

United States

Population: 293 m. **Fertility rate:** 2.07. **GDP per capita:** USD 36 700.

Children under 5 years: US Census Bureau lists number of children under age 5 as 19.8 million, but does not provide a category for children under 6 years (www.census.gov/popest/age.html).

Female labour force participation: 69.8% of women participate in the labour market in 2004, 18.8% of whom are in part-time employment as against 8.1% male part-time employment (part-time employment is defined as less than 30 hours weekly in salaried employment. Many part-time, cash economy jobs are not included in these figures).

Labour force participation rate of women with children under 6 years: c. 58% (Current Population Survey for year 2000). Demand for ECEC places is almost as high among non-employed parents, and the level of family income and of maternal education remain prime indicators of participation.

Maternity and parental leave: Under the Family and Medical Leave Act, covered employers must grant an eligible employee up to a total of 12-work weeks of unpaid leave during any 12-month period in specified circumstances, including the birth and care of a newborn child of the employee. Five States pay temporary disability benefit for 10 weeks.

Average duration of parental leave: Data not available.

Compulsory school age: Generally 6 years.

Public social expenditure: 15.7% (OECD average is 22% – OECD, *Society at a Glance*, 2005). **Child poverty rate:** 21.9% after taxes and transfers – OECD average is 11.2% (UNICEF, 2005). Head Start and similar programmes serve about 3 out of 5 children in poverty, generally on a sessional or half-day basis, but increasingly full-day.

Funding of public pre-primary educational services (ISCED Level 0): About 0.4% of GDP is provided from public funds (OECD, *Society at a Glance*, 2005) for pre-kindergarten education, essentially from state and local government funds. The unit cost per child 3-6 years (public institutions only) amounts to USD 7 881 (this figure probably includes private contributions which, in the United States, amount to about two-thirds of cost). According to NIEER figures the average state investment in pre-kindergarten is less than USD 3 600 per child enrolled. Head Start invests just over USD 7 200 per child enrolled, but receives a further 20% cash or in-kind contribution from various sources, bringing investment per child to USD 8 626 (NIEER, 2005, *The State of Pre-School Yearbook*, Rutgers University, NJ, nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf).

Average costs to parents: Outside school services and Head Start, parents may assume all the costs of child care. Overall, the federal government underwrites 25% of costs, State and local government 15% and parents the remaining 60%. Low-income parents pay on average 18% of family income per child enrolled in child care.

Legal entitlement to a free service: c. 5 years, but increasingly children have access to state-funded pre-kindergarten programmes at age 4 years (see below).

Major service types: i) The purchase of services system, generally licensed and supervised by state child care agencies. It is composed of private family day care, child care and early education centres (under a wide variety of names) offering a range of full-day and part-day programmes for children 0-6 years; ii) the public school system under the responsibility of each State offering pre-school (publicly funded pre-kindergarten programmes for 3- and 4-year old children) and kindergarten programmes (mainly serving 5-year-olds); and iii) Head Start programmes for low-income families primarily serve 3- and 4-year-olds.

Rate of access to regulated services: In 2002, c. 38% of children in the age group 0-3 years had access to licensed services; 56.4% of 3- to 5-year-olds had access (NCCIC, 2005, www.nccic.org/, figures for 2002). Over 90% of children are enrolled in state kindergarten 5-6 years. According to Barnett (“Testimony to the House Subcommittee on Education Reform: Hearing on ‘Early Childhood Education: Improvement Through Integration’”, 2005), more recent attendance figures are: “7 of 10 children now attend a pre-school programme at age 4; 4 of 10 children attend a pre-school programme at age 3 (House Subcommittee Hearing, April 2005)”. Head Start covers 11% of all 3- and 4-year-olds; state pre-kindergarten covers about 2.5% of 3-year-olds and 16% of 4-year-olds. Georgia and Oklahoma make pre-kindergarten available to all 4-year-olds.

Designation and professional qualifications of key staff: Teachers with 4-year degrees lead the kindergarten/pre-kindergarten programmes in public schools. 75% of staff leading Head Start programmes have at least a 1-year Child Development Course and approximately 57% of these have an Associates Degree or higher. In the private sector (c. 90% of child care provision), the proportion of qualified staff is not known.

