

What Policy Changes Are Needed?

Research provides compelling evidence that the majority of children in child care centers in the US today are receiving poor to mediocre care. We urge legislators, agencies, and organizations to consider the following:

- Strengthen standards and regulations for child care programs.
- Require initial and ongoing training for staff working in child care programs.
- Find ways to recruit and retain more highly educated and skilled staff.
- Continue efforts to inform parents about the importance of quality child care and its effects on children.
- Provide funds sufficient to support the costs of high quality child care.

Quality in Child Care Centers

The need for affordable child care will increase under the new welfare provisions of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, as access to child care becomes a critical ingredient of welfare recipients' employability. A critical concern of parents is the quality of that care. Although little nationally representative data are available about the quality of early child care programs, here's what we know from studies in selected areas or with particular types of centers:

- Quality in child care centers around the country is often mediocre. For example, of more than 400 centers studied in four states, only 8% of infant classrooms and 24% of preschool classrooms were of good or excellent quality. Ten percent of preschool programs and 40% of infant programs were rated as having poor quality. (*Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study*, [CQO] 1995)
- A significant correlation exists between program quality and outcomes for children. Outcomes related to quality include cooperative play, sociability, creativity, ability to solve social conflicts, self control, and language and cognitive development. (CQO, 1995; Frede, 1995; Love et al., 1996; NICHD, 1996)
- Research suggests that education of staff is positively related to the quality of care. However, two recent studies found that only a small percentage of teachers in child care programs have a bachelor's degree or higher. (CQO, 1995; NICHD, 1996)
- Child care center staff turnover is high, ranging from 25–50% a year. This means that children are constantly adapting to new caregivers and administrators are constantly orienting and training staff.
- Child care center staff compensation, including wages and benefits, is exceptionally low, with child care staff among the lower paid of all classes of workers in the US.
- Research suggests that quality is important for all children, regardless of family income level (CQO, 1995; Love et al., 1996; NICHD Network, 1997).



References and Resources

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John Love of Mathematica Policy Research Incorporated is primary author of the brief. The production of *Early Childhood Research and Policy Briefs* is a joint effort of faculty and consultants of the National Center for Early Development and Learning.

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Gina Harrison, Publications Director
Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center
CB# 8185
Chapel Hill NC 27599-8185
Phone: (919) 966-4221, or email <gina_harrison@unc.edu>
or
Carol Sue Fromboluti
OERI/US Dept. of Education
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Room 522
Washington, DC 20208-5520
Phone: (202) 219-1672, or email <carol_fromboluti@ed.gov>

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