



## The State of Early Childhood Programs: 2009

*Enriching experiences in the context of high quality early childhood programs give young children an enhanced chance at success in school.<sup>1</sup> Poor children, who are particularly at risk for academic failure, can benefit greatly from early childhood programs that include not only education but other wide-ranging services for themselves and their families. Benefits of high quality early childhood experiences have been found to extend far beyond the young years, as they include a marked decrease in the likelihood children will some day engage in criminal activity or be dependent on public welfare programs.<sup>2</sup>*

### ***Quality of Early Childhood Programs in America***

- The most vulnerable of children, including infants, toddlers, special needs children and children from low-income families, tend to be in family child care homes.<sup>3</sup> Vulnerable children also tend to be in the poorest quality care.<sup>4</sup>
- Researchers assert that findings from existing child care research can be summarized in two statements. First, child outcomes are more positive when children are in higher quality child care. However the quality of most child care is “mediocre” and, as a result, the well-being of children is threatened.<sup>5</sup>
- Studies indicate that children in poor quality child care have delays in language and reading skills and display more aggressive behaviors towards both adults and children.<sup>4</sup>
- Although teacher education tends to be low across the early childhood field, research indicates a positive relation between teacher education levels, program quality, and positive outcomes for children.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Availability of Early Childhood Programs***

- Sixty percent of children under the age of five participate in non-parent child care including licensed center-based and family child care as well as non-regulated care.<sup>3</sup> The selection of non-regulated care is due to a variety of reasons including cost constraints, preference for relative care, or the need for child care during non-traditional work hours.<sup>7</sup>
- There are more than 6 million “latchkey” children across the nation. These are children who return to an empty home after school; this is partially due to a scarcity of after-school programs in inner city and rural areas.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Cost of Early Childhood Programs***

- The cost for full-time center-based care for a 4-year-old ranges from \$3,380 to \$10,787 a year in fees and child care fees for one infant in a center range from \$4,542 to \$14,591 a year.<sup>9</sup>
- Poor families who paid for child care in 2002 spent 35% of their income as compared to 7% spent by non-poor families.<sup>9</sup>
- In 2005, \$2.8 million in state and federal funds was spent on pre-kindergarten programs, most of which targeted children at risk for school failure.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Families and Early Childhood Programs***

- Sixty-four percent of mothers with children under six years of age and 57% of mothers with children under one are working.<sup>9</sup>

- A significant number of families use informal care due to the cost of formal child care and accessibility constraints.<sup>6</sup>
- Determining how many families use child care is difficult as some families frequently change programs<sup>11</sup> or use multiple child care settings (including non-regulated care).<sup>12</sup> Consider the following statistics:
  - Among families using more than one type of child care in 2002, 34% of children with employed mothers and 21% of children with non-employed mothers used family child care arrangements as their secondary child care setting.<sup>3</sup>
  - Data from the 2005 National Household Education Surveys Program indicates 60% of young children (birth-age 5) were in at least one non-parental care arrangement during the week and of these 16% used multiple settings.<sup>13</sup>
  - Researchers estimate the non-regulated care population to be as many as one-third of all children who are in family child care arrangements.<sup>12,14</sup>

### ***Teachers in Early Childhood Programs***

- Only 29 of more than 800 occupations earn less annual salary than child care workers.<sup>15</sup>
- The median salary for a child care worker is \$19,670 as compared with the median salaries for a secretary (\$29,190), a school bus driver (\$26,190), and a kindergarten teacher (\$47,750).<sup>15</sup>
- In 2002, 33% of teachers in center-based programs and 17% of family child care providers had a minimum of a Bachelor's degree.<sup>16</sup>
- When examining the qualifications of the early childhood educator workforce, including school-based kindergarten teachers (11%) and staff who work in school-based early childhood programs (5%), the remaining 84% of the workforce employed in other early childhood settings (center-based and home-based programs), researchers found the educational qualifications to be steadily decreasing:

A dramatic demographic pattern exists to educational attainment among ECE teachers that is strikingly different than patterns for all workers. The younger a teacher or administrator is today, the *less* likely they are to have a college degree. Only a little over a quarter of those age 24-36 have a college degree compared to 36% of those ages 40-50 and 43% of those over age 50.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Subsidized Early Childhood Programs***

- In FY 2007, 24% of the care paid for by the Child Care Development Fund was for non-regulated care.<sup>18</sup>
- Only one in seven children eligible for child care subsidies is receiving such assistance.<sup>19</sup>
- Early Head Start reaches approximately 50,000 infants and toddlers out of over 2 million eligible children.<sup>20</sup>
- In 2005, Head Start served 906,993 children, which is 50% of the children who were eligible.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Regulation of Early Childhood Programs***

- Although 40 states regulate the minimum qualifications for an early childhood teacher, 25 of those states only require prior experience. The remaining 15 states require prior experience in addition to either a high school diploma or GED.<sup>21</sup>
- The most common infant-to-staff ratio across the U.S. is 4:1 and six states allow a ratio of 6:1.<sup>21</sup> For the highest quality care, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends a ratio of 3:1.<sup>22</sup>
- Although the most common toddler-to-staff ratio across the U.S. is 6:1, 9 states allow a ratio of 10:1.<sup>21</sup> For the highest quality care, NAEYC recommends a ratio of 4:1.<sup>22</sup>

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