

Opportunities for Implementing the Child Care and Development Block Grant Reauthorization

Highlights

- Congress reauthorized the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) for the first time since 1996
- CCDBG is the major source of funding for the Kansas child care system
- CCDBG reauthorization creates both opportunities and requirements for improving Kansas child care policies
- On August 31, 2015, child care stakeholders convened to discuss CCDBG opportunities and offer feedback for the Kansas child care system
- This report includes key feedback and suggestions to improve the child care system



Photo courtesy of KHI News Service.

Stakeholders at the August convening included:

- Butler County Community College
- Child Care Aware of America
- Child Care Aware of Kansas
- Highland County Community College
- Johnson County Community College
- Kansas Action for Children
- Kansas Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs
- Kansas Association for the Education of Young Children
- Kansas Association of Community Action Programs
- Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities, Inc.
- Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund
- Kansas Children's Service League
- Kansas Head Start Association
- Kansas State Alliance of YMCAs
- Kansas State Department of Education
- Kansas State University
- Mid-America Regional Council
- Project EAGLE
- The Child Care Providers Coalition of Kansas, Inc.
- The Family Conservancy
- The Kansas Enrichment Network
- The Tiny-K Alliance
- Wichita State University Center for Support & Research

Convening Background

On August 31, 2015, Kansas Action for Children (KAC) hosted child care stakeholders to discuss the future of child care in Kansas in the context of the reauthorized federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). The convening brought child care providers, other members of the child care system, advocates, and members of the education community together in Topeka, Kansas, to listen to experts present information about CCDBG reauthorization. KAC facilitated a discussion about the existing child care system in Kansas and opportunities for improvement.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant Reauthorization

CCDBG reauthorization presents Kansas the opportunity to reexamine its child care system as it seeks to comply with new federal requirements. The Child Care and

Development Fund (CCDF) is a major source of funding for child care assistance and other critical pieces of the Kansas child care system, like the statewide resource and referral agency and initiatives that improve child care quality.

In an effort to maximize this opportunity, KAC convened individuals and organizations affected by reauthorization. These stakeholders discussed the current state of child care in Kansas, the reauthorization process, possible improvements, and potential barriers to successful implementation. At the conclusion of the conversation, KAC collected the feedback provided by participants to share with state agency personnel and policymakers as they develop a plan for CCDBG reauthorization. The group's feedback follows.

Existing Challenges

Much of the stakeholders' feedback reinforced long-standing, systemic trends in the Kansas child care system.

Availability of Care for Infants and Toddlers

Stakeholders agreed that Kansas does not have an adequate supply of child care for infants and toddlers. Care for the youngest children is also the most expensive; a full year of center-based care for a child under the age of one costs \$11,925 on average, according to the most recent state market rate survey. That is more than one-fifth of the state median household income.

Stakeholders explained that infant care also creates financial challenges for child care providers because younger children require more staff.

Compensation Rates

Stakeholders shared the consensus that child care providers are not adequately compensated for their work. Low compensation makes it difficult for providers to remain in business and decreases the attractiveness of the child care profession relative to other low-wage work.

Low profit margins weaken providers' ability to absorb costs associated with new state requirements. For example, CCDBG reauthorization expands required background checks for child care providers. Stakeholders expressed concern that providers will struggle to afford additional background checks if costs are shifted directly to providers.

Stakeholders repeatedly highlighted opportunities to better support child care providers. Kansas has not updated its reimbursement rates for subsidized care since 2002, resulting in a growing disparity between private payment levels and state child care assistance. The most recent state market rate survey reports that subsidy rates statewide are worth 35% to 45% of the market rate for care (the federally recommended reimbursement rate is at least 75% of the market rate for care). Stakeholders agreed that low

Lexie Engelman, photo courtesy of the Engelman family.



The 2010 passage of Lexie's Law significantly improved the quality of child care in Kansas. Continuing education requirements and the availability of professional development enable the child care workforce to meet enhanced standards required by CCDBG.

reimbursement rates pose a serious challenge to providers seeking to serve children receiving assistance, as well as for families seeking care.

Child Care Quality

Child care stakeholders agreed health and safety standards authorized by Lexie's Law in 2010 significantly improve the quality of child care in Kansas. Continuing education requirements and the availability of professional development enable the child care workforce to meet enhanced standards. However, stakeholders expressed a desire to further improve the quality of child care for all Kansas children, noting that the state's infrastructure supporting quality improvement (for example, grants and scholarships available to providers working to improve the quality of their practice) has eroded over time.

