

**POLICY  
BRIEF**

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# Quality, Affordable Early Learning



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The decisions and investments we make today determine whether Kansas kids have a rock-solid foundation for growth and development and are able to build upon it in decades to come. Kansas Action for Children has identified three policy areas that will transform the lives of children and families and allow our communities to thrive:

- **Affordable child care**
- **Paid family leave**
- **Infant and maternal health.**



# EARLY EDUCATION SHAPES DEVELOPING BRAINS, BUT AVAILABILITY MUST BE ADDRESSED

To ensure a successful future for Kansas, we must lift up our children, facilitating their skills so they can lead the way to our prosperous next chapter. Education unlocks opportunity and creates pathways to success. But, our focus on Kansas children cannot wait until kindergarten or even preschool; we must begin at birth to maximize our opportunities.

Science tells us that stable, consistent experiences and relationships early in life shape the architecture of the developing brain. Because all future development is based on the strength of early foundations, we must ensure that every Kansas child has the opportunities for those positive experiences and relationships.

Children's critical early years are not the time to take shortcuts. High-quality, affordable early learning opportunities can help children prepare to be future leaders in our communities and in our state.

In 2017, nearly seven in 10 Kansas children (69 percent) had their resident parents in the workforce.<sup>1</sup> We know that high-quality and reliable child care is unaffordable or inaccessible for many families in Kansas, making it difficult for parents to balance work and family responsibilities. However, policymakers and practitioners can work together to increase early learning opportunities for our youngest residents. Policy changes can make it easier for low- and moderate-income families to access effective early care and educational opportunities through the state's child care assistance program.

## EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES CAN COUNTER SYSTEMIC BARRIERS FACING CHILDREN OF COLOR

Due to systemic barriers, children of color face extra obstacles to achieve educational success. Residential segregation can result in them being more likely to attend underfunded schools with fewer course options, resources, and less-qualified teachers.<sup>2</sup> Urban districts

without adequate property tax revenue, or economically depressed rural districts, support schools with fewer resources and make educational attainment more difficult. As a result, children of color face challenges to fully capitalize on their abilities. Overall, children of color in Kansas are less likely to be proficient in reading and math and finish college, lowering their ability to achieve educational success and boost the state's economy.<sup>3</sup>

The good news is high-quality early education programs help children enter school prepared to learn. One study found being part of an intensive early childhood education program starting in preschool led to a 47 percent increase in those earning an associate's degree and a 41 percent increase for those earning a bachelor's degree.<sup>4, 5</sup> Businesses also know early education is a key tool for ensuring quality employees are available to meet growing demand.<sup>6, 7</sup> By bolstering educational achievement through high-quality early childhood care and education, we can achieve not just better educational outcomes, but better economic and health outcomes. In fact, research suggests that "high-quality care from birth to age 5 yields a return on investment of 13 percent per annum from better outcomes in education, earnings, and health."<sup>8, 9, 10</sup>



- Increased employment for parents and children:** Early education helps children prepare for the future while assisting their parents in working and contributing to the economy. Research shows children who receive high-quality early education have increased rates of employment at age 30.<sup>11</sup>
- Increased income for parents and increased home ownership for children:** Parents with children in high-quality programs had sustained wage growth, and those children had higher rates of home ownership.<sup>12, 13</sup>
- Decreased rates of disease and health care costs:** Children participating in early childhood education from birth to age 5 showed lower rates of chronic disease and subsequent lower health care costs.<sup>14</sup>

**Current policy limits opportunities to early learning, particularly among families of color and low-income families.**

Child care in Kansas can be costly for families and their budgets. Regardless of whether the childcare is home- or center-based, the annual cost is comparable to a year of public college tuition. For a family of four living at or below the poverty line (an annual yearly income of \$25,100 in 2018), child care for an infant and 4-year-old would likely be more than half of their annual income for accredited home care and more than 85 percent of their annual income for accredited center care.<sup>15</sup>

### 2018 COST OF CHILD CARE IN THE STATE OF KANSAS



Source: Child Care Aware of America.

In 2018, there were nearly 40,000 Kansas children under age 5 living in poverty. With roughly 200,000 Kansas children under 5, this means that about one in five young children in Kansas live in poverty.<sup>16</sup> Without affordable child care, low-income families and families of color are more likely to face barriers to economic security. In 2017, Black (32 percent) and Latinx children (30 percent) are almost three times as likely as white children in Kansas

(11 percent) to live in poverty.<sup>17</sup> As a result, families of color are also more likely to depend on programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).<sup>18</sup>

Low-income families and children of color lack access to critical child care and early educational services that affect children’s ability to learn and develop long term.



