

Pathways and Partnerships for Child Care Excellence

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Child Care



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More than 12 million American children regularly rely on child care to support their healthy development and school success. Of these, over 1.6 million children receive a child care subsidy from the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program each month. In addition, CCDF helps leverage child care investments from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and other funding streams, resulting in financial support to make child care more affordable for a total of 2.5 million children each month. Each year, CCDF invests over \$5 billion (\$7 billion in 2009 from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act), plus additional funds transferred from TANF to CCDF. States, Territories, and Tribes annually spend \$1 billion to support child care quality improvement, resulting in better learning environments and more effective caregivers in child care centers and family child care homes across the country.

At the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is pursuing a comprehensive approach to helping more children in low-income families access high-quality care. ACF's Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development coordinates efforts across Head Start, child care, home visiting, and other early childhood development programs throughout HHS and across the Federal Government. ACF's Office of Child Care (OCC) administers the CCDF and works with State, Territory, and Tribal governments to provide strong support for children and their families as they juggle work schedules and struggle to find affordable, high-quality child care for their children. Still, we have much work to do to achieve our vision of high-quality child care choices for all parents, especially low-income parents, so that they no longer have to worry about their children's safety and learning while they work to support their families.

Helping More Children in Low-Income Families Access High-Quality Care

In everything that we do, OCC is focusing on raising the bar on quality in child care across the country. We are especially concerned about the quality of care for children in low-income families, because research shows that child care quality matters even more for these children. The most recent findings from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development found that the quality of child care that children received in their preschool years had small but detectable effects on their academic success and behavior all the way into adolescence. Despite the importance of quality, the research and data available indicate that the quality of our Nation's child care, on average, is inadequate to support children's learning and development to help them succeed in school and in life.

HHS has responded to these challenges in the following ways:

- **Proposing Principles for a Child Care and Development Block Grant Reauthorization that strongly focuses on quality by:**

- Serving more children in low-income families in safe, healthy, nurturing child care settings that are highly effective in promoting learning, child development, and school readiness.
- Supporting parent employment and expanding high-quality choices available to parents across the range of child care settings.
- Minimizing the disruptions to children's development and learning by promoting continuity of care.
- Strengthening accountability in the CCDF program.

- Improving coordination of Federal early care and education programs through alignment of program goals and priorities.
- **Improving the CCDF planning and reporting process.** OCC has proposed a revision to the Child Care and Development Fund Plan application (known as the Preprint). The child care quality section has been redesigned to focus on the components of a strong child care system: health and safety requirements, early learning guidelines, quality improvement systems for programs, and professional development and workforce initiatives. The new Preprint establishes a planning process for States and Territories that includes a self-assessment, goal-setting for quality in the coming biennium, and an annual progress report known as the Quality Performance Report.

For the first time, the Quality Performance Report will collect data on child care quality activities and quality outcomes.

- **Redesigning child care technical assistance.** OCC has stepped up technical assistance (TA) in a number of areas, including quality rating and improvement systems and fiscal integrity. In FY 2011, we will be recompeting our Child Care Technical Assistance Network to specialize in core areas, including the following new projects:
 - National Center on Child Care Subsidy Administration and Accountability
 - National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement Systems
 - National Center on Child Care Professional Development Systems and Workforce Initiatives.

Pathways to Excellence for Child Care Programs

States, Territories, and Tribes have pioneered new pathways to excellence to help home-based and center-based providers move ahead toward continuous quality improvement. At OCC, we are building on that innovation and supporting the replication of best practices. Across the country, States are using CCDF to build an infrastructure for child care quality that spans a wide variety of child care, Head Start, prekindergarten, and afterschool programs. These coordination efforts will be bolstered by the State Advisory Councils for Early Childhood Education and Care.

Ensuring the Health and Safety of Children in Child Care

Health and safety is the foundation of quality in child care. It is the paramount concern of every parent. Under the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act, every State must operate a system of child care licensing, but in many States, those standards are not high enough to ensure the health and safety of children, they do not apply to many settings in which young children are cared for, and monitoring to ensure compliance with standards is not adequate. OCC is stepping up our work with States, Territories, and Tribes to strengthen standards to ensure safety, health, and well-being, while supporting child care providers to meet standards. OCC resources for States, Territories, and Tribes include:

- **Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs, Third Edition,** our national model child care standards, developed through a public-private partnership between HHS (Maternal and Child Health Bureau), the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Public Health Association. A revised version with comprehensive improvements will be released in early 2011.

- **Preventing Childhood Obesity in Early Care and Education Programs** is the new set of national standards describing evidence-based best practices in nutrition, physical activity, and screen time for early care and education programs. These standards, part of the new *Caring for Our Children* revision, are already available at http://nrckids.org/CFOC3/PREVENTING_OBESITY/index.htm.
- **The 2008 Child Care Licensing Study**, produced through a partnership between OCC's National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center and the National Association for Regulatory Administration, offers a comprehensive, 50-State view of licensing policies and practices and is available at <http://www.naralicensing.org/>.

In the coming year, OCC will:

- **Promote the adoption of the national model child care standards.** OCC will work with the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, States, and Tribes, to promote the adoption of the standards in *Caring for Our Children*. OCC's Healthy Child Care America project provides free resources to help States adopt and implement key health and safety practices. For example, online training is available on safe-sleep practices for infants and safer medicine administration in child care.
- **Focus on nutrition and physical activity.** In 2011, HHS will provide tools to States to promote the adoption of the nutrition, physical activity, and screen time standards. Through a partnership with the Office of Head Start, the Office of Child Care is training State teams to promote the use of the nationally recognized training model, *I Am Moving, I Am Learning*, in child care.
- **Work with States to strengthen licensing systems.** OCC is building partnerships between State child care licensing officials and State CCDF administrators, convening them at the national and regional levels to identify best practices and promote replication across the country.

