



State Policies through a Two-Generation Lens

Strengthening the Collective Impact of Policies that Affect the Life Course of Young Children and their Parents

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Two-generation approaches to promoting the healthy development and school success of young children aim to enhance the well-being and life opportunities of both parents and children.¹ This approach is based on research that shows how conditions affecting both parents and children are interrelated and play a key role in children's development. For example, health insurance for parents matters for children's well-being since parents' health and mental health problems can reduce parenting capacities and the chance that young children will receive the consistent attention and stimulation they need to develop competencies that are key to school success.² Similarly, children's experience of stable, high quality early care and education supports both children's early learning and parents' work effort.³

Several innovative two-generation programs that support the well-being and life chances of both children and parents are being developed and tested. In promising initiatives around the country, including model programs in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Tulsa, Oklahoma, young children are enrolled in high quality preschool programs while their parents receive education and training in high demand jobs that help move families toward greater economic security.⁴ Leading scholars view emerging two-generation models as particularly promising because they are informed by research on components of these models that contribute to desired outcomes; these include high-quality learning experiences for children in early care and education programs and employment training for parents that helps them acquire skills needed for higher wage jobs.⁵

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At a time when a new wave of two-generation programs shows promise, it is important to consider how to strengthen *policies* that can provide two-generation supports to large numbers of families with young children. Multiple policies affect both young children and their parents, including policies that determine safety net benefits, wages, and access to high-quality child care and health care.⁶ Consequently, two-generation supports for low-income families can best be understood by considering the *collective* impact of key policies on the experiences of young children and their parents. In all states, the influence of policies that collectively affect families with young children is mixed. Some policies contribute to positive two-generation supports while others are likely to detract from these supports. An example illustrates this mixed impact. In a Georgia family headed by a single mother, a young child benefits from a state-funded prekindergarten program which was found to promote children's early learning in a recent evaluation.⁷ But this family

experiences economic hardship as a result of the parent's low-wage job and high out-of-pocket health care expenses. Georgia, like 47 other states, has not set its minimum wage at a level that would bring a family of three above the federal poverty line, and it is also one of 21 states currently opting out of the Medicaid expansion allowed under the Affordable Care Act, which provides health insurance to poor adults.⁸

Of course, many other state policies contribute to a collective two-generation impact on families. Table 1 shows a range of policy choices across the states in three areas: early care and education, health, and supports for parenting and family economic security.⁹ The table provides a view of policies' collective two-generation impact on conditions affecting families with young children, and illustrates the value of looking at policies across multiple domains to consider their collective impact.

How strong is the collective policy support for children and their parents in the states?

Table 1 calls attention to the overall weakness of two-generation policy supports that could promote the well-being and life opportunities of young children and their parents. Most states have strong policies in one or more of the three areas – early care and education, health, and parenting and family economic supports. But states also show critical gaps in the two-generation supports that policies in these areas, collectively, could provide. These gaps are evident within and across the three areas. As examples:

- ◆ Among the 20 states that have a state-funded Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which increases the incomes of working families, other policies in these same states place economic burdens on families and limit their access to stable child care, a key work support. Nine of the states with a refundable EITC do not keep co-payments for child care below 10 percent of family income and 15 of the states do not provide child care subsidies to families at or above 200 percent of the federal poverty line, policies that can lead to child care and related work interruptions for low-income families with fluctuating incomes.
- ◆ Families' access to stable, high-quality child care and economic security are threatened when states'

child care subsidy rates fail to meet the federal recommendation of reimbursement at 75 percent of the state's market rate and when states do not require recommended child-adult ratios in child care settings; only North Dakota has adopted both of these recommended policies.

- ◆ Although 41 states fund prekindergarten programs, only 4 of these provide Part C Early Intervention services to at-risk infants and toddlers to help address developmental problems before children reach preschool. Also, only 2 states that fund prekindergarten programs offer paid family leave for parents, another critical support for infant health and development.
- ◆ Among the 8 states that require the recommended schedule of screenings under Medicaid's Early and Periodic Screening, Detection, and Treatment Program (EPSDT), which can help ensure young children's optimal health and development, 4 have not expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, leaving parents at risk of untreated health problems that could diminish their parenting capacity while imposing an economic burden on families in which parents must pay out-of-pocket for health care.

