

A National Snapshot of State-Level Collaboration for Early Care and Education

September 2015 Research Brief

Gary Resnick, Meghan Broadstone, Heidi Rosenberg, and Sarah Kim

Child Care Collaboration Study

The Child Care Collaboration Study, conducted by a research team at Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), and funded by the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, is designed to examine collaborations among child care administrators and providers at both the state and local levels and to determine whether different models of collaboration are related to access and quality of early care and education programs. The study comprises two phases, the first of which focuses on the national landscape regarding collaboration among child care administrators. The second phase builds on the findings from the first phase to examine relationships between state-and local-level collaborations in two specific states, Maryland and Vermont. This research brief focuses on the findings from the first phase of the study by describing collaboration among state early care and education leaders across the country and focusing on these leaders' perceptions of the interactions among their respective agencies.

Child Care, Head Start, and Pre-K: Brief Description

The three major public sources of funding for early care and education consist of Child Care and Development Block Grants, Early Head Start/Head Start, and state-funded pre-kindergarten (pre-K). These funding streams are designed primarily to support low-income or other high-needs families' efforts to secure child care and early education opportunities for their children. There are three state-level administrators associated with each of these main funding streams.

- The federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), reauthorized in 2014, authorizes states to oversee and administer child care services, including child care subsidies.ⁱ Child care subsidies offset the costs of care for low-income working parents (or those in school) by paying for a portion of the costs of full-day, full-year child care. This fund is administered in each state by a Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Administrator.
- Early Head Start (for children up to three years of age) and Head Start (for children between the ages of three and five) are designed to provide low-income children and their families with educational programming, comprehensive services, and opportunities to connect parents with job training and other needed services. Some programs operate full-day, full-year programs, though most are part-day, school-year programs.ⁱⁱ While Early Head Start and Head Start are federal programs, states have designated Head Start State Collaboration Offices (HSSCO) that serve to facilitate collaboration among Early Head Start and Head Start grantees as well as with other entities that provide services for low-income children and their families.ⁱⁱⁱ Each Collaboration Office is headed by a Head Start State Collaboration Director.
- State-funded pre-K is currently available in 40 states and the District of Columbia. The goal of most state-funded pre-K is to provide children with educational enrichment to enhance school readiness. These pre-K programs typically establish eligibility through a combination of family income requirements and children's special needs status. Like Head Start, most pre-K programs operate on a part-day and part-year basis.^{iv} Early Childhood Specialists in state Departments of Education are typically in charge of administering a state's pre-K program.

Although these funding sources offer potentially complementary benefits, differences in their eligibility requirements, operations, missions, standards, and oversight can create challenges as families attempt to access high-quality care with schedules that meet their needs. Collaboration among state-level early care and education agencies has the potential to help bridge the coverage and quality gaps left by each type of program.

What is Collaboration and Why is it Important?

Despite the lack of agreement on a definition of collaboration,^x for the purposes of the Child Care Collaboration Study, “collaboration” is defined as an interaction between two or more agencies and their representatives, aimed at improving access to, and the quality of, early care and education. This definition of collaboration is applicable to federal, state, and local levels. The Child Care Collaboration Study examines collaboration at the state and local levels.

For decades, researchers and policymakers have recognized the potential benefits of collaboration among child care, Head Start, and pre-K to offer more seamless services to low-income children and families. Collaboration can bridge program and policy fragmentation to increase parents’ access to full-time care, while enhancing the quality of the care environment.^{xi} In so doing, collaboration can help enhance children’s school readiness by optimally supporting parents’ work or education schedules.^{xii}

Several federal and state initiatives (see sidebar) promote or require collaboration among state early care and education agencies, an acknowledgement that collaboration is a critical strategy for expanding opportunities for children and families. However, while research has demonstrated positive effects of collaboration among early care and education entities, past research employed qualitative methods and focused on a specific type of partnership (e.g., Early Head Start and child care)^{xiii} or relied on the

Federal and State Policies and Initiatives That Support Collaboration Among Early Childhood Programs

State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care (SACs) are charged with developing a high-quality, comprehensive system of early childhood development and care. The SACs ensure statewide coordination and collaboration among the wide range of early childhood programs and services in the state, including child care, Head Start, preschool services under IDEA, programs for infants and families, and pre-kindergarten programs and services. Most states (N=49) have SACs but not all receive federal funds. The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded \$92 million to 45 states, the District of Columbia, and four territories; in 44 states, ACF made supplemental funding of \$7.2 million.^{1,v}

In 2011, the **Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC)** was launched with the aim of increasing access to high-quality early childhood programs.^{vi} Thirty-five states applied for these competitive grants and 20 received awards.

