

December 2013

# Meeting New Jersey's Child Care Challenge: A Kids Count Special Report



Cover photo courtesy of the Long Branch School District

**Cecilia Zalkind**  
*Executive Director*

**Mary Coogan**  
*Assistant Director*

**Richard Trenk**  
*President, ACNJ  
Board of Trustees*

*Report Authors:*  
**Nancy Parello,**  
**Diane Dellanno,**  
**Nicole Hellriegel**

Giving Every Child A Chance

35 Halsey Street, 2nd Floor, Newark, NJ 07102 • (973) 643-3876 • Fax (973) 643-9153 • [advocates@acnj.org](mailto:advocates@acnj.org) •

[www.acnj.org](http://www.acnj.org)

# Meeting New Jersey's Child Care Challenge: A Kids Count Special Report

## ACNJ Board of Trustees

**President:**

Richard Trenk

**Administrative Vice President:**

Kendell Sprott

**Program Vice President:**

Gerard Thiers

**Secretary:** Eileen Leahey

**Treasurer:** Matthew Loncar

**Members:**

John Boyne  
Brenda Considine  
Hendricks Davis  
Louise Eagle  
Maurice Elias  
Vito Gagliardi  
Stuart Grant  
Gail Houlihan  
Nancy Lauter  
Valerie Mauriello  
Nicole McGrath  
Margaret McLeod  
Jennifer Mermans  
Evelina Padilla  
Maria Pinho  
Clare Sapienza-Eck  
Robert Sterling  
Charles Venti

## Acknowledgements:

Special thanks to...

Child & Family Resources: Rebekka Zydel  
Child Care Connection: Nancy Thomson  
NJ Department of Children and Families:  
Joseph Ribsam  
NJ Department of Education: Karin Garver  
NJ Department of Health and Human Services:  
Natasha Johnson  
Population Reference Bureau: Jean D'Amico,  
Kelvin Pollard  
Programs for Parents: Beverly Lynn

Advocates for Children of New Jersey's work on this report was made possible through the generous support of The Nicholson Foundation and our individual donors.



For more information, visit [www.acnj.org](http://www.acnj.org).

---

## Connect with us!



Find us on Facebook at  
[facebook.com/acnjforkids](https://facebook.com/acnjforkids)



Follow us on Twitter at  
[twitter.com/acnjforkids](https://twitter.com/acnjforkids)

View our videos at  
[youtube.com/acnjforkids](https://youtube.com/acnjforkids)



35 Halsey Street  
Newark, NJ 07102

(973) 643-3876  
(973) 643-9153 (fax)

[advocates@acnj.org](mailto:advocates@acnj.org)

Advocates for Children of New Jersey is the trusted, independent voice putting children's needs first for more than 30 years. Our work results in better laws and policies, more effective funding and stronger services for children and families. And it means that more children are given the chance to grow up safe, healthy and educated.

Advocates for Children of New Jersey © 2013

Giving Every Child A Chance

# Child Care is Hard to Find, Harder to Afford

## Executive Summary

Quality child care for young children is essential to building strong families, strong communities and an economically-healthy state and nation. Child care is more than a family issue. It is an economic issue that affects thousands of working parents, employers and child care workers across the state.

More than 400,000 New Jersey children ages 5 and under live in families where both parents work. Regardless of where parents live, work or how much they earn, quality child care is hard to find and even harder to afford.

Quality child care is critical for two reasons. First, during children's first five years, the brain develops more than at any other time of their lives. It is imperative that children spend those early days in a nurturing, stimulating environment. Children who experience high-quality child care have a better chance of arriving at kindergarten with the foundation they need for school success, research shows. That means that getting all children off to the right start benefits children, families and our state as a whole.

Second, in order to financially support their children, parents need safe, reliable, affordable care so they can work. Increasingly, both parents must work outside the home to make ends meet, especially in high-cost New Jersey.

New Jersey parents face particular challenges in finding quality early care for their children. The cost of care can take a huge bite out of a family's budget, about 24 percent for an average New Jersey family with two young children and 88 percent for families struggling to survive on poverty-level wages. That is much higher than the recommended 10 percent of family income.<sup>1</sup>



When factoring in New Jersey's high housing costs, even parents earning a decent wage struggle to afford quality care.

New Jersey also faces challenges in regulating and measuring the quality of care children receive in different settings across the state. While New Jersey ranks 17th overall for its child care centers, the state ranks nearly last in the nation for its oversight of child care, according to Child Care Aware of America.<sup>2</sup>

New Jersey is only now beginning to develop a statewide system to rate and improve child care quality — envisioned to initially reach less than one-third of sites serving at-risk young children.

This special *Kids Count* report provides a close look at child care for New Jersey's youngest children, birth to age 5, in two key areas — cost and quality. As New Jersey begins to implement this statewide "quality rating and improvement" system, Advocates for Children of New Jersey provides this report to inform public policy decisions. The goal is to ensure that children of working parents spend their formative years in quality child care, helping children to thrive, while giving employers a stable workforce, and strengthening the economic health of our families, our neighborhoods and the state as a whole.

