmental delays and their families (Family Infant Toddler), child care assistance, state-funded prekindergarten (New Mexico PreK), tribal partnerships, and quality initiatives.[134]

In addition, under the legislation, from FY 2026 to FY 2028, funds from an oil and gas emergency school tax will be evenly split between the ECTF and the Behavioral Health Trust Fund and revenue from federal mineral leasing will be divided equally between the ECTF and the Medicaid Trust Fund. The measure includes a safeguard to revert transfers to the ECTF if its balance falls below its FY 2025 level, and the ECTF will once again receive 100 percent of these designated revenue transfers beginning in FY 2029.[135]

The state is implementing universal child care—child care assistance for parents who are working or in school, regardless of income and with no copayment requirement—through regulatory change. As part of this regulatory change, the state has established an enhanced payment rate for providers to incentivize higher wages for child care workers. After FY 2026, the legislature must appropriate funds to continue this initiative.[136]

New Mexico enacted legislation (Senate Bill 175) that amends the Child Care Revolving Loan Fund to allow the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) and the New Mexico Finance Authority to use the fund to contract for services with providers or employers seeking to create or expand child care programs for employees. The legislation also requires the department to prioritize loans for providers serving high numbers of families receiving child care assistance and low-income families in communities with high poverty rates and providers that offer care during nontraditional hours.[137]

Lastly, ECECD increased provider payment rates for the Family Infant Toddler early intervention program by 7 percent, supported by increased funding in the FY 2026 state budget.[138]

NEW YORK'S FY 2025-26 budget appropriates approximately $2.470 billion for child care assistance, including $1.410 billion in state general funds (a $413.57 million increase over the previous year), up to $576 million in federal CCDBG funds, and $483.63 million in federal TANF funds. Other child care investments in the budget include $110 million for payment of capital costs of design, construction, rehabilitation, and equipment for existing or proposed child care facilities, with $10 million of those funds reserved for home-based child care programs; level funding of up to $10.7 million for the Infant-Toddler Resource Network, which provides training and supports to providers; level funding of $5 million for QUALITYstarsNY, the state's quality rating and improvement system; level funding of $5 million for New York City and $5 million for communities outside the city to maintain pilot programs to provide child care assistance to children otherwise ineligible for assistance due to immigration status or because their parents engage in episodic work and earn less than 400 percent of the federal poverty level; level funding of $5 million for a pilot of staffed family child care networks to support and grow the capacity of family child care providers; level funding of $4.8 million for an employer-supported child care pilot program (first funded in 2023, but not yet launched) to serve families with incomes between 85 percent and 100 percent of state median income in three regions of the state; $3 million and statutory language allowing for the creation of a child care provider substitute pool administered by the Early Care and Learning Council (ELC), the statewide coordinating organization of the 35 Child Care Resource Centers (CCRCs); and $1 million to support work of the coalition on child care, which includes developing recommendations on sustainable child care funding.[139]

The budget also provides level funding of $1.2 billion for the state's universal prekindergarten program; level funding of $205 million for the early intervention program; and level funding for home visiting programs, including $37 million for Healthy Families NY, $4.2 million for Nurse-Family Partnerships, and $200,000 for Parent Child Plus, Inc. In addition, the budget includes $112.4 million for the Learning and Enrichment After-School Program Supports (LEAPS) initiative, an increase of nearly $9 million to cover minimum wage adjustments for current grantees, with limited additional funds available to extend or expand current after-school contracts, award new contracts, and provide technical assistance to grant recipients.[140]

The budget expands New York's refundable child tax credit, the Empire State Child Credit (ESCC), by increasing the credit amount to $1,000 per child per year for children under age 4 beginning in the 2025 tax year; extending the credit to provide $500 per child per year for children ages 4 to 17 starting in the 2026 tax year; and removing income phase-in requirements that had previously excluded families with the lowest incomes from receiving the full credit amount. In addition, the budget establishes a one-time $1,800 benefit to public assistance recipients upon the birth of a new child.[141]