How can states assess policies that collectively influence the strength of two-generation supports for families with young children?

The policies shown in Table 1 represent only a limited sample of key state policies that are likely to influence the strength of two-generation supports for young children and their parents in a state. The broad categories presented in Table 1 can be used to identify a larger set of individual policies in a state that collectively influence two-generation supports for families. This set of policies should then become the focus of a comprehensive audit that identifies whether each policy contributes to or detracts from two-generation supports for families, and also identifies policy gaps, such as investments in scaling up promising two-generation models. Additional policies that states should consider for this type of analysis are suggested next.

State Policies That Have a Collective Impact on Families with Young Children

As shown in Table 1, **Early Care and Education** should include policies that support low-income families' continuous access to early care and education settings and the quality of these settings. Many states are implementing, evaluating, and strengthening Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS) as a means of raising the quality of early care and education across multiple sectors, including child care, Head Start, and state prekindergarten programs. This package of QRIS activities constitutes an important policy that can promote families' access to high-quality early care and education.¹⁰ Other key policies that should be included in this category are home visiting and parent engagement in preschool and the early grades. A number of states are supplementing federal support for evidence-based home visiting programs, some of which show benefits for both children and parents.¹¹ There has also been a recent expansion of state parent engagement initiatives aimed at helping parents promote young children's early learning through home-based interactions.¹² Some parent engagement models incorporate a two-generation approach, helping parents increase their support for children's early learning and gain access to programs that address families' economic security.¹³

In the **Health** domain, a primary focus of a two-generation policy audit should be low-income parents' coverage for and access to health and mental health care, including screening, prevention, and treatment. Parents' health care coverage is associated with families' increased use of preventive child health care, which includes health and developmental screening.¹⁴ Children's development in the early years is also tied to parents' mental health, and maternal depression is especially detrimental to young children's early social-emotional and cognitive growth.¹⁵ An increasing number of states are using Medicaid funding for parent depression screening in pediatric settings along with interventions that target both parents and children who are experiencing mental health problems.¹⁶

Policies included under **Parenting and Family Economic Support** in Table 1 provide supports for family income (e.g., a state EITC) as well as financial assistance that allows parents to care for their very young children (e.g., Paid Family Leave and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families work exemptions for parents with children under age 1). These policies are associated with health and developmental benefits for young children.¹⁷ State investments in high quality adult education and job training programs are also critical policies in this domain, given their contribution to improved educational outcomes for children and parental employment.¹⁸ In addition, state policies that provide assistance to help low-income families manage housing and energy costs should be included in this category. Housing and energy expenses create major burdens for families, necessitating decisions about allocating scarce income to essentials – rent, electricity, food, and medicine.¹⁹

Table 1

	EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION							
	Child care subsidy eligibility set at or above 200% FPL	Child care subsidy meets federal recommendations	Offers state pre-k and/or supplements Head Start	Requires district to offer full-day kindergarten	Meets recommended child-staff ratios for toddler-preschool settings	Requires 1 teacher per 18 students in kindergarten	Adopted Common Core (K-12)	Adopted social-emotional learning standards (K-12)
STATE	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
ALABAMA			✓	✓		✓	✓	
ALASKA	✓		✓					
ARIZONA			✓				✓	
ARKANSAS			✓	✓			✓	
CALIFORNIA	✓		✓				✓	
COLORADO			✓				✓	
CONNECTICUT	✓		✓		✓		✓	
DELAWARE	✓		✓	✓			✓	
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	✓		✓	✓			✓	
FLORIDA			✓			✓	✓	
GEORGIA			✓			✓	✓	
HAWAII	✓						✓	
IDAHO							✓	
ILLINOIS			✓				✓	✓
INDIANA							✓	
IOWA			✓			✓	✓	
KANSAS			✓				✓	✓
KENTUCKY			✓				✓	
LOUISIANA			✓	✓			✓	
MAINE	✓		✓			✓	✓	
MARYLAND			✓	✓			✓	
MASSACHUSETTS	✓		✓				✓	
MICHIGAN			✓				✓	
MINNESOTA			✓					
MISSISSIPPI				✓			✓	
MISSOURI			✓				✓	
MONTANA							✓	
NEBRASKA			✓					
NEVADA	✓		✓			✓	✓	
NEW HAMPSHIRE	✓						✓	
NEW JERSEY			✓				✓	
NEW MEXICO	✓		✓			✓	✓	
NEW YORK	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
NORTH CAROLINA	✓		✓	✓			✓	
NORTH DAKOTA	✓	✓			✓		✓	
OHIO			✓				✓	
OKLAHOMA			✓	✓			✓	
OREGON			✓		✓		✓	
PENNSYLVANIA	✓		✓				✓	✓
RHODE ISLAND			✓				✓	
SOUTH CAROLINA			✓	✓			✓	
SOUTH DAKOTA		✓					✓	
TENNESSEE			✓	✓			✓	
TEXAS			✓					
UTAH							✓	
VERMONT			✓		✓		✓	
VIRGINIA			✓					
WASHINGTON	✓		✓				✓	
WEST VIRGINIA			✓	✓			✓	
WISCONSIN			✓				✓	
WYOMING							✓	

