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## CCDBG Implementation: Louisiana

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*When the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) was reauthorized in 2014, states faced unique paths to comply with the new law. CLASP interviewed stakeholders in three states—Alabama, California, and Louisiana—to understand successes and challenges on their road to CCDBG implementation. In each of these profiles, we summarize key takeaways, lessons learned, and opportunities that lie ahead for the selected state.*

### **Context: A Strong Policy Foundation and Skilled Advocacy Leadership**

Louisiana was already implementing sweeping reforms in its early education system when the federal reauthorization of CCDBG passed. These reforms were long overdue, as Louisiana's child care assistance program was chronically underfunded, had stringent eligibility requirements, and the number of children receiving subsidies declined by more than 60 percent between 2009 and 2018.<sup>1</sup> When the state passed The Early Childhood Education Act in 2012, also known as Act Three, it mandated an overhaul of the entire early care system from ages birth to 4 to raise standards and

accountability.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the Act did not include additional funds for the early education system or state child care assistance program to implement those changes. Because of Act Three, advocates had already been pushing for some of CCDBG's reauthorization reforms like 12-month eligibility.

Act Three created a state advisory council on early childhood care and education and moved the system from the Department of Family Services into the state Department of Education (DOE).<sup>3</sup> Advocates noted some mistrust between child care providers and the DOE because funds had previously been siphoned away from child care to pre-K programs in schools. Early education providers also worried that the restructuring would create challenges because their programs differ from K-12 schools, for instance with significantly higher levels of staff turnover. Another major difference is that schools don't have to pay for their background checks while early education providers do—a cost that would become prohibitive under the new reauthorization requirements. After the move, the Department of Education advocated for some reforms supported by advocates that would parallel mandates in CCDBG reauthorization like limits on maximum group size.

Historically, Louisiana has made few investments in its child care system and has shifted a lot of discretionary funding from child care to preschool or K-12 schools. This underfunding has led to harsh eligibility restrictions, low quality, and insufficient subsidy reimbursement rates. One of our interviewees said, “the cost of care here is the cheapest in the country because it's the worst quality.” When considering state income eligibility limits, only about 8 percent of potentially eligible children in Louisiana received assistance in 2016, with only 4 percent of Hispanic children participating, compared to 7 percent of white non-Hispanic children.<sup>4</sup>

## Reactions to Reauthorization

Advocates and early educators in Louisiana had mixed reactions to the 2014 reauthorization of CCDBG. The state was already complying with the mandate for 12-month eligibility. However, it did not comply with many other parts of the law, including:

- Two-tier income eligibility structure for child care assistance;
- Background checks for providers in centers, family homes, or license-exempt settings;
- Pre-licensure inspections of family child care;
- Unannounced annual inspections of licensed family child care;
- Online inspection reports; and
- Regulation of group sizes for age groups five and younger.<sup>5</sup>

Many advocates believed that the reauthorization's mandate on background checks would be extremely difficult to implement. One said, “[Background checks were] the one piece of the federal law that gave us huge pause and I'm worried about our providers. Before CCDBG reauthorization we didn't have the systems in place to implement it... There has been a lot of pushback against that one from the field.”<sup>6</sup> Background checks are particularly difficult to implement in Louisiana because the new requirements doubled the cost of the checks to almost \$100. High turnover rates of teachers made this cost even more burdensome for providers.

Advocates expressed frustration that, like Act Three, CCDBG reauthorization was an unfunded mandate that forced providers to improve their program quality without giving them the resources to do so. They worried that the additional costs would be borne by the already underpaid child care providers.

Notably, some Louisiana advocates have expressed positive reactions to reauthorization as well—seeing it as an opportunity to keep the momentum going and improve state level policy to support child care. Advocates also used the lack of federal funding as an opportunity to highlight to state legislators the lack of state funding.

## Implementation Process

In recent years, child care and early education stakeholders in Louisiana had many successes, some related to implementation of the CCDBG reauthorization and some not. Building on the foundation of Act Three, Louisiana made incremental changes that improved access to child care subsidies.