Low-income families are more likely to have difficulty finding affordable, high-quality early education services, especially those that work nontraditional work hours. For families of color, systemic barriers make it more difficult to access these services because of multiple factors: affordability, access, supply, and quality of care.<sup>19</sup> Research shares that “communities with the highest percentages of Black residents have a lower supply of child-care programs as well as a slightly lower availability of degreed workers.”<sup>20, 21</sup> In addition, not all child care providers offer dual language services and the cultural competency needed to serve immigrant children.

## WHAT IS THE CCDBG?

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is federal funding administered by states. It provides financial assistance for low-income families to attain quality child care, while allowing families to maintain employment or seek higher education.<sup>22</sup> From 2006 to 2016, Kansas has decreased the number of children in the state served by CCDBG by 10,000 children.<sup>23</sup> These funds are essential for providing affordable, quality child care to low income families while allowing parents to maintain stable employment.

Research shows families receiving child care subsidies are more likely to be and have more stable employment.<sup>24</sup> Child care subsidies, which are provided through funding opportunities such as CCDBG, are important, particularly for low-income children. Low-income children disproportionately benefit from high-quality early learning opportunities, and child care subsidies make high-quality early learning programs more affordable for low-income families.<sup>25, 26</sup>

In 2016, Kansas was one of four states that did not provide enough state matching funds to draw down all federal matching funds, losing \$4 million in federal dollars.<sup>27</sup> Kansas policymakers must ensure that our state meets the requirements needed to access and use all federal funding to which the state is entitled.

In 2018, federal funding of the CCDBG increased by \$2.4 billion, giving states such as Kansas the opportunity to increase the accessibility and quality of child-care available to low income families and families of color.<sup>28</sup>

## POLICYMAKERS CAN INCREASE ACCESS TO EARLY LEARNING THROUGH REGULATION AND LEGISLATION

- This year, Kansas will increase the child care subsidy reimbursement rate to cover 65 percent of the market rate for child care. This increase is a step in the right direction to secure high-quality child care for low-income families. The increased reimbursement will likely lead to more providers accepting child care subsidies, increasing both access to and affordability of child care for low-income families. Kansas can build on this momentum in two ways:
  - Establishing rates by county, not as a reflection of statewide averages; and
  - Setting rates at the 75th percentile of the most recent market rate survey.
- Some states, such as Minnesota, created an additional income tax rate for their highest earners, using the added revenue to increase the number of low-income children attending high-quality early learning programs.<sup>29</sup>
- A final consideration when crafting policy to make high-quality early learning opportunities more affordable for families is that increased affordability must not come at the expense of the child care facility and staff. Child care providers are woefully underpaid. In Kansas, the average annual salary of all child care providers is less than \$20,000.<sup>30</sup> More must be done to ensure early opportunities make financial sense for both families and child care providers.

## CONCLUSION

The research is clear. High-quality early learning opportunities help build the architecture of young brains. Policymakers have opportunities to pass legislation and craft regulation to make it easier for families to find, afford, and benefit from early education. We call on policymakers to increase high-quality, early learning opportunities for children from birth to 5, especially for those who also have the most to gain from these programs.

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<sup>26</sup>Anna D. Johnson, Rebecca M. Ryan, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Child-Care Subsidies: Do They Impact the Quality of Care Children Experience? *Child Development* 83, no. 4 (2012).

<sup>27</sup>In 2015, three states did not provide enough matching funds to draw down all federal matching funds: Idaho (\$7.6 million), Kansas (\$3.5 million), and Michigan (\$22.8 million). A total of \$34 million was returned to the federal government for redistribution to other states in the next fiscal year.

<sup>28</sup>Ruth Cosse, “Child Care Assistance and Spending in 2016.” Center for Law and Social Policy. June 2018. <https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018/06/Child%20Care%20Assistance%20and%20Participation%20in%202016.pdf>

<sup>29</sup>Leachman, Michael et al. “Advancing Racial Equity With State Tax Policy.” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. November 15, 2018. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/advancing-racial-equity-with-state-tax-policy>

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