A vast majority of states (44) have developed a statewide **Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)** to establish common standards of quality and to provide built-in supports and incentives for programs.^{vii}

In 2014, as part of President Obama’s Early Education Plan, Congress authorized \$500 million to support states and communities in expanding high-quality early learning through the creation of a new **Early Head Start–Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnership** initiative.^{viii}

The **Preschool Development Grants** from the U. S. Department of Education provide more than \$226 million to support states to (1) build or enhance their infrastructure to provide high-quality preschool programs, and (2) expand high-quality preschool programs in high-need communities. These states will serve as models for expanding preschool to all 4-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families. In FY2014, 13 states received expansion grants, while five states received development grants.^{ix}

¹ The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, Public Law (P.L.) 110-134, authorized the State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care (SACs) grant. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), P.L. 111-115, funded the grant (Administration for Children and Families, 2015). State leadership, through the governors’ offices, authorized Councils to use state funds to meet the required federal match. All 49 Councils met the required 70% match of state funds. Governors in 44 states (88%) requested and received supplemental SAC funds and, in 20 states (41%), the state legislature passed laws to support or sustain SAC activities and initiatives.

perspective of just one agency.^{xiv} The current study takes a quantitative approach to measuring collaboration by conducting a survey of early care and education leaders from multiple agencies from each state across the country. This approach helps to provide a better understanding of how agencies within each state work together to improve access to, and the quality of, early care and education programs.

Methods

The first phase of the Child Care Collaboration Study focused on the three key administrators in each state responsible for early care and education programs. An online survey was sent to each state Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Administrator, the Head Start State Collaboration Director, and (if applicable) the state Early Childhood Specialist administering the state pre-K program.² This national survey asked about

- background characteristics of state-level early care and education leaders;
- their roles and responsibilities;
- the nature of respondents’ relationships and communication with other early care and education leaders;
- the degree of interaction between respondents’ agencies and the other early care and education agencies within their state;
- policies and practices that support collaboration in the state; and
- actions, policies, and structural elements that enabled or hindered collaboration among state-level early care and education agencies.

From surveys sent to administrators in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, response rates ranged from 61% for Early Childhood Specialists responsible for state-funded pre-K to 92% for the state CCDF Administrators and the Head Start Collaboration Directors (see Table 1).

Table 1. *State Survey Respondents*

Role	Number of Respondents Contacted	Total Number of Completed Surveys	Response Rate
CCDF Administrator	52	48	92%
Head Start Collaboration Director	52	48	92%
Early Childhood Specialist	41 ³	25	61%

The research team analyzed the online survey using basic descriptive statistics to determine frequencies, means, and standard deviations, as well as inferential statistics to test relationships between variables. We tested for significance using the conventional p-value of .05 or less, but many relationships did not reach these levels, possibly due to the small sample sizes for particular survey items. Despite this limitation, we report non-significant variation across groups that suggests areas for future inquiry.

² In this report, the Child Care and Development Fund Administrator will be referred to as “CCDF Administrator,” the Head Start State Collaboration Director will be referred to as “Head Start Collaboration Director,” and the Early Childhood Specialist in the state Department of Education will be referred to as “Early Childhood Specialist.” In figures and graphs, these roles will be abbreviated as CCDF, HSSCD, and ECS.

³ Note: 11 states do not have state-funded pre-K and therefore did not receive the Early Childhood Specialist version of the survey.

Key Findings

Governance Structure

The governance structure of state early care and education agencies relates to the allocation of authority and accountability for these programs within the same agency or a different one.^{xv} Shared governance, in which the same state agency houses all of the state early care and education agencies, may encourage each entity to work together and, ultimately, may strengthen collaboration by removing administrative “siloing.” The research team examined data from the most recent Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) state and territory plans (FFY 2014–2015), the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website, and the Center for Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO) website to determine where early care and education programs were housed. The research team then determined whether the CCDF lead agency, Head Start State Collaboration Office, and pre-K office were housed within the same state-level agency.

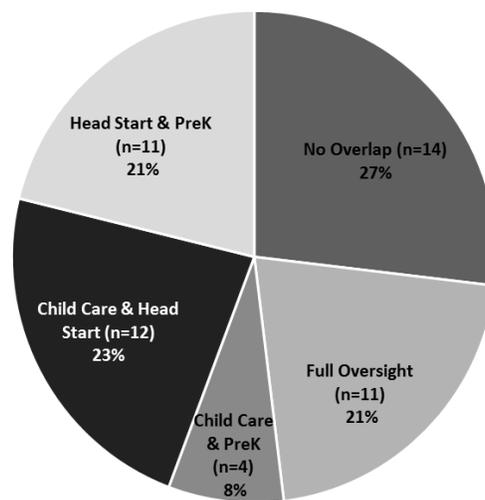


Figure 1. Shared oversight of child care, Head Start, and state pre-K.

