

Conclusion



The quality of child care is a reflection of a state's child care standards and oversight – monitoring of those standards. Why does the quality of child care matter? The answer is simple. Nearly 12 million children under age 5 spend time every week in a child care setting. The children of working mothers spend, on average, 36 hours a week in child care. Research shows that 90 percent of brain development occurs between birth and age 5, which has a life-long impact making these years a critical period for child development. Last, but not least, the health and safety of children are at stake.

When NACCRRRA conducted a national parent poll in 2006, the overwhelming majority of

parents thought that caregivers were trained in child development, trained in first-aid and CPR, trained to recognize child abuse and report it, underwent background checks, and that the government inspected child care programs.

The reality is that child care standards, (including training requirements for caregivers), and oversight vary by state and many states are doing little to protect the health and safety of children or to promote school readiness.

State Rankings:

What we know from our review of standards and oversight is that the DoD child care system

stands alone as a model for the states. The DoD child care system is not only ranked number one on the top 10 list of states with the best child care center standards, but is also ranked number

one on the top 10 list of states conducting effective oversight. Other than DoD, no state appears on both top 10 lists.

Child Care Center Top 10 Best Standards		
State	Score	Rank
Department of Defense	77	1
Illinois	66	2
Minnesota	66	2
Pennsylvania	64	4
Rhode Island	64	4
Maryland	63	6
Vermont	63	6
North Dakota	62	8
New Jersey	62	8
Wisconsin	62	8
Top Possible Score: 100		

Child Care Center Bottom 10 Weakest Standards		
State	Score	Rank
Idaho	8	52
Louisiana	13	51
Kentucky	27	50
Nebraska	29	49
Arkansas	31	48
Georgia	33	45
South Carolina	33	45
Florida	33	45
Colorado	34	44
Kansas	36	43
Top Possible Score: 100		

Child Care Center Top 10 Best Oversight*		
State	Score	Rank
Department of Defense	40	1
Florida	37	2
Oklahoma	35	3
Virginia	35	3
South Carolina	35	3
Washington	34	6
North Carolina	34	6
Tennessee	32	8
Michigan	31	9
Nevada	31	9
Georgia	31	9
Top Possible Score: 50		

Child Care Center Bottom 10 Weakest Oversight**		
State	Score	Rank
Idaho	7	52
Utah	9	49
Maine	9	49
Oregon	9	49
Connecticut	10	48
Wisconsin	11	47
New Mexico	12	46
New Jersey	13	45
Arizona	14	44
New Hampshire	15	40
Iowa	15	40
Pennsylvania	15	40
Rhode Island	15	40
Top Possible Score: 50		

* 11 states are listed because 3 states tie for the 9th rank.

** 13 states are listed because 4 states tie for the 40th rank.

What does this mean? It is not enough to be moving in the right direction with strong child care standards if a state’s oversight system doesn’t measure up. Without sufficient oversight, there is no way to evaluate whether a state’s standards actually mean anything beyond the paper they are written on. For example, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Wisconsin are among the top 10 states for child care standards. But, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Wisconsin rank among the weakest 10 states for oversight and monitoring. Maybe the states measure up, but accountability is lacking.

The criteria used to rank the states are among the most basic of requirements to ensure children’s safety and to promote healthy development. When looking at the top 10 states in “overall rankings” (combining state scores for both standards and oversight), beyond the Department of Defense, only 9 of these states appear either on the top 10 list

for standards or the top 10 list for oversight. Illinois (ranked #2 overall), Maryland (ranked #4 overall), North Dakota (ranked #7 overall), Minnesota (ranked #10 overall) and Vermont (ranked #10 overall) appear on the top 10 list for standards. Washington (ranked #4 overall), Oklahoma (ranked #6 overall), Michigan (ranked #7 overall), and Tennessee (ranked #7 overall) appear on the top 10 list for oversight. Simply put, there are very few states with both strong standards and strong oversight. States with stronger standards need to match their requirements with more effective oversight, otherwise the standards can be hollow.

There is a lot of room for improvement by the states. The top 10 overall have a better system in place to ensure that the standards are enforced or that the actual settings comply with the standards as envisioned. However, even these states are not meeting many of the benchmarks.

