

Snapshot

Start Early's [2020 State Policy Update Report](#) provides a snapshot of early childhood care and education budget and policy changes during the 2019-2020 legislative sessions (as of November 2020). All 50 states and Washington, D.C. were invited to complete our 2020 State Policy Update survey, and representatives from a total of 28 states and Washington, D.C. responded. This year, survey respondents were asked to categorize legislative, administrative and budgetary changes that occurred in the 2019-2020 sessions, and provide reflections on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic decline. As a result, we are able to offer a very robust report that illuminates trends and connects early childhood policy and funding advances across the country.

This year's findings illuminated movements across the early learning field and offered insights into work that needs to continue to happen to support children and families in the coming years. Below are some highlights from the report and policy recommendations from those who submitted survey responses.

Early Care & Education

State advocates reported several policy changes to provide emergency support to the child care field, including subsidy rate increases, free child care for essential workers and stabilization grants through CARES Act funding to cover revenue losses due to decreased enrollment. They also reported policy changes that allowed billing based on enrollment instead of attendance, allowed subsidy payments for services offered remotely and waived parent co-pays for subsidized child care.

Despite a major shift in focus to address the exposed child care crisis, state advocates also reported successes in expanding public preschool and securing additional funding for early childhood facilities. Of these policy changes that were successfully implemented to respond to the pandemic, state advocates recommended that the following changes be made **permanent** beyond the current health crisis:

- Allow child care subsidies to be paid based on enrollment, not attendance
- Increase Child Care Development Fund subsidy funding and waive certain requirements; make the subsidy more widely available; adopt electronic forms; and allow applicants to submit via email
- Collect data on open child care slots and map the information
- Offer start-up grants for home-based child care providers to address child care deserts that exist due to tremendous decreases in both licensed family child care and family, friend and neighbor providers
- Waive, or significantly adjust, the child care copay to provide relief for working families and address the challenges that families face the closer they get to income cut-off thresholds
- Improve coordination between the K-12 and early learning fields to better understand the impact of early childhood investments on learning outcomes

Infant & Family Supports

State advocates reported numerous successes in adopting policies to improve supports for infants and families. Highlights include:

- Secured and dedicated funding to reduce maternal mortality
- Extended postpartum Medicaid coverage
- Expanded newborn screenings to include additional tests
- Allowance of Medicaid to cover telehealth well-child visits and psychiatry consultation programs
- Increased the availability of long-acting reversible contraception
- Increased funding for preventative health care for children

Advocates also helped pass legislation that funded pilots and expansion of early childhood mental health consultation programs, improving access to mental health services for families, including those experiencing homelessness. Additional funding was also allocated to a study on the effectiveness of mental health consultation.

Particularly, advocates wasted no time diving into the needs of families during the economic downturn. In response to dire economic challenges for families brought on by the pandemic, advocates supported:

- Expansion of paid family leave
- Reforms to the child welfare system
- Increases in TANF payments
- Access to pandemic-specific EBT programs/special food assistance programs
- Extended eligibility for TANF, SNAP and several health care programs
- Eviction moratoriums, rental assistance and prohibitions on utility shut offs

Of these changes that were successfully implemented to respond to the pandemic, state advocates recommended that the following changes be made **permanent** beyond the current health crisis:

- Continue to initiate conversations with groups involved in issues outside of early care and education stakeholders that impact families (such as housing)
- Implement less stringent work requirements, presumed eligibility, simpler determination processes, and continuous eligibility for families utilizing support programs like TANF, SNAP, and child care assistance
- Increase income supports, nutrition assistance, and rental assistance for families
- Provide assistance and relief for families (preventing evictions, establishing payment plans, more flexibility with recertification for benefits, etc.)
- Remove red tape that kicks children off their Medicaid coverage

Early Intervention & Home Visiting

In the area of early intervention, state advocates' efforts successfully contributed to many financial investments and changes that increased access to these critical services for children, including:

- Secured funding for research on access to early intervention services for families involved in the child welfare system
- Rate increases
- Telehealth transitions and supports, including Medicaid coverage and necessary technology and equipment for families receiving services

Home visiting systems and also received imperative funding and supports, including:

- Expanded Medicaid funding for programs
- Extended services for pregnant/parenting teens
- TANF eligibility to include participation of a single parent with a newborn in a home visiting program during the child's first year
- Allowance of virtual visits to be reimbursed

Across the country, advocates are working to ensure that parents and children can continue to receive telehealth supports, include home visiting and early intervention services.

Workforce & Higher Education

One of the biggest needs that emerged during the pandemic was increased support for the workforce. In this area, advocates supported several initiatives, including:

- Launch of programs to help diversify the early childhood workforce
- Expansion of implicit bias training
- Establishment of reporting systems to track workforce longitudinal data
- Secured bonuses for emergency child care center teachers
- Expansion of professional development to align preschool to 3rd grade instruction
- Expansion of early learning scholarships and wage supplements

Moving forward, they would like to see many of the programs above stay in place, particularly increased professional development stipends to encourage continued learning.

Revenue, Data & Governance

State advocates reported significant investments and new funding streams across the field for high-quality early childhood programs, including dedicated funding to conduct a needs assessment for the birth-to-age 5 system. Advocates also reported procured funding to collect and publish positive COVID-19 cases among child care staff, children and families.

In addition, new systems were launched to track suspension and expulsion rates among young children and to better align early care and education programs.

Advocates underscored the need for increased collaborations between philanthropic organizations, advocates and business and state leaders to problem-solve in real time to implement changes that best support our youngest learners, their families and the early childhood workforce.