Across the country, in one-fifth (21%) of states, the Head Start State Collaboration, child care, and pre-K offices were housed within the same state-level agency. In addition, among the 23% of states that had child care and the Head Start State Collaboration Office in the same agency, half (six states) did not have pre-K. Overall, 33% of states had shared oversight for all of the relevant early care and education state programs on which this study focuses. In slightly over one-quarter (27%) of states, there was no shared governance across these three early care and education programs.

Roles and Responsibilities

The backgrounds of early care and education state administrators may be related to whether or not they engage in collaboration. The amount of time individuals have spent in their current roles, as well as the clarity of their roles, may affect their ability to develop professional contacts and networks and to understand how they can develop collaborations. Survey respondents provided information about the length of time they have spent in their current roles, as well as their perceptions of the clarity of their roles and responsibilities.

Regarding length of time in their current roles, state Early Childhood Specialists (pre-K) reported greater longevity, on average, than did the other two groups (Figure 2, below). Among the survey respondents, three-quarters (75%) of Early Childhood Specialists had served in their role for over three years, compared to slightly over half (56%) of Head Start Collaboration Directors and fewer than half (46%) of CCDF Administrators. Fewer Early Childhood Specialists (8%) were relatively new to the job, compared with respondents who held other positions (15% of Head Start Collaboration Directors and 17% of CCDF Administrators).

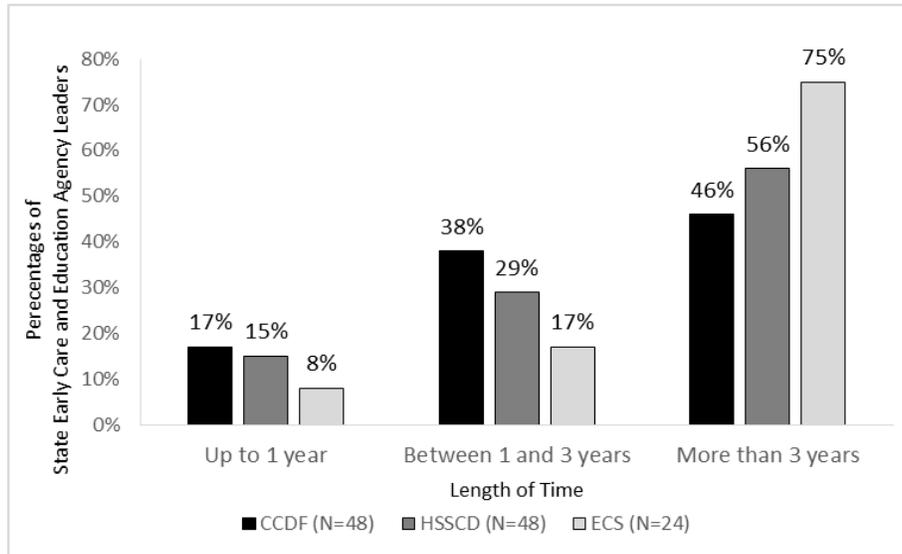


Figure 2. Length of time in current role (percentages of state early care and education leaders).

The survey also asked CCDF Administrators, Head Start Collaboration Directors, and Early Childhood Specialists to rate their agreement—on a five-point scale, from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”—with the following statement: “I feel my current roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.” Across all groups, a majority of respondents agreed that their roles and responsibilities were clearly defined, and there were mainly small differences among the three sets of respondents, except for the “strongly agree” response choice. While close to one-third of CCDF Administrators (33%) and Early Childhood Specialists (32%) strongly agreed that their roles were clearly defined, only 15% of Head Start Collaboration Directors gave this response (Figure 3).

