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# Connecticut Early Care & Education Progress Report, 2011

*by Sarah Esty & Cyd Oppenheimer, J.D.*

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**This update<sup>1</sup> of our 2010 Early Care and Education Progress Report seeks to answer the following questions:**

- How many resources is Connecticut investing in early care and education (and where are these resources going)?
- How many children is Connecticut serving, and which children have access to state subsidies for early care and education?
- What is the quality of the early care and education programs and environments to which these children have access?
- Are these children ready for kindergarten, and how are they doing by fourth grade?

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<sup>1</sup> For 2011, we have updated all data from the 2010 Progress Report. All data sources included in our Appendices are omitted from this document for readability, but are available online at [ctkidslink.org](http://ctkidslink.org) or from the author on request. This document provides a brief overview of any significant changes from 2010 and restates our recommendations for reform. For more complete context, please see the Connecticut Early Care and Education Progress Report, 2010, available at [ctkidslink.org/publications/ece11progressreport.pdf](http://ctkidslink.org/publications/ece11progressreport.pdf). A full new edition of our Early Care and Education Progress Report will be available in December 2012.



## Key Findings

- *We still need system reform.* As our data amply show, there is no method to the madness of Connecticut's publicly-funded early care and education programs and services, which is currently a patchwork of multiple funding streams, controlled by multiple agencies, with varied reporting and eligibility requirements and inconsistent and insufficient data collection. Connecticut's federal Race to the Top application and the passage of Public Act 181, creating a planning process for an early care and education system, represent a much-needed new commitment to the development of a comprehensive, coordinated system of care that will allow us to serve our youngest and most vulnerable citizens in the highest-quality, most developmentally appropriate, and highest-impact environments. However, substantive steps towards implementation have been minimal.
- *Funding levels are still too low.* The state's strong commitment to systems building and improvement has not been accompanied by funding for this system. Total state funding for early care and education in 2011 increased by less than 1% from 2010, and remains more than 10% below 2002 levels.
- *We are not serving all the children who need help.* In October 2010, Connecticut was providing state subsidies for early care and education to more than 40,000 children under the age of 5. However, over 86% of infants and toddlers, and at least 25% of preschoolers living in struggling families (defined here as families earning under 75% of the state median income) remain unserved by any form of state or federal subsidy for early care and education.
- *We need more data so we can do this right.* We continue to have insufficient data to determine the extent of the impact that receiving a state or federal early care and education subsidy has on a child's later school success. We also lack sufficient data to determine which programs and services are having the greatest impact or why.

## Why do we care?

- Research is clear: **high quality early care and education can be powerful counters to risk factors – such as poverty, abuse or neglect, and limited parental education – that cause some children to enter kindergarten at a disadvantage from which they never recover.** Data show that children who have access to language-rich, nurturing, and responsive caregivers in the early years are more likely to be academically and socially ready for kindergarten, less likely to need special education services or be retained, and more likely to graduate from high school and become productive members of the workforce.
- **Increasing access to high quality early care and education environments keeps Connecticut working.** In 2010, 67% of Connecticut children under six lived in families where all parents were working or looking for work.<sup>2</sup> For many families with young children, child care is more expensive than any other necessity. Making child care affordable, reliable, and high-quality enables parents to show up at work every day.
- **Decreasing investment in early care and education heightens the achievement gap and hurts our economy, now and in the future.**



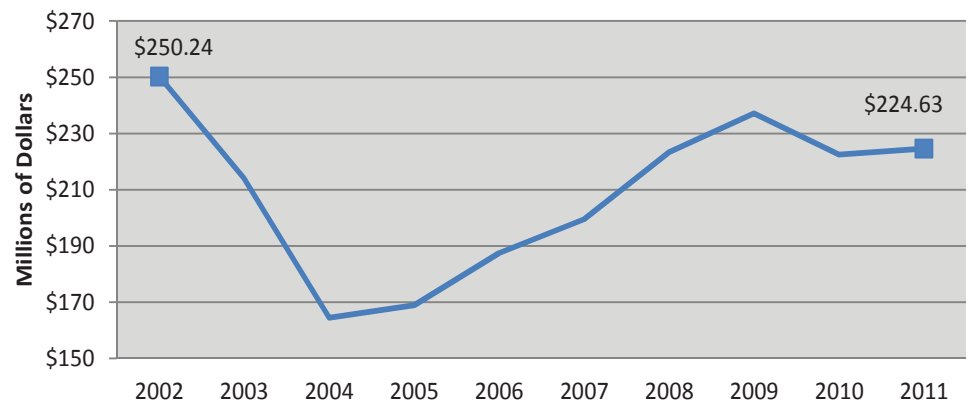
<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Table C23008: Age of Own Children Under 18 Years in Families and Subfamilies by Living Arrangements by Employment Status of Parents – Universe: Own children under 18 years in families and subfamilies.