Child-staff ratios: Different standards apply across the United States. In general, a ratio of 4-6:1 exists for infants; 10- to 20:1 for pre-school. NIEER (2005 *State Preschool Yearbook*, 2006) sets the maximum ratio of 10:1 as a benchmark in classrooms for both 3- and 4-year-old children and 37 States have reached this benchmark or have done better.

Maximum group size: Wide variation exists across States. In regulated centre-based settings, the maximum group size generally ranges from 8 to 24 for 0- to 3-year-olds and 14 to 40 for 3- to 5-year-olds.

Auspices

American attitudes towards early childhood and family policy have traditionally been underpinned by a high value placed on individual responsibility; consideration of the family as a private unit; and volunteerism rather than statutory enactment of social welfare policies (public social welfare expenditure in the United States is well below the OECD average). In accordance with a philosophy of limiting government intervention in matters related to family, there is no overall national child or family policy, nor is there any one federal state department in charge of children’s services. However, the Federal Government, through Congress and the Administration, attends to broad ECEC goals and the funding of services to children considered “at risk” (Clearinghouse on International Developments, Columbia University, 2004). Head Start is the most important targeted federal programme, and in 2003-04 covered 7% of 3-year-olds and 11% of 4-year-olds (about 21% of American children under 5 years live in poverty, UNICEF, 2005). Market-based businesses, funded mostly by parents, provide the greater part of early care and education

programmes for 0- to 4-year-olds. Employer-sponsored child care and employer contributions to child care remain weak.

The US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) manages most of the funding for social services (including the Head Start programme), but policy and provision of child care are matters for each State. Public education is primarily a state responsibility, and may include compensatory and special education for 3- to 5-year-olds deemed to be disadvantaged, funded mainly by the United States Department of Education. According to the United States General Accounting Office (2000), 69 different federal programmes were providing or supporting education and care for children under 5 years; and nine different federal agencies and departments administered these programmes. The United States Department of Health and Human Services and the United States Department of Education also provide technical assistance and research support to assist States in implementing their programmes and to encourage the replication of best practices. In 2002, the Bush Administration launched the *Good Start, Grow Smart* early literacy initiative to improve children's school readiness. The initiative focuses on four areas: clear expectations for young children; professional development for teachers; research support and dissemination of good practice; and the stimulation of partnerships (see Box 6.2 in Chapter 6).

In recent times, States increasingly take a leadership role in developing and implementing pre-kindergarten services and early intervention services for young children at risk. Policy decisions are made with regard to eligibility, the extent of the supply and availability of services, the allocation of services and benefits, and the scope and quality of services, including health and safety standards. States use legislation, supplemental funding and regulation to implement policy decisions. However, the policies in place and the allocation of resources vary greatly across and within States, and 10 States provided no state funding for pre-kindergarten in 2004. Local government and community participation in the development of early childhood policies is encouraged in some States through the formation of local planning groups, who must raise matched funding and develop local plans. Other States assume nearly complete fiscal, regulatory and policy-making responsibilities for early childhood education and care.

Context

Labour force rates: In 2004, 69.8% of women participated in the United States labour force, of whom 18.8% worked part-time compared to 8.1% of men (part-time work figures do not take into account casual or cash economy labour). Of families with children under 6 years, 10.5% have no parent employed. 56.6% of mothers with a child under 3 are employed, and 60% of mothers with a child between 3-6 years – a rate slightly under the OECD average (OECD, *Society at a Glance*, 2005).

Parental leave: Unpaid family leave is the normal solution adopted by mothers in the United States at the time of birth. Five States (California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island) have a paid temporary disability benefit that includes pregnancy and maternity, typically for 10-12 weeks. Numerous employers offer maternity leave under temporary disability plans. The 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides for a 12-week job-protected but unpaid leave (for employees in firms with 50 or more workers) at the time of pregnancy, childbirth, or illness. Employers can require that employees use their vacation and sick leave before claiming the family leave. Despite initiatives in some

States to provide more flexible leave-taking, the situation is essentially unchanged since 1993 (Clearinghouse on International Developments, Columbia University, 2004).