The state approved legislation (Assembly Bill 612) allowing the Office of Children and Family Services the flexibility to adjust child-staff ratios for child care programs as necessary, and to align ratios with the New York City Department of Mental Hygiene's (DOHMH) ratios.[142]

Finally, the state enacted a measure (Senate Bill 1926) that requires each local social services district to maintain a waiting list of eligible families who apply for child care assistance and do not receive it and to report those waiting lists—with information on the ages of the children and incomes of the families on the lists—to the state's Office of Children and Family Services, which would then be required to compile the data into a report for the governor and legislature.[143]

North Carolina

North Carolina enacted legislation (HB 412) that requires the Division of Child Development and Early Education to develop a proposed plan to decouple the state's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) from provider payment rates for the child care assistance program and to complete a new child care market rate study by May 1, 2026. The study must contain potential rates not segmented by the star ratings and new market rates for the QRIS. The rates will only be implemented if they are authorized by the state's General Assembly and approved by the federal Administration of Children and Families.[144]

The legislation also makes several child care regulatory changes, including increasing the maximum group size for infants and toddlers in child care centers (but maintaining the same child-teacher ratios); permitting a lead teacher to plan and implement daily activities for two groups but requiring that, if a lead teacher is responsible for two groups, at least one other individual overseeing the group must be engaging in early childhood credential coursework or seeking on-the-job training to seek future qualification as a lead teacher; allowing a teacher to qualify as a lead teacher with five years or more of documented experience teaching in a licensed child care facility in North Carolina and treating this experience as equivalent to the North Carolina Early Childhood Credential when awarding quality ratings; and clarifying mandatory licensing standards for out-of-school child care provided at elementary and middle schools for school-age children.[145]

In addition, the legislation requires the Division of Child Development and Early Education to establish a school-age/out-of-school care credential in consultation with the North Carolina Community Colleges System; requires the Division to award the North Carolina Early Childhood Administration Credential or the North Carolina Family Child Care Credential to individuals who have completed continuing education courses equivalent to child care curriculum courses as determined by the Community College System; requires the Commissioner of Insurance to establish a work group to examine the potential for the development of group liability insurance opportunities for child care providers; creates an exemption for certain Department of Defense family child care homes from child care licensure requirements; requires the Division, in coordination with the Child Care Commission, to clarify rules governing multiuse child care centers; and establishes a work group to examine streamlining regulatory requirements related to the physical structures of licensed child care facilities.[146]

NORTH DAKOTA'S biennial budget for FY 2025-27 provides one-time appropriations of $11 million to support child care programs serving infants and toddlers; $7.8 million to support child care infrastructure, quality, and services for children with special needs; $4 million to expand the Best-in-Class state-funded preschool program; and $1.5 million for the Waterford Upstart program, an at-home school readiness program that offers online lessons for preschool-age children and tools to help families support their children's learning (a decrease from $2.4 million in the previous biennium for the program). Additionally, the budget includes $21.6 million to continue the improvements to the child care assistance program implemented during the previous session, including expanded eligibility to allow more families to receive assistance and reduced copayments. However, the state started a waiting list for child care assistance as of December 1, 2025 and announced that some payment rates for the child care assistance program would be reduced as of January 1, 2026.[147]

The state approved legislation (Senate Bill 2282) to create a new tax credit for employers that contribute to licensed child care programs on behalf of their employees. Employers can receive a tax credit equal to 50 percent of their contributions and can claim up to $1,000 in contributions per employee.[148]

North Dakota enacted legislation (House Bill 1119) requiring a study on child care provider licensing; calling for an evaluation of the state's child care programs, policies, and funding; and creating a child care services advisory committee consisting of representatives of child care and preschool programs, legislators, and a child care expert.[149]