Child Care Center Overall Rankings (Standards & Oversight)					
Top 10 Best Overall*			Bottom 10 Weakest Overall		
State	Score	Rank	State	Score	Rank
Department of Defense	117	1	Idaho	15	52
Illinois	90	2	Louisiana	37	51
New York	90	2	Nebraska	49	50
Maryland	89	4	Kentucky	51	49
Washington	89	4	California	54	47
Oklahoma	85	6	Kansas	54	47
Michigan	83	7	Utah	55	45
North Dakota	83	7	New Mexico	55	45
Tennessee	83	7	Maine	57	44
Minnesota	82	10	New Hampshire	58	43
Vermont	82	10			
Top Possible Score: 150					

*11 states are listed because two states ranked 10th.



Key Strengths & Weaknesses:

- **Oversight:** NACCRRRA's benchmark for manageable oversight is 50 or fewer child care programs for each licensing inspector to oversee. Just five states (*New York, Tennessee, Hawaii, Alaska, and South Dakota*) plus the Department of Defense meet this standard, with the remaining states exceeding the recommended caseload. In fact, 21 states (*Michigan, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Massachusetts, Indiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, Delaware, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Iowa, Oregon, Maine, New Hampshire, Utah, Kansas, California, Nebraska, Georgia, and Idaho*) have a caseload of more than 140 child care programs for each licensing inspector to monitor. Such caseloads are just too large to ensure accountability of child care programs to state standards.
- **Inspections:** NACCRRRA's benchmark is quarterly inspections. Just three states (*Tennessee, Nevada, and Missouri*) plus the Department of Defense conduct monitoring inspections at least quarterly. In fact, 8 states (*New York, Alaska, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Connecticut, Alabama, Colorado and California*) do not even conduct inspections on an annual basis.
- **Health and Safety Requirements:** NACCRRRA's benchmark includes 10 basic health and safety areas: immunizations, guidance/discipline, diapering and hand-washing, fire drills, administration of medication, incident reporting, putting infants on their backs to sleep, hazardous materials, playground surfaces under outdoor equipment, and emergency preparedness. Only 8 states (*Illinois, Wisconsin, New Jersey, Texas, Oregon, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and Ohio*) plus the Department of Defense address all 10 of these health and safety requirements. Four states (*South Carolina, the District of Columbia, Louisiana, and Idaho*) either allow or do not specifically prohibit corporal punishment.
- **Background Checks:** NACCRRRA's benchmark includes a full background check – a criminal history check plus a check of the child abuse and neglect registry, a state fingerprint check, federal fingerprint check, and a sex offender registry check. Only 3 states (*Illinois, Michigan and Nevada*) meet this standard. While NACCRRRA's polling reveals that most parents believe states conduct background checks (NACCRRRA, 2006), 21 states (including the District of Columbia) do not conduct fingerprint checks, which make a background check complete.
- **Minimum Center Director Qualifications:** NACCRRRA's benchmark for minimum qualifications for child care center directors is a Bachelor's degree (BA). Only the Department of Defense and New Jersey require center directors to have a BA or higher. Forty states do not even require an Associate's degree (2 year college degree) or a Child Development Associate credential for center directors.
- **Minimum Staff Qualifications:** NACCRRRA's benchmark for minimum qualifications for child care classroom teachers is a Child Development Associate

(CDA) credential or Associate's degree in a related field or higher. However, 21 states have no minimum educational requirement (not even a high school degree) for teachers in a child care center classroom. Twenty-eight states plus the Department of Defense require only a high school degree or GED for teachers in a child care center classroom. This is one reason why training of the child care workforce is so important. Yet only 5 states (*Minnesota, Washington, New Mexico, Wyoming, and Colorado*) plus the Department of Defense require center providers to have orientation training, training in first-aid, CPR, fire safety, and other health and safety training.

■ **Child Development Activities:**

NACCRRRA's benchmark for child development activities requires center programs to have activities in all six developmental domains (social, emotional, physical, language/literacy, cognitive/intellectual, and cultural). Only 13 states (*Illinois, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, North Dakota, New Jersey, Indiana, Vermont, New York, Washington, Hawaii, Arizona, the District of Columbia, and Nevada*) meet this standard. In fact, ten states have no requirements at all with regard to developmental activities for children (*Tennessee, Maine, Utah, Wyoming, Alabama, California, Colorado, Nebraska, Louisiana, and Idaho*).