## Resources: How much is Connecticut spending on early care and education, and where are these resources going?

Connecticut spent \$224.63 million<sup>3</sup> on early care and education in 2011, up slightly from \$222.48 million in 2010, but still below the 2002 high of \$250.24 million. Connecticut's program-rich, system-poor nature is reflected in the distribution of these funds, which was as follows:

- \$215.63 million spent on *programming*, defined as funding given directly to early care and education providers to subsidize "slots" in their programs, centers, or homes;
- \$7.19 million spent on *quality improvement*, defined as funding earmarked for program enhancements, professional training and development, and technical assistance and support;
- \$1.81 million spent on *infrastructure*, defined as funding for strategic planning, data collection and analysis, and design and management of a coordinated system of early care and education.

### Total Amount Spent on Early Childhood (Adjusted to 2011 Dollars)



<sup>3</sup> This amount does not include federal funding for Head Start or Early Head Start, for which \$59.32 million was available for Connecticut in Federal Fiscal Year 2011. (See e-mail from Grace-Ann Whitney, State Head Start Collaboration Office, State Department of Education, October 26, 2011.) We included federal funds to the extent that state government has some degree of discretion over how these funds are spent, such as funds from the Child Care and Development Block Grant and the Social Services Block Grant. Because Head Start funds go directly to programs, and do not go through state government at all, we felt that including them artificially inflated the extent to which Connecticut is choosing to invest in its youngest children. Note that we do include children served by Head Start and Early Head Start in our account of the number of children served by subsidized early care and education programs, as in this instance we are interested in the actual number of children receiving services, and whether or not those services are state- or federally-subsidized is irrelevant.

Notably, although the amount spent on infrastructure remained low, it does reflect a 31% increase from 2010 levels. This increase was driven partly by new funding from the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act directed to the Early Childhood Education Cabinet and partly by a reconstituted funding match for the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund's community planning initiative (a multi-year initiative intended to provide local communities with the resources to create their own early childhood systems blueprint).

*The Good News: Connecticut increased its expenditures on early care and education in 2011, and devoted more financial resources and governmental attention to critically-needed system-building work.*

*The Bad News: Overall spending on early childhood remains below 2002 (and even 2009) levels. Funding for infrastructure building and quality improvement remains inadequate.*



## Capacity: How many children is Connecticut serving with early care and education subsidies?

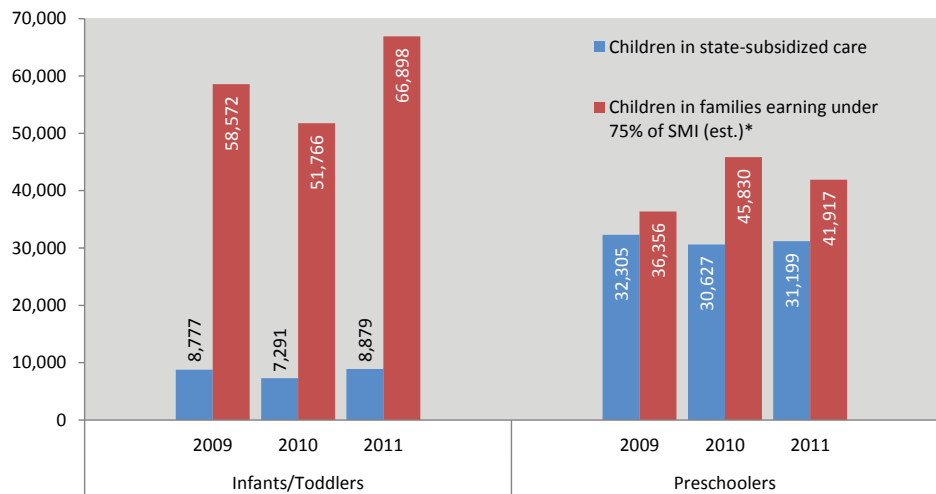
Connecticut served 8,879 infants and toddlers, and 31,199 3- and 4-year-olds with early care and education subsidies in 2011. This represents a 22% increase in infants/toddlers served, and a 2% increase in preschoolers served, from 2010. The increase in the number of children served was driven primarily by increased funding for Care4Kids (the state-funded child care subsidy program for poor working families).