OHIO'S FY 2026-27 budget revises the payment structure for Publicly Funded Child Care (the primary child care assistance program that serves families with incomes at or below 145 percent of the federal poverty level), changing from paying providers based on attendance to paying based on enrollment. In addition, the budget allocates $200 million of federal funds to the Child Care Choice Voucher program (which serves families with incomes between 146 percent and 200 percent of the federal poverty level), allowing the state to serve 20,000 more children. The budget also includes $10 million for the Child Care Cred pilot, a cost-sharing model among employers, employees, and the state, and $2.85 million for the Child Care Provider Recruitment program, which aims to increase child care in underserved areas in the state. The budget increases funding for several early childhood programs as well; funding for early intervention is increased by $15.196 million, funding for the Help Me Grow home visiting program is increased by $21.5 million, and funding for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library is increased by $500,000 over the biennium. The budget also invests $6.2 million in additional funding to expand early literacy access through curricula and activities aligned with the science of reading.[150]

OKLAHOMA enacted legislation (House Bill 2778) that makes employees of licensed child care facilities who have incomes below $120,000 for a two-parent household and $60,000 for single-parent household eligible for child care assistance for their own children, with no copayment.[151] The state also enacted legislation (Senate Bill 841) that requires early childhood educators to complete a comprehensive reading instruction assessment, in addition to the teacher education program already required.[152] In addition, the state approved the Advancing Rights for Caregiving, Health, and Extended Recovery (Maternity Leave Protection for Teachers) Act (House Bill 1601), which requires the board of education of each school district to provide paid sick leave for all teachers and allow teachers to use up to six weeks of accrued sick leave to extend their six-week, statutorily-provided maternity leave.[153]

Oklahoma enacted legislation (House Bill 1847) allowing family child care homes and large child care homes to operate under the 2018 International Residential Code as adopted by the Oklahoma Uniform Building Code Commission, prohibiting municipalities from enacting tighter fire and safety restrictions, and providing that child care homes cannot be denied a license to operate if they comply with requirements from the State Fire Marshal.[154]

Lastly, Oklahoma Human Services issued new rules requiring child care programs with a five-star rating under the state's quality rating and improvement system to obtain accreditation from a nationally recognized accrediting organization approved by Child Care Services to maintain that quality rating. The state will use $500,000 of federal Preschool Development Grant funds to assist programs working toward accreditation.[155]

OREGON'S FY 2025-27 biennial budget set funding for Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC) programs 3 percent ($45 million) below the amount needed to maintain current service levels. All DELC programs received less than needed to keep pace with inflation, with additional cuts to several programs, including the Early Childhood Equity Fund, which supports culturally specific kindergarten readiness and family support programming; Preschool Promise, the state-funded prekindergarten program; the Healthy Families Oregon home visiting program; parenting education; and professional learning for early educators.[156]

The budget includes $415.9 million in total funding for Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education for FY 2025-27, which is sufficient to maintain current service levels, but this amount assumes a higher level of federal funding than is likely to be received.[157] The state also approved legislation (House Bill 2682) requiring the Department of Education to establish an advisory committee to study and develop recommendations to update the funding model for Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education.[158]

The state enacted legislation (House Bill 3560) allowing child care centers in residential zones when located near places such as schools, parks, libraries, places of worship, or apartment buildings.[159] Another measure approved by the state (Senate Bill 1099) requires cities and counties to allow churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, and other nonresidential places of worship to be used for preschool.[160] Additionally, the state authorized DELC to waive certain requirements for certified child care facilities upon good cause shown and if the resulting circumstances protect the welfare of the children and the consumer interests of the parents of the children (House Bill 2814).[161]

To improve access to child care for indigenous communities in Oregon, the legislature enacted legislation (House Bill 2815) that requires DELC to develop and implement a statewide early learning and care plan in consultation with the nine federally recognized Indian tribes in the state and state agencies with relevant expertise and establish an advisory committee (the Oregon Tribal Early Learning Alliance) and the Tribal Early Learning Fund.[162]

PENNSYLVANIA'S FY 2025-26 budget includes $7.5 million to increase payment rates for the state prekindergarten program to help providers raise wages and stabilize the early educator workforce and $25 million for a new Child Care Staff Retention and Recruitment Program, providing about $450 per employee annually to licensed child care assistance program providers.[163]

