



Helping Parents Access Child Care for Education and Training

A Framework for State Action

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Accessing affordable child care is a common challenge for parents; it is especially difficult for those with low incomes who need education or training to gain knowledge and skills that can lead to higher paying jobs. Ideally, parents seeking job-related education or training would be able to access child care assistance as part of enrolling in occupational programs, but access varies across states, localities, and training providers. Accessing care for education and training can depend on numerous factors—from local policies and funding to the availability of child care that meets parents’ needs—but state policies, practices, and funding play a critical role. This document offers a framework for state policies and practices connected to two key federal programs: the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). The framework is designed to be used by state administrators and other stakeholders to support access to child care so parents with low incomes can participate in education and training while supporting the development and education of their children.

This document draws on more than five years of work from our [Bridging the Gap initiative](#), which has examined the ways workforce development and child care assistance intersect in the lives of parents with low incomes who need child care to participate in education and training activities (box 1). Although the framework focuses primarily on [WIOA](#) and [CCDF](#) program policies and practices, we also discuss the ways that states can leverage other funding, programs, and partnerships, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families ([TANF](#)), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ([SNAP](#)), SNAP Employment and Training ([SNAP E&T](#)), and state postsecondary education systems.

BOX 1

About Bridging the Gap

Since 2014, Urban Institute researchers have undertaken phased studies examining child care, postsecondary education, and workforce development. We have looked at the systems, policies, and practices that affect access to child care for parents with low incomes and low skills who are seeking education and training to improve their economic security. We have documented the needs of parents with low incomes and challenges in meeting family needs, explored and shared effective policies and practices, and facilitated collaboration among practitioners. And, we have produced the following publications, which are useful resources to support efforts connected to the Bridging the Gap framework.

Exploring and documenting challenges

- A [report](#) and [policy brief](#) giving an overview of child care and workforce development systems, their intersection, and implications for policy
- An [analysis](#) of parents with low incomes and their participation in education and training
- An [analysis](#) of employed student parents with low incomes

Supporting the development of effective policies

- An [overview](#) of CCDF state eligibility policies and services for families in education and training
- An [examination](#) of the implications of the reauthorized CCDF for parents seeking education and training
- An [overview](#) of the implications of new WIOA provisions for families needing child care to participate
- An [overview](#) of challenges and opportunities around supporting the child care and workforce development needs of TANF families
- A [compilation](#) of research insights pulled from previous Bridging the Gap studies about meeting the child care needs of parents with low incomes seeking education and job training to inform policy discussions about work requirements for safety net programs
- An [overview](#) of CCDF state eligibility policies as of 2017 and changes to those policies over the past five years
- An [overview](#) of the proportion of families who receive CCDF subsidies and the activities for which they receive those subsidies in each state

Supporting the development of effective practices

- A [presentation](#) of four collaborations between workforce or postsecondary organizations and child care organizations
- A [report](#) and [policy brief](#) on programmatic strategies that can support parents with low incomes seeking education and training
- A [report](#) and [fact sheet](#) about a survey of local workforce development boards exploring approaches to meeting the needs of families and related policy barriers
- [Profiles](#) of the approaches five local workforce development boards are taking to address parents' child care needs

Supporting collaboration and access to resources

- An [online discussion](#) among practitioners working to bridge the gap between child care and education and training
- A [synopsis](#) of the “Bridging the Gap: A Strategic Dialogue” conference proceedings

In addition to drawing on the Bridging the Gap project, the framework is informed by our team's collective expertise in WIOA, CCDF, and other federal programs, as well as recent interviews with program administrators in five states (Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, Texas, and Vermont) aimed at understanding their efforts around providing child care for parents in education and training. Finally, we sought insights from a range of external expert advisors to enhance the information presented here.

The framework is meant to provide insights on what we have learned about some of the ways states can act to meet the child care needs of parents in education and training and to improve the experience of parents when they seek assistance through the child care or workforce systems; it is not meant to be a definitive and complete description of all the strategies states could put in place to address the issue. Data are not available to allow us to evaluate the pros, cons, or impacts of different approaches, so the information provided here suggests practices that appear promising based on our assessment of the available data and information.

Insights for Action

WIOA and CCDF are two of the primary federal programs supporting workforce development and child care assistance, respectively. Despite similar goals around economic security and self-sufficiency and the need for child care assistance to facilitate education and training, parents with low incomes in need of upskilling are not necessarily a priority population for WIOA or CCDF. The two organizations' systems, which often operate separately, are not funded sufficiently to meet the child care assistance needs of all parents with low incomes participating in education, training, and employment activities; therefore, states must prioritize which parents get available funding. Nevertheless, states can take specific steps with these programs to support child care for parents in need of upskilling, depending on how states organize and prioritize workforce development and child care assistance programs.

- State agencies can prioritize the child care needs of parents with low incomes within any administrative structure. While cross-agency collaboration is useful, state agencies can make progress in this area working within their own agency.
- State leaders can incorporate education and training for parents with low incomes in their visions and strategic plans for moving families out of poverty and include access to child care as a critical support service for those families.
- Outside regular program administration, states can leverage planning opportunities, such as plans for federal funding or new statewide initiative planning, to collaborate with other stakeholders around this issue.
- States can work to facilitate local or regional child care access for education and training activities through state policies and through technical assistance, board meetings, or other communications that allow for the sharing and dissemination of best practices among local service providers.

