

The child care development fund and workforce development for low-income parents ^[1]

Opportunities and challenges with reauthorization

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AVAILABILITY

[Full brief PDF](#) ^[2]

Overview

Low-income, low-skilled parents can face particular challenges in getting the education and training they need to improve their employment and career path opportunities so they can better support their families. Key among these challenges is the difficulty they can face in finding and affording child care. Such families may be eligible for child care assistance from the nation's primary child care assistance program, the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF; also known as the Child Care and Development Block Grant). However, program data and interviews with practitioners and policymakers across the country suggest that parents seeking education and training are less likely to get child care assistance than those needing it to support employment.

This situation appears to be due to multiple factors, including that the CCDF is not funded at sufficient levels to serve all eligible families. States must make trade-offs in choosing which low-income families will get assistance, and parents participating in education and training have often not been considered a high priority. As a result, child care assistance is not consistently available to help low income parents improve their skills to support improved employment opportunities and career pathways that, in turn, would lead to higher-paying jobs that would support the healthy development of their children (Adams, Spaulding, and Heller 2015; Adams et al. 2014). This reality undercuts the goals of both the workforce development system and the child care system, which focus on supporting low income individuals' ability to get and retain good-paying jobs.

However, in recent years, these families' needs are becoming more visible. Policymakers from diverse ends of the political spectrum have started to identify the child care challenges faced by parents (particularly single parents) seeking to improve their employment opportunities through education and training. The child care challenges these parents face are also reflected in the growing interest in two generation strategies, which work to simultaneously meet parents' needs for education and training and their children's need for high-quality early education (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2014; Mosle and Patel 2012).

In addition to this growing awareness, the CCDF was recently reauthorized for the first time in 18 years, which means that states across the country must reexamine their child care policies and services to conform to the requirements of the new legislation. Although it is still a block grant with significant state flexibility and discretion, the reauthorized CCDF establishes new requirements and priorities for states to implement in the coming years. Further, the primary federal workforce program that governs many state and local workforce policies was also recently reauthorized with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), with a greater focus on meeting the needs of individuals with barriers to employment (Spaulding 2015). As a result of these developments, the child care and workforce development systems are both currently in a state of transition as stakeholders redesign them to meet these new demands.

The state of flux precipitated by WIOA and the reauthorization of the CCDF provides a unique, urgent opportunity for stakeholders in each system to support low-income parents' ability to get education and training by strengthening each system's approach to these families and by forging partnerships between the systems. This brief focuses on the opportunities provided by the reauthorization of the CCDF and lays out strategies states can use as they rework their CCDF policies and systems to conform to the new requirements to better meet the child care needs of low-income parents in education and training. Its companion paper focuses on the opportunities created by the reauthorization of the nation's workforce law with WIOA for better meeting these needs (Spaulding 2015). Both briefs build upon findings from several research projects conducted as part of a larger Urban Institute project, reported in *Bridging the Gap: Exploring the*

Intersection of Workforce Development and Child Care (Adams et al. 2015), which focuses on the particular needs of low-wage and low-skilled parents who need child care in order to get education and training (see box 1).

This brief provides information on three areas:

- Understanding the issues—a brief discussion of the child care needs of low-income parents seeking education and training and an overview of the key relevant provisions of the newly reauthorized CCDF and WIOA.
- Key policy opportunities—a set of opportunities for policymakers seeking to better serve parents in education and training as states revise their child care systems to conform with CCDF reauthorization provisions.
- Next steps—challenges and opportunities in a time of transition.

The strategies suggested in this brief reflect insights of the research team, gathered across our research efforts for the Bridging the Gap project, as well as work the authors have done with states in recent years to simplify their child care assistance systems and link programs through the Work Support Strategies project (Adams and Matthews 2013). These efforts have involved interviewing and working with policymakers and practitioners across the country, and thus the ideas presented here reflect their insights and experiences.

Related link: Bridging the gap: Exploring the intersection of workforce development and child care [3]

Region: United States [4]

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