## What are the child care options for NJ parents?

About 412,000 New Jersey children under age six spend at least part of their week in some form of child care because their parents work. The type of child care a parent selects depends on a variety of factors, including affordability, location, quality, a family's income and where they live. In addition to using formal child care settings, anecdotal evidence suggests New Jersey parents frequently rely on family and friends to meet their child care needs.

In August 2013, about 343,000 slots were available for New Jersey children, ages 0 to 13, in 4,015 child care centers licensed by the state. Of those, 266,000, were in centers licensed to serve children from birth to five years, including all Head Start programs. State law requires most child care centers to be licensed through the New Jersey Department of Children and Families.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, an estimated 11,330 slots were available in private homes that are registered with the state to provide child care. These registered family child care providers can care for up to five children in their home. It is likely that many more people are caring for children in their homes because state registration is voluntary — not mandatory — and many choose not to register. Providers accepting state subsidies, however, must register.

A limited number of programs are available that focus on early education, such as Head Start and state-funded preschool, often becoming a piece of parents' child care arrangements.

Head Start and Early Head Start are federally-funded early education that also provide families with various supports, including health, nutrition and social services. This care is available to a fraction of the eligible children who could benefit from this service. In August 2012, nearly 14,138 children were in Head Start centers across the state, while roughly 1,600 children, ages 0 to 3, attended Early Head Start. This represents just 14 percent of all children, 0-5, living in families earning poverty-level wages, which makes them eligible for Head Start.

New Jersey does, however, fund public preschool for about 52,000 young learners in both school district classrooms and community-based centers. This includes 35 school districts that receive significant state funding to provide high-quality, full-day preschools, which have been nationally recognized.

## Susan's Choice: Quality Child Care or Feeding Her Children

Susan Jones\* worries each day when she drops her 3-year-old off at a child care center that isn't up to the standards she would like for her second youngest child.

But she has no choice. The care for her 1-year-old consumes a large portion of her income and she can't afford the same amount for her older child.

The Atlantic County mom works full-time as an assistant teacher at a Pleasantville preschool, attends college part-time and cares for her four children. She hopes to earn a degree in psychology and find a job as a school guidance counselor or psychologist.

For several years, Susan cobbled together child care, prevailing on various family members to help out. But it's difficult to constantly ask others who are busy juggling their own lives to care for her children.

"My grandmother helps me but she's 78," she says. "Other family members help. But, honestly, for awhile my kids haven't been at a steady place."

She knew she had to get some consistent care for her two youngest children. She was able to find a private child care home for her 1-year-old. But at \$500 a month for one child, she could not afford to place her 3-year-old there, too. Care for both children would have consumed half of her monthly salary.

"I would have liked to send them together," she says. "I'm not happy with the environment of the child care center. But I had to choose which kid could go where because it costs more than I can afford. And since the 3-year-old could talk, I decided to send him to the center."

*\*Name has been changed to protect the family's privacy.*





## NJ Demographics and Working Parents, 2012

Child Population 0 – 5	638,658
# Children 0 – 5 with All Parents Working	412,293
% Children 0 – 5 with All Parents Working	66
# Children 0 – 5 in Single-Parent Households	142,121
% Children 0 – 5 in Single-Parent Households	25

## Child Care Options in New Jersey, 2013

Number of Centers that Offer Care for Children Ages 0 – 2 1/2	1,625
Number of Centers that Offer Care for Children Ages 0 – 5	3,108
Capacity of Centers that Offer Care to Children Ages 0 – 5	250,300
Head Start Enrollment	14,138
Early Head Start Enrollment	1,611
District-Based Publicly-Funded Preschool Enrollment	26,606

### Family Child Care

Number of Registered Family Child Care Homes	2,266
Estimated Capacity of Registered Family Child Care Homes	11,330
Approved Relative/Friend Homes	1,603

*Data on capacity of child care centers that serve children ages 0 - 5 exclude Head Start and Early Head Start enrollment. Head Start and Early Head Start enrollment were not available for 2013. Approved relative/friend homes are only available to parents receiving child care subsidies. The quantity of this type of care can vary greatly from month to month, depending on the number of parents who qualify and choose to use it.*

Another 110 districts receive funding to provide preschool, but many are only half-day and may or may not meet high-quality standards. It is positive that New Jersey invests in preschool, yet many children are unable to access high-quality preschools simply because of where they live.

With the data currently available, it is impossible to calculate whether these options are sufficient to meet the needs of New Jersey's working parents and their children.

Anecdotally, we know that many parents struggle to find quality care for their infants and toddlers. In fact, less than half of New Jersey child care centers are licensed to provide infant/toddler care. Caring for infants and toddlers is more expensive as rules require both lower staff-child ratios and special facility accommodations for very young children.

According to a U.S. Census report,<sup>4</sup> about one-third of employees with young children work evenings, weekends and variable shifts. Yet, only an estimated 4 percent of New Jersey licensed child care centers and 28 percent of family homes provide this off-hours care, according to the New Jersey Division of Family Development.

To assist parents in locating care, every New Jersey county has a Child Care Resource and Referral Agency that can supply a list of providers in that county, including family child care providers. While these agencies may provide general information about what constitutes quality care, they cannot offer assistance in determining the level of quality a particular provider offers. They can tell parents which programs are accredited, Head Start or state-funded preschools.