- States can adjust eligibility, authorization, and other key CCDF policies to allow more parents to receive subsidies for education and training activities.
- State WIOA agencies can provide leadership and support to local workforce stakeholders to encourage providing child care assistance for parents with low incomes who need job training.
- States can leverage other sources of funding beyond WIOA and CCDF to allow more parents to access child care specifically for education and training that lead to higher-paying occupations.

Although further research is needed to better understand what state policies and practices are most effective, this resource aims to identify opportunities for state action.

Who Should Use the Framework?

Our intended audience for this framework includes state administrators and agency staff that set policies and oversee the following programs:

- Child Care Development Fund subsidy programs, the primary source of public funding for child care for families with low incomes;
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act programs, the main federal program governing workforce development services and collaboration; and
- other programs, including TANF, Career and Technical Education (CTE), SNAP, and SNAP E&T, which share goals of helping parents with low incomes advance in the workforce and can collaborate with the child care and workforce development systems.

Additional key stakeholders can also use the framework to identify areas of action in working with state agencies or in supporting their efforts. These include frontline staff, local policymakers, service providers, practitioners, advocates, and philanthropists who are engaged in efforts to support parents and families with low incomes in realizing economic security and mobility goals.

Context

Before diving into the key areas of state action, we offer some context to help the various actors we see as users of this guide:

- To make the case for action, we provide an overview of research and data related to the need for child care assistance to facilitate education and training for parents with low incomes.
- Acknowledging the importance of local context, we briefly describe state administrative structures that can influence the approaches state agencies take to address this issue.

The Case for Action

There are two key points that help explain why it is important to address the child care needs of parents with low incomes who are seeking education and training, and some of the related challenges.

1. Parents with low incomes can benefit from education and training to improve their employability and their economic well-being.
 - » **Good jobs require skills.** Estimates of the percentage of future jobs that will require some education and training beyond high school range between one- to two-thirds of jobs, and data consistently show that higher education levels are associated with lower unemployment and higher earnings (BLS 2013; Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl 2013).¹
 - » **Many families are poor and need good jobs.** The Census Bureau estimates that 17 percent of families with dependent children had income below the federal poverty level (FPL) in 2017, and that percentage was much higher for single-parent households. Eight percent of families with dependent children with at least one parent working had income below the poverty level, and 23 percent of working single mothers had income below FPL.
 - » **Parents with low incomes often lack skills.** Forty-two percent of parents in poverty have a high school level or less in educational attainment, and this number increases to 81 percent for single mothers below FPL.²
 - » **Child care is a critical support.** Studies have documented the importance of access to quality child care as key to facilitating success in parents' education or training (Hamilton and Gueron 2002; Taniguchi and Kaufman 2005; Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen 2010).
2. Child care can be a barrier to education and training for parents, as it is costly and hard to find.
 - » **Child care is costly.** The cost of formal child care averages about \$8,600 a year and varies greatly depending on location, age of the child, and type of formal care (Child Care Aware 2017).
 - » **Child care is hard to find.** The supply of quality child care is inadequate overall, with some communities especially having a shortage of care options (Malik et al. 2018).
 - » **For certain families, finding child care can be especially difficult.** Some families are particularly likely to face barriers to accessing quality care, including families with nontraditional and irregular schedules, families with infants and toddlers, families living in rural areas, and families who have children with special needs (Henly and Adams 2018).

How Key Federal Programs Are Administered at the State Level

WIOA, CCDF, and other programs that provide career and technical education, job training, employment services, and personal supports for parents with low incomes are organized and administered in varied ways across states. Those administrative approaches can have implications for how states address the issues raised in this framework. Our research has revealed the following three broad administrative approaches or “models”:

- **Parallel model:** States can operate WIOA, CCDF, and other relevant programs out of separate agencies and prioritize child care access for parents in education and training within their individual agencies, designing and implementing their strategies in parallel. Examples of this approach can be seen in Vermont and Arkansas, where workforce development and child care agencies do not collaborate regularly, but both states provide child care for employment and training activities through workforce programs.
- **Collaborative model:** States can operate programs in separate agencies and actively communicate across those agencies to maximize coordination. Examples of this approach can be seen in Georgia and Tennessee, where state agencies have practices in place that facilitate regular collaboration across WIOA, child care, and other key programs.
- **Integrated model:** States can bring all programs related to workforce development and supportive services under one state agency. The main example of this approach is Texas, which operates WIOA, CCDF, TANF, and SNAP programs under a single agency, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). Within TWC, a single division develops and disseminates high-level workforce development and child care policies statewide, providing leadership and guidance for regional workforce development boards around specific issues as needed.

The administrative approach that a state uses does not necessarily support or constrain the ability to prioritize the needs of parents in education and training, as there are examples of states using each model and effectively prioritizing parents in education and training. However, administrative structures may have implications for the way states take action or how they work to improve the experience of families accessing services.

How the Framework Is Structured

This framework focuses on five potential areas for action:

- Developing agency vision and motivation
- Planning and collaboration
- Approaches specific to state CCDF programs
- Approaches specific to state WIOA programs
- Leveraging multiple sources of funding to support child care

For each “action area,” we briefly explain its importance, provide some approaches for addressing the need for child care for education and training as it relates to the action area, and describe some examples of state approaches. For additional information, context, and research related to child care access for parents with low incomes in need of education and training, please visit our [Bridging the Gap project web page](#) or the resources listed in box 1.

Action Area 1: Developing Agency Vision and Motivation

Why Is This Important?