*The Good News: More infants, toddlers, and preschoolers were able to access care through state and federal subsidies in 2011, with very substantial increases in the number of infants and toddlers getting care.*

*The Bad News: Less than 14% of infants/toddlers living in families earning under 75% of the State Median Income are receiving any kind of state or federal subsidy for early care and education. While we are doing considerably better with our preschoolers, it remains the case that at least one out of every four 3- and 4-year-olds living in a family earning under 75% of the State Median Income does not receive any kind of subsidized early care and education.*



### Access to State-Subsidized Care for Young Children, 2009-2011



\*Source: Estimates come from CT Voices analysis of US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2008, 2009, 2010 Public Use Microdata Sample

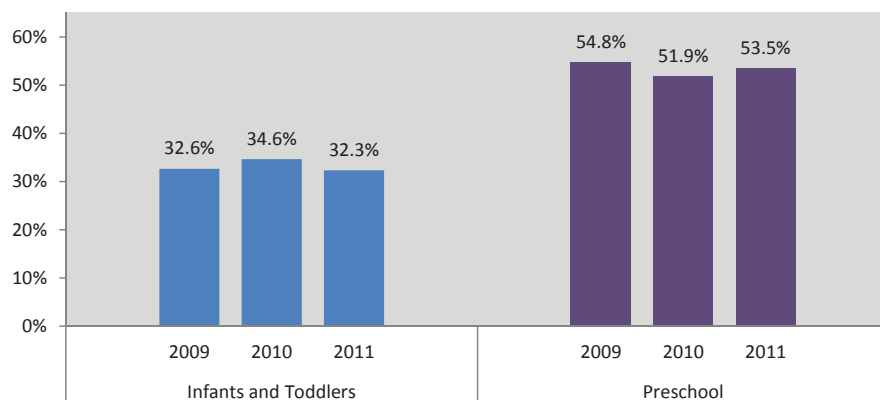


## Quality: How many children receiving state subsidies for early care and education are being served in accredited facilities and by staff with a B.A.?

Although “quality” of early care and education settings can be hard to quantify, and, in the absence of a Quality Rating and Improvement System, is not always documented, we can look at the number of children receiving state subsidies for early care and education in *accredited* facilities, defined as facilities that have met standards set by national and regional organizations including the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association for Family Child Care, Head Start, and others.

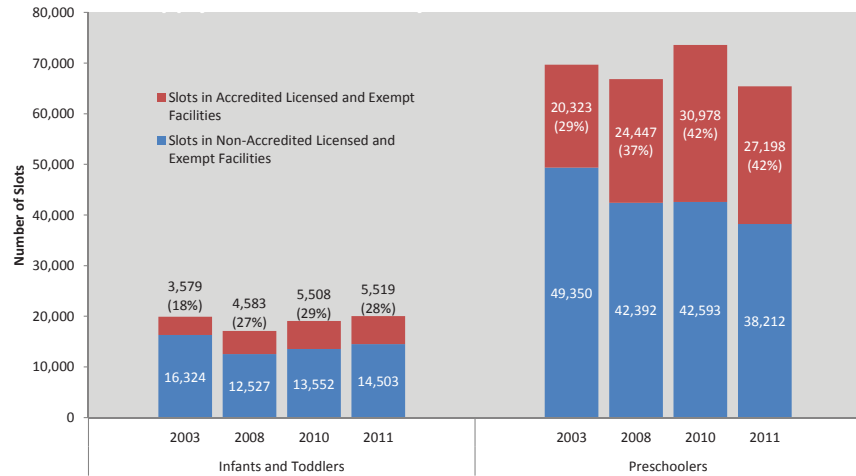
In 2011, 32% (2,872) of infants and toddlers receiving state subsidies for early care and education were served in accredited facilities, while 54% (16,701) of 3- and 4-year-olds receiving state-subsidies for early care and education were served in accredited facilities. In both cases this represents a slight decline from 2010 levels.