## How much do New Jersey parents pay for child care?

For parents of young children, child care consumes a major portion of the family budget — more than healthcare and food. After housing, child care is, on average, a family's second highest expense, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's *Expenditures on Children by Families, 2012*.<sup>5</sup>

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that parents spend no more than 10 percent of their family income on child care. The typical New Jersey family spends more than double that.

A typical New Jersey family with an infant and toddler, earning the state median income of about \$85,000, spends more than \$20,000 a year on center-based child care, or about 24 percent of their gross income. When you factor in New Jersey's high housing costs, even families earning a decent wage struggle to meet all of their family's financial needs and must often choose between quality child care and other necessities.

Low-income and single-parent households face an even tougher battle. Single working mothers of one infant can expect to spend about one-third of their income for child care. Low-income parents will spend one quarter of their income on care for one child, or nearly half for two children.

Barbara, a Central Jersey mom of three, has a typical story. Although she and her husband both work full-time, the family cannot afford regulated care — and they earn a little too much to qualify for assistance. Instead, they have relied on neighbors and others to care for their children in private homes. Over the years, they have been forced to change providers

repeatedly because they were concerned about their daughters' safety and well-being.

"The other day, my daughter came home with scratches on her face so I had to find someone else," said Barbara, who works as an administrative assistant for a non-profit organization. "It's hard to find people you can trust for the amount of money we can afford to pay. It is very stressful and worrisome for everyone. But I just can't afford to put my daughter in a licensed child care center."

### Average Annual Costs of Child Care, 2012

#### Child Care Center

Infants Age 1 and Under	\$10,949
Preschooler	\$9,170

#### Registered Family Child Care

Infants Age 1 and Under	\$8,520
Preschooler	\$7,562

### Child Care Costs 2012, Average New Jersey Family

**Median Income for Families with Children \$85,185**

Center-Based Child Care Costs		Registered Family Child Care Costs	
Center-Based Infant Care as % of Family Median Income	13	Registered Family Infant Care as % of Median Family Income	10
Center-Based Preschool Care as % of Family Median Income	11	Registered Family Preschool Care as % of Family Median Income	9

### Child Care Costs 2012, Average Single Mother Household

**Single-Mother Median Income \$27,589**

# of Children Ages 0 – 5 in Single-Mother Households	109,445
% of Children Ages 0 – 5 in Single-Mother Households	19

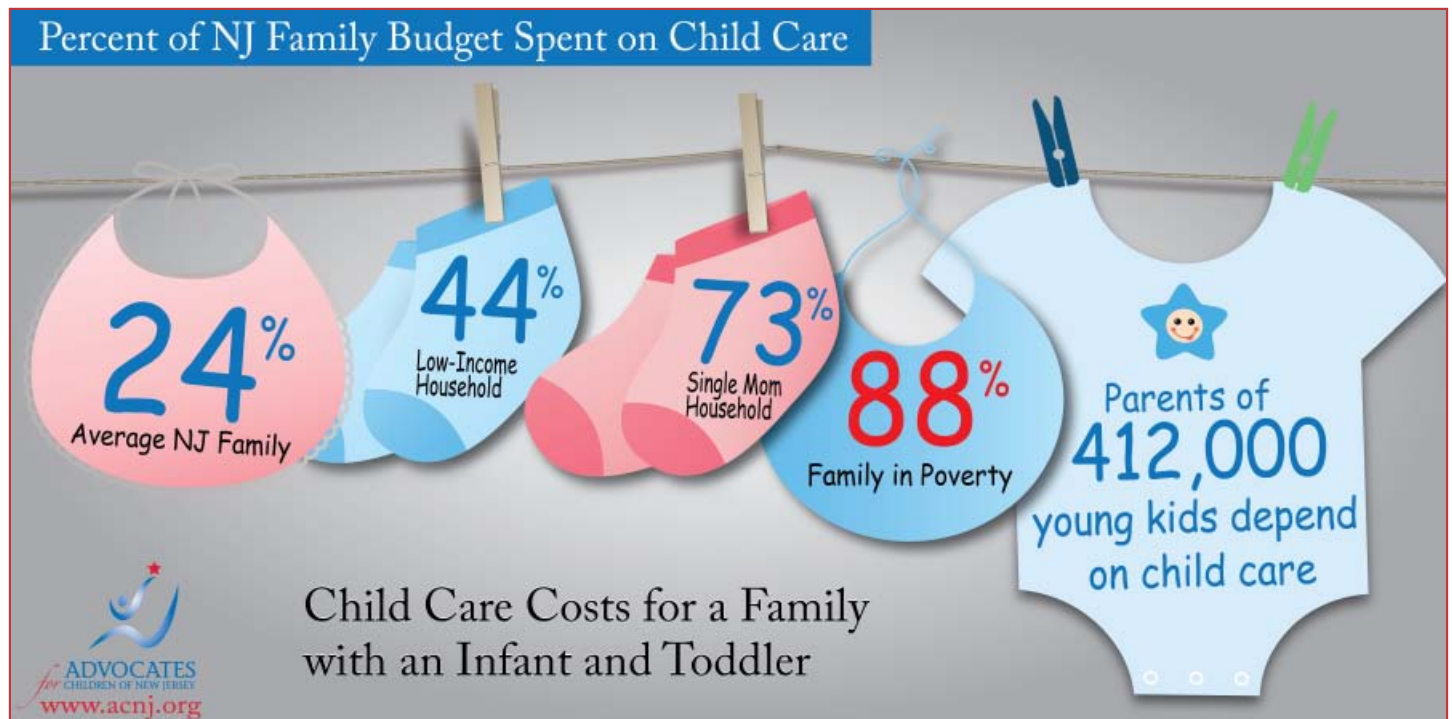
Licensed Center-Based Child Care Costs		Registered Family Child Care Costs	
Center-Based Infant Care as % of Single-Mother Median Income	40	Registered Family Infant Care as % of Single-Mother Family Income	31
Center-Based Preschool Care as % of Single-Mother Median Income	33	Registered Family Preschool Care as % of Single-Mother Median Income	27

