



State Child Care Policies for Limited English Proficient Families

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Introduction

One in seven young children under the age of 6 in the United States has at least one parent who is limited English proficient (LEP), and more than one in four young children has a parent who speaks a language other than English.¹ Children whose parents are LEP often face difficult barriers when it comes to accessing child care and early education programs and assistance. LEP families, including recent immigrant families, are frequently unaware of the availability and benefits of early education programs or services because information is not readily available in their primary language. LEP families often struggle to navigate issues of location, along with complex eligibility and enrollment processes—particularly when language barriers are not appropriately addressed—often resulting in a decreased likelihood of enrollment. Additionally, there is an insufficient supply of bilingual and bicultural early care and education providers, which is especially the case for children of backgrounds other than Latino and who speak languages other than Spanish and English.²

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), the largest source of federal funding for child care assistance available to states, provides low-income families with help paying for child care. Studies have shown that low-income LEP, as well as immigrant families, are less likely to receive child care assistance. A 2006 study from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that after controlling for other factors, children with LEP parents are about half as likely to receive financial assistance for child care.³

Policies at the federal, state, and local level can help make child care programs and assistance more easily accessible and responsive to the needs of LEP families. These policies to help LEP families be more aware of child care assistance and better utilize it include creating and disseminating information to parents in multiple languages to help increase awareness; expanding the availability of high-quality child care in language-minority communities; and, incentivizing the hiring of bilingual staff in subsidy agencies.

Under CCDBG, every two years states are required to submit plans describing how they will use CCDBG funds to help low-income families access child care and improve the quality of child care for all children. The most recent set of CCDBG state plans for FFY 2012-2013 offer insight into how states' activities and policies are targeted toward LEP and immigrant families, children, and providers. The newly revised State Plan includes sets of questions covering state strategies for serving LEP families. We provide in this paper summaries of state responses to questions about engaging with LEP families and providers and better serving them through state child care assistance programs. Information in this paper is not meant to be representative of all state initiatives toward these groups. We recognize that some states may be conducting initiatives either through CCDBG funding or other funding sources, but may not have explicitly mentioned these activities within their FFY 2012-2013 plan. While details are limited, the state reported activities provide an outline of the current and future

activities states plan to undertake to support LEP families, children, and providers in accessing and providing high-quality child care.

State Activities to Support LEP Families and Child Care Providers

Resources and Assistance for LEP Families

Developing culturally and linguistically competent resources within state child care agencies and programs is critical to providing outreach and services to families who are limited English proficient. To address barriers in awareness and access, states are implementing policies that target LEP families and ease the child care assistance enrollment process.

Thirty-seven (37) states report offering **applications for child care assistance in languages other than English** as well as informational materials in other languages. Some states also offer their websites in different languages. Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Louisiana, New York, and North Carolina all report offering their child care assistance websites in non-English languages. [Arizona](#) offers its website in English and Spanish with an easily accessible translate option. [Colorado](#), [Louisiana](#), and [New York](#) offer Google Translate options on their websites with drop down menus that allow users to choose from multiple language options.

Most states (42) report offering **bilingual caseworkers or translators for LEP families**. For many states, multilingual capacity is in the form of language line services that provide over-the-phone interpretation in many languages at any time. Arizona reports that in many of its offices there are Child Care Specialists who are bilingual in Spanish, and there are areas of the state where interpretation services for individuals speaking Navajo are available.

State child care lead agencies also **improve access in language-minority communities by accepting applications at local community-based locations**. Sixteen states—Arkansas, District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont—reported that their lead agency accepts applications at local community-based locations. By accepting applications at a variety of locations within the community, states have the opportunity to reach more families, which can include LEP families, and target language-minority communities.

Resources and Assistance for LEP Child Care Providers

Child care providers in language-minority communities may have difficulty accessing child care licensing and subsidy information due to linguistic and cultural barriers.⁴ Child care providers who reflect the home cultures and speak the home languages of children and families help support the healthy development of children by

offering continuity between the child's home and child care setting.⁵ But these providers need access to the full range of support and quality improvement efforts. Available data show a lack of diversity among the child care workforce, which is comprised primarily of white, non-Hispanic females.⁶ State policies can support the diversification of the workforce to reflect more adequately the growing diversity of young children in the U.S.