State agencies and other stakeholders play a critical role in prioritizing the child care needs of parents seeking education and training. In both child care and workforce systems, state agencies have significant flexibility and discretion, and therefore can choose to prioritize these families or not. State agencies that choose to make the needs of these families a priority in their vision can have significant impact on the ability of families to meet the goals of moving up the economic ladder while supporting the development of their children. As discussed in subsequent sections, they can also shape the way that local service agencies approach their service delivery by providing leadership, incentives, and supports, as well as funding, and creating policies that support the vision.

By ensuring that the needs of these families are highlighted as part of the agency's vision, and as part of strategies to meet agency goals, states can establish the context and create momentum for the agencies and their partners to act on behalf of families. State leadership can help sharpen vision around supportive services for parent upskilling and ensure that resources are focused on child care assistance for parents with low incomes seeking education and training.

Approaches

- WIOA agencies and other agencies involved in workforce development programs (such as SNAP E&T programs and state departments of higher education) can recognize that child care is essential for the success of their mission of achieving core workforce development goals. Child care assistance supports education and training for parents; it helps parents get and keep jobs; it meets employer needs for a more trained and productive workforce now; and—if the care is good quality—it can promote a high-quality future workforce.
- CCDF agencies can recognize that reducing barriers for parents to obtain education and training is as critical for helping parents toward economic success as reducing barriers to employment. Seeing these parents as a priority for service, and ensuring that child care assistance policies and practices support that vision, is essential in ensuring that these parents can get the support they need.
- State agencies working with parents on a range of issues, including workforce development, child care, and other supports, can recognize that they are a key element of an overarching goal to support both parents and children simultaneously. This vision, which is often described as a “two-generation” approach, involves simultaneously supporting steps toward improving skills and employability of parents while also supporting the development and well-being of their children.

Examples

- The Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative is administered by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) in close partnership with the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services (ADWS). The TANF-funded initiative recognizes child care assistance and other personal supports, such as transportation assistance, as critical components of their job training programs. The Career Pathways Initiative recognizes that parents with low incomes need support in order to succeed in job training programs.
- State CCDF agencies in Arkansas and Vermont have historically seen parents participating in education and training activities as an equal priority to parents who are employed. Both states have a relatively high proportion of parents receiving subsidies to support education and training activities.

“We have always treated student families like working families” —Ivory Daniels, Arkansas Department of Human Services

“We see value in schooling to get people into the job market. Our goal is to support families from beginning to end” —Anne Rada, Vermont Department for Children and Families

- States like Georgia and Tennessee have implemented two-generation approaches to serving families, which include vision and motivation to meet the child care needs of parents seeking education and training. The two-generation approach, which has been articulated and supported by Ascend at the Aspen Institute and several foundations, has helped bring the need for child care to support workforce development into sharper focus for some states.

“With 2-gen, no matter where you are, both parent and child services, any access point can refer them, and in most cases, there is funding that covers it. WIOA can help fund child care services and transportation. We are interfacing with TANF; if you are coming in on that side, you can be referred over.” —Joe Dan Banker, Technical College System of Georgia

- The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) has treated child care assistance as part of their workforce system since the agency was created in 1995, supporting an overarching vision of providing programs and services that promote self-sufficiency by enabling parents to work or attend workforce training or education activities. The agency also prioritizes educating parents on the availability of quality child care, which enhances children’s early learning and development. Though the state does not have goals related specifically to child care assistance for education and training activities, the issue is integral to its overarching focus on workforce development.

Action Area 2: Planning, Collaboration, and Sharing Their Vision

Why Is This Important?

States can help move efforts to support the child care needs of parents needing education and training forward through **planning** activities, establishing **collaborative structures**, and creating **mechanisms to share the vision**. Furthermore, these three kinds of efforts can take place either *within* the agency or *across* agencies. The amount, nature, and types of these activities within and across workforce development and child care subsidy stakeholders can vary greatly across states.

Planning: States have many planning functions that can be used to codify their vision. Some of these are formal mandated plans, such as the state plans for both WIOA and CCDF (box 2). These plans provide states with an opportunity to envision what they would like their agency to accomplish in helping meet the child care needs of parents in education and training, as well as to identify collaborative planning efforts they can undertake with their sister agencies. One important issue to note is that required state plans for various programs related to education and training and child care assistance are on different schedules, and it can be a heavy lift for states to stay on top of, and coordinate, various federal program planning requirements. States can also undertake other planning activities. For example, states might bring stakeholders together for planning meetings for a limited period of time to facilitate implementation of specific initiatives.

Collaborative structures: In addition to within-agency and across-agency planning activities, states can put formal or informal cross-stakeholder collaborative structures and approaches in place. These can be ongoing structures—such as regular meetings with sister agencies—or temporary structures, such as a collaborative effort that may take place when a state needs to accomplish something that may not be ongoing, including the development of the state plans described above. Regular collaboration across programs can improve the experiences of parents seeking job training and child care assistance, especially if it helps ensure frontline staff and service providers are able to give parents all the information they need and refer parents to other programs as necessary.

Mechanisms to share the vision: Finally, states can create formal and informal mechanisms to share their vision. For example, some states have processes in place to communicate regularly with local leaders and stakeholders through regional meetings or technical assistance groups. States may also convene working groups with local stakeholders around specific issues, such as meeting the requirements of new federal legislation. State-level administrators can also play a role by encouraging local areas to adopt best practices, or by disseminating best practices from one to region to another.

Approaches

- State agencies can use formal planning processes, such as the development of federally mandated state plans (see box 2), to ensure that the child care needs of parents seeking

education and training are included in the overall vision. Plans can include partnerships across agencies or a broader vision of workforce development and child care supports within an agency.