## Child Care Costs 2012, Average Family in Poverty

Federal Poverty Level for a Family of 4		\$23,050	
# of Children Ages 0 – 5 Below Poverty Level		113,637	
% of Children Ages 0 – 5 Below Poverty Level		18	
Licensed Center-Based Child Care Costs		Registered Family Child Care Costs	
Center-Based Infant Care as % of Poverty-Level Income	48	Registered Family Infant Care as % of Poverty-Level Income	37
Center-Based Preschool Care as % of Family Median Income	40	Registered Family Preschool Care as % of Poverty-Level Income	33

## Child Care Costs 2012, Average Low-Income Family

Federal Low-Income Level for a Family of 4		\$46,100	
# of Children Ages 0 – 5 in Low-Income Families		225,927	
% of Children Ages 0 – 5 Low-Income Families		36	
Licensed Center-Based Child Care Costs		Registered Family Child Care Costs	
Center-Based Infant Care as % of Low-Income Level	24	Registered Family Infant Care as % of Low-Income Level	18
Center-Based Preschool Care as % of Low-Income Level	20	Registered Family Preschool Care as % of Low-Income Level	16



## Limited Assistance Available

Only families earning up to double the federal poverty level, (\$46,100 for a family of four), can qualify for a child care subsidy. In state fiscal year 2013, a monthly average of about 50,000 children received a federal child care subsidy. In 2012, about 25,500 children ages 0 to 5 received a subsidy, representing just 11 percent of all young children living in families that would qualify for help with child care.<sup>6</sup>

New Jersey does provide other child care assistance, but it is available only to families in certain situations.

### Family/friend assistance

Parents who are working or attending school can use a subsidy to pay a relative or friend to care for their children. As of June 2013, about 1,600 parents were receiving this type of assistance. The reimbursement rate for these “approved” home providers is lower than the rate for child care centers and registered family child care homes. Oversight of these arrangements is minimal and the number of parents using this assistance varies greatly from month to month.

### Child protection subsidies

New Jersey also helps families involved in the state’s child protection system. This includes child care subsidies for foster parents and birth parents whose children are living at home but are under the supervision of the state Division of Child Protection and Permanency.

State officials say that New Jersey no longer has a waiting list for child care subsidies. It is unclear, however, why so many low-income parents who would qualify for subsidies are not receiving them, nor how those parents are managing to pay for child care. Studies do show that children in low-income families are more likely to spend their early years in informal child care arrangements with friends and family members, which tend to be less stable.<sup>7</sup>

Another factor may be the lack of effective, coordinated outreach to children living in “underserved” families, such as low-income, immigrant and migrant families, according to a 2012 report from the National Institute of Early Education Research at Rutgers.<sup>8</sup> The report documents a disjointed system of outreach that may result in many parents being unaware that child care assistance is available. The report provided



a host of recommendations to improve efforts to reach families who could benefit from child care assistance.

### Tax credits help

To help pay for child care, New Jersey families, regardless of income, can claim federal tax credits for up to 35 percent of their child care expenses, according to the Internal Revenue Service. The Child Care and Dependent Care Tax Credit provides up to \$3,000 a year for one child or up to \$6,000 for two or more. However, New Jersey is one of only fourteen states that offer no state tax credit, earning an “F” in the National Women’s Law Center’s *Making the Grade for Care 2011* report.<sup>9</sup>

It is critical to New Jersey families, communities, employers and our state that all young children receive high-quality care and that parents receive the assistance they need to find and afford that care.



## How can NJ parents assess the quality of child care?

New Jersey is now creating a state-wide system that rates and improves the quality of child care, similar to those in place in 37 other states.

These “quality rating and improvement systems” provide information to parents about the quality of care in all settings and give child care providers the help and incentives they need to improve child care quality.

In general, these systems use research-based tools to assess and improve quality in early child care and education. Based on those assessments, states typically assign a rating to each provider to give parents a way to compare quality and select an appropriate provider.

Another critical piece of these systems is to help child care providers to improve the quality of the care they offer. States with effective child care rating systems typically give providers supports and training to strengthen their skills and then rewards them with financial incentives when they meet goals for improvement. In addition, these systems provide a level of accountability currently lacking in New Jersey for the public investment made in early child care and education.

