

Making child care choices: How welfare and work policies influence parents' decisions -- Policy brief ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Available in print for order (see SOURCE) and online for download.

- Policy brief available in html and pdf. ^[2]

Summary: Reauthorization of the 1996 federal welfare reform law has rekindled a policy debate about whether current child care assistance provisions meet the needs of working families and support children's intellectual and social development. For low-income parents who work — many of whom have jobs that pay low wages and entail working unpredictable, unconventional hours — the difficulties of securing affordable, accessible, and reliable child care can be substantial. Although federal and state spending on child care has increased considerably since 1996, most eligible children still do not receive assistance. This policy brief summarizes new findings on the child care decisions of about 20,000 low-income parents who took part in nine random assignment evaluations conducted by MDRC. Some of the 21 welfare and employment programs investigated in the evaluations expanded the child care assistance available to parents, while the others provided standard assistance, that is, whatever help was generally available. By permitting comparisons between the effects of the two types of programs, these studies afford rare evidence on how different child care policies affect parents' use of subsidies, decisions about care arrangements, and problems with child care. The brief also presents highlights from in-depth interviews with 38 low-income families. (This brief is based on Next Generation Working Paper Nos. 1-3, 7, and 9-11, all of which are available in the Next Generation section of the MDRC website.)

Related link: More from the Next Generation Project ^[3]

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