States report using many of the same strategies for overcoming language barriers with LEP child care providers as they use for reaching LEP families, such as providing informational materials, training and technical assistance (TA), and websites in languages other than English, and having bilingual caseworkers or translators available for assistance. The state plans also identify strategies specific to providers, such as offering health and safety requirements in languages other than English and contracts or agreements in multiple languages.

Most states (46) report that they make **bilingual caseworkers or translators available** to help overcome language barriers with providers. Once again, many of these states report using language line services and phone-operated systems for interpretation services. In addition to this, there are a few states (5) that mention providing access to in-person translators for trainings, outreach, and provider engagement.

Thirty-seven (37) states report that they provide **informational materials to providers in languages other than English**. Indiana offers information about its [Paths to QUALITY program](#), the state's child care quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), in both English and Spanish. Utah reports providing written quality materials in Spanish to its child care providers. Iowa reports that its Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) partners translate their core materials for providers into Spanish. New Jersey provides translated versions of its child care handbooks for providers, and also notes that it makes translations available upon request as well as based on the need for additional languages.

Just over half of states (26) report offering **training and TA to providers in languages other than English**. Iowa provides foundational training opportunities for providers who speak Spanish or Bosnian. In New Hampshire, individuals within a community help provide translation services for verbal trainings, and state child care staff will work with community volunteers to provide in-person, onsite training in non-English languages. Utah reports offering training classes in Spanish.

Seventeen states—Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, and Washington—report providing their **CCDBG health and safety requirements in non-English languages**. Making this information available to providers whose primary language is not English supplies providers with access to information on the prevention and control of infectious diseases, which includes age-appropriate immunizations; building and physical premises safety; and minimum health and safety training appropriate to the provider settings.

Arizona, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Pennsylvania report providing **contracts or agreements with providers in languages other than English**. States do not provide additional information on the content of these contracts/agreements in their plans. Nine states—Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, and Rhode Island—report offering **websites in non-English languages** as a means of overcoming language barriers with providers.

English Language Development in State Early Learning Guidelines

Early learning guidelines that focus on English language learners (ELLs) and English language development are one way states can support early childhood education policy and practices that focus on ELLs. The 2012-2013 CCDBG state plans ask states to report on whether or not they have guidelines that cover English language development. Twenty-six states—Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming—report that their **early learning guidelines cover English language development for ELLs**.⁷ Of the 26, only 7 states report having guidelines that cover children from birth through age 5 and older: Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Maryland, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and Washington. Others address ELLs ages birth to 3, ages 3 to 5, or 5 and older through various standards.

The level of attention and detail to ELL's English language development or home language development varies significantly across these 26 states' early learning guidelines. A few states provide comprehensive and detailed specifics on the activities and strategies that support ELLs as well as what patterns of English language development caregivers and teachers can expect for children learning more than one language. For example:

- Alaska is the only state to have comprehensive early learning guidelines that include attention to home language development.⁸ Alaska's early learning guidelines for ELLs include indicators on what to expect from children as they develop dual-language skills, as well as strategies for caregivers to promote a child's language acquisition.
- California is the only state to have developed specific early learning guidelines for ELLs. The state's guidelines focus on bilingual language development and the stages of English language acquisition a child goes through, covering listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Also included are examples of how caregivers' behavior supports ELLs.
- Idaho provides indicators and strategies that cover what to expect in an ELLs' language development starting at birth, and outlines how caregivers can promote a child's English language acquisition while respecting both the development of a child's home language and English language skills.
- New Jersey and Texas offer early learning guidelines covering ELLs for preschool-aged children. Both states discuss instructional strategies for teachers with ELLs, and emphasize the importance of incorporating and building off of a child's home language skills.

Many states point out the **importance of communicating with children in their home language, and creating culturally aware and sensitive environments**. Alaska, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Texas explicitly state the importance of caregivers using a child's home language and supporting a child's home language development in addition to English language development.