### Percentages of Children Receiving Subsidies in Accredited Care



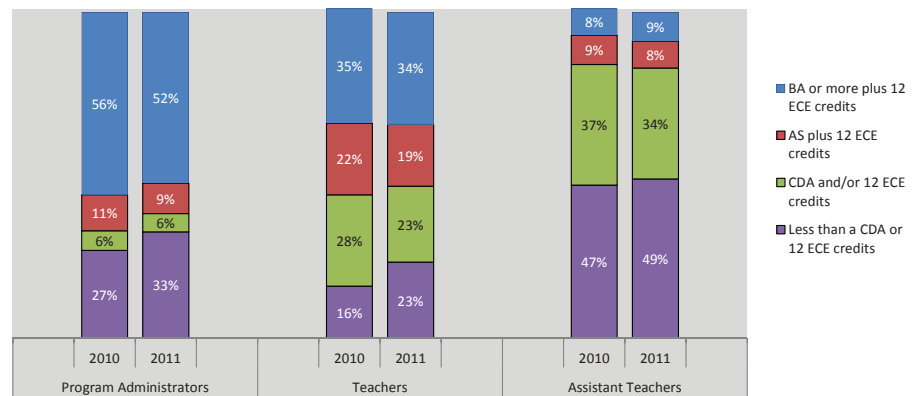
It continues to be the case that the majority of slots available for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers are *not* accredited. In 2011, the number of accredited slots (both subsidized and unsubsidized) for infants and toddlers was 5,519, only 28% of total slots (again, both subsidized and unsubsidized). The number of accredited slots for preschoolers was 27,198, 42% of total slots. While the number of accredited slots for infants and toddlers remained relatively steady from 2010, the number of accredited preschool slots fell 12% from 2010 (a decrease of 3,780 slots).

## Supply of Accredited Early Care and Education Slots



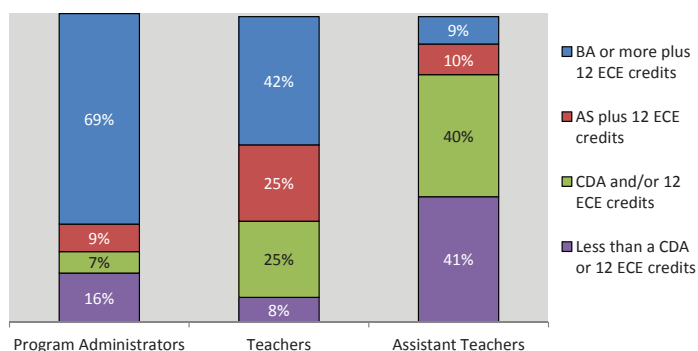
Another way to assess quality is to look at the educational qualifications of the staff who work in early childhood centers. According to the state’s Workforce Registry (which collects data on about half of all early childhood center staff in the state overall, including all staff in centers receiving state subsidies<sup>4</sup>), in 2011, 61% of administrators, 53% of teachers, and 17% of assistant teachers had a bachelors’ or associates’ degree and 12 early childhood education credits, while 33% of administrators, 23% of teachers, and 49% of assistant teachers lacked even a Child Development Associate credential (CDA) and 12 Early Care and Education (ECE) credits. The staff in publicly funded centers were significantly better educated, with higher percentages of administrators and teachers holding bachelor’s degrees and fewer of all staff without a CDA or 12 ECE credits.

## Educational Attainment of ECE Center Staff, 2010-2011



<sup>4</sup> Centers receiving state subsidies are mandated by law to participate in the Workforce Registry; centers not receiving state subsidies may participate in the Registry but are not required to do so.