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION VARIABLES

1. State sets its child care subsidy family eligibility at or above 200% FPL.^a
2. State offers a child care subsidy with a reimbursement rate above 75% of the market rate of child care.^b
3. State funds pre-K and/or provides supplemental funds to Head Start.^c
4. State requires local districts to offer full-day kindergarten.^d
5. State meets recommended child-staff ratio of 4:1 for 18-month olds with a maximum class size of 8 in child care centers. State also meets the recommended child-staff ratio of 10:1 for 4-year olds, with a maximum class size of 20 in child care centers.^e
6. State requires 1 teacher per 18 students in kindergarten classrooms.^f
7. State has adopted Common Core standards for kindergarten to 12th grade levels.^g
8. State has comprehensive, free-standing standards for social-emotional learning at the kindergarten to 12th grade levels.^h

Table 1

STATE	HEALTH AND NUTRITION				PARENTING AND FAMILY ECONOMIC SUPPORTS					
	Includes at-risk children in definition of eligibility for IDEA Part C (9)	Requires Medicaid/CHIP redetermination no more than once per year (10)	Adopted Medicaid expansion under ACA (11)	Meets EPSDT periodicity schedule for all children under 9 years (12)	Exempts single parents on TANF until youngest is 1 year old (13)	Minimum wage meets or exceeds \$9.10 an hour (14)	Exempts single parents below poverty from personal income tax (15)	Refundable EITC (16)	Co-payments for child care subsidies below 10% of family income (17)	Paid family leave (18)
ALABAMA		✓								
ALASKA		✓			✓		✓		✓	
ARIZONA			✓				✓		✓	
ARKANSAS			✓				✓			
CALIFORNIA		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓
COLORADO		✓	✓				✓			
CONNECTICUT			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
DELAWARE		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
FLORIDA		✓					✓		✓	
GEORGIA				✓	✓					
HAWAII	✓		✓				✓			
IDAHO		✓					✓			
ILLINOIS	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
INDIANA							✓	✓	✓	
IOWA		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	
KANSAS		✓					✓	✓	✓	
KENTUCKY			✓		✓		✓			
LOUISIANA		✓					✓	✓	✓	
MAINE		✓			✓		✓		✓	
MARYLAND			✓		✓		✓			
MASSACHUSETTS	✓		✓				✓	✓		
MICHIGAN		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
MINNESOTA			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
MISSISSIPPI		✓			✓				✓	
MISSOURI					✓					
MONTANA		✓								
NEBRASKA							✓	✓		
NEVADA		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	
NEW HAMPSHIRE	✓		✓		✓		✓			
NEW JERSEY		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
NEW MEXICO	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	
NEW YORK		✓	✓				✓	✓		
NORTH CAROLINA		✓			✓		✓			
NORTH DAKOTA		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	
OHIO		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
OKLAHOMA							✓	✓	✓	
OREGON		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
PENNSYLVANIA		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	
RHODE ISLAND			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
SOUTH CAROLINA		✓					✓		✓	
SOUTH DAKOTA				✓			✓			
TENNESSEE		✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	
TEXAS		✓		✓	✓		✓			
UTAH		✓					✓		✓	
VERMONT			✓		✓		✓	✓		
VIRGINIA		✓			✓		✓			
WASHINGTON		✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	
WEST VIRGINIA	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	
WISCONSIN							✓	✓		
WYOMING		✓					✓		✓	