- State agencies can come together to plan and strategize around specific initiatives or events, such as a state task force focused on job growth and the future of work or grant application planning.
- State agencies can implement or increase cross-program communication through regular, periodic cross-agency meetings; by establishing specific points of contact in each agency for reaching out as needed; and by creating temporary boards or working groups with comprehensive program representation to address specific goals or issues.
- States can develop formal collaborative entities, such as state boards or regional councils, to focus on child care access for education and training or leverage existing collaborative efforts by making this issue a key topic of discussion.
- States can facilitate one-off, multi-stakeholder summits or working meetings on providing child care for parents with low incomes in need of education and training. Stakeholders can include policy directors from state agencies administering WIOA, CCDF, and other federally funded programs, as well as local service providers, nonprofits, and the business sector.
- State agencies can have dedicated staff that are responsible for regular collaboration, both with other state agencies and with local or regional staff.

Examples

- In Arkansas, the Department of Workforce Services and the Department of Higher Education have quarterly meetings to discuss roles and responsibilities for administering the Career Pathways Initiative. Education and training, case management, and sometimes child care take place on college campuses across the state, but the college system relies heavily on the Department of Workforce services for policies around eligibility and other supportive services.
- In Georgia, the state workforce development board is mainly an organizational entity as far as how WIOA funds are spent; most decisions are made at the local level. Two years ago, the state implemented collaborative structures and mechanisms, including summits and conferences, to ease the way for local stakeholders, including frontline staff, to connect with one another and learn from strategic presentations. As Donna Johnson from the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) stated, “This has created a greater level of commitment [to child care] throughout the [workforce] system.” DECAL and the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), which administer CCDF and WIOA funds respectively, have a collaborative partnership. The state agencies have established connections between DECAL Family Support Consultants and TCSG Student Navigators and Special Populations Coordinators at the local level, where these frontline staff refer parents to employment and training and child care assistance programs.

- The Texas WIOA plan discusses child care assistance throughout and recognizes quality child care as a key support for parents making their way along career pathways, which include a mix of education, training, and employment. In addition, staff in the TWC workforce development division provide technical assistance to regional boards as needed, such as to help them meet federal and state program requirements, and they also convene statewide workgroups made up of a variety of stakeholders around specific issues, such as youth workforce development.
- Vermont established regional teams as part of its SNAP E&T-funded pilot program Jobs for Independence (JFI) to help local service providers from various programs and other stakeholders stay informed about the program and to ensure all components of the program were being implemented. Regional teams include representatives from various workforce system programs as well as the state's network of community action agencies. The state plans to continue and expand membership in the regional teams as part of their new SNAP E&T program Individual Career Advancement Network (ICAN), and they specifically plan to make sure CCDF program staff are included.

BOX 2

WIOA and CCDF State Plans

State agencies can collaborate in developing WIOA and CCDF state plans³ and modifications. Under WIOA, states were required to submit a four-year plan for their public workforce systems in 2016 and must submit modifications to the four-year plans every two years. Similarly, under the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014, which reauthorizes CCDF, states are required to submit CCDF plans every three years.

As part of WIOA planning, states were required to coordinate across all WIOA-funded federal programs and were encouraged to include relevant human services programs as part of their collaborative planning efforts as well. Similarly, states are required to report in their CCDF plans the state agencies with which they collaborated. Although state CCDF administering agencies are not required to collaborate with agencies overseeing workforce development programs as part of planning, workforce programs are listed as options in the plan template, and the template also references collaboration with local workforce development boards (WDBs).

In 2017, we informally reviewed WIOA and CCDF state plans to understand how states are subsidizing child care and meeting other supportive service needs of parents with low incomes seeking education and training, under the reauthorized WIOA and CCDF laws. Our review found some evidence that states made efforts to consider the child care needs of parents seeking education and training:

- Roughly half of state CCDF plans mentioned some form of communication with workforce development agencies and programs, from making the plan available for review to direct collaboration, as part of CCDF state plan development.
- Although no WIOA state plans mentioned partnership or consultation with CCDF agencies for WIOA plan development, all but a few state WIOA plans at least mention child care as an important supportive service for their programs, or a service to which they will refer people.

The next round of WIOA state plan modifications is due in 2020, and the next set of CCDF three-year state plans is due in 2021.

Action Area 3: CCDF-Specific Policies and Strategies

Why Is This Important?

State and local CCDF policies are essential in shaping whether parents in education and training can access child care assistance. As noted elsewhere in the framework, CCDF is the biggest funding source of subsidized child care for parents with low incomes in the US and is the most commonly reported source of funding for child care for parents in education and training, according to our survey of local workforce development boards (Spaulding and Gebrekristos 2018). State CCDF agencies usually set key policy parameters, and local agencies have relatively little discretion over such policies, other than in the few states that allow some decisions to be made at the county (e.g., Colorado and Florida) or regional (Texas) level. As a result, state decisions about child care subsidy eligibility rules, priorities for service, application processes, how child care is authorized, and what kinds of care can be subsidized all affect whether parents in education and training can access help paying for the child care they need to participate and succeed. The cumulative impact of the way states approach each of these decisions can be seen in the wide variation across states in the proportion of their CCDF caseload that receives child care assistance for education and training purposes, ranging from 70 percent in Virginia and 49 percent in Tennessee to less than five percent in Arizona (Gebrekristos 2019).⁴

Eligibility: The first area where state CCDF agencies can create or reduce barriers to child care subsidies concerns whether parents seeking education and training are eligible to get child care assistance and under what circumstances. An analysis of state eligibility policies from 2017 (Minton, Tran, and Dwyer 2019) found the following:

- Most states allow **parents in education and training** to be eligible for assistance, though many set additional conditions on eligibility (such as work requirements, time limits, types of degrees, etc.) that are likely to mean that some subset of parents participating in workforce development programs will not be eligible.
- The majority of states—44 plus the District of Columbia—allow parents to get child care assistance to **finish high school or to earn an equivalent certification**, though a third of them (15 states) placed additional stipulations on the qualifying activities, such as requiring parents to also meet work requirements or restricted activities in some circumstances.
- About two-thirds of the states—32 plus the District of Columbia—allow parents wishing to attend **English as a second or other language (ESL/ESOL)** classes to be eligible, though six of these states require those parents to also meet minimum work requirements to have their English literacy activities covered.