### Generally, the goals of child care quality rating systems are to:

- Expand parents’ awareness of and use of quality information when selecting care
- Reward child care providers that improve quality
- Support training and professional development of the early childhood workforce
- Expand the supply of quality child care, especially those serving low-income children
- Give young children the foundation they need for school success



New Jersey is piloting a child care rating system. Called Grow NJ Kids, plans call for expanding from the initial pilot of 56 early learning programs to 1,790 by 2018, or about 28 percent of sites serving infants and young children with high needs, according to the state’s Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant application, submitted in October 2013. This will eventually include child care centers, family child care homes, special education programs, state-funded preschools and other early education settings. The state is also planning to develop a training academy to coordinate professional development and technical assistance for programs serving high-needs children, according to the application.

If New Jersey is successful in securing this grant, funding would be allocated to pay for engaging parents in their child’s early education, promoting an effective career development system for early childhood educators and assessing children’s school readiness upon entering kindergarten, while creating a statewide database to measure progress.

State officials say that current supports, such as parent liaisons in Head Start and certain preschools, would continue to receive state support and are not contingent upon New Jersey receiving the federal grant.

This is a welcome and long-awaited plan. New Jersey’s quality rating system was first spearheaded by The Build Initiative, led by Advocates for Children of New Jersey, more than a decade ago. The current plan, however, only covers 40 percent of at-risk children. A longer range plan needs to be developed to ensure that all parents and their children have

access to information about the quality of care and providers across New Jersey have supports to improve child care quality. In addition, if New Jersey fails to secure federal funding, the state would need to identify funds to support the first phase of implementation. So far, only limited funds have been earmarked for this effort.

## How well-trained are NJ child care workers?

New Jersey’s child care workers earn barely above the poverty level at \$22,880 a year, far lower than preschool, kindergarten and elementary school teachers. This low salary can result in high turnover and lack of staff skills, which are both detrimental to young children.<sup>10</sup>

While education and training requirements can vary depending on the size of a center, in general, head teachers must have a BA, which can be in any field, as long as they have related credits or experience in early childhood development. Assistant teachers are required to have one of seven different qualifications, such as an associate’s degree in early childhood education or a Child Development Associate Credential.

Currently, comprehensive data in this area are only available for the federal Head Start child care centers, which show that nearly all have at least a child care credential and 71 percent have a degree or advanced degree in early childhood education. With an annual average salary of \$37,575, these teachers also earn almost twice as much as the average child care worker in New Jersey.

New Jersey collects information about other child care workers’ credentials through the New Jersey Registry, an online database that records a worker’s education, training and work experience in the field of early childhood education, afterschool and primary education. The goal is to help participants

track their annual professional development hours, while providing data about the New Jersey early childhood workforce. Unfortunately, to date just 2,700 of roughly 65,000 child care workers are active registrants, according to Professional Impact NJ, which administers the registry. The New Jersey Department of Human Services is working with Professional Impact to expand capacity to collect data in the registry.

### Child Care Wages in New Jersey 2012

Average Annual Wage for Child Care Workers	\$22,880
Average Annual Wage for Preschool Teachers*	\$36,820
Average Annual Wage for Kindergarten Teachers*	\$60,130
Average Annual Wage for Elementary School Teachers*	\$66,240
Average Annual Wage for Preschool and Child Care Center/Program Administrators	\$60,530

### Head Start Staff Information — NJ 2012

Average Teacher Salary	\$37,575
% Teachers with no Credential	2%
% Teachers with a Child Development Associate Credential or State Equivalent	14%
% Teachers with A.A. in Early Childhood or Related Field	12%
% Teachers with a B.A. in Early Childhood or Related Field	59%
% Teachers with Graduate Degree in Early Childhood or Related Field	13%

## Where can parents obtain information about child care quality?

While this system is being developed, parents are left with little information about the quality of care their children are receiving during those critical first years. Just 6.5 percent of New Jersey’s 4,000 centers have earned a national accreditation. An even smaller number of family child care providers — seven statewide — have earned an accreditation from the National Association for Family Child Care.

### Accredited Child Care Centers — 2013

Number of Centers	4,015
Number of Accredited Centers	262
% of Centers that are Accredited	6.5

This leaves parents with very little credible information to consider when making one of the most important decisions of their children’s lives — where their kids will spend their days during their most formative years.

While New Jersey ranks 3rd nationally for its “program standards,” the state ranks nearly last in the nation for center-based child care oversight, according to *Child Care Aware® of America*.<sup>12</sup>

State officials dispute this ranking, saying it fails to consider the frequency of inspections and the qualifications of licensing staff.

According to state officials, New Jersey resumed annual monitoring of child care centers last year and hired more inspectors to conduct these unannounced inspections. They also say that most inspectors hold a degree and early childhood experience.

New Jersey family child care homes are inspected once every two years, with random annual monitoring conducted on at least 20 percent of homes in any given year, according to state rules.