Building Quality Rating and Improvement Systems

Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) set standards of excellence for child care providers and then provide a pathway to help programs continually improve to meet the higher standards. Just as important, QRIS provide financial and technical assistance support for child care programs and serve as a bridge to bring together all early childhood programs in States under one vision of care and education. Secretary Kathleen Sebelius has adopted an HHS High Priority Performance Goal to increase the number of States and Territories with strong quality rating and improvement systems. OCC provides resources for State, Territories, and Tribes:

- **Quality Rating and Improvement System Resource Guide.** This comprehensive Guide provides detailed information and State examples on developing, implementing, and evaluating quality rating and improvement systems and is available at <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/qrisresourceguide>.
- **Quality Rating and Improvement System Cost Estimation Model.** This online tool allows for projecting costs to implement a QRIS initiative under a variety of scenarios determined by the user and is available at <http://qriscostmodel.nccic.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm>.

In the coming year, OCC will:

- **Develop high-quality benchmarks for QRIS** to serve as guideposts for States as they continue to design and build their systems. OCC will track and report on the number of States that are implementing these best practices in QRIS to achieve continuous quality improvement in child care.

- **Provide intensive TA to over half the States in FY 2011 to help them progress toward the benchmarks**, which serve as a self-assessment tool so that States, working with OCC and its TA providers, can assess areas of strength in their quality improvement systems and identify areas to work on in the coming year.
- **Launch a National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement Systems** as part of our Child Care Technical Assistance Network to provide technical assistance to States and Territories as they build and strengthen quality improvement systems.

Pathways to Excellence for Child Care Professionals

Building Strong Professional Development and Supportive Workforce Initiatives

Responsive, well-qualified caregivers are the most important factor in children's development and learning. Some estimates indicate that child care teachers are a third of America's teacher corps¹. OCC is helping States, Territories, and Tribes build professional development systems and workforce initiatives to help child care professionals pursue better training and higher education, moving up career ladders to higher compensation.

OCC resources for States, Territories, and Tribes:

- **Early Childhood Professional Development Systems Toolkit** provides step-by-step information for States to build, implement, and evaluate cross-sector professional development (PD) systems and is available at http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/pd_toolkit/index.html.
- **Afterschool Professional Development System Toolkit** includes discussion guides, tools, and resources to address the opportunities and challenges in fostering afterschool PD systems and is available at http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/prof_dev.html.

In the coming year, OCC will:

- **Publish a set of high-quality features of professional development and workforce systems.** OCC will use this tool, similar to the QRIS benchmarks, and pilot them as a self-assessment tool to guide our technical assistance in States.
- **Establish a National Center on the Child Care Professional Development Systems and Workforce Initiatives.** The Center would be devoted to assisting States in building their capacity to produce highly qualified professionals in early childhood education and school-age care.

¹Brandon, R.N., T.J. Stutman & M. Maroto (2010, Forthcoming), "The Economic Value of Early Care and Education in the US," in Weiss, E. and R. Brandon (2010 Forthcoming), "Economic Analysis: The Early Childhood Sector." Washington, DC: Partnership for America's Economic Success.

Pathways to Stronger Policies and Accountability

Building a Child Care Subsidy System That Is Child-Focused, Family-Friendly, and Works in Partnership With Child Care Providers.

In 2010, OCC policy staff conducted a comprehensive review of policies to identify ways that the child care subsidy system can support child development, remove access barriers for families, and improve processes with providers. The first result was new questions in the CCDF Plan Preprint on access, continuity of care, and practices with families and providers. In 2011, OCC will issue more program guidance that helps grantees realize our shared vision of a child care subsidy system that works for working families and their children.

Strengthening Program Integrity

OCC works with CCDF grantees to ensure that all program funds are used to the benefit of eligible children and families. Our efforts to strengthen program integrity focus on reducing administrative errors and preventing, detecting, and eliminating fraud. Recent actions include:

- **Developing stronger policy guidance on CCDF program integrity.** ACF issued a Program Instruction on August 26, 2010, that provides guidance to grantees on preventing waste, fraud, and abuse in the CCDF program and how to improve program integrity while not reducing program access for eligible children (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/law/guidance/current/pi2010-06/pi2010-06.htm>).
- **Reducing administrative errors.** ACF works with States to conduct triennial case record reviews to identify and reduce administrative errors in the CCDF program. As of June 2010, we have completed one cycle of administrative error-rate reviews, establishing a baseline across the 50 States. States will report on targeted actions to reduce errors in the revised Biennial CCDF Plan.

In the coming year, OCC is providing improved CCDF program integrity tools:

- **Self-Assessment Instrument for Internal Controls and Risk Management.** OCC's tool helps States better analyze risk and strengthen internal controls to prevent improper payments. Based on feedback from pilot States, OCC will revise the self-assessment to tailor it to the administrative specifications of the CCDF program.
- **Information Technology Guide.** A *Child Care Administrator's Improper Payments Information Technology Guide* covers key considerations that program officials should take into account when building automated systems to reduce improper payments. In 2011, OCC will update the Guide with new accountability information, key fraud prevention measures, and best practices.