Access to subsidies if eligible: Even if parents are eligible, it is not certain that they will be able to get a subsidy, as CCDF is inadequately funded and estimated to only serve one in seven eligible children.⁵ States therefore must choose for whom to prioritize services, with some states making parents in

education and training an equal priority to families seeking child care to support employment and others choosing to make them lower priority.

Ease of applying: If parents are eligible and of high enough priority to potentially get a subsidy, a third hurdle is where they have to go and what they have to do to apply (and later, what they have to do to stay eligible) (Adams and Matthews 2013). When CCDF was reauthorized in 2014, new regulations went into effect to support continuity of care and reduce client burden for getting and keeping subsidies (Adams and Heller 2015). However, there is not yet evidence on what impact these changes have had on the ease of getting or retaining subsidies.

Authorization policies: State decisions as to how to authorize hours for coursework and trainings (and employment, for those who work and go to school or training) can also create access barriers or ease access for parents in education and training (Adams and Heller 2015).

Policies about which providers can receive payment: State decisions about which child care providers can receive CCDF funding can also affect whether parents can get assistance for child care to support education and training. Many states seem to be focusing more of their subsidy resources on center-based child care settings (Henly and Adams 2018). This is a challenge because centers are usually only open during traditional work hours and therefore are less accessible for parents whose schedules are nontraditional; centers are also not as available for infants and toddlers or in rural areas. Such settings may not only be less accessible, but also may not be appropriate or desirable for all families.

Policies around consumer education and helping parents find care: Parents can also face challenges finding care—both because supply can be inadequate in some communities and certain families have fewer options (Malik et al. 2018; Henly and Adams 2018), and because it can be difficult to find and evaluate options. State decisions about whether to help parents find care through resource and referral services, or to try to build a diverse supply of care that parents need (such as family child care and home-based care settings that can be more flexible than center-based options), can also affect whether parents in education and training will be able to get the care they need.

Approaches

- States can **establish eligibility rules that give broad access to child care for families in education and training**. Rules regarding work, time limits, and degree requirements, while designed to help target scarce resources, may have the effect of not supporting successful outcomes for those in need.
- States choose how to allocate child care resources, often by identifying priority categories. The decision of whether to **make parents in education and training of equal priority to parents who need assistance to support employment**, or a lower priority, is a key issue in shaping access to subsidies. Without additional funds, however, this would result in displacing other families.

- State efforts to **simplify access and retention of subsidies** can include efforts to colocate program access sites, integrate or otherwise simplify application processes, minimize paperwork requirements, expedite verification processes, and minimize redetermination and reporting requirements can help parents get and keep assistance. States can help parents get and keep subsidies by keeping these requirements simple for parents in education and training activities.
- States can **remove tight linkages between the hours authorized for child care and the hours that parents attend class or training**. Tight ties between the parent’s schedule—which can be irregular—and the provider’s child care schedule can make it much harder to find child care providers willing to accept the subsidy and harder for parents to find time for homework, etc.
- States can make sure to **provide subsidies that cover a full range of settings**, as limiting subsidies to child care centers or a small set of highly rated programs may limit the ability of parents in education and training to use child care assistance even if eligible and authorized to receive it.
- States are required to **support consumer education** efforts under CCDF. States can ensure that these consumer education efforts include helping parents in education and training access child care that meets their needs.

Examples

- Arkansas’s CCDF program treats parents needing education and training the same way it treats parents who need help to support employment. Parents simply say if they need child care to help go to school, and the policy allows them to go to school either full or part time, and/or work, at least 30 hours a week.
- In Georgia, CCDF is run by the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). As an education agency, the program finds it relatively easy to partner with the technical and community colleges in the state to meet the needs of parents with low incomes that are seeking child care for education and training. For some time the state has allowed parents to be eligible for child care if they are enrolled in training and education programs including technical certificates and diplomas, adult education, GED, literacy, and ESL classes. More recently in 2018, related to their new partnerships, the state added “getting an associate’s degree” as an approved activity for child care eligibility for families in any of 12 priority eligibility groups. Georgia gives equal priority to those working and those enrolled in an education or training program. The CCDF program does not have minimum GPA requirements or time limits and supports a resource and referral system to help parents find child care.
- Tennessee began a statewide initiative in 2013 called Drive to 55, with a goal of equipping 55 percent of adults in the state with a college degree or certificate or degree by 2025. To support this effort, the Tennessee Department of Human Services reworked its eligibility policies to increase access to child care assistance for parents that are either working or engaged in

education or training at a postsecondary institution or both for at least 30 hours a week. Through its Smart Steps Child Care Program, parents engaged in these activities with children from ages six weeks to five years have access to affordable early childhood education, making families responsible for only a portion of their child care costs or copay based on a sliding income scale. Since its inception in June 2016, more than 20,000 children have been served, which will likely improve with increased coordination between the CCDF program and WIOA.