Recommendations:

If we are to ensure that all children are safe, and that all child care centers promote school readiness so that children in every state can enter kindergarten with the skills to succeed, then states must do a better job at setting standards and conducting oversight. Parents want their children to be safe; they expect it. They also want their children to be learning. In fact, NACCRRRA's parent poll found that the most important goal of child care for many parents was safety, but the

second most frequent goal cited by parents was the goal of preparing children to enter school ready to learn (NACCRRRA, 2006).

NACCRRRA's parent poll found that parents overwhelmingly support proposals to improve the quality of child care. Among the findings of NACCRRRA's child care poll (NACCRRRA, 2006):

- ▶ 93 percent of parents support improving existing health and safety standards;
- ▶ 95 percent of parents support requiring inspections;
- ▶ 95 percent of parents support requiring training in child development and safety;
- ▶ 95 percent of parents support requiring pre-service training;
- ▶ 93 percent of parents support on-going annual training; and,
- ▶ 92 percent of parents support quality standards to ensure school readiness.

Simple steps undertaken by Congress and the states can better align federal and state policies with what children need to ensure a healthy and safe environment, and what parents believe and want for their children's safety and development. NACCRRRA is not calling for national or federal standards for child care. However, given the \$11 billion in federal funds





spent annually by the states on child care, NACCRRA believes that there should be more accountability for the settings in which children spend so much time (whether children receive a subsidy or not). All children should be safe in child care. If all children are to enter kindergarten with the skills to succeed, child care must include developmentally appropriate activities by trained caregivers.

Recommendations to Congress

NACCRRA recommends that Congress strengthen the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) law to:

- ▶ Require all paid providers (caring for unrelated children on a regular basis) to have at least 40 hours of training in child development and guidance, first-aid/CPR, recognizing child abuse, fire-safety training, and basic health and safety practices *prior* to working with children.
- ▶ Require all paid providers (caring for unrelated children on a regular basis) to attend at least 24 hours of on-going training annually. In-service training should ensure

child care providers get training in each of the 13 Child Development Associate (CDA) functional areas, and lead to demonstrated levels of competence.

- ▶ Require background checks, including fingerprint checks, for all paid providers (caring for unrelated children on a regular basis) *prior* to working alone with children.
- ▶ Require program activities to address all six developmental domains (social, emotional, physical, language/literacy, cognitive/intellectual, and cultural).
- ▶ Require quarterly unannounced inspections for all paid providers (caring for unrelated children on a regular basis).
- ▶ Require states to post inspection findings on the internet where parents can easily access the information to be better informed about child care options.
- ▶ Strengthen Congressional oversight with regard to how states are meeting health and safety requirements.

Recommendations to States

NACCRRRA recommends that States strengthen child care standards and oversight to:

- ▶ Meet NAEYC staff:child ratios and limit overall group size (to promote child safety and child development).
- ▶ Reduce inspector caseloads to a ratio of no more than 50:1 to improve accountability for meeting state standards.
- ▶ Require licensing staff to have a bachelor's degree or higher in a related field.
- ▶ Require child care center directors to have a BA or higher to promote program quality and improve accountability.
- ▶ Require child care providers to have a minimum of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential *prior* to working with children (or be enrolled in a program to receive such a credential within two years of employment).
- ▶ Require state health and safety standards to include all 10 basic areas (immunizations, guidance/discipline, diapering and hand-washing, fire drills, administration of medication, incident reporting, placing infants to sleep on their backs, hazardous materials, playground surfaces under outdoor equipment, and emergency preparedness).
- ▶ Require parent involvement and at-will access to centers during normal business hours.

Final Thoughts

Child care licensing and oversight sounds boring and bureaucratic to the general public. But, no parent thinks that protecting the health and safety of children is boring. Parents know that protecting children is essential in any child care setting. And, state and federal law should reflect that necessity.

Furthermore, it is increasingly clear that school readiness requires a birth-to-five strategy. Forty-six percent of kindergarten teachers report that half of their students or more are not ready for kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000). Child care is central to that objective and must play a role in any school readiness effort – at both the federal and state level. It is time to look at the child care settings children are in and to connect the dots to school readiness.

We know what needs to be done and the time for action is now. Nationally, there is consensus on the need to keep children healthy and safe and to promote school readiness. Strengthening the quality of child care is a means to that end.