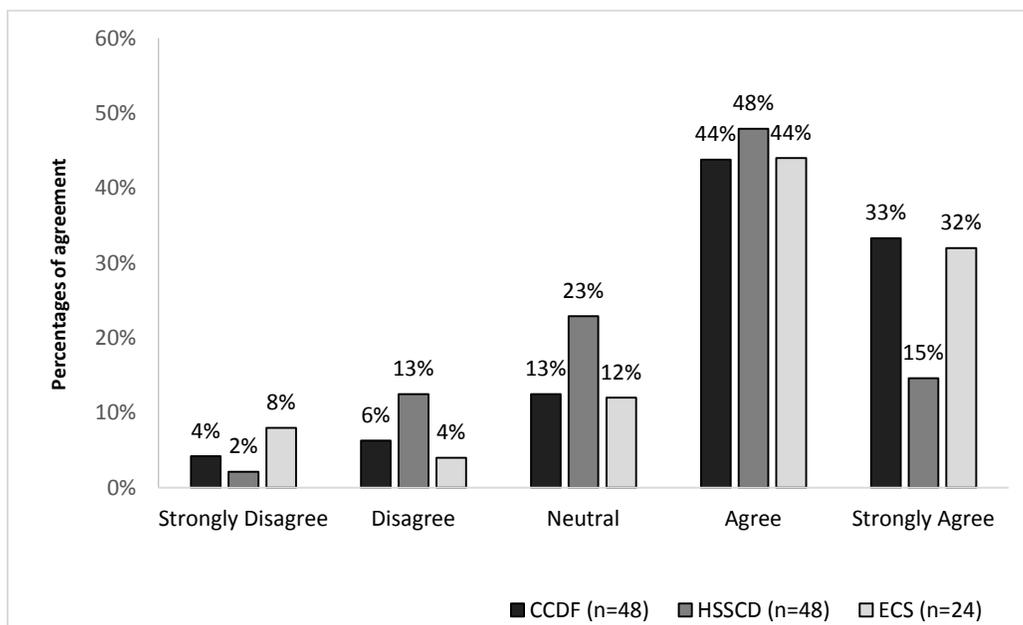


Figure 3. Percentages of state early care and education leaders’ agreement with statement, “My roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.”

To further examine this data point, the research team combined the three lower ratings of “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” and “neutral” (indicating that roles are not clearly defined) and compared them with the “agree” and “strongly agree” ratings. Based on a set of paired comparisons of the average ratings, the Head Start Collaboration Directors had significantly lower perceptions of role clarity compared with CCDF Administrators in particular.⁴

Interactions Among Early Care and Education Leaders

In previous research, successful collaboration has been linked to the frequency and intensity of interactions among key actors. The research team sought to understand how CCDF Administrators, Head Start Collaboration Directors, and Early Childhood Specialists relate to and regard one another. The survey included questions about respondents’ frequency of communication with one another, how each perceived his or her relationships with members of the other respondent groups, and how each would rate their levels of collaboration for the interactions among their respective offices.

Frequency of Communication

Respondents reported how frequently they communicated with their early care and education counterparts along a scale ranging from “never” to “at least once a week.” To explore some of the differences in communication frequency among respondent groups, the research team looked specifically at differences regarding the communication frequency of “at least once a week,” a potential indicator of increased collaboration (Figure 4).

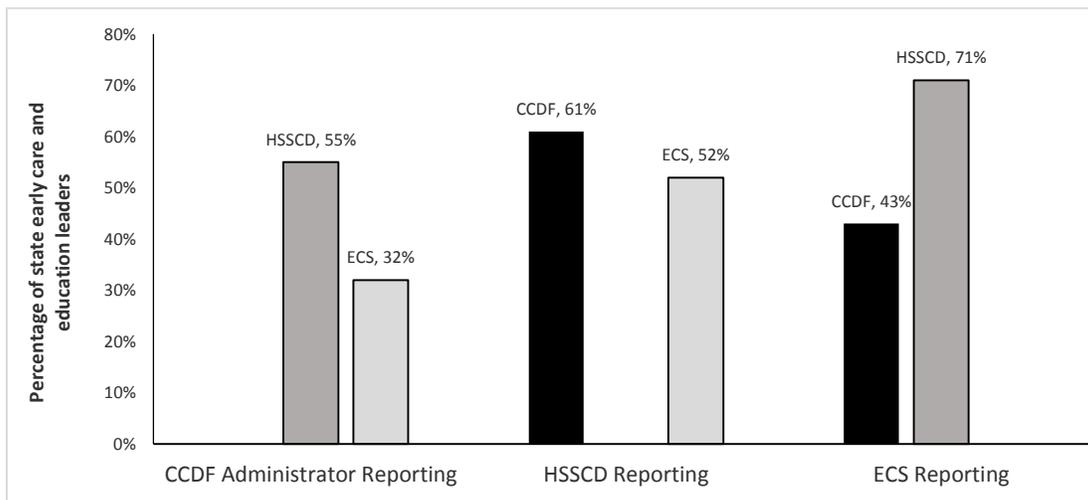


Figure 4. Percentages of state early care and education leaders who reported communication frequency of at least once a week. Percentages are based on number of valid responses. For each respondent group, there were cases with missing data. Analytic sample sizes were as follows: CCDF reporting on HSSCD N=47, CCDF reporting on ECS N=31, HSSCD reporting on CCDF N=46, HSSCD reporting on ECS N=31, ECS reporting on CCDF N=21, ECS reporting on HSSCD N=21.