- Vermont has made parents in education and training an equal priority category for service relative to parents who are employed or receiving TANF.

“Everyone is eligible as long as you meet income guidelines and have a service need.”

—Anne Rada, Vermont Department for Children and Families

Child care assistance is approved as long as parents are attending an accredited program where they will get a certificate or degree at the end. The state also works to make policies that allow families to retain child care services relatively easily.

“We want to make the subsidy process as easy as possible for clients. Therefore, we no longer request verification of continued enrollment or semester grades during their 12-month eligibility period. That information is collected during the redetermination period only.”

—Anne Rada, Vermont Department for Children and Families

Vermont authorizes part-time (up to 25 hours) or full-time (26–50 hours) child care. This allows child care providers to be paid a full weekly part-time rate even if the parent is taking one class and only needs child care one day a week.

Action Area 4: WIOA-Specific Policies and Strategies

Why Is This Important?

WIOA aims to meet the needs of multiple customers, including a broad population of job seekers as well as employers. Anyone can walk into an [American Job Center](#)—the local point of access to workforce development services under WIOA⁶—and register for basic services, although access to more extensive services and assistance varies. Unlike CCDF, where policies are primarily set and monitored at the state level, implementation and oversight of WIOA is a responsibility shared by states and local areas.

Leadership: States have critical roles to play with respect to providing overall vision and motivation, as well as in leading planning activities and facilitating collaboration. Providing leadership at the state level for local workforce boards is one of the most critical roles for states in the WIOA system. Other research we conducted provides insights into the many ways that local boards and workforce programs can work to support child care (Adams and Gebrekristos 2018; Adams, Derrick-Mills, and Heller 2016). States can actively support and encourage such efforts in localities statewide.

Policies around using WIOA funds to support child care: Another area where state workforce agencies have a role to play is in the establishment of policies regarding using WIOA funds to support child care

needs. WIOA allows for formula funding to be used to provide supportive services, including child care and transportation assistance, although—because funding is limited—WIOA is unlikely to support direct payment of child care needs for customers, but rather to be leveraged as one potential resource (see Action Area 5 below). Although there is some evidence that local workforce systems are using WIOA for child care, we do not know how many customers received this assistance or the level of assistance provided (Spaulding and Gebrekristos 2018). The most recently available annual WIOA performance data from 2017 indicate that only 5 percent of those who exited the system that year received supportive services, or about 34,134 people nationwide.⁷ Data are not reported on which types of supportive services were received, so we do not know how many received child care supports specifically, as opposed to transportation assistance, help with housing, uniforms or books, or other services. Prior research has shown workforce system funds to be a relatively limited expenditure for local areas. Mastri and McCutchen (2015), in research that focused on the Workforce Investment Act, WIOA's predecessor, found only 3 percent of funding was spent on supportive services in the 30 surveyed local areas. Adams and Gebrekristos (2018), in their examination of five local WDB efforts to support access to child care, found state and local limits on the amount of total WIOA funding that could be spent on child care. State limits on funding for child care are likely driven by the limited funding available overall under WIOA, suggesting the need to put in place policies that allow for leveraging funding across multiple sources, as discussed in further detail under Action Area 5.

Policies around assessments and employment plans: The WIOA legislation sets certain policies regarding the services that must be available to job seeker customers at the local level. American Job Centers are required to do an in-depth assessment of supportive service needs, including child care, and to develop an employment plan for eligible participants that identifies employment goals and strategies as well as the services needed to achieve the employment goals (Spaulding 2015). However, even though, in theory, states can set policies regarding the delivery of services at the local level, we found in our selected interviews with states that policies regarding service delivery were more likely to be established and enforced at the local level, with state agencies playing a supportive role. States may want to consider ways to encourage local WDB's to ensure that child care is a part of assessments and employment plans for parents who are seeking services.

Data policies: An important role for states under WIOA is related to data collection and reporting. WIOA has extensive data collection requirements for states and local areas. States collect and analyze data for the development of state plans and oversee data collection for the purpose of performance measurement and reporting. These activities provide the opportunity to elevate parents and their child care needs as priorities in the planning and implementation of WIOA services. Other research has shown the important role that data sharing policies can have in improving access to different kinds of benefits for families (Adams and Spaulding 2018). WIOA also requires program evaluations. As federal, state, and local entities consider various options for evaluating the impacts of WIOA programs, consideration can be given to designs that measure the marginal contributions of child care and other supportive services.

Approaches

- State workforce agencies can **provide vision, support, and technical assistance** to local workforce boards around strategies to meet the child care needs of their clients.
- States can **encourage local workforce boards to include services that support parents** who might need child care. These could include, for example, child care needs in screenings and assessments, colocating child care staff in local offices, providing child care referrals for parents and helping them navigate the child care subsidy program, or actively supporting partnerships with local child care agencies and providers.
- States can **set policies regarding the use of funding for supportive services**, such as child care, that allow for more expansive access, while also considering overall funding constraints and other competing priorities.
- To bolster resources for child care, state WIOA agencies can actively **work with CCDF agencies to improve access** to CCDF subsidies, and also to help localities identify partners and other resources to meet parents' needs (see more on this in Action Area 3).
- States can **create a data infrastructure** that supports tracking outcomes for parents and impacts of child care accessibility, making it easier for parents to receive services by supporting data sharing across the systems that touch parents' lives.