Access and provision

ECEC programmes in the United States include a wide range of part-day and full-day programmes having an education and/or social welfare focus. Across the country, private family day care and centre-based ECEC constitute 90% of provision for the 0-3 age group. About two-thirds of this provision is non-profit and one-third for-profit but most is licensed. The most usual forms of provision outside the home for children up to the age of 3 years are private, giving way gradually to publicly-funded pre-kindergarten and kindergarten provision by the school districts as children mature. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programmes are normally made available to children from the age of 4 or 5, and increasingly from 3 years. Overall, there are three broad types of provision:

- *The purchase of services system:* The large purchase of services system is composed of private centres and family day care homes providing programmes for the general population. These services are subject to licensing and funding standards proposed by state social service agencies, but pedagogical and pre-service staff requirements can be very low or non-existent. Most States, however, now require a certain number of annual hours of further training from all staff. Families may also purchase care in unregulated or informal settings, such as the homes of family, friends, or neighbours.
- *The public school system:* The public school system is under the responsibility of each State. In general, all States offer free, half-day kindergarten for 5-year-olds, and have reached a coverage level of about 90%. Most States offer pre-school, that is, publicly funded pre-kindergarten programmes for some 4- and 3-year-old children (see access rates below).
- *Head Start:* Head Start and Early Head Start are comprehensive child development programmes that serve children from 0 to age 5, pregnant women, and their families, but primarily enrol 3- and 4-year-olds. They are child- and family focused programmes and have the overall goal of increasing the school readiness of young children in low-income families.

Rates of provision

0-2 years: By 9 months, about 50% of infants are in a regular child care arrangement, such as a centre-based care arrangement or care provided by a non-relative or relative in a private home (NCES, 2004, <http://nces.ed.gov/>). The share of relative care is 26%.

2-3 years: Provision is characterised by decreasing at-home or relative care (39%) and increasing use of family day care, centre-based settings and pre-school education programmes, e.g. 48% of 3-year-old children are enrolled, mostly in private, part-day, nursery school programmes. Only Kentucky, Massachusetts and New Jersey have more than 10% of their 3-year-olds enrolled in public pre-kindergarten programmes (NIEER, 2004, *Pre-School Policy Matters*, Issue 6, Rutgers University, NJ).

3-6 years: Overall, approximately 56% of United States children aged 3-6 years are enrolled in state pre-primary programmes (Clearinghouse on International Developments, Columbia University, 2004). Most school districts offer free half- or full-day kindergarten to all 5-year-olds as part of formal primary schooling, 90% of whom are now enrolled (kindergarten is the first year of formal schooling in the United States). 16.1% of 4-year-olds

are enrolled in state pre-kindergarten programmes and 3% of 3-year-olds have similar access. Wide variations exist, however, across States: 22 States enrol less than 10% of pre-kindergarten children and 10 States do not fund these programmes. In contrast, a few States are moving towards universal access for 4-year-olds. In 2001-02, Georgia expanded funding to allow places for the children of all parents who wish their child to attend. Oklahoma has succeeded in enrolling 60% of its 4-year-olds. New York established a “universal” programme some years ago, but the necessary financial resources were not found. In general, free places are provided only for children said to be “at risk”.

Children with diverse needs

Children with disabilities: Federal law requires that public early childhood programmes should accommodate children with disabilities in “the least restrictive environment”. In most States, there is growing inclusion of children with disabilities. 10% of available places in Head Start are intended for these children (the actual percentage of children with disabilities in Head Start programmes is 12%). Special education programmes reach 5% of all 3- and 4-year-olds.

Children from low-income families: The child poverty rate in the United States is 21.9% after taxes and transfers (OECD average is 11.2%). Rapid economic growth and expanded labour markets during the 1990s brought many families out of poverty, but according to the UNICEF analysis, government support to families still on welfare has fallen to an annual USD 2 779 per child. Of families who received Child Care and Development Fund subsidies in 2003, approximately half were below the Federal Poverty Level (USD 15 260 annual for a family of three).