Oversight is also lacking for home-based child care, coming in 52<sup>nd</sup>, primarily because the state does not require home-based providers be licensed by the state.<sup>13</sup>

## Pennsylvania Keystone STARS

Pennsylvania Keystone STARS is one of the largest and most mature child care quality rating systems in the nation, recently celebrating its 10-year anniversary. Instead of driving quality improvement through minimal licensing requirements, Pennsylvania’s approach has been to invest in a voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Today, nearly 4,000 child care providers, serving about 160,000 children annually, participate in Keystone STARS. This includes 70 percent of child care centers statewide.

Administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Child Development and Early Learning, Keystone STARS’ standards are organized into four key areas: staff education, learning environment, leadership/ management and family/community partnerships. When a program meets the standards in a certain area, it receives a mark of quality — a STAR designation. A good Keystone STARS designation informs parents that their children are in a developmentally-appropriate, respectful environment in which they are learning new skills and concepts each day, enhancing their development and improving their chances of success in school and in life.

Participating providers can receive financial assistance for college credits and training, technical assistance to meet requirements for higher STARS levels and financial supports to help continue to improve the quality of their care. Keystone STARS providers that serve children receiving a subsidy also receive higher reimbursements for the quality care they provide.

Keystone STARS promotes parent choice as the ultimate driver of child care quality improvement. Parents looking for child care can easily find out if a provider in their community has attained a star rating by simply typing their zip code into the Keystone STARS website. Through information and financial supports to parents and providers, Keystone STARS has helped to spur both supply and demand of higher quality care. New Jersey should do the same.

## How Does New Jersey Rank Nationally with Child Care?

	National Rank
Oversight for Center-Based Child Care	46 <sup>th</sup>
Program Standards for Center-Based Child Care	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Overall for Family Child Care	52 <sup>nd</sup>
Overall for Center-Based Child Care	17 <sup>th</sup>

*Note: Family Child Care only receives an overall rank from Child Care Aware.*

Other inspections are conducted on both centers and family homes when a complaint is filed against a particular provider. The state Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit investigates allegations of abuse or neglect in child care settings.

New Jersey's civil service rules do not require child care inspectors to have a bachelor's degree or a background in early education. According to state officials, however, the Office of Licensing attempts to hire candidates with degrees and all but one of the current inspectors have at least a BA. Sixty-three percent have degrees in early childhood, elementary or special education. In addition, inspectors receive four to five months of training, state officials said.

This includes orientation to licensing and uniform fire code regulations, safe playground standards, health and safety standards, physical plant, early childhood curriculum and other areas.

Trainings are conducted both in the office and in the field, under an experienced inspector/mentor. All inspectors complete this training before being allowed to work independently. In addition, the Office of Licensing provides additional "refreshers" during staff meetings, as well as in-service trainings.

## What do the inspections cover?

The state Office of Licensing inspects child care centers using a 7-page form that covers a myriad of health, safety and quality of care measures, ranging from having first-aid kits on-hand and conducting monthly fire drills to ensuring that a variety of age-appropriate activities are being offered.

Licensing staff say that inspectors typically spend three to five hours in a center, but that can range, depending on the center size and whether it's providing all-day or after-school care. Small centers and after-school programs typically take much less



time. Inspectors spend approximately 20 minutes in each classroom, observing the activities and children’s interaction with each other, as well as how teachers and other staff interact with the children, licensing officials said.

Inspectors also review a center’s records, including discipline policies, activities schedule and curriculum. This, they say, gives inspectors a clear picture of the quality of care children are receiving.

However, with a staff of 38 inspectors responsible for oversight of roughly 4,000 centers statewide, the average inspector is juggling more than 100 centers over the course of one year. That is more than twice the 50 centers recommended by Child Care Aware of America.<sup>14</sup> Licensing officials say inspectors may conduct as many as two or three inspections a day, in addition to travel time.

They must also investigate complaints made by parents or others who interact with the centers. The licensing office typically receives a total of 1,000 complaints a year, adding to inspectors’ workload. In addition, inspectors must follow-up on centers that have been cited for violations in the routine inspections.

### Oklahoma Department of Human Services

Oklahoma is one of the more progressive states in its efforts to ensure the health and safety of children in child care. Oklahoma’s child care providers are inspected, unannounced, three times per year, compared to New Jersey’s annual inspections.

The licensing reports are available online. Parents and others can easily view inspection reports and a history of any complaints by visiting the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Child Care Locator page. In addition to detailed information about the child care program and its quality rating, the Child Care Locator also provides a summary of recent monitoring visits, including date of the visit, reason for the visit, how a provider performed on general requirements, along with a description of each category and a complaint summary, if applicable.

Posting information on the Internet provides parents with easy access to critical information to make informed decisions about who will care for their children. New Jersey should implement a similar system.

The state has added licensing staff in recent years and reduced caseloads from about 200 centers per staff member. Even with this, the volume of work inspectors and their supervisors face could compromise their ability to accurately assess each center to ensure children are safe and in positive learning environments.

Some child care providers say that inspections focus primarily on health and safety issues.

“There is very little monitoring on areas such as whether developmentally-appropriate practices are being used or whether the classroom is a rich environment for learning,” said one North Jersey child care center operator.