### Strategy tailored to the state

Advocates found it effective to ally themselves with the state in recognizing that the federal law established many unfunded requirements. Through this lens, key advocates were able to work closely with staff at DOE (the lead agency), legislators, and others to move forward on specific requirements of the law.

For example, the reauthorization included language encouraging states to set co-payments at affordable levels for families. The state was able to decrease co-pays while increasing overall reimbursement rates by 250 percent, shifting the cost burden away from families while financially supporting providers.

Reauthorization also requires states to make greater investments in program quality improvements like staff professional development. Investing in professional development had been a challenge because of the state's high rate of early education staff turnover—40 percent. DOE gave providers bonuses for providing higher quality care through new certification requirements. By 2019, all lead teachers in centers must have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential from one of the department's approved programs.<sup>7</sup> To combat its turnover rate, the state doubled a refundable tax credit for teachers—the School Readiness Tax Credit for Child Care Teachers & Directors—if they stay in a licensed center for two years and attain higher education or training. The credit is worth up to \$3,300.

Finally, Louisiana lowered the minimum number of work or education hours required for family eligibility from 30 to 20 hours a week and allowed full-time students in school or job training to qualify for child care assistance.<sup>8</sup>

## Keys to Success

The success of reauthorization in Louisiana was due in large part to the leadership of advocates who were strategic, expert, and well positioned to influence the conversation.

Specifically, advocates worked hard to bring the voices of child care to the table so the system wasn't driven underground. Some of our interviewees emphasized the importance of being connected to providers by listening to them and documenting their stories. They noted the particular importance of this in under-resourced and marginalized communities. Other interviewees stressed the value of partnerships between the DOE, Head Start, and national organizations.

Louisiana successfully implemented numerous improvements in its child care system by building on state momentum and tailoring arguments to fit the state context. Melanie Bronfin of the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children played a key role as a well-connected advocate whose work as a bridge builder was cited by other advocates and journalists. Jenna Conway, the former Assistant Superintendent of Early Care and Education at DOE, was also cited as an important leader in reform efforts.

## Next Steps

Louisiana has already used new CCDBG funds to take more than 4,000 children off its child care assistance waitlist. Some of the funding was also used to reimburse providers for background check costs. Teacher-child ratios for child care are still high, infant-toddlers subsidy rates are still very low, and developmental screenings need to be prioritized more highly.<sup>9</sup> Louisiana should prioritize using additional CCDBG funds to address these remaining challenges as soon as possible.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Louisiana Believes, *4,500 Children Removed from Child Care Waiting List Due to One-Time Funding*, Louisiana Department of Education, 2018, <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/newsroom/news-releases/2018/08/01/4-500-children-removed-from-child-care-waiting-list-due-to-one-time-funding>.

<sup>2</sup> Louisiana Policy Institute for Children, *The Early Childhood Education Act (Act 3)*, <http://www.policyinstitutela.org/act-3>.

<sup>3</sup> This occurred under Act 868 of the 2014 Louisiana Legislative Session and was implemented in 2015.

<sup>4</sup> CLASP analysis of 2016 ACS 1-year data, 2012-2016 ACS 5-year data, and Administration for Children and Families Office of Child Care 2016 Administrative Data.

<sup>5</sup> Hannah Matthews, *Implementing the Child Care and Development Block Grant Reauthorization: A Guide for States, 2017*, <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/implementing-child-care-and-development-block-grant-reauthorization-0>.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Child Care Advocate, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Abbie Lieberman, *Lessons from the Bayou State*, New America, 2018, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/lessons-louisianas-early-childhood-system/>.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Lussier, *Louisiana Loosens Eligibility Rules for Child Care Assistance, But Funding Lacking*, The Advocate, 2017, [https://www.theadvocate.com/baton\\_rouge/news/education/article\\_b547ddd8-f537-11e6-be69-8770d06b5a32.html](https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/education/article_b547ddd8-f537-11e6-be69-8770d06b5a32.html).

<sup>9</sup> Louisiana Policy Institute for Children, *Early Care and Education in Louisiana, 2018*, [http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/43cca3\\_24e064c9362449b7b5ab43f2d590f497.pdf](http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/43cca3_24e064c9362449b7b5ab43f2d590f497.pdf).