## Educational Attainment of Staff in Publicly Funded ECE Centers, 2011



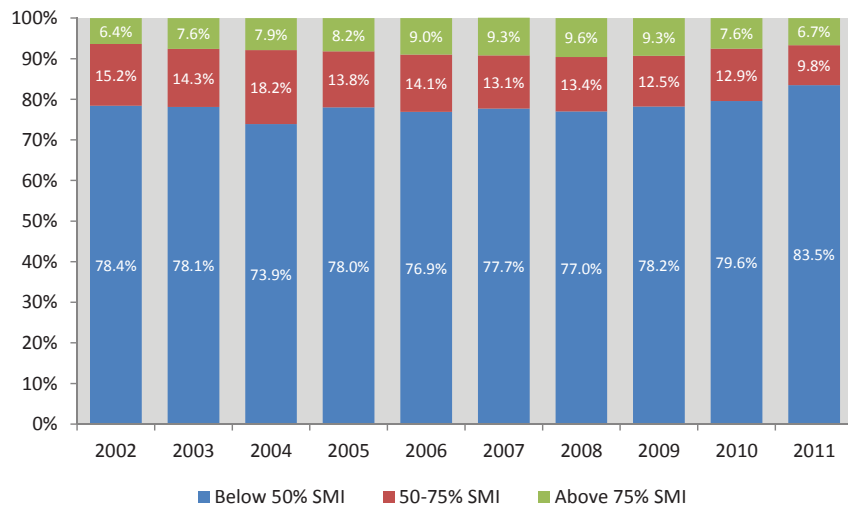
*The Good News: The total number of accredited slots available for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers has increased substantially since 2003. The level of education is higher among staff in programs receiving state subsidies than in program overall.*

*The Bad News: More than two-thirds of infants and toddlers and almost half of preschoolers receiving some form of state subsidy for early care and education are not in accredited care. The number and percentage of accredited slots available for infants and toddlers (who are experiencing the most rapid brain development of any age group) lag far behind the number and percentage available for preschoolers. Despite efforts to increase the level of education of ECE teachers, the average level of education fell from 2010 to 2011. The lack of a formal quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) remains a challenge to tracking and improving the quality of Connecticut's early care and education services.*

## Access: Which children are receiving state subsidies for early care and education?

Black and Hispanic children, who face severe achievement gaps in Connecticut's K-12 education system, comprise 75% of Head Start and 76% of School Readiness participants. The proportion of School Readiness recipients in the lowest income bracket (under 50% of state median income (SMI)) rose to 83.5% in 2011, up 4 percentage points from 2010 to a decade-long high, meaning that more spots are going to the neediest families. However, without state subsidies, child care remains unaffordable for many middle-income families, and will remain unaffordable without new funding for more slots. For example, a median-income family of four with a toddler and a preschooler in center-based care pays about \$22,171 per year, or 22% of their income for child care; a family earning 75% of state median income pays about 29%.<sup>5</sup>

**Income Distribution of School Readiness Recipients Statewide, 2002-2011**



*The Good News: The proportion of School Readiness recipients in the lowest income bracket has reached a new high, increasing significantly from 2010. Head Start and School Readiness continue to serve large percentages of black and Hispanic children, who face the greatest K-12 achievement gaps.*

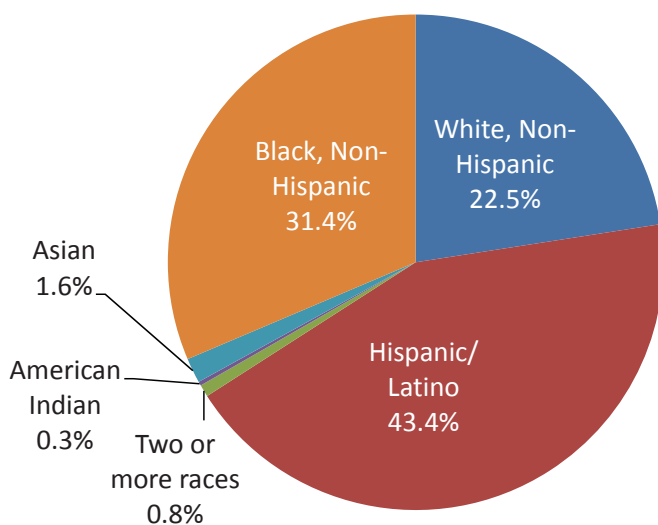
<sup>5</sup> CT Voices analysis of July 2011 fee data from 211 Childcare, available at <http://211childcare.org/professionals/FeeCT.asp>, and income data from the Connecticut Department of Social Services Selected Annual Federal Poverty and State Median Income Guidelines, available at <http://www.ct.gov/dss/lib/dss/PDFs/PovSMI.pdf>.