The state also created the Working Pennsylvanians Tax Credit, which is modeled after the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and will provide $193 million in tax relief for qualifying families in the first year.[164]

RHODE ISLAND'S FY 2026 budget includes $3 million in federal funding to create a new provider payment rate category for the child care assistance program; the new infant care rate will apply to care for children ages 6 weeks to 18 months and will be 20 percent higher than the rate for toddler care. The state also approved $2.7 million in federal funding to extend the Child Care for Child Care Educators pilot program, which covers the cost of care for children of early educators with incomes up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level, for three more years. Additionally, Rhode Island enacted legislation that increases paid family and medical leave wage replacement rates from 60 percent to 70 percent in 2027 and 75 percent in 2028; increases the payroll contribution cap from $89,200 to $100,000; and adds sibling to the definition of family for family leave.[165]

SOUTH CAROLINA did not enact any major child care legislation during the first half of the legislature's two-year session.[166]

SOUTH DAKOTA, building on its pilot quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), developed and implemented the Quality Care South Dakota (QCSD) initiative through a partnership between the Department of Social Services and the South Dakota State University Quality Collaborative. QCSD is housed at the Child and Family Resource Network on the campus of South Dakota State University. QCSD is expanding to 90 programs this year.[167]

TENNESSEE'S FY 2025-26 budget includes $5.9 million for Smart Steps, the state's child care assistance program for income-eligible working families, to allow more families to be served and to ease the graduated phase-out of assistance. The budget also includes $7.2 million to expand the WAGE$ program, which provides salary supplements to early educators based on the educational credentials they have received.[168]

The state enacted legislation (House Bill 105)[169] to allow organizations that are not nonprofits to access the $45 million in Child Care Improvement Pilot Grants that were previously restricted to nonprofit organizations.[170]

Additionally, the state approved legislation (Senate Bill 1379)[171] that allows child care agencies to lease or purchase underutilized property from local education agencies; classifies a family child care home as residential property for certain purposes, including zoning and building codes; and permits a host-school's fire inspection and facilities to be sufficient for a child care agency's provisional license under the Department of Human Services.[172]

The state enacted legislation (House Bill 106) that revises the categories of child care that are exempt from licensing—for example, exempting programs that provide care on an occasional or infrequent basis, such as care during special events or at gyms or recreation centers.[173]

TEXAS' FY 2026 budget includes $100 million over the biennium in unexpended TANF funds to support child care assistance. The funds will be used to help cover the rising cost of child care and thus prevent the loss of thousands of child care assistance slots; the waiting list for child care assistance already had nearly 95,000 children on it as of mid-2025.[174]

The state approved an $8.5 billion public education funding bill (House Bill 2) that includes a provision allowing children of public school teachers to be eligible for public prekindergarten in the school district where they work. The legislation also increased the Early Education Allotment (EEA), which school districts can use for prekindergarten as well as covering the costs associated with meeting early literacy and numeracy requirements, by an estimated $90 million. In addition, the measure adjusts the formula for distributing EEA funds to districts from being based on districts' average daily attendance of low-income or emergent bilingual students in kindergarten through third grade to being based on districts' prekindergarten attendance. Other provisions of the legislation limit school districts' ability to offer prekindergarten; starting in the 2027-28 school year, schools will only be allowed to repurpose, lease, or build a classroom for students eligible for free prekindergarten, or offer tuition-based prekindergarten to families who are not eligible for free prekindergarten, if one of four new intermediary organizations designated by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) verifies that an eligible private child care provider is unavailable to serve the families who are seeking to enroll.[175]

Texas enacted legislation (Senate Bill 462)[176] that gives employees of licensed child care facilities priority on the waiting list for child care assistance. Another measure that was approved (House Bill 2294)[177] allows Local Workforce Development Boards (which administer the child care assistance program) to pay child care providers serving children receiving child care assistance and participating in the state's quality rating and improvement system (Texas Rising Star) the maximum rate for their quality level, even if the provider's listed rates are lower (as long as doing so does not lower the Texas Workforce Commission's goal for the average number of children served each day through subsidized child care in that area).[178]

