

## Early Childhood Learning

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### Highlights

The period from birth to 5 years old is a critical time for a child's brain development. In these early years, children develop cognitive, social, emotional, and linguistic skills essential to achieving success once they begin school.<sup>a</sup>

This report provides background for public policy dialogue on this critical birth-to-5 period in the lives of Idaho's young children. Findings include the following:

- ◆ There are roughly 146,000 children under age 6 in Idaho. More than half—about 83,000—live in households in which all parents work outside the home.<sup>b</sup>
- ◆ Idaho has no comprehensive system to track all places where children are being cared for when their parents are working. We have data on the number of child care slots licensed by the state and cities (about 24,000 and 8,000, respectively).<sup>c,d</sup> However, we do not know how many of these slots are in facilities that provide opportunities for children to develop skills essential to achieving success when they begin school.
- ◆ Family engagement is a key element of many early learning programs, including Head Start and Early Head Start. Other examples are "Read to Me," offered through public libraries, and the Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program.<sup>e,f</sup>
- ◆ Though we lack good information on the extent of learning opportunities for Idaho's youngest children, we do know that only 54% of Idaho's kindergartners enter school ready to learn to read. This suggests Idaho's young children would benefit from more learning opportunities before they get to elementary school, both in the home and elsewhere.<sup>g</sup>

### Ready to learn

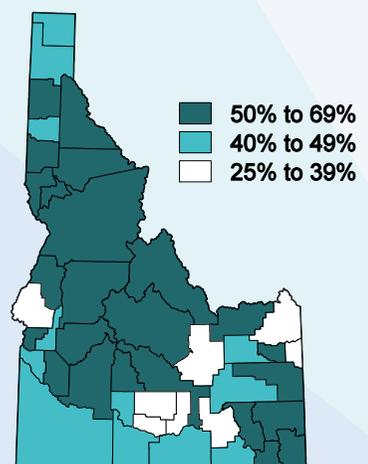
One indicator of future learning success is a child's readiness to learn to read when they enter kindergarten. In Idaho, these readiness skills are measured by the Idaho Reading Indicator (IRI). It gauges whether entering kindergartners can name and sound out letters correctly.

Based on kindergartners' scores on the Fall 2014 IRI:

- ◆ 20% had skills below grade level (not at all ready),
- ◆ 26% had skills near grade level (almost ready), and
- ◆ 54% had skills that were at, or above, grade level (ready to learn to read).

The share of kindergartners with skills at or above grade level varies widely across school districts, from as low as 15% in one district, to as high as 92% in another. The map on the right shows county-level information.<sup>g</sup>

**Kindergartners with reading-ready skills at or above grade level**  
Percent by county, Fall 2014



SOURCE: ID Department of Education

# Learning environments for young children

Early learning is supported by a variety of programs in Idaho. Some focus on the family's role at home, and others on learning in other settings. In both cases, family engagement is an indicator of a high quality early learning program.

## HOME-BASED EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS

In many cases, home-based early learning programs provide assessments of child development, connect families with others to build their support network, and provide referrals to appropriate services when needed.

- ◆ **Maternal Infant & Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program<sup>e</sup>**—This home-visiting program serves pregnant women, young children, and their families. Services are provided in the home and promote positive health outcomes, school readiness, and development of positive parenting skills. The program currently serves about 100 children in 4 counties, and is being expanded to serve about 500 children in 11 counties. It is funded by both federal and state dollars, and has three components:
  - ◇ **Parents as Teachers** —Using evidence-based research as a guide, Parents as Teachers helps organizations and professionals to deliver parent education to parents with young children. There are no income criteria for participation.
  - ◇ **Early Head Start Home-Based** —This program provides weekly home visits and twice-monthly group socialization activities for low-income families with young children up to 3 years old. It is designed to provide early and comprehensive child development and family support services. At least 10% of enrollment opportunities must be made available to children with disabilities.
  - ◇ **Nurse-Family Partnership** —Nurses with the Nurse-Family Partnership help low-income, first-time moms have a healthy pregnancy, ensure their child's health and development, and work toward economic self-sufficiency.
- ◆ **Nonprofit home visiting programs**—Nonprofit organizations, like southwestern Idaho's Family Advocates, provide home visiting services similar to those of MIECHV programs.

## EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

- ◆ **Infant Toddler Program<sup>e</sup>** —The Infant Toddler Program coordinates an early intervention system to identify and serve children from birth to 3 years of age, who have an existing or potential developmental delay. Services are available based on a child's and family's needs. Examples include speech, occupational, and physical therapy; service coordination; counseling and home visits; and health services. In FY2014, the program served 3,774 Idaho children. Funding comes from federal, state, and third-party sources.
- ◆ **State developmental preschools<sup>e</sup>** —Public school districts are required to provide early intervention and special education services to individuals ages 3-21. For preschoolers, this happens in a variety of ways: in-district preschools; cooperative preschools serving more than one district; special education teachers employed by the school district, but embedded in a Head Start program; and community early learning centers. In 2014, developmental preschools served 2,828 children.
- ◆ **Head Start and Early Head Start<sup>f</sup>**—These federally-funded programs promote school readiness among low-income children. Services include screening and assessment of health and other risk factors; education; promotion of parental involvement; and referrals for additional support as needed. All Head Start programs are evaluated to ensure they meet high quality standards. In 2013, Head Start served 4,024 children ages 3-5, and Early Head Start served 997 children under age 3. There are only enough Head Start slots to serve 20% of Idaho's income-eligible children.

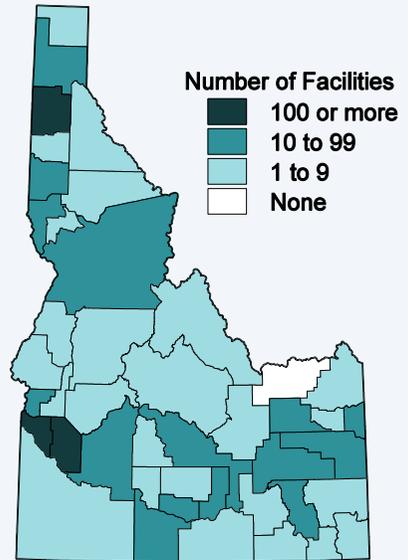
## CHILD CARE AND PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

Idaho does not have a comprehensive system to track what children are learning and where they are being cared for when they are not at home full-time. We have pieces of the puzzle. For example, we know how many children are in Head Start, and that the program has rigorous quality standards, but we do not have similar information for all programs. Here are some child care and preschools programs, and what we can say about the number of children served and learning opportunities offered:

- ◆ **State-licensed programs<sup>c,h</sup>**—Idaho requires all child care providers serving more than 6 children to be licensed. The state’s 701 state-licensed facilities have capacity to serve about 24,000 children. Almost 90% of licensed providers are centers serving at least 13 children. While state-licensing requirements aim to ensure children are cared for in a safe environment, there are few requirements for staff education or training, and no requirements to provide learning opportunities or parental partnerships.
- ◆ **City-licensed programs<sup>d</sup>**—Eight Idaho cities have their own licensing requirements that go beyond those set by the state: Ammon, Boise, Chubbuck, Coeur d’Alene, Idaho Falls, Lewiston, Moscow, and Pocatello. City-licensed facilities have capacity to serve over 8,000 children. Only 4 cities require care providers and staff to have more training than the state requires.
- ◆ **Non-licensed care**—Many children are cared for in settings that are not required to be licensed or monitored for health and safety, for example, in someone else’s home, or in a facility that cares for 6 or fewer children. We have no information about learning opportunities for this group of Idaho’s children.
- ◆ **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation<sup>i</sup>**—There are currently 19 NAEYC-accredited preschool and child care programs in Idaho. Together, they have capacity to serve 1,770 children. NAEYC accreditation criteria include standards specifically pertaining to curriculum, assessment of child progress, teaching, professional development, and the learning environment. Similarly, the National Association for Family Child Care has accredited 5 family child care providers in Idaho.
- ◆ **Steps to Quality, STAR-Rated Programs<sup>c</sup>**—To become STAR-rated by the Idaho STARS Project, child care providers must meet or exceed quality standards for about 40 indicators related to the classroom environment, listening and reasoning skills, activities, interaction, program structure, and staff development. While only 7 programs are currently STAR-rated, more than 100 programs are in the process of meeting recently-revised STAR-rated standards.