Ethnic and bilingual children: Of the children receiving Child Care and Development Fund subsidies in 2003, 41% were African American; 35% white; 16% Hispanic and 3% multi-racial; 1% Asian; and 1% Native American or Native Alaskan. Both federal agencies and state governments provide multiple outreach efforts to reach these and other populations, such as providing application forms and consumer education materials in multiple languages. For example, in 2004, the Child Care Bureau released a brochure on “What Providers Should Know About Care Assistance for Families” as a targeted effort to reach Hispanic families and providers.

Quality

Licensing and accreditation: Licensing standards and programme accreditation are strongly co-related with higher quality in early childhood education and care (CQCO Study Team, 1995). Licensing makes requirements with regard to space per child, health and hygiene; maximum group size, child-staff ratios; staff qualifications and other structural features of programming. Across the United States, there are large variations in state regulations and different standards in licensing requirements. According to Helburn and Bergmann (*America’s Child Care Problem: The Way Out*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 2002) licensing standards are so low in nearly one-third of States as to threaten children’s physical safety and health. In yet others, the enforcement of licensing and programme standards is weak. However, States increasingly use funds to provide grants and loans to providers for specific quality improvements; for training and technical assistance; and for monitoring compliance with regulatory requirements. According to the United States Child Care Bureau (2005), both the federal and state governments are investing significant resources in a variety of efforts to improve the quality of child care. The Child Care Bureau

funds a network of technical assistance resources to provide information, guidance and support to States in implementing policies and practices that promote child care quality and access. States also increasingly promote programme accreditation by providing incentives and rewards, such as quality rating systems and tiered subsidy reimbursement, that encourage providers to go beyond the minimum licensing standards.

Funding: Although child care funding has tripled over the last ten years and is now at a historically high level,¹ the total public expenditure of USD 20.4 billion dollars on children 0-5 years amounts to 0.2% of GDP. According to OECD (*Education at a Glance*, 2005), public expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP for pre-primary amounts to nearly 0.4% of GDP (this figure presumably includes expenditure on kindergarten for children, 5-6 years). Approximately 34% of expenditure on pre-school from 3-6 years came from public sources and 66% from private sources, half of this being from household expenditure. Federal funding is largely targeted on children with disabilities and children from low-income families. The NIEER *State of Pre-school 2005* indicates state spending per pre-school child in 2004 to be USD 3 551 for children in pre-kindergarten (less than in 2001-02); USD 7 222 (federal contribution only) for children in a Head Start programme,² compared to an average of USD 9 173 (figure from 2003) spent per child in K-12 classrooms from state, federal and local sources. The same author indicates that in most States “spending per child appears to be too low to support a high-quality pre-school programme” (p. 17, 2003 edition).

Parental contributions: Where child care is concerned, families in many instances pay all costs, but on average contribute about 60%, with the federal government contributing 25%, and States and local government about 15%. Depending on the State, parents pay on average more than USD 3 000 annually per child for child care, with low-income families paying on average 18% of income, and families earning less than USD 1 200 per month paying 25% of income. Some costs can be recuperated through federal tax benefits for parents. Low-income families can benefit from fee subsidies through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) block grant, but many low-income families tend to use informal, unregulated arrangements. (For further information on the cost of child care in the United States, please see: www.nccic.org/poptopics/averagecost.html).

Staffing and training: No national system exists to set the qualifications of early childhood workers; each State is free to establish its own standards in order to meet its particular needs and circumstances.

Head Start has created its own professional profile and relies primarily on Child Development Associates (CDA)³ to lead the programmes. This training is equivalent (depending on the State) to half a two-year, tertiary-level, professional diploma or associate degree. It is widely recognised across the United States and provides some credits for a university degree in several States. 75% of Head Start programme leaders have taken at least a one-year child development course qualifying them for CDA status, and approximately 57% have earned an Associates Degree or higher. The proportion of CDAs to staff in the programmes is not available.

In the early education sector (pre-kindergarten and kindergarten), a two-tiered system exists, with teacher degree requirements being more stringent in the public school settings than in non-public settings (NIEER, 2004, *Pre-School Policy Matters*, Issue 6, Rutgers University, NJ). In 23 of the 44 States that fund pre-school initiatives all lead teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree, but fewer than half the States make this requirement

of lead teachers in private settings, although most require a CDA qualification (NIEER, 2004). In the public school system, lead kindergarten staff are certified teachers (98%) with at least a 4-year degree, but certification (specialised training) in early childhood education is required in only 29 States. The proportion of lead teachers in the various sectors is not available. A small number of assistant teachers work in pre-schools, but only 12 States require assistants to have at least a CDA qualification.