Examples

- Georgia takes a “no wrong door” approach to WIOA services and supportive services, so that customers get the same information and have access to the same services no matter where they go for assistance. Interview respondents from Georgia emphasized a need for ongoing coordination with service providers across programs in order to facilitate ongoing consistency for families. To facilitate collaboration and streamline services for families, Georgia is working on creating a data exchange across agencies. One purpose would be to make it possible to analyze across the system whether child care needs are being met. They are looking to other states to see how best to operationalize the data exchange.
- In Tennessee, local workforce development boards are encouraged to use WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth program funds to fill gaps in supportive services, including child care. For example, the Southeast Tennessee Local Workforce Development Board issued guidance in 2018 and 2019 to American Job Center staff with specific instructions for how to provide clients with supportive services that they aren't able to obtain elsewhere.
- In Texas, TWC acts as a key partner for Texas Workforce Solutions, which includes 28 regional boards, program contractors, and community partners. While regional boards in Texas make many policy and procedural decisions, within the overall state policy framework, based on the specific needs of their region, TWC acts as a presence across regions to provide technical

assistance around federal and state requirements and convene stakeholders across regions as needed to collaborate on particular issues.

Action Area 5: Leveraging Multiple Sources of Funding to Support Child Care

Why Is This Important?

WIOA and CCDF have limited funding to pay for child care, and states with high percentages of families with low incomes often have to make difficult choices on which families to serve. CCDF and WIOA funding alone are generally not enough to cover the needs of all parents with low incomes that are working or need education and training to acquire the skills needed for gainful employment. At the very basic level, states can support child care for parents in education and training by maximizing the use of these funds for this purpose, while also leveraging other sources of funding, including federal child-care specific funding (see table 1), other federal funding that allows for expenditures on child care (see table 2), state funding, or private funding from philanthropy or employers.

States can also braid or blend funding to better meet the needs of families. Blending or braiding funding involves combining two or more sources of funding to support a program or activity. Braided funding pools multiple funding streams toward one purpose while separately tracking and reporting on each source of funding. Blended funding combines multiple funding streams for one purpose without continuing to differentiate or track individual sources.⁸ Both approaches can streamline funding for programs that provide child care assistance and can lead to a smoother service access experience for families. The client experience can also be improved when this is done seamlessly, so that the client does not know that multiple funding sources are being used and paperwork and data collection for different programs is minimized.

Across our Bridging the Gap studies, we have identified multiple cases where states, local areas, or service providers are drawing on other sources of funding to support child care needs. In a survey of local Workforce Development Boards, for example, we found that 26 percent of respondents leveraged other federal sources of funding to pay for child care, 22 percent used state public funding, 9 percent used local funding, and 5 percent drew on private funding to cover child care as a supportive service (Spaulding and Gebrekristos 2018). More examples can be found in our study of partnerships between workforce development and child care entities (Derrick-Mills, Heller, and Adams 2016).

Approaches

- States can leverage sources of federal funding explicitly focused on child care, including CCDF and TANF.
- States can leverage federal programs that are not explicitly focused on child care but allow funding to be used for supportive services such as child care, including WIOA and SNAP.

- States can dedicate their resources to pay for child care generally, or to fill the gap for certain populations when federal resources are not applicable or resources are scarce.
- States can blend or braid multiple sources of funding to support child care assistance for parents with low incomes in education and training.

Examples

- In addition to supporting parents with low incomes through CCDF funds, Arkansas uses federal and state TANF dollars to fund the Career Pathways Initiative, which pays for child care for parents during the times they are attending class, as well as funds tuition and other supportive services, including transportation.
- Texas relies on its regional workforce boards to secure state matching funds to allow the state to draw down the maximum amount of federal CCDF funding possible. Some regional boards secure additional funding through their relationships with various local partners. Additionally, philanthropic organizations and advocacy groups in the state fund consumer outreach and education about child care assistance and other supportive services.
- Vermont leverages SNAP E&T funding to support education and training and supportive services for individuals with low incomes, including parents, as part of their newly implemented Individual Career Advancement Network (ICAN) program. ICAN fills the gap for parents with low incomes and child care needs that don't necessarily meet the eligibility requirements for CCDF assistance, such as for noncustodial parents or parents that need child care for a one-off training activity. Vermont also uses WIOA funds for child care assistance as needed when CCDF funding isn't applicable. Finally, Vermont uses state funding as necessary to ensure that all applicants eligible for their CCDF program receive assistance.

TABLE 1

Major Federal and State Funding Streams Providing Child Care and Early Education Assistance or Services

Program	Funding	Description
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) or Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)	\$8.1 billion for federal fiscal year (FY) 2018 ^a	Federal and state funds used to provide subsidies for eligible families with low incomes who need child care to work or participate in education and training; also provides some funds to support the quality and supply of child care ^b
Head Start and Early Head Start	\$9.8 billion for FY 2018 ^c	Federal funds that flow directly to local community agencies (including nonprofit, for-profit, and public agencies) and school systems that provide early education services for eligible children in families with low incomes from birth to age two (Early Head start) and ages 3 to 4 (Head Start)
State prekindergarten	More than \$8.15 billion across the 44 states and DC that offered preschool during the 2017–2018 school year ^d	State funding for prekindergarten services through school systems, Head Start programs, and community-based child care programs, depending on the state
Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program	\$50 million for FY 2018 ^e	Federal funds that flow directly to public, state, and private institutions of higher education to support student parents

^a CLASP, “Child Care in the FY 2018 Omnibus Spending Bill,” March 2018,

<https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018/03/Child%20Care%20in%20the%20FY%202018%20Omnibus.pdf>

^b States can access federal matching funds in addition to federal mandatory funding by providing a share of the matching funds and spending the funds at a required maintenance of effort (MOE) level; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds can be transferred to CCDF to support child care services. For more information on CCDF program administration and funding, see https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/fundamentals_of_ccdf_administration.pdf.