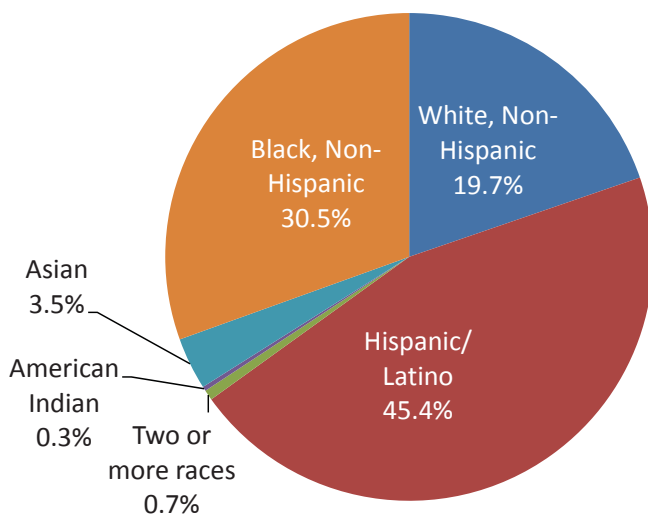
*The Bad News: With the high cost of child care, many families with incomes above 50% of the SMI struggle to afford care. The data the state collects at kindergarten entry are insufficient to determine how many children in each demographic group lack early care and education experience, which makes it difficult to know where to expand services and how much need remains unmet.*



### Demographics of Head Start Program (October 2010)



### Demographics of School Readiness Program (October 2010)



## ***Outcomes: Are children receiving state subsidies for early care and education prepared for kindergarten, and how are they doing by fourth grade?***

As of yet, Connecticut has conducted no longitudinal studies to determine whether children who receive state subsidies for early care and education have better educational outcomes than their similarly situated peers. There are not even sufficient data available to determine whether children who have received state subsidies for early care and education demonstrate any significant advantages on the kindergarten inventory assessment (administered in the fall of kindergarten) than their similarly situated peers.

That said, what we do know is that children from Connecticut's poorest areas (District Reference Group [DRG] I) are doing better in kindergarten and fourth grade along a number of measures. More of them are entering kindergarten with preschool experience, fewer are being retained in kindergarten, and more are achieving goal levels on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) in reading, writing, and math. Statewide averages generally show similar positive trends, though changes from 2010 were slight.

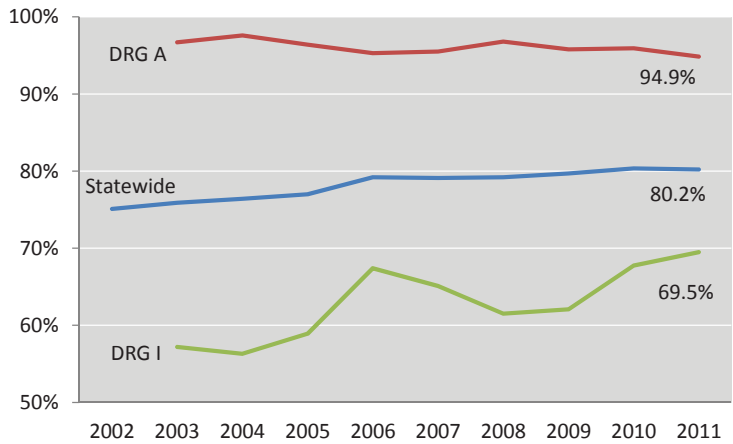
However, children from poorer areas continue to lag significantly behind their peers from richer communities and are not making progress quickly enough to catch up anytime soon.