In addition, these inspection reports are not always readily available to parents. The state requires centers to have copies of inspection and violation reports on-hand and provide them to parents upon request, but it is unclear how many parents are aware these reports exist or whether centers routinely alert parents to the fact that they are entitled to review these records.

According to the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, the public can call the department to review these records. ACNJ staff members called the number listed on the department’s website several times in the fall of 2013 to determine the process for obtaining these records. They were told an inspector would contact them within five days and conduct a “file review” over the phone. ACNJ staff received a return call about one month after placing the initial call, and only after a draft of this report was shared with the Department of Children and Families.

Other states, including Oklahoma, provide interactive websites where parents can find licensing reports, learn if a center has had any violations and do child abuse/neglect background checks on center staff. Up until September, when inspectors began using electronic forms, New Jersey relied on an archaic paper-based system.

Another problem is that New Jersey does not currently require finger-printing or criminal background checks for family child care providers or anyone living in the house. A federal proposal would require states to mandate these checks but this has not yet been approved. New Jersey could enact such a requirement independent of federal action.

## Summary

Clearly, New Jersey has a long way to go before we can say that all young children have access to quality child care that can lay the foundation for success in school and in life. This critical early care is important for children, parents and our state as a whole. When children arrive at kindergarten ready for success, they are more likely to graduate career- or college-ready. This strengthens our state on many fronts, including health, education and economics.



## Recommendations

To help New Jersey's working parents afford quality child care, New Jersey should explore ways to increase supports for working parents. This could include a variety of solutions, including more effective outreach to parents who qualify for child care assistance and expanding efforts to provide supports to those that do not qualify under current guidelines.

To improve the quality of child care and help parents select quality care, New Jersey should strengthen

its inspection process and provide a more user-friendly way for parents to access information about particular centers. The state should also accelerate implementation of Grow NJ Kids and strengthen regulation of family child care homes.

Advocates for Children of New Jersey offers more specific recommendations in an issue brief that accompanies this report, entitled, *Child Care Solutions for NJ's Working Families*.

## Endnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center for the Child Care Bureau. (2008). Child Care and Development Fund: Report of state and territory plans: FY 2008-2009. Section 3.5.5 — Affordable co-payments, p. 89. Retrieved from <http://www.researchconnections.org/child-care/resources/14784/pdf>.
- <sup>2</sup> Child Care Aware of America. (2013). We Can Do Better: Child Care Aware® of America's Ranking of State Child Care Center Regulation and Oversight, 2013 Update. Arlington, VA: Author.
- <sup>3</sup> Centers housed in private religious institutions, preschools located in public schools and a handful of other types of child care centers are exempt from licensing requirements.
- <sup>4</sup> US Census Bureau. (April 2013). Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Spring 2011. Current Population Reports, P70-135. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC: Author.
- <sup>5</sup> Lino, Mark. (2013). Expenditures on Children by Families, 2012. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- <sup>6</sup> New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development. Data are for October 2012.
- <sup>7</sup> Schmit, S. and Matthews, H. (August 2013). Better For Babies: A Study of State Infant and Toddler Child Care Policies, Washington, DC: Center For Law and Social Policy.
- <sup>8</sup> Sharp, J., Alexandre, J., and Barnett, W.S. (March 2012). More than Marketing: A New Jersey Study on Outreach to Underserved Populations Ages Birth to Five. National Institute of Early Education Research.
- <sup>9</sup> National Women's Law Center. (April 2011). Making the Grade for Care: Ranking State Child and Dependent Care Tax Provisions. Washington, DC: Author.
- <sup>10</sup> Cohen, J and Ewen, D. (October 2008). Infants and Toddlers in Child Care. ZERO TO THREE and Center for Law and Social Policy.
- <sup>11</sup> National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC). Retrieved from: <http://www.nafcc.org> October 2013.
- <sup>12</sup> Child Care Aware of America. We Can Do Better: Child Care Aware® of America's Ranking of State Child Care Center Regulation and Oversight, 2013 Update. Arlington, VA: Author.
- <sup>13</sup> Child Care Aware of America. (2012). Leaving Children to Chance: 2012 Update. Ranking of State Standards and Oversight of Small Family Child Care Homes. Arlington, VA: Author.
- <sup>14</sup> Child Care Aware of America. We Can Do Better: Child Care Aware® of America's Ranking of State Child Care Center Regulation and Oversight, 2013 Update. Arlington, VA: Author.

## Data Sources and Technical Notes

**Child Population 0 – 5, 2012.** As reported by the Population Reference Bureau, analysis of Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Health Statistics, *Vintage 2012 postcensal estimates of the resident population of the United States*. Data files prepared under a collaborative arrangement between CDC/NCHS and the US Census Bureau. Data are as of July 1, 2012.

**Number and Percent Children 0 – 5 with All Parents Working, 2012.** As reported by the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, chart b23008. Includes children in two parent households where both parents are working and children in single parent households where that parent is working.

**Number and Percent Children 0 – 5 in Single-Parent Households, 2012.** As reported by the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, chart b09002.

**Number and Capacity of Child Care Centers Licensed to Serve Ages 0 – 5, 2013.** As reported by the NJ Department of Children and Families, Office of Licensing. Data only include centers that are licensed to serve children between the ages of 0 and 5. Data exclude Head Start and Early Head Start enrollment.