The state approved legislation (Senate Bill 599)[179] that restricts local governments and municipalities from imposing additional health and safety standards on family child care home providers; under the legislation, licensed family child care homes are only required to meet standards set by the state.[180]

The state enacted measures to streamline governance and oversight of early childhood education programs, including by bringing together state agencies to develop a plan to improve early learning opportunities for young children with disabilities and developmental delays (House Bill 2310);[181] establishing the Governor's Task Force on Governance of Early Childhood Education and Care (House Bill 117);[182] codifying the creation of an Early Childhood Integrated Data System to better assess program capacity and effectiveness (House Bill 3963);[183] and establishing a Quad-Agency Child Care Initiative to review and streamline state regulations across the four participating agencies (Texas Workforce Commission, Health and Human Services Commission, Department of Family and Protective Services, and Texas Education Agency) (House Bill 4903).[184] Finally, the state approved legislation (Senate Bill 1265)[185] that directs the Texas Workforce Commission to prominently publish resources on its website to help employers better support their employees' child care needs.[186]

UTAH approved the use of federal TANF funding to provide an additional $2 million a year for three years (a 17 percent increase)[187] for the state's School Readiness Grant Program, which provides grants to help preschool programs improve their quality as well as grants to fund seats in high-quality preschool programs for children who are economically disadvantaged, at risk, English language learners, or in foster care (Senate Bill 2).[188]

The state approved a tax cut package (House Bill 106) that includes language expanding the state's nonrefundable child tax credit, which had previously only been available to families with children ages 1 to 4, to make it available to families with children under age 6. The tax cut package also includes provisions creating a nonrefundable employer tax credit that allows employers to claim a tax credit equal to 10 percent of qualifying child care expenditures, including any costs paid or incurred for the operating costs of an employer's child care center, whether operated by the employer or a contractor, as well as costs related to training the center's staff and providing increased compensation to early educators with higher levels of training.[189]

The state enacted legislation (House Bill 373)[190] that implements the Utah-based app Upkid, a paid service that connects child care programs with substitute teachers. Finally, the state approved a measure (House Bill 410)[191] that provides that the time employed as a preschool teacher in a child care program is equivalent to the time employed in a public school or accredited private school for purposes of relicensing and that authorizes the use of housing and transit reinvestment zone funds (funds generated by increases in property tax revenues, business activity, and economic growth linked to those infrastructure investments) to include construction or expansion of child care facilities within the zone.[192]

VERMONT'S FY 2026 budget establishes a new child care reserve fund and includes language that will provide long-term stability to the child care system and protect the public investment of Act 76, which greatly expanded eligibility for child care assistance and increased provider payment rates, helping create over 1,000 new child care spaces and over 100 new child care programs since its passage in 2023. The budget also includes a 5 percent increase in payment rates for care for infants and toddlers whose families are receiving child care assistance; funding to expand the capacity of Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) sponsor organizations so that they can onboard new family child care providers and continue to support existing providers; and a one-time funding increase to grow the Early Childhood Youth Apprenticeship Program, which provides on-the-job learning opportunities to those seeking to become early educators.[193]

VIRGINIA enacted legislation (House Bill 1833) establishing the four-year Small Family Day Home Provider Incentive Pilot Program. The program will fund the Ready Region Chesapeake Bay lead agency (which coordinates early care and education services and resources in the region) to work in conjunction with public and private partners to support training for small family child care homes in the region and to provide incentive payments of $500 for small family child care homes when they achieve voluntary registration, become licensed, or begin participating in the state's quality rating and improvement system (Virginia Quality Birth to Five, or VQB5).[194]

Additionally, the state enacted a measure (House Bill 2265) allowing an individual who has been employed in Virginia as a preschool special education teacher licensed with an endorsement in special education-general curriculum K-12 for at least 15 school years to be deemed licensed as a teacher with an endorsement in special education early childhood (birth–age 5) upon the recommendation of the division superintendent in the local school division.[195]