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

- 9. State includes at-risk children in its definition of eligibility for IDEA Part C.ⁱ
- 10. State does not require redetermination of eligibility for Medicaid/CHIP more than once per year.^j
- 11. State adopted the expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (ACA).^k
- 12. State meets EPSDT periodicity schedule of screenings, as set by the American Academy of Pediatrics, for the following age groups: <1 year, 1-2 years, 3-5 years, and 6-9 years.^l

PARENTING AND FAMILY ECONOMIC SUPPORTS

- 13. State exempts single parents on TANF from work requirements until the youngest child is 1 year old.^m
- 14. State established a minimum wage that meets or exceeds \$9.10/hour and is indexed to inflation.ⁿ
- 15. State exempts single-parent families of three below the poverty level from personal income tax.^o
- 16. State offers a refundable Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).^p
- 17. State keeps co-payments for child care subsidies below 10% of a family's income for families of three with an income at 150% FPL.^q
- 18. State offers paid family leave for a minimum of 6 weeks with full or partial replacement of wages.^r

Recommendations

The following recommendations suggest strategies states can use to build two-generation supports for large numbers of young children and their parents.

- ◆ **States should develop the capacity of existing policy councils and initiatives, such as Early Learning Advisory Councils (ELACs) and child poverty commissions, to promote strong two-generation supports for families with young children.** In some states, poverty commissions may be the best settings for this work. For example, Vermont's 2014 Child Poverty Council report includes specific recommendations for increasing access to high quality early care and education programs, job development and educational opportunities for parents, and housing assistance.²⁰ In other states, the continuing work of Early Learning Advisory Councils (ELACs), established under the Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007, could be expanded to include policies that support family economic security and parent health and mental health.²¹ State poverty commissions and ELACs typically include both elected officials and leaders outside of government.
- ◆ **States should identify and analyze a range of policies that collectively influence the strength of two-generation supports for families.** Policies that help ensure families' access to high quality early care and education, promote parent and child health and mental health screening and treatment, and support parenting and family economic security should be included in a comprehensive two-generation policy audit. Cross-sector policy councils that engage a mix of state policymakers and non-governmental stakeholders are well suited to conduct a two-generation policy audit and promote policies that work together to improve the well-being and life opportunities of young children and their parents.
- ◆ **Based on an audit of policies across multiple domains, states should develop and package multi-component policies that significantly strengthen two-generation supports for young children and their parents.** One example of a policy package would be a state proposal that combines the following supports for low-income working families with young children: (1) a state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); (2) setting eligibility for child care subsidies at 300 percent of the federal poverty line; (3) a requirement that child care settings use recommended child-staff ratios at all ages; and (4) investment in evidence-informed quality supports, such as professional development and coaching for early care and education settings. Another example, targeting parents with very low education and work skills, might include: (1) state supplementation of Early Head Start; (2) state investment in mentor-supported adult education and training for high-demand jobs; and (3) transition assistance to help families maintain gains (e.g., help enrolling children in a high-quality early care and education setting following Early Head Start, assistance accessing benefits that help families move toward economic security during a transition to employment).
- ◆ **Policymakers should consider the merits of individual policies they wish to promote through a two-generation lens, asking whether the policy enhances or detracts from critical two-generation supports for low-income families.** From this perspective, the value of many individual policies, such as expanding Medicaid coverage for low-income parents or establishing a refundable EITC, can be seen more clearly. These policies and others that promote parenting capacity and family economic security are essential to children's early learning and help maximize the benefits of other child-focused policies such as prekindergarten expansion.

See NCCP's **State Early Childhood Profiles** to review your state's policy choices in the areas of early care and education, health, and parenting/family economic supports. Summary information for policies across the states is also provided. This resource is regularly updated. Go to: www.nccp.org/profiles/early_childhood.html

See NCCP's **Young Child Risk Calculator** to calculate the prevalence of young children experiencing various risks in your state, including parents with low education and unemployment. Go to: www.nccp.org/tools/risk

Endnotes

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