Quality Improvement Standards, Technical Assistance, and Career Pathways for Caring for ELLs

State policies can encourage local communities and caregivers to develop practices that support the needs of English language learners and provide them with high-quality programs. The 2012-2013 CCDBG state plans ask states whether or not they offer quality improvement standards and technical assistance, along with including specializations or credentials in their career pathways for caregivers working with ELLs. The answers to these questions shed light on the different ways states are supporting caregivers and encouraging the development of high-quality child care for ELLs.

Eleven states reported having **standards related to ELLs in their quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS)**. These states are: Arkansas, California, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Washington, and Wisconsin.

- As part of [Idaho's QRIS](#)—(referred to as Idaho STARS)—the state's quality standards encourage providers to write policies and procedures for children with disabilities in a family's primary language.⁹
- [Massachusetts' QRIS](#) includes offering materials that reflect the language and culture of children in the classroom and their communities. QRIS standards require staff to receive formal professional development in curriculum that includes working with children from diverse languages and cultures and English language learners. Additionally, the state's QRIS includes standards encouraging families to volunteer with programs and share their language and cultural traditions.¹⁰
- [Washington's QRIS standards](#) encourage family engagement and partnership by asking child care programs to provide information about community-based programs (such as community mental health, child nutrition, physical fitness, food banks, etc.) in families' languages.¹¹

Twenty states reported offering **technical assistance to programs that support teaching ELLs**. States were asked whether this technical assistance came in the form of information or written materials, training, and/or on-site consultation. Ten states—Arizona, California, Idaho, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, North Dakota, Tennessee, and Wisconsin—reported offering all three types of technical assistances to help programs teach ELLs. Six states reported offering two types of technical assistance. Arkansas, Georgia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota reported offering information or written materials and training to child care programs and providers. Mississippi reported offering training and on-site consultations. Nebraska and New Mexico offer programs information or written materials, and Washington offers on-site consultations. New Jersey reports that it offers programs and provider training on teaching ELLs, including trainings in Spanish. [Wisconsin's Early Dual Language Learner Initiative \(EDLLI\)](#) offers caregivers and community partners resources, professional development, and technical assistance on culturally and linguistically responsive practices for young children.¹²

CCDBG state plans define career pathways, or career lattices, as the options and sequence of qualifications and ongoing professional development that the state offers programs and caregivers to work with children. Career pathways are meant to assist the child care workers in understanding career options and identifying steps for advancing in the workforce. Additionally, career pathways are meant to recognize and reward higher levels of

preparation and mastery of practice to promote higher quality services for children. Four states (Arkansas, California, New Jersey, and Wisconsin) report offering **career pathways** for those in their child care workforce **that include specializations or credentials for working with English language learners**.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2012-2013 CCDBG state plans provide useful information for understanding how state child care policies for LEP families and providers are seeking to address the critical barriers to quality child care and early education faced by many families with young children. State-reported information on outreach and engagement of LEP parents and providers; early learning guidelines; quality improvement standards; technical assistance; and career pathways provide a starting place for understanding and assessing state activities and initiatives in these areas.

Some of the most commonly reported activities include: offering bilingual caseworkers or translators for parents and providers, providing informational materials about child care assistance in non-English languages, offering child care assistance applications in other languages besides English, and covering English language development in state early learning guidelines for ELLs. Eleven states—Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin—responded as having ten or more of the policies or activities that the 2012-2013 CCDBG plans outlined as relating to child care assistance and ELLs and their families. Each of these policies takes a step toward helping states and communities work with providers who speak non-English languages and serve children from families that are limited English proficient.

While these policies are an important starting place for viewing the state child care policy landscape for LEP families, more details on the activities reported in state plans would offer a better picture of the accessibility of child care assistance for LEP families. To date, many state materials, policies, and guidelines related to young children in language-minority families lack specificity. In the case of translation and interpretation services, many states rely on computer or over-the phone services. While these can be helpful for access in many languages, they do not replace the need for bilingual and bicultural staff. More can be done for states to fully support the developmental needs of ELLs, the needs of LEP parents, and promote communication and appropriate practices with caregivers.