Child care services employ a wide range of adults, many untrained. A report, *Counting the Child Care Workforce: A Catalogue of State Data Sources to Quantify and Describe Child Caregivers in the Fifty States and the District of Columbia* (Stahr-Breunig et al., 2003) found that approximately half of the States lack the current child care workforce data necessary to estimate the size and characteristics of the child care workforce. According to Kagan and Rigby (2003) (see note 1 above), 37 States require no or minimal training for child care providers in the private sector who supply the majority of services for children under 3. The educational levels and working conditions of the majority of staff in this sector are low, and annual staff turnover rates of 35% are not uncommon.

Professional development: Again, similar diversity exists in the area of professional development, with again weak regulation of the purchase-of-services sector. In public pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, 27 States require teachers to participate in at least 15 hours annually of in-service training. Alabama sets the highest annual in-service requirement in the United States: 40 clock hours per year.

Work conditions: In the United States, the status of early childhood staff outside the public school system is low, and annual staff turnover rates of over 30% are frequent. Professional status appears to be aligned to education and salaries, with staff in programmes that offer more training or require more competence generally commanding higher salaries and benefits. The Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that only 15 of 764 occupations have lower median wages than child care workers.⁴ Teachers who work in the public school system in K-12 receive better pay (in many localities twice the pay) than Head Start or purchase-of-service staff. Outside the school system, there are no uniform statutory requirements regarding working hours or employer provision of training.

Child-staff ratios: Wide variations in state regulations, different standards in licensing requirements, different funding standards, voluntary accreditation standards and voluntary goals standards make it difficult to describe child-staff ratios for the United States as a whole. In general, ratios of 4-6:1 are required for infants; ratios of between 10 to 20 children per teacher in pre-school settings, with 2- and 3-year-old children having ratios somewhere in the middle. However, according to Helburn and Bergmann (2002), standards in about one-third of the States are low and the enforcement of licensing regulations weak. Many programmes are exempted from regulation and licensing agencies are often understaffed and cannot adequately monitor providers (National Survey of Early Childhood Health, 2000). At the same time, NCCIC research indicates that child-staff ratios became more stringent in the United States between 1986 and 2002, and that fewer States leave ECEC unregulated (LeMoine et al., 2004, *Child Care Center Licensing Regulations: Child:Staff Ratios and Maximum Group Size Requirements*, NCCIC, Washington). In addition, although state regulations concerning child-staff ratios may not always be observed, the overall picture is better than in the traditional pre-primary education sector in Europe where ratios of 20+ children to 1 teacher are not uncommon. According to NIEER (2005), child-staff

ratios of 10:1 or better are achieved in pre-school settings in 37 of the 50 States in the United States.

Curriculum and pedagogy: Broad curriculum typologies exist across school districts, church providers, commercial chains or networks providing child care and pre-school services. In this tradition of independence, many eclectic curricula and practices continue to exist. In state programmes, programme content and pedagogical approach were traditionally left open for each centre to decide, unless a curriculum had been adopted by an entire school district. In 2002, the *Good Start, Grow Smart* (GSGS) early learning initiative was launched to promote literacy and school readiness (see Box 6.2, Chapter 6). GSGS encourages States to develop early learning guidelines that include expectations for what children should know and be able to do when they enter kindergarten, in the areas of early reading and early math skills, aligned with State K-12 standards. These standards now tend to govern the choice of curricula by programmes and school districts. Almost all States have drafted early learning guidelines and at least 27 States have begun implementation. Over 90% of States have gone beyond the original requirement, and have offered guidelines in most areas of child development. The GSGS initiative works with States to develop plans for offering education and training activities to child care and pre-school teachers that support early learning guidelines.