^c “Head Start Program Facts Fiscal Year 2018,” accessed March 1, 2019, <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/hs-program-fact-sheet-2018.pdf>.

^d National Institute for Early Education. 2019. The State of Preschool 2018. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/YB2018_Executive-Summary.pdf.

^e Aaron Loewenberg, “New Spending Bill Boosts Funding for Key ECE Programs,” *New America*, October 8, 2018, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/new-spending-bill-boosts-funding-key-ece-programs/>.

TABLE 2

Selected Federal Employment and Training Programs That Can Be Leveraged to Pay for an Individual's Child Care

Program title	Funding	Description
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Programs	\$4.8 billion across all programs for FY 2018 ^a	In addition to funding for supportive services that can be used for child care and provided to customers at American Job Centers, WIOA includes funding for a range of programs serving vulnerable populations and for adult education services.
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) grants	In FY 2017, combined federal TANF and state maintenance-of-effort (MOE) expenditures and transfers totaled \$31.1 billion ^b	This program funds employment and training programs for TANF recipients and other populations with low incomes. TANF funds can be transferred to CCDF or spent directly to support these child care services. ^c
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) employment and training (E&T)	\$477 million for FY 2018 ^d	Two types of funding are relevant to child care: 100 percent grant funding to states and 50-50 funds that can support administrative costs or participant reimbursements. Due to limited 100 percent funding, states have increasingly relied on 50-50 funding, which allows states and their partners to use non-Federal funds to provide supports such as child care to SNAP E&T participants and receive a 50 percent reimbursement from the US Department of Agriculture on those expenditures.

Note: This table lists the primary workforce development-focused funding sources that can be leveraged to pay for child care. Other sources of funding may include federal student aid (Pell grants, loans, etc.), Perkins formula grants, Trade Adjustment Act funding, etc.

^a US Department of Labor, "FY 2020 Detailed Budget Documentation," accessed April 1, 2019, p. 8 and 15,

<https://www.dol.gov/general/budget>; US Department of Education, "Department of Education Fiscal Year 2020 President's Budget," March 11, 2019, p. 6, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget20/20pbapt.pdf>. Figure is for enacted 2019 budgets for (1) training and employment services, including Adult Employment and Training Activities, Youth Activities, Dislocated Workers and Training Activities, Indian and Native American Programs, Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers, Reentry Employment Opportunities, Apprenticeship Program, Workforce Data Quality Initiative, and Youthbuild; (2) Employment Service Grants to States; and (3) Adult Basic Education and Literacy State Grants. Figure does not include funding for the JobCorps, competitive national grants and other smaller programs administered by the Departments of Education or Health and Human Services.

^b Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, "TANF and MOE Spending and Transfers by Activity, FY 2017 (Contains National and State Pie Charts)," February 6, 2019, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/resource/tanf-and-moe-spending-and-transfers-by-activity-fy-2017-contains-national-state-pie-charts>.

^c States can access federal matching funds in addition to federal mandatory funding by providing a share of the matching funds and spending the funds at a required maintenance of effort (MOE) level. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds can be transferred to CCDF or spent directly to support these child care services.

^d *Appendix: Budget of the U.S. Government, Fiscal Year 2018*, pg. 156, budget line 003 under "Obligations by program activity," <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BUDGET-2018-APP/pdf/BUDGET-2018-APP.pdf>.

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Notes

- ¹ “Unemployment Rates and Earnings by Educational Attainment, 2017,” Employment Projections, Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed September 25, 2018, <https://www.bls.gov/emp/chart-unemployment-earnings-education.htm>.
- ² US Census Bureau, 2013–2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.
- ³ For CCDF state plans, see Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, “Approved CCDF Plans (FY 2016–2018),” June 16, 2016, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/state-plans>. For WIOA state plans, see US Department of Education, “Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Plan Modifications (PY 2018–2020),” modified December 20, 2018, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/wioa/state-plans/index.html>.
- ⁴ The proportion of families in Virginia receiving CCDF subsidies for employment and education and/or training (ETW) significantly increased from FY 2014 to FY 2015 (13 to 60 percent). This increase might be the result of changes in state policy, reporting guidelines, or other reasons. In FY 2014, Virginia implemented a new statewide child care system and switched from reporting sample data to full population data.
- ⁵ Nina Chien, “Factsheet: Estimates of Child Care Eligibility & Receipt for Fiscal Year 2015,” Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, US Department of Health and Human Services, January 2019, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/260361/CY2015ChildCareSubsidyEligibility.pdf>.
- ⁶ American Job Centers, formerly known as one-stop career centers, are authorized under the WIOA to provide local access to all core programs in one place. WIOA core programs include (1) WIOA Title I adult, dislocated worker and youth formula programs administered by the US Department of Labor; (2) Adult Education and Literacy Act programs administered by the US Department of Education; (3) Wagner-Peyser Act employment services administered by the US Department of Labor; and (4) Rehabilitation Act Title I programs administered by the US Department of Education. See Employment and Training Administration, United States Department of Labor, “The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: Fact Sheet: One-Stop Career Centers,” accessed March 1, 2019, https://www.doleta.gov/wioa/Docs/WIOA_OneStop_FactSheet.pdf.
- ⁷ For WIOA performance and service data, see <https://www.doleta.gov/performance/results/>.
- ⁸ “Guide to Learning About Local Workforce Systems,” Urban Institute, accessed March 1, 2019, <https://workforce.urban.org/>.

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