*The Good News: The percentages of children from poor communities entering kindergarten with preschool experience and meeting goal in mathematics and reading on the CMT are at the highest levels since at least 2002. Children from Connecticut's poorest communities made progress on all outcome measures in 2011.*

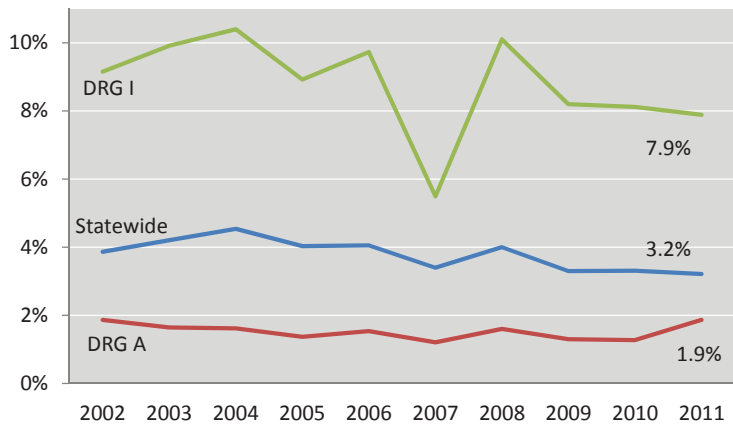
*The Bad News: Children from poor communities still lag far behind their peers from richer communities on all outcome measures in kindergarten through fourth grade. Connecticut lacks a mechanism for tracking individual students from preschool through K-12 education to show the impacts of a quality pre-k experience.*



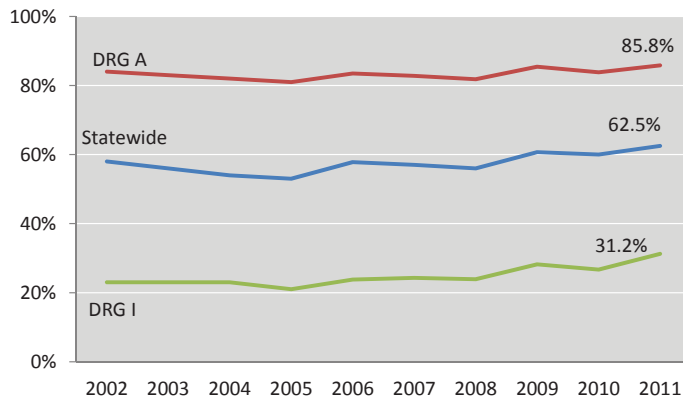
### Percent of Kindergartners with Preschool Experience, by District Reference Group (DRG)



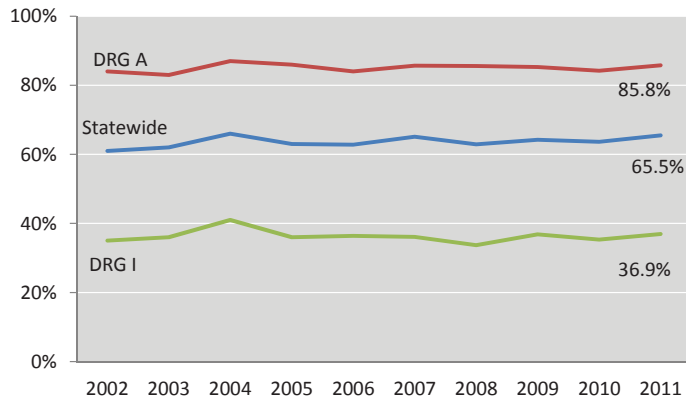
### Percent of Kindergartners Held Back, by District Reference Group (DRG)