Many private child care and preschool programs fall outside the programs listed in our report, and do not report data about their capacity or the learning opportunities they offer.

State and city-licensed facilities  
Number by county, 2015



SOURCE: ID Department of Health & Welfare, and authors' contacts with city personnel

## Selected early childhood learning indicators

For county-level data, see <http://www.uidaho.edu/learning>

	IDAHO		
	Metropolitan counties	Nonmetro counties	State total
<b>NUMBER OF CHILDREN (2010)<sup>b</sup></b>			
Infants (ages 0-2)	47,219	25,256	72,475
Preschoolers (ages 3-5)	49,394	24,460	73,854
Total under age 6	96,613	49,716	146,329
<b>CHILDREN UNDER AGE 6 WHO HAVE ALL PARENTS IN THE WORKFORCE, BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE (% , 2009-2013 average)<sup>b</sup></b>			
Two-parent households	51	50	50
Single-mother households	72	72	72
Single-father households	90	90	90
All types of households	57	56	57
<b>CHILDREN UNDER AGE 5 IN POVERTY (2009-2013 average)<sup>b</sup></b>			
Percent	21	25	22
Number	16,368	9,634	26,002
<b>PROGRAM CAPACITY AND ENROLLMENT</b>			
Idaho Child Care Program-registered facilities, capacity (2015) <sup>c</sup>	22,097	7,492	29,589
Head Start & Early Head Start, actual enrollment (2012-13) <sup>f</sup>	2,842	2,179	5,021
Enrollment as a percentage of income-eligible children	19	22	20
State developmental preschools, enrollment (2014) <sup>g</sup>	NA	NA	2,828
<b>LICENSED CHILD CARE (2015)</b>			
Capacity of state-licensed facilities (number of slots) <sup>e</sup>	13,413	10,713	24,126
Child care centers, serving 13+ children (% of slots)	88	87	87
Group child care, serving 7-12 children (% of slots)	10	13	12
Capacity of city-licensed facilities (number of slots) <sup>d</sup>	7,741	368	8,109
Child care centers, serving 13+ children (% of slots)	73	82	74
Group child care, serving 7-12 children (% of slots)	22	5	21
<b>IDAHO READING INDICATOR (Fall 2014)</b>			
Kindergarteners with reading skills at or above grade level (%) <sup>h</sup>	56	46	54

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### SOURCES:

- a—Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child, *In Brief: Early Childhood Program Effectiveness*
- b—US Census Bureau: American Community Survey, and Decennial Census of Population and Housing
- c—Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children, Idaho STARS
- d—Data collected by the McClure Center through personal contacts with cities.
- e—Idaho Department of Health and Welfare: Maternal Infant & Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, and Infant Toddler Program
- f—Idaho Head Start Association, Idaho Head Start Data Book 2013
- g—Idaho Department of Education: Idaho Reading Indicator, School Finance Data, and Special Education
- h—ChildCare Aware
- i—National Association for the Education of Young Children; National Association for Family Child Care

### REPORT AUTHORS:

Christy Dearien, Research Associate  
Priscilla Salant, Director  
Erinn Cruz, Research Associate

**McClure Center for Public Policy Research**  
[mcclurecenter@uidaho.edu](mailto:mcclurecenter@uidaho.edu)