Monitoring, evaluation and research: National monitoring and reporting at population level is limited because the focus and direction of ECEC policy and provision is largely within States. The federal government has set challenging operating standards for Head Start, which are sometimes aspired to by other bodies and centres. Voluntary guidelines at national level have also been developed in the United States by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National Early Childhood Programme Accreditation (NECPA) and the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), which impact positively on a wide range of service types. States also provide their own licensing and accreditation guidelines, such as the Arkansas Department of Education *Rules Governing the Arkansas Better Chance Programme*. State monitoring and oversight often include inspections of licensed centres and homes, although as mentioned, licensing agencies are often overstretched. In the private sector, it is expected that licensing standards, self-regulation, competition, information, and client supervision will be sufficient to maintain quality.

Research: As in the formal education field, the United States is pre-eminent in research on child development and early education. Evaluation studies tend to predominate, but substantial longitudinal and policy studies are also funded (please see Chapter 9 of this report). Research activity is generally linked to universities, several of which have significant ECEC research centres. The United States Child Care Bureau annually provides USD 10 million for child care research, demonstration and evaluation activities that increase the capacity for child care research at the national, state, and local levels while addressing critical questions with implications for children and families.

Parent and community involvement: In the United States, parent involvement figures prominently in early childhood programming, and state and national agency regulations in this regard are more demanding than in most other countries. The requirement to consult and involve parents in their children's learning is understood and practised in most early childhood settings. Public opinion rates parental choice as a major consideration in setting public policy, although research indicates that parental choice of child care is often limited

by availability and affordability (Fuller, Livas and Bridges, 2005, “How to Expand and Improve Preschool in California: Ideals, Evidence, and Policy Options”, PACE Working Paper, UC-Berkeley). Although subsidies made available through the Child Care and Development Fund help many low-income working families to access a wider range of child care options, high costs and insufficient numbers of reliable caregivers restrict the choice of many families (Bainbridge, Marcia, Meyers, Tanaka and Waldfogel, 2005, “Who Gets an Early Education? Family Income and the Enrollment of Three- to Five-Year-Olds from 1968 to 2000”, *Social Science Quarterly*, Volume 86). The Child Care Bureau also funds public information and outreach activities to help parents to make well-informed choices.

OECD policy issues

Among the issues for policy attention identified by the OECD review team for the United States were (OECD, 1999)

- *The need to create a co-ordinated and comprehensive ECEC system:* The present (at that time) patchwork of services, regulations and funding sources leads to confusion, uneven quality and inequality of access. The responsibility to provide political leadership, funding, clear policy goals and frameworks rests with government, both at federal and state level. An effective first step might be the nomination of a national commission to propose how government roles in ECEC could be strengthened. Stronger implication by Education Departments may be vital for creating a more equitable system with broad public support. Stable networks of inter-agency partnerships at the state level could also be effective.
- *The urgent need to address access issues:* The access of children 3-5 years from ethnic and low-income backgrounds is a serious concern. Only 45% of children from 3-5 years from low-income families are enrolled in pre-school, compared to 75% among high-income families. These inequalities are often linked to contextual issues, such as housing policy, which tends to support segregation of families by income and ethnic origin. A more proactive stance towards child poverty and diversity is recommended.
- *The need for quality improvement:* Quality in child care can be very weak, especially for the 0-3 age group, and regulations in many States may set standards far too low, even for health and safety issues. In addition, families of 4-year-old children often have access only to narrowly focused, instructional type programmes. Voluntary accreditation of centres as proposed by the NAEYC can dramatically improve standards and the use of well-known methods (e.g. the Project Approach) or guidelines (e.g. the revised *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programmes*) can contribute significantly to the effectiveness of programmes.
- *Creating an effective staff training and professional development system:* Serious weaknesses occur in the initial and continued training of staff at all levels. In addition, concerns were expressed about recruitment, remuneration, status, retention and career development. Projects such as T.E.A.C.H. address many of these issues. The articulation of qualifications and staff licensing within and across States is also a challenge.

Developments

Both the Education Commission of the States (2006) and NIEER (2005 *State Preschool Yearbook*, 2006) provide an insight into the rapid development of ECEC in the United States in recent years, in particular in state public education services:

Access

- 41 States provide funding today for pre-school programmes, spending an estimated USD 3.5 billion dollars compared with just under USD 200 million dollars in 1999.
- A move towards universal provision for pre-kindergarten, beyond the traditional targeted approach adopted previously. Some six States have now achieved over 60% enrolment of children of 4-5 years in public programmes.
- A move towards full-day rather than half-day kindergarten.

