



EARLY CHILDHOOD

Early Learning in the United States: 2017

By [Simon Workman](#) and Jessica Troe | Posted on July 20, 2017, 9:02 am



AP/Lisa Rathke

Children climb in the playground at a preschool in Hinesburg, Vermont, July 7, 2016.

The importance of high-quality early learning programs, such as child care and preschool, for children and families in the United States is well-recognized. Research has demonstrated the [short- and long-term benefits](#) for children who participate in high-quality early learning programs, and more than [15 million children](#) have both parents in the workforce—making access to high-quality

early learning programs an economic necessity. However, many states' policies fail to support access to affordable, high-quality programs.

The [high cost](#) of child care leaves too many families without options. The average cost of center-based care in the United States comprises nearly 30 percent of the median family income. However, the high cost of care does not guarantee quality, and state systems to measure and increase quality are [underutilized](#) in most states. While many states publicly fund preschool programs, only [5 percent of 3-year-olds and 32 percent of 4-year-olds](#) are enrolled in a public preschool setting, such as Head Start or a state-funded preschool program, and even among these publicly funded preschool programs, quality varies greatly.

The following fact sheets provide an in-depth look at both the need for and the current state of early learning programs in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The fact sheets include:

- State-specific costs of child care and cost as a percentage of income for families of color and families living in poverty
- Percentages of child care providers participating in a state quality rating and improvement system
- Brief descriptions of state-funded preschool programs and the proportion of children in each state who access these programs
- How access to affordable, high-quality early childhood programs can boost states' economies
- How capping child care costs at 10 percent of a family's income and [voluntary universal preschool](#) for 3- and 4-year-olds can benefit children and families in each state

State policymakers and advocates can use this tool to highlight why it is important to enact policies that support young children's learning, families' economic security, and state economies.

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