
State Efforts to Coordinate Early Care and Education: A Statutory Overview

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In a recent 50-state study, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) reports that 36 states have statutory language encouraging or requiring programs to coordinate early education and child care programs. This chapter explains why states are interested in coordination, and specifies the differences between child care and early education programs. The authors describe different ways that state statutes have encouraged or required programs to coordinate these two systems.

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) conducted a 50-state survey of state laws focusing on coordination of child care systems and early education systems, including preschool and Head Start. As policymakers expand programs to serve more children and improve services for successful outcomes, they are also recognizing that the two systems provide similar services for young children.

Policymakers are coordinating early education and child care for three primary reasons:

- ❖ to maximize resources,
- ❖ to support working families, and
- ❖ to provide quality, early childhood services.

Generally, child care services tend to focus on a younger population, are full-day, and are administered by state human services departments. Early education programs like Head Start or preschool are geared towards the 3-5 year-old population, are typically half-day, and are usually administered by departments of education. There are three main reasons why states coordinate these services.

- 1) Coordination encourages government efficiency by streamlining state and federal early childhood systems. Preschool, Head Start, and child care programs can complement each other, reduce duplication of services, and maximize public resources including administration, staff, and service costs.
- 2) Supporting working families is a priority for policymakers. Coordination eases logistical and financial burdens on families by developing a single point of entry for early childhood programs, as well as job skills training, literacy, and other social services for parents.

NCSL found that 36 states have statutory language requiring coordination of early care and education programs.

- 3) State coordination action improves child development and long-term academic and behavioral outcomes through quality enhancement of early childhood services.

The forthcoming NCSL survey found that 36 states have statutory language encouraging or requiring programs to coordinate these two systems. For example, in the area of program requirements:

- ❖ 19 states have statutory language requiring coordination before programs are eligible to receive funding;
- ❖ 21 states require government facilitation of coordination efforts among programs, agencies, policies, or funding;
- ❖ 12 states require a structural examination of state coordination policy, such as an evaluation, and usually require a report to the legislature with recommendations;
- ❖ 9 states have statutory language expressing legislative intent to integrate child care and early education programs;
- ❖ 6 states define preschool under the term child care, or vice versa; and
- ❖ At least 5 states specify the coordination of funds.

States have handled the coordination of funds in several different ways. In Colorado, consolidated child care pilot programs are required to coordinate funding to develop a seamless system of early childhood and family support services. School readiness legislation in Florida states that programs can integrate funding from local, state, federal, and lottery sources. In Massachusetts, the law encourages community councils to blend funding sources, including low-income and Head Start funds.

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