Improving programme quality

- In 2005, governors in 10 States identified efforts they will make to strengthen the delivery and quality of early learning programmes, including the use of quality rating systems. Connecticut, for example, will increase subsidies to stabilise the finances of struggling programmes, to improve the credentials of child care workers and to create a kindergarten readiness assessment tool. Rating systems typically address standards, accountability, professional development, finance and parent outreach. Currently, 10 States are using such systems.
- Favoured means of improving quality in the American States are:
 - ❖ *The development of quality standards, e.g.* Florida's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Education Programme requires the development of performance standards for the children enrolled.
 - ❖ *Upgrading or improving the qualifications and training of teachers, e.g.* in Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts...
 - ❖ *Licensing and accreditation* to ensure more uniform quality across programmes.
 - ❖ *A focus on school readiness:* for example, the Texas Early Start initiative, focused on improving language and pre-literacy skills, must ensure that teachers concentrate on the goal of preparing children for school. Both Florida and Massachusetts have voted funds to develop kindergarten readiness assessment tools.
- A concern about quality remains, however, as though funding increased in 27 States in 2005 and numbers enrolled continue to rise, overall expenditure remains modest (about 1% of K-12 spending). In fact, expenditure per pre-kindergarten child enrolled has fallen in value since 2001 (NIEER, 2005).

Consolidating governance structure

- In addition to the States mentioned in Chapter 2 (Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts), Connecticut, Washington State, Mississippi, and other States are moving towards consolidating ECEC governance structures through creating early learning agencies or through the use of state education plans (South Dakota, South Carolina). Currently, six approaches to renewing governance have been adopted, including the creation of (ECS, March 2006, www.ecs.org/):
 - ❖ A new ECEC agency in state government.
 - ❖ A new unit of office within the executive branch.
 - ❖ An early childhood cabinet, e.g. Connecticut.
 - ❖ A management team or office, e.g. North Carolina's Office of School Readiness.
 - ❖ A public-private organisation, e.g. the Ohio Partnership for Continued Learning.
 - ❖ A collaborative task force or council.

P-3 alignment

- In an effort to maintain the advances made by children in their kindergarten years, some States wish to align standards, curriculum, instructional practice and assessment within and across grade levels to P-3 levels. The advantages and risks of such an approach are discussed in Chapter 3 of the present text.

Notes

1. Combined federal and state funding for child care totals (in 2003-4) about USD 11.5 billion, the Head Start investment stands at USD 6.5 billion, and state investment in pre-kindergarten is about USD 2.4 billion (Kagan and Rigby, 2003, "Policy Matters: Setting and Measuring Benchmarks for State Policies. Improving the Readiness of Children for School. A Discussion Paper", Center for the Study of Social Policy, Washington, DC; NIEER, 2004, *Pre-School Policy Matters*, Issue 6, Rutgers University, NJ; Gilliam and Zigler, 2004, "A Critical Meta-analysis of All Evaluations of State-funded Preschool from 1977 to 2004", Rutgers University, NIEER Working Paper).
2. Although Head Start programmes use many untrained personnel and salaries are typically low, the unit cost per child is high as programmes provide not only education and care for young children, but also intensive family support and community outreach. Head Start programmes generally obtain an additional funding of about 20%, which brings up the unit cost to USD 8 626 per year per child.
3. A CDA is a state-awarded certificate, to someone who is 18 years or older, holds a high school diploma or GED, and has completed 480 hours or more of work experience with young children within the past five years. Individuals must also have completed 120 clock hours or more of instruction in the 8 subject areas of: planning a safe, healthy learning environment; steps to advance children's physical, intellectual development; positive ways to support children's social and emotional development; strategies to establish productive relationships with families; strategies to manage an effective programme operation; maintaining a commitment to professionalism; observing and recording children's behavior; and principles of child growth and development. Requirements must also include performance-based assessment of their skills in working with young children and their families.
4. In a communication during 2005, the United States National Child Care Bureau indicated that there might be a definitional problem with how this data related to child care.