The state approved a measure (House Bill 1760) that directs the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and the Department of Education to convene a work group to develop a plan for creating a mental health screening and assessment tool for children ages 5 and younger in early childhood care and for providing mental health consultation resources and training to early childhood education providers, pediatric health providers, and families; the work group is required to report its findings and recommendations to the Chairs of the House Committee on Appropriations and the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations by November 1, 2025.[196] The state also approved legislation (Senate Bill 1391/House Bill 2645)[197] that adds a member of the Department of Veterans Services to the Commission on Early Childhood Care and Education.[198]

Finally, the state enacted legislation (House Bill 1685) that clarifies when certain publicly funded early childhood programs are excluded from oversight requirements, including programs that receive financial assistance for military child care and are accredited by a U.S. Department of Defense-approved national accrediting body.[199]

WASHINGTON'S FY 2026 budget allocates $383.7 million to fund the provisions of the state's collective bargaining agreement with home-based child care providers, including an increase in payment rates for family child care providers participating in the child care assistance program (Working Connections Child Care) to the 85th percentile of the 2024 market rates as of July 1, 2025; an increase of 50 cents per child, per hour for family, friend, and neighbor care providers participating in Working Connections Child Care as of July 1, 2025; and an increase in the state's contribution to support health care for home-based child care providers. The budget provides $11.7 million to support enrollment-based pay and prospective payments for providers participating in Working Connections Child Care as well. The budget also invests $13.9 million to support a 5 percent increase in payment rates for full-day slots in the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)—which provides early education to 3- and 4-year-old children who are from low-income families, are experiencing homelessness, have disabilities, or have other risk factors—and nearly $4 million for 250 full-day ECEAP slots.[200] In addition, the state maintained funding for Coordinated Recruitment and Enrollment, an effort to facilitate families' access to early learning programs for children ages 3 to 5.[201]

However, the state's fiscal crisis required delays to some planned expansions and improvements and some steps backward on early care and education programs and policies. The increase in the income limit for Working Connections Child Care to 75 percent of state median income was delayed to July 1, 2029; the effective date of the increase in payment rates for child care centers was pushed back from July 1, 2025, to July 1, 2026; family copayments for Working Connections Child Care were increased; the ECEAP entitlement was delayed to the 2030-31 school year; funding for the Early ECEAP program, which served children under age 3, was eliminated; state funding for the Child Care Complex Needs Fund (which supports providers serving children with developmental delays, disabilities, and other special needs) was reduced by 25 percent; state funding to support family, friend, and neighbor care was reduced; and Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and the Dual Language Rate Enhancement both received a 50 percent reduction in funding.[202]

Washington approved several measures aimed at raising revenue to help address the state's funding shortfall, including legislation (House Bill 2081)[203] that increases the tax rate for several Business and Occupation Tax Surcharges, including an increase for child care businesses from 0.484 percent to 0.5 percent effective January 1, 2035; increases surcharges on financial institutions, high grossing businesses, and advanced computer services; and adds a new 0.5 percent tax on businesses taking effect January 2026 and expiring on December 31, 2029.[204]

The state enacted another measure (Senate Bill 5813)[205] that increases funding for the education legacy trust account—which the state uses to support public education, child care, early learning, and higher education—by imposing an additional 2.9 percent excise tax on capital gains in excess of $1 million and increasing the top tier rates for the estate tax by 35 percent.[206]

The state enacted legislation (House Bill 1314) that makes improvements to the Early Learning Facilities Fund, which supports the planning, renovation, purchase, and construction of early learning facilities. The legislation establishes emergency grants for projects following natural disasters or a health and safety threat, lowers matching fund requirements for providers with limited funds, allows tribal compact schools to access funding, and allows grants and loans to be used to convert ECEAP slots from part day to full day or full day to extended day.[207] The state also provided nearly $100 million in capital funding for the Early Learning Facilities Fund in the FY 2026 budget, including $51 million for competitive grants, $9 million for minor renovation grants, and $3 million for the new emergency grants.[208]