Over half of CCDF Administrators (61%) and Early Childhood Specialists (52%) reported communication with the Head Start Collaboration Director at least once a week. Less consistency was observed in respondents’ frequency of communication regarding the other early care and education leaders. Just one-third of Early Childhood Specialists (32%) reported communicating at least weekly with the CCDF Administrator, compared to over half (55%) of Head Start Collaboration Directors who said they did so. In addition, less than half (43%) of CCDF Administrators reported communicating at least weekly with Early Childhood Specialists, compared to nearly three-quarters (71%) of Head Start Collaboration Directors who said they did so.

⁴ Significant at $p < .02$, $t = 2.50$, $df = 43$. The differences between the ratings of Head Start Collaboration Directors and Early Childhood Specialists did not reach levels of statistical significance, possibly due to a reduced sample size.

Quality of Relationships Among Early Education and Care Leaders

Previous research on Head Start and child care partnerships found that the quality of the relationship among those engaged in the partnership was associated with partnership success both at the local^{xvi} and statewide^{xvii} levels. In the larger collaboration literature, the quality of relationships is an important indicator of successful partnerships in terms of mutuality and trust.^{xviii}

The survey included questions about the quality of the relationships among the three state early care and education administrators using a set of six statements (see sidebar), with response choices on a five-point scale (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much so*). Comparisons of relationship quality looked at the total relationship score averaged across the six items to keep the score on the same five-point scale metric (higher scores indicate higher quality of the relationship).⁵

An analysis of average ratings by respondent group revealed that all averages were above a three, or “neutral,” suggesting that, on average, no respondent group had an unfavorable perception of their relationship with their other early care and education counterparts. However, there was variation in how pairs reported the quality of relationships with their state agency early care and education counterparts (Table 2).

Quality of Relationship Scale Items

1. I feel I can pick up the phone and call this person
2. I interact with this person outside of my primary professional role
3. I feel I have a shared philosophy and vision with this person
4. I feel like I have a good understanding of what this person does in his/her role
5. I feel my interaction/communication with this person has enhanced my ability to administer my program in my state
6. I would be in contact with this person regardless of our professional duties

Table 2. Paired Comparisons of Average Relationship Quality Scores, Reported by State Early Care and Education Leaders

Reported by	Relationship with					
	CCDF Administrator		Head Start Collaboration Director		Early Childhood Specialist	
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
CCDF Administrator	--	--	3.5	42	3.1	17
Head Start Collaboration Director	3.5	42	--	--	3.6	19
Early Childhood Specialist	3.6	17	4.0	19	--	--

Note: Means and N's are based on valid pairs of data. The specific comparisons are indicated by those pairs with identical N's. Each of these comparisons involved slightly different sample sizes because all paired comparisons used the maximum number of valid scores available for each pair.

The highest relationship quality scores were assigned by Early Childhood Specialists in rating their relationships with the Head Start Collaboration Directors. The lowest quality scores were given by the CCDF Administrators in rating the quality of their relationships with the Early Childhood Specialists. Table 2 reveals several variations between pairs of ratings, as follows:

- The Early Childhood Specialists rated their relationships with CCDF Administrators higher than the CCDF Administrators rated the quality of the same relationship (means of 3.6 vs. 3.1).

⁵ Internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha was high for most of the relationship quality scores, ranging from 0.85 to 0.95 except for Head Start Collaboration Directors' rating of their relationship with the Early Childhood Specialist, which was only moderate (Alpha=0.68).

- Early Childhood Specialists rated their relationships with Head Start Collaboration Directors higher than they rated their relationships with CCDF Administrators (means of 4.0 vs. 3.6).
- CCDF Administrators rated their relationships with Head Start Collaboration Directors higher than they rated their relationships with Early Childhood Specialists (means of 3.5 vs. 3.1).

Overall, Early Childhood Specialists rated relationships with their state counterparts higher than other respondents rated relationships with them, across all states.

Levels of Collaboration

To assess state-level early care and education agencies' degree of collaboration with each other and with other agencies, the survey included a modified version of a well-validated scale termed the Levels of Collaboration (LOC) scale (see sidebar).^{xix} Respondents were asked to rate the level to which they collaborate with the other two early care and education agencies that are the focus of this study, as well as with other statewide agencies that may be only indirectly involved in early care and education. Higher ratings on the LOC scale indicated a greater level of collaboration.