CLASP makes the following recommendations for state child care policies:

- Implement a language access plan to ensure effective communication with LEP families at all points of contact. This may include, but is not limited to, hiring of bilingual staff, translation of materials, and meaningful cultural competency training.
- Provide funding for bilingual staff and translation and interpretation services at local child care subsidy agencies—including informational materials, applications, and recertification notifications—to ensure LEP parents have access to information on child care assistance.

- Use direct contracts through the subsidy system to provide dedicated spaces for ELLs in high quality early education programs.
- Ensure that health and safety and other basic training is available in multiple languages through community-based providers, child care resource and referral agencies and other providers to reach LEP early childhood providers.
- Revise early learning guidelines to stress the importance of both first and second language acquisition for ELLs and include appropriate expectations for progress in speaking, listening, and understanding in both home language and in English. Standards should reflect the most current research on second language learning and include appropriate practices for how bilingual staff should use children's home languages in the program and serve as language models and describe appropriate classroom environments for ELLs.
- Ensure that QRIS and other quality initiatives include targeted standards and funding to support programs in increasing the quality of child care for children from language-minority families.
- Support career ladders for bilingual early childhood professionals and those who speak languages other than English.

¹ Randy Capps, Michael Fix, Jason Ost, Jane Reardon-Anderson, and Jeffrey S. Passel, *The Health And Well-Being Of Young Children of Immigrants*, Urban Institute, 2004. http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311139_Childrenimmigrants.pdf. "Limited English proficient (LEP)" is defined as speaking English less than "very well" or not at all.

² Hannah Matthews and Danielle Ewen, *Early Education Programs and Children of Immigrants: Learning Each Other's Language*, 2010, <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412205-early-education.pdf>. Hannah Matthews and Deeana Jang, *The Challenges of Change: Learning from the Child Care and Early Education Experiences of Immigrant Families*, Center for Law and Social Policy, 2007. <http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/0356.pdf>.

³ U.S. Government Accountability Office. 2006. *Child Care and Early Childhood Education: More Information Sharing and Program Review by HHS Could Enhance Access for Families with Limited English Proficiency*. GAO-06-807. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Accountability Office.

⁴ Hannah Matthews and Deeana Jang, *The Challenges of Change: Learning from the Child Care and Early Education Experiences of Immigrant Families*, Center for Law and Social Policy, 2007.

⁵ Hannah Matthews, *Charting Progress for Babies in Child Care Project: Support a Diverse and Culturally Competent Workforce*, 2008. http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/babies/make_the_case/files/cp_rationale5.pdf.

⁶ Committee on Early Childhood Care and Education Workforce: A Workshop, Institute of Medicine, National Research Council. "2 Defining and Describing the Workforce." *The Early Childhood Care and Education Workforce: Challenges and Opportunities: A Workshop Report*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2012.

⁷ An Office of Head Start (OHS) analysis, found a total of 35 states with either separate ELL guidelines, separate ELL section(s) within their state early learning guidelines, and/or mentions of ELLs in their guidelines' introduction or in a single domain, such as language and literacy. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/center/state-guidelines/snapshot.html>.

⁸ National Council of La Raza (NCLR), "Preschool Education: Delivering on the Promise for Latino Children," 2011. http://www.nclr.org/images/uploads/publications/Preschool_Education.pdf.

⁹ IdahoStars, "Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards for Child Care Centers." <http://www.idahoaeys.org/pdfs/qriscstandardsforcenter.pdf>.

¹⁰ Massachusetts Executive Office of Education, "Massachusetts QRIS Standards," updated June 16, 2011. <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/qrisc/massachusetts-qrisc-standards.html>.

¹¹ Washington State Department of Early Learning, "Washington Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards: A Framework to Support Positive Child Outcomes," 2011. http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/elac-qrisc/docs/WAQRIS_Standards2011.pdf.

¹² Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners, "Serving Dual Language Learners," 2010. http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/dual-language-learners_about.php.