The state enacted legislation (House Bill 1351)[209] that allows children who are eligible for ECEAP to enroll in an available slot after their third birthday, rather than waiting for the next school year.[210]

As part of a broader K-12 special education measure (Senate Bill 5263), the state adjusted its school funding formula used to determine district allocations so that the multiplier for each child receiving Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (early intervention services) was increased to 1.2 to match the multiplier used for prekindergarten students receiving special education services.[211] The state also enacted legislation (Senate Bill 5769) mandating that the annual average enrollment of children in Transition to Kindergarten—a program for children who are at least 4 years old by August 31 and need additional preparation to be ready for kindergarten in the following school year—in the 2025-26 school year not exceed the annual average enrollment of children in the 2024-25 school year.[212]

The state approved several measures affecting local regulation of child care facilities, including legislation (Senate Bill 5509)[213] requiring cities and towns to allow child care centers as a permitted building for all zones except industrial zones, light industrial zones, and open space zones and requiring conditional-use approval of an on-site child care center in industrial or light industrial zones, except in or around high hazard facilities; legislation (Senate Bill 5184)[214] that prohibits cities and counties from setting minimum parking requirements for certain properties, businesses, and activities, including for child care facilities; and legislation (Senate Bill 5655)[215] requiring the occupancy load of a child care center operated in a dedicated space within an existing building with more than one use to be calculated based only on the areas in the building where the child care services are provided.[216]

Finally, the state enacted legislation (House Bill 1648) that delays the deadline for child care providers to meet certain education requirements or the equivalent from August 1, 2026, to at least August 1, 2030, and allowing licensed child care providers to demonstrate experience-based competency as an alternative means of complying with staff qualification requirements.[217]

WEST VIRGINIA did not advance any child care bills during the 2025 legislative session. However, the West Virginia Small Business Development Center (WV SBDC) launched a new pilot initiative, Childcare West Virginia: Building the Business that Supports Business. The project is funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission's Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Initiative, which targets federal resources to expand economic opportunities for coal communities[218] and is in partnership with the WV Workforce Resiliency Office and Wonderschool (a private child care development firm). The objectives of the initiative are to establish a child care business assistance program that will help open 40 new child care programs and offer support and coaching to 50 existing child care providers and to pilot a West Virginia Tri-Share program where child care costs will be shared among the parent, the employer, and the state.[219]

WISCONSIN'S FY 2025-27 budget allocates $110 million in interest from unspent federal pandemic relief dollars to direct payments for child care providers, allowing payments that began during COVID-19 to continue through June 2026. The budget also includes $66 million in state general purpose revenue to provide prekindergarten for 4-year-olds in child care settings, Wisconsin's first entirely state-funded child care initiative. Additionally, the state raised provider payment rates for the child care assistance program from the 41st to the 75th percentile of market rates, using federal funds.[220]

The state increased the number of children a family child care provider can serve from eight children to 12 children, if the provider has the space and staffing to meet requirements. The state also reduced the minimum age for teaching assistants from 17 or 18 (depending on qualifications) to 16. And the state launched a pilot program that temporarily changes the child-teacher ratios for children ages 18 to 24 months from 4:1 to 7:1 and for children ages 24 to 30 months from 6:1 to 7:1, while incentivizing provider participation with $200 per infant and $100 per toddler receiving child care assistance if the provider agrees to increase child-teacher ratios.[221]

Lastly, Wisconsin allocated $2 million to Wonderschool to develop an online platform designed to connect child care providers with qualified staff and support capacity expansion, with a particular focus on rural communities. An additional $2 million was awarded to Thriving Wisconsin and the state's child care resource and referral agencies to enhance technical assistance for establishing and sustaining high-quality programs, recruit providers in areas of greatest need, deliver training on regulatory compliance, and offer locally tailored services and supports.[222]

WYOMING enacted legislation (House Bill 188) that exempts from regulation providers that are caring for up to four children from multiple families, with no more than two children under age 2, at the home of one of the children.[223]

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