The ratings of collaboration with each other by each of the three key state agencies responsible for early care and education revealed little variation, with average scores ranging from 2.1 to 2.4. These average ratings fell within the level of "coordination," and there were no statistically significant differences between pairs of ratings.

State early care and education administrators also were asked to rate their levels of collaboration with other state-level agencies whose work intersects with early care and education, even if it is not their primary focus.⁶ Overall, respondents rated their interactions with these other agencies at a lower level than they rated their interactions with the other respondent groups' early care and education agencies, with average scores generally falling within the "networking" level.⁷ However, there were some notable exceptions. All three respondent groups rated their interactions with the Early Childhood Advisory Councils/State Advisory Councils at the "coordination" level. As a group, CCDF Administrators also rated their level of collaboration with TANF and child welfare agencies at the "coordination" level. Head Start Collaboration Directors rated their interactions with agencies serving children with special needs and MIECHV agencies at this higher level as well. Early Childhood Specialists rated their interactions with K-12 public education programs and agencies serving children with special needs at the "coordination" level.

These results are preliminary and will be more fully explored in the next phase of the study by asking these other state agencies to rate their collaboration with early care and education agencies, thus producing fully reciprocal ratings. By crossing agency lines to meet policy and program needs in early care and education, collaboration between state early care and education administrators with other state agencies may lead to streamlined policies that increase access to, and the quality of, early care and education services.

**Modified
Levels of Collaboration Scale**

0 = No Interaction

1 = Networking: Aware of organization; loosely defined roles; little communication; all decisions are made independently.

2 = Coordination: Share information; some defined roles; frequent communication; some shared decision making.

3 = Collaboration: Share ideas and resources; frequent communication is characterized by mutual trust; decision-making is done jointly.

⁶ The Levels of Collaboration scale included a list of the agencies responsible for the Early Childhood Advisory Council/State Advisory Council (ECAC), K-12 public education, public health, employment services/workforce development, TANF, Child and Adult Food Care program, programs for children with special needs, MIECHV, child welfare, mental health, community-based child abuse prevention, and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act.

⁷ The findings summarized in this paragraph were based on paired comparisons of LOC ratings by the three state early care and education administrators with each other and against their ratings of collaboration with other agencies.

Does Governance Structure Make a Difference?

The research team also explored whether there was a relationship between the governance structure and administrators' ratings of their levels of collaboration with their counterparts in other early care and education agencies, across all states. Governance structure is defined as the extent to which state early care and education administrators (CCDF Administrators, Head Start Collaboration Directors, and Early Childhood Specialists) were co-located within the same state agency. A significant relationship between shared governance structure and higher levels of collaboration may be beneficial by reducing fragmentation, improving quality, decreasing inequity, and creating greater coherence among policies and services.^{xx}

To test this notion, the research team assigned states to one of three possible groups of governance structure—full, partial, and no oversight.⁸ We then compared each governance structure type against a variety of measures of relationships, communication, and collaboration, using the average ratings reported by each of the early care and education administrators in each state.⁹ We found only one statistically significant relationship between governance structure and the other measures in our analysis relating to the Levels of Collaboration scale ratings (Figure 5).

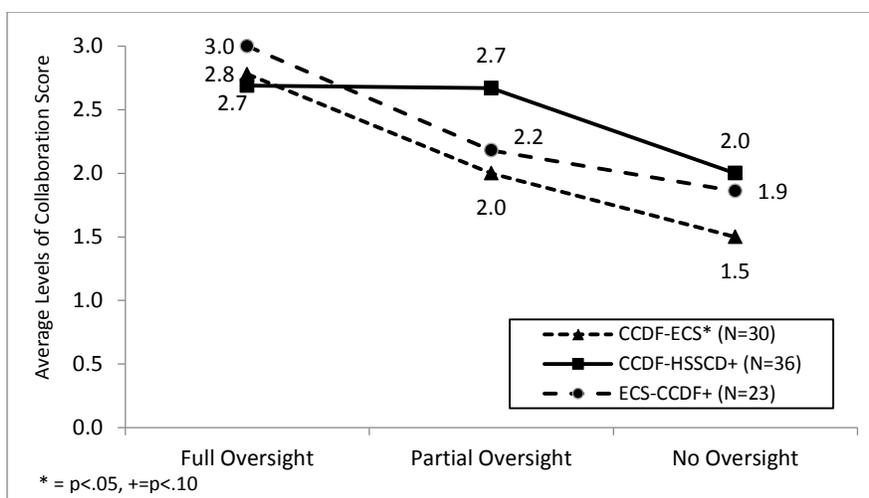


Figure 5. Levels of Collaboration scale ratings reported by pairs of state early care and education leaders against governance structure.¹⁰

