Build Family Child Care Into State Early Childhood Plans

When states expand preschool without planning for family childcare(FCC),they risk weakening the mixed-age programs families rely on for infant and toddler care.

What States Can Do

Ensure FCC educators represent their work in state and local decisions
FCC educators are experts in their work, communities, and field. Ensure FCC representation at policy tables and on boards comes directly from educators doing the work. Agencies that develop and enforce regulations cannot substitute for educator representation. Involve educators from the beginning and throughout planning. They should never be an afterthought.

Make sure regulations and sustainability go together
Ensure regulations make sense in practice and uphold best practices and safety. Examine how enrollment rules, age categories, and ratios affect program sustainability. Regulations should never ask the people doing the work to shoulder the burden of keeping the system afloat through their own income, time, and labor.

Connect professional recognition with compensation and benefits
Ensure professional recognition translates into tangible benefits for FCC educators and their families: compensation, health care, retirement, and access to loans and grants. Recognition must go beyond pizza parties and certificates.

Do not reduce reimbursement because care happens in a home
Family child care educators should not receive lower reimbursement because they operate in a home. Care should not be assumed to cost less because it happens in a home rather than a center. The setting does not justify paying educators less.

Use state and community data every year
Use annually updated data as circumstances for children, families, and educators change. Pair surveys with facilitated conversations so educators can explain the numbers and help shape the response. Outdated data leaves states and communities playing catch-up in advancing equity and addressing real concerns.

What families and programs can lose

Educators described losing preschool-ageenrollmentand struggling to fill openings under existing age and ratio rules. Unfilled spots can mean less tuition income and pressure to change ages served or hours offered. Families can lose infant and toddler care, sibling placements, or hours that fit their work schedules.

These findings show the operating pressures states need to consider when planning for FCC.

57.5%
agreed local marketchanges affected their program(84 of 146).

50.7%
changed how theyoperate in response to regulatorychanges (73 of 144).

73.6%
disagreed that subsidy reimbursementscovercare costs (106 of 144).

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Source: 2026 National Family Child Care Landscape Survey Policy Brief, pp. 2-7. The voluntary sample includes 146 survey responses, supplemented by facilitated conversations and written submissions. The figures describe respondents. The risks above are policy implications.