Stakeholders suggested a Quality Rating Improvement System as a possible way to share information about the quality of child care with parents, highlighting that this strategy would require additional resources to reward participating providers. Similarly, stakeholders considered offering certifiably higher-quality providers increased reimbursement rates for subsidized care as a potential strategy to improve the quality of care, if resources to fund a system of tiered reimbursement become available.

These issues reflect a child care system that is under-resourced at every level. Although the federal CCDBG reauthorization did not include additional funding, addressing the items outlined above will require a significant infusion of resources at the federal and/or state level. Those investments will be critical to ensure that all Kansas children can access quality child care.

Issues raised by stakeholders reflect a child care system in Kansas that is under-resourced at every level.

Emerging Challenges

Several new issues and insights also emerged from the conversation.

Decline in Licensed Child Care Providers

One theme that clearly surfaced during the discussion was a recognition that fewer licensed child care providers are operating in the state of Kansas. Stakeholders hypothesized that providers may be experiencing difficulty complying with state licensing standards. These challenges may be especially difficult for providers who do not speak fluent English or who live in rural communities with fewer resources available to support the overall child care system.

CCDBG offers Kansas the opportunity to address these concerns. It is possible that unlicensed care has increased as Kansas has improved its standards for care. Stakeholders recommended efforts to engage unlicensed caregivers and to improve outreach and education for currently licensed providers as they apply for and maintain their licenses.

Align Federal and State Guidelines

As the state updates its policies in light of federal reauthorization of major early childhood programs, including CCDBG

and Head Start, stakeholders urged the state to work to minimize conflict between federal and state rules and regulations.

Streamline professional development

Stakeholders lifted up multiple opportunities to improve professional development for child care providers.

These included:

- Streamlining the Kansas professional development process to culminate in a college degree or to count toward college credit
- Creating a registry, which could promote additional voluntary professional development
- Adding options for child care providers to learn about business management and development
- Developing strategies to better serve populations of children with specific needs, including children with special needs, homeless children, and English language learners

CCDBG Opportunities

The reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant presents Kansas the opportunity to review and improve its child care policies, including:

- Evaluating the trend of declining licensed child care providers
- Supporting providers applying for and maintaining licensure
- Tailoring licensing policies to meet the needs of a diverse child care system
- Aligning federal and state rules and regulations
- Aligning policies between affected programs, including child care assistance, TANF, and Head Start
- Improving professional development opportunities for child care providers
- Developing strategies to better serve populations of children with specific needs



The August 31 child care stakeholder convening in Topeka.



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Moving Forward

When asked to describe what is at stake as the state undertakes CCDBG reauthorization, stakeholders' answer was clear: both the number of Kansas children receiving care and the quality of the care that they receive depend on the decisions Kansas makes during the coming months. Stakeholders recognize that child care is, fundamentally, early education, and that children who experience high-quality care settings are far more likely to experience success later in life. At every level, stakeholders reinforced the importance of incorporating stakeholder feedback into the development of the state plan.

According to child care stakeholders, Kansas must continue efforts to coordinate between agencies, providers, and stakeholders. This is especially important during the development of a state plan, as the state allocates funding between early childhood stakeholders.

Stakeholders noted that although federal CCDBG reauthorization created new requirements, Kansas will not receive additional dollars to comply. This creates a concern that the state will shift funding away from important services or current models to meet new requirements. Stakeholders recommended that providers, parents, and stakeholders advocate for additional investments in early childhood programs throughout the CCDBG reauthorization process, noting that the benefits from those investments are clear.

Discussion participants offered several suggestions for effectively engaging child care stakeholders during the CCDBG reauthorization process. One home-based provider noted that many providers' schedules prevent them from attending meetings while operating their child care business. She suggested holding meetings during the evenings and utilizing technology

to reach out to providers. Stakeholders also emphasized the need to gather feedback in multiple regions across the state.

CCDBG reauthorization offers all individuals and organizations who have a stake in child care in Kansas the opportunity to shape the future of child care in the state. Successful CCDBG implementation will depend on the willingness of state agencies and policymakers to solicit and incorporate that feedback into plans for reauthorization.

For more information, visit Kansas Action for Children online at www.kac.org or call 785-232-0550.