Figure 5 shows a linear relationship between governance structure and Levels of Collaboration scale ratings. In states where all agencies involved in early education and care were co-located within the same state agency—termed “full oversight”—administrators reported higher average LOC ratings, compared with states with partial or no shared oversight. These higher ratings suggest that early care and education administrators perceive there to be greater coordination and collaboration when co-location occurs. The largest differences were observed primarily in states with no shared governance structure in which state early care and education administrators

⁸ Full oversight was coded whenever all applicable administrators reported to the same agency head. In states with no state pre-K, both of the other administrators (CCDF Administrators and Head Start Collaboration Directors) had shared oversight. Partial oversight was defined as two of three or one of the two administrators reporting to the same agency, while no oversight was coded where none of the applicable administrators reported to the same agency head.

⁹ States with different governance structures did not show differences in our measure of relationship quality. For the measure of communication frequency, there was only one significant difference, in which states with partial oversight showed the most frequent communication, followed by states with full oversight. Since there was no clear direction for these measures, these results were not included in the narrative.

¹⁰ The three lines represent ratings of collaboration made by one administrator in interactions with another administrator across states grouped according to governance structure or oversight. Thus, “CCDF-ECS” refers to the level of collaboration rating made by the CCDF Administrator in their work with the Early Childhood Specialist. Similarly, “CCDF-HSSCD” refers to the rating made by the CCDF Administrator in their collaboration with the Head Start State Collaboration Director.

were located in different agencies. These states showed the lowest levels of collaboration, primarily at the “networking” rather than at the “coordination” or “collaboration” levels. These differences were statistically significant for ratings of collaboration reported by CCDF Administrators in their work with Early Childhood Specialists (CCDF–ECS) and Head Start Collaboration Directors (CCDF–HSSCD). They also were significant for Early Childhood Specialists’ ratings of their level of collaboration with CCDF Administrators (ECS–CCDF). In states where early care and education administrators were either fully or partially co-located in the same agency, average collaboration scores were primarily at the higher “coordination” level.¹¹

Collaboration Facilitators and Barriers

The survey also included a list of six factors that potentially can facilitate collaboration, and asked respondents to select those factors that supported their rating of “coordination” or “collaboration” on the Levels of Collaboration scale for interactions between their agency and other state agencies (Figure 6).¹²

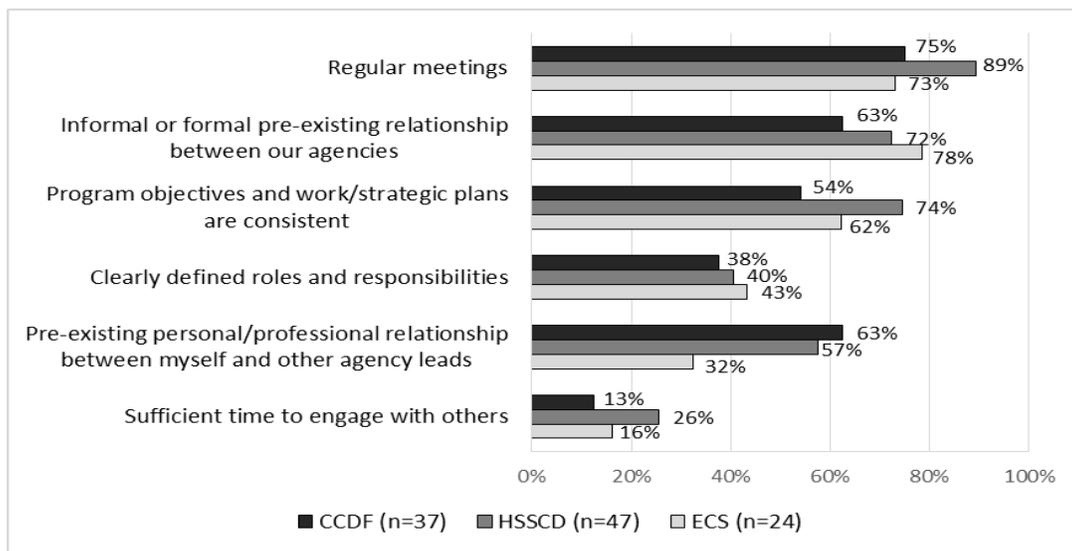


Figure 6. Factors that facilitate state-level coordination or collaboration, most frequently reported by state early care and education leaders.

