

We CAN Do Better: 2009 Update

NACCRRRA's Ranking of State Child Care Center Regulation and Oversight

Over 11 million children under age 5 spend an average of 36 hours a week in some type of child care setting. Almost two-thirds of these children are in center-based care. State child care licensing regulations govern the health, safety and learning opportunities for these children. Oversight of licensing regulations determines how well the regulations are applied. Weak regulations allow children to be in child care settings that may not be safe, healthy or developmentally appropriate. Strong regulations with weak oversight means, in essence, that compliance becomes voluntary.

Two years ago, NACCRRRA reviewed state child care center licensing regulations and oversight. NACCRRRA scored the states, the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense (DoD) on 10 regulation and five oversight benchmarks. NACCRRRA's update of that report, *We Can Do Better: 2009 Update*, found modest improvement, but still much more needs to be done to ensure that children are in settings that are safe and promote healthy child development.

Child Care Center Overall Rankings (Combined Regulations & Oversight)

Top 10 Best Overall			Bottom 10 Weakest Overall		
State	Score	Rank	State	Score	Rank
Dept. of Defense	131	1	New Mexico	69	43
District of Columbia	111	2	Arkansas	66	44
Oklahoma	106	3	Iowa	66	44
Tennessee	106	3	Missouri	66	44
Maryland	104	5	Kansas	64	47
Rhode Island	104	5	California	62	48
New York	100	7	Georgia	53	49
Illinois	98	8	Nebraska	49	50
Florida	97	9	Louisiana	46	51
Washington	97	9	Idaho	15	52

Note: Total Possible Score is 150

Key Findings:

- Current state child care center regulation and oversight do little to protect the health and safety of children or to promote school success. The average score for states was 83 out of 150 points (53 percent) -- the equivalent of an F. No state earned an A. Only DoD earned a B, and one state earned a C. Thirty-three states earned a failing grade.
- Once again, DoD ranked first for both regulations and oversight. No other state is on the top 10 list for both elements.
- Only 11 states now require a comprehensive background check (including a state and federal fingerprint check, a check of the child abuse registry, and a check of the sex offender registry).

- Half the states conduct inspections only once a year or less frequently. Some states conduct inspections only once every five or ten years.
- Pre-service training and on-going training for child care staff, minimum education requirements for staff and center directors, and required age appropriate program activities for children vary greatly among the states and overall are weak.
- Only 17 states require regular inspection reports and substantiated complaint reports to be posted on the internet so that parents can make informed choices among child care settings in their community.

NACCRRR RECOMMENDATIONS

CONGRESS should strengthen the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to:	STATES should strengthen regulations and oversight to:
1. Require accountability for the expenditure of federal funds.	1. Require responsibility for the expenditure of federal funds and the protection of children in a safe child care setting that promotes healthy child development.
2. Require background checks, based on fingerprints, for all child care center employees.	2. Reduce licensing caseloads to a ratio of no more than 50:1. Require licensing staff to have a Bachelor's degree or higher in early childhood education or a related field.
3. Require states to establish minimum health and safety regulations and enforce them through regular unannounced inspections.	3. Require child care center directors to have a Bachelor's degree or higher in early childhood education in order to promote program quality.
4. Require all child care staff to have at least 40 hours of pre-service training (including CPR, first-aid and other basic safety and health training in addition to child development) and 24 hours of ongoing annual training.	4. Require staff training to be intentional and sequential.
5. Authorize the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to withhold funding from states that do not require minimum protections for children and that do not conduct regular unannounced inspections of child care settings.	5. Require states to post inspection findings and substantiated complaints on the Internet so parents can make informed choices when choosing child care.
6. Increase the quality set-aside to 6 percent of base funding and 25 percent of new funding (post FY2008) to bring quality investments on par with Head Start.	6. Require NACCRRR's 10 basic health and safety standards.

Currently, about \$12 billion in government funds is spent on child care each year. But, little is known about the quality of care that children are in. President Obama has called for a "new era of responsibility." Child care should be part of that era. Federal funds should be spent in an accountable manner. States should take responsibility for ensuring that children are protected and in a setting promoting healthy development when they are not in the care of their parents. We can do better.

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