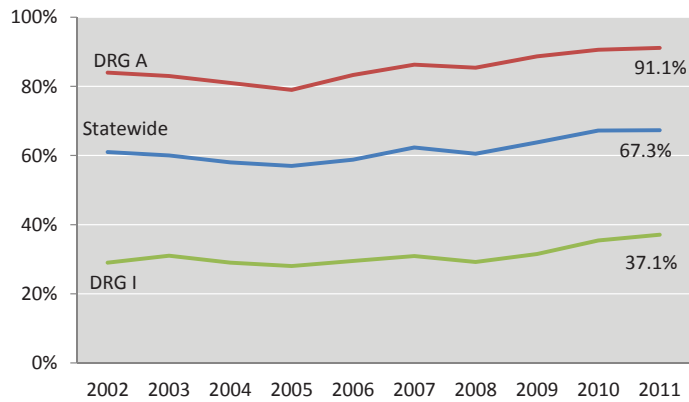
### Percent of Fourth Graders Meeting Goal in Reading on the CMT



### Percent of Fourth Graders Meeting Goal in Writing on the CMT



### Percent of Fourth Graders Meeting Goal in Mathematics on the CMT





## Recommendations: *What can Connecticut do to better serve its youngest and most vulnerable citizens?*

In the last year, Connecticut has made important progress towards a comprehensive system of early care and education, including the passage of Public Act 11-181, which establishes a systems-building process under a planning director, and a strong application for the federal Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge. However, much work remains to be done to translate plans and commitment into action and long term systems change.

As the state moves forward with planning and implementing a new early care system, it must focus on the following fundamental elements:

- **Uniform reporting requirements** – Reporting requirements should be combined across programs, so providers must comply with a single set of standards that meets all statutory mandates and include all data elements needed for quality assessment and longitudinal analysis.
- **Unified funding stream** – Blending and braiding state and federal funding sources could allow early care and education programs to access a single funding source, enabling providers to be reimbursed more fully and efficiently for providing quality care.
- **Fully-funded slots** – Based on evidence and research as to the real cost of high quality care, early care and education programs should be funded with per-slot subsidies that constitute sufficient “full funding” for services provided to infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children.
- **A quality rating and improvement system** – A quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) would allow parents and providers to assess and improve program quality. Such a system should be created, implemented, and maintained for child care centers, family child care homes, and kith and kin care, and should include a tiered payment system which reflects quality and thus, incentivizes improvement. Additionally, resources and technical assistance should be provided to programs to improve quality.
- **Workforce development and improved workforce compensation** – Professional development opportunities in the ECE field should be expanded, through methods such as increasing the number of state scholarships available for child care workers or providing subsidies to state institutions of higher education to enlarge their degree programs in early education. Compensation and benefits for ECE workers should be increased to levels that would allow job openings for qualified workers in the ECE community to be competitive with job openings in other educational realms.



- **Coordinated, complete, and transparent data collection** – Complete and accurate data should be collected, linked to, and coordinated with the K-12 data system, so that quality assessments and longitudinal analyses of programs can be performed and student progress can be monitored. This data should be transparent and easily accessible to all.
- **Uniform standards for early learning** – A comprehensive set of early learning standards for birth through age five should be developed through collaboration between members of the ECE and K-12 communities, resulting in early learning standards that are aligned with Connecticut’s existing K-12 standards and curriculum.
- **Improved outreach to parents and easier, one-step access to programs** – Parents should be able to apply for any and all early care and education programs (and potentially, related services, such as health care) through a streamlined, efficient application process that would increase families’ participation in ECE programs to the greatest extent possible. Furthermore, parents should retain at least some degree of choice as to the ECE programs in which their children participate. Systematic education of parents regarding the availability, quality, and variety of available early care and education programs, both subsidized and unsubsidized, is of critical importance in helping parents make informed decisions about the ECE programs and services in which they choose to enroll their children.

While Connecticut has expressed a clear commitment to building a strong, unified early care system, it must also ensure the funding necessary to support these improvements. The state must, at minimum, maintain, and ideally expand, funding for early care and education. Connecticut is poised to make great gains in early care and education in the coming years, effecting lasting changes that will benefit our youngest and most vulnerable children, setting them on a path of lifetime success. Continued commitment, thoughtful implementation, and ongoing financial support will be necessary to make these changes reality.



*For data sources and additional detailed data on Connecticut's early care and education system, see the Appendices for this report, available separately at [ctkidslink.org](http://ctkidslink.org).*

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