**Number and Estimated Capacity of Registered Family Child Care Programs, 2012.** As reported by the NJ Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NJACCRRRA), *The State of Child Care in New Jersey: A Profile of Key Child Care Indicators 2012*.

**Approved Relative/Friend Homes, 2013.** As reported by the NJ Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development. Data are for fiscal year 2013.

**Head Start Enrollment, 2012.** As reported by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) DataFinder. Data include funded enrollment numbers and are an analysis of Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) data.

**Early Head Start Enrollment, 2012.** As reported by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) DataFinder. Data include funded enrollment numbers and are an analysis of Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) data.

**District-Based Publicly Funded Preschool Enrollment, 2012-13.** As reported by the NJ Department of Education. Data include the number of children ages 3 and 4 enrolled in half- and full-day New Jersey Department of Education approved preschools that are operated in-district. Excludes children enrolled in preschools that are operated in community centers and children enrolled in Head Start or other federally-funded programs that do not receive any state aid.

**Average Annual Costs of Child Care, 2012.** As reported by the NJ Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NJACCRRRA), *The State of Child Care in New Jersey: A Profile of Key Child Care Indicators 2012*. The average annual costs were compiled by local CCR&Rs through a survey that is reported annually to Child Care Aware of America. Figures only include those centers that report their fees to Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies.

**Median Income for Families with Children, 2012.** As reported by the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, chart b19125.

**Single-Mother Median Income, 2013.** As reported by the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, chart b19126.

**Number and Percent of Children Ages 0 – 5 in Single-Mother Households, 2012.** As reported by the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, chart b09002.

**Federal Poverty Level for a Family of Four, 2012.** As reported by the US Department of Health and Human Services, 2012 HHS Poverty Guidelines.

**Number and Percent of Children Ages 0 – 5 Below Poverty Level, 2012.** As reported by the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, chart b17024.

**Federal Low-Income Level for a Family of Four, 2012.** As reported by the US Department of Health and Human Services, 2012 HHS Poverty Guidelines.

**Number and Percent of Children Ages 0 – 5 in Low-Income Families, 2012.** As reported by the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, chart b17024.

**Number of Child Care Centers, 2013.** As reported by the Department of Children and Families, Office of Licensing. Data include all child care centers, serving all ages.

**Number and Percent of Accredited Child Care Centers, 2013.** As reported by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Early Childhood Program Accreditation.

**National Ranks for Oversight, Standards and Overall for Center-Based Child Care, 2013.** Child Care Aware of America. (2013). *We Can Do Better: Child Care Aware® of America's Ranking of State Child Care Center Regulations and Oversight, 2013 Update*. Arlington, VA: Author.

**National Rank for Overall for Family Child Care, 2012.** Child Care Aware of America. Leaving Children to Chance. *NACCRRRA's Ranking of State Standards and Oversight of Small Family Child Care Homes, 2012 Update*. Arlington, VA: Author.

**Average Annual Wage for Child Care Workers, 2012.** As reported by the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) Survey data. Data are as of May 2012.

**Average Annual Wage for Preschool Teachers, 2012.** As reported by the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) Survey data. Data are as of May 2012.

**Average Annual Wage for Kindergarten Teachers, 2012.** As reported by the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) Survey data. Data are as of May 2012.

**Average Annual Wage for Elementary School Teachers, 2012.** As reported by the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) Survey data. Data are as of May 2012.

**Average Annual Wage for Preschool and Child Care Center/Program Administrators, 2012.** As reported by the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) Survey data. Data are as of May 2012.

**Average Head Start Teacher Salary, 2012.** As reported by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) DataFinder. Average salary includes all programs, including part-day and migrant/seasonal.

**Head Start Teacher Credentials, 2012.** As reported by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) DataFinder. Data are an analysis of Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) data.

## Right from the Start

This report is part of *Advocates for Children of New Jersey's* ongoing Right from the Start Campaign, aimed at improving the safety, health and well-being of New Jersey's youngest children. This initiative examines issues and advances change to give children the strongest possible start.

A coordinated early care and education system, starting at birth and continuing into a child's early elementary years, is the foundation to ensure that children are reading on target by 3rd grade. This early literacy is key to long-term school success.

Child care is a critical piece of an effective early learning system, as is high-quality preschool and early intervention programs.

While New Jersey has some aspects of a strong early care and education system in place — quality preschools for some children and growing use of home visitation services — there is still much more to do before we can say that all children are getting off to the right start.

To learn more, visit [www.acnj.org](http://www.acnj.org).

### Connect with us!



Find us on Facebook at [facebook.com/acnjforkids](http://facebook.com/acnjforkids)

Follow us on Twitter at [twitter.com/acnjforkids](http://twitter.com/acnjforkids)



View our videos at [youtube.com/acnjforkids](http://youtube.com/acnjforkids)



## Giving Every Child A Chance

35 Halsey Street, 2nd Floor, Newark, NJ 07102 • (973) 643-3876 • Fax (973) 643-9153 • [advocates@acnj.org](mailto:advocates@acnj.org) •

[www.acnj.org](http://www.acnj.org)