Overall, there were no significant differences in the percentages of state early care and education administrator types who identified each factor. The top three factors selected by over half of all respondent groups included

- regular meetings;
- informal or formal pre-existing relationships between agencies; and
- consistent program objectives and strategic plans.

Regarding the importance of pre-existing relationships in particular, CCDF Administrators and Head Start Collaboration Directors were much more likely to select relationships between *agencies* as a contributing factor than they were to select relationships between *individuals*. In contrast, Early Childhood Specialists were equally

¹¹ The difference between states with full vs. partial oversight did not reach levels of statistical significance, possibly due to small sample sizes.

¹² Respondents were asked “Looking at the agencies where you have rated your interactions as Coordination or Collaboration, why does your agency have more contact with these particular agencies around issues of child care access and/or quality?” Respondents could identify any of the following factors from a list they were given: (a) Pre-existing personal/professional relationship between myself and other agency leads; (b) Informal or formal pre-existing relationship between our agencies; (c) Clearly defined roles and responsibilities; (d) Regular meetings; (e) Sufficient time to engage with others outside of carrying out my primary job responsibilities; and (f) Program objectives and work/strategic plans are consistent.

likely to select pre-existing relationships between agencies and people as factors that facilitate state-level coordination or collaboration.

The survey also asked respondents to justify their rating of interactions with other agencies as “no interaction” or “networking,” the two lowest ratings on the Levels of Collaboration scale, by selecting up to six factors from a list. These factors were similar to those listed as facilitators earlier, except expressed in negative terms, as they suggest potential barriers to state-level collaboration around issues of child care access and/or quality (Figure 7).¹³

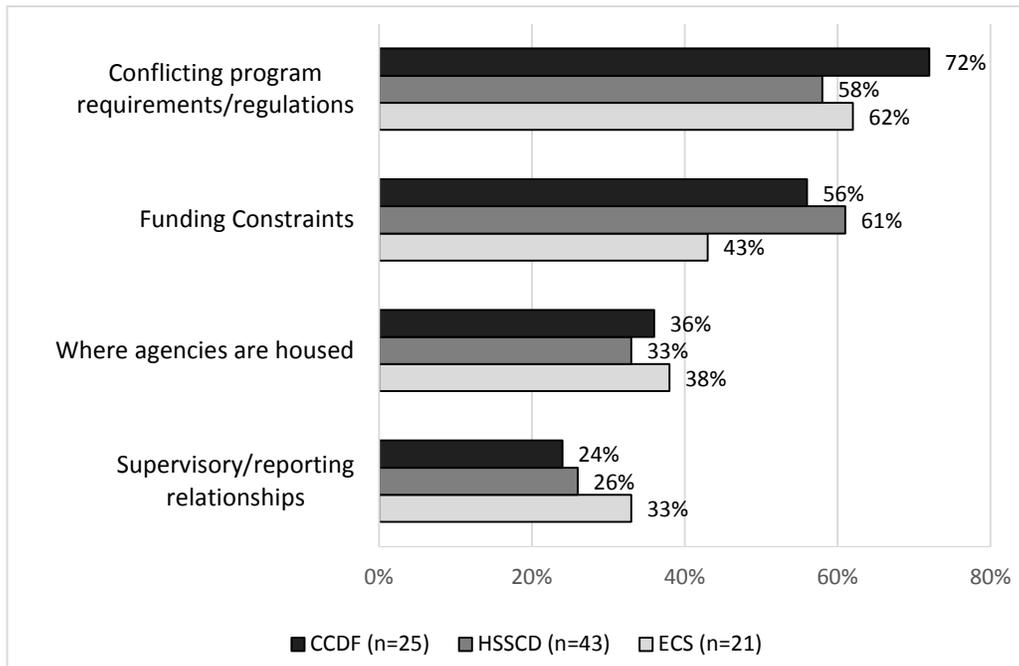


Figure 7. Factors that may create barriers to state-level collaboration most frequently reported by state early care and education leaders.

As noted for facilitators of collaboration, there were no significant differences in the percentages of state early care and education administrator groups who identified each barrier. It is also interesting to note that approximately one-third of all respondents reported that the lack of shared governance represented a barrier to collaboration in their state.

How State-Level Collaboration Supports Services for Children and Families

The survey included open-response questions that asked CCDF Administrators, Head Start Collaboration Directors, and Early Childhood Specialists, for example: **“Of all of the activities you perform to support collaboration among your agency and [the other state agencies], which has made the biggest difference in supporting the delivery of quality child care services to children in your state?”** Respondents offered a variety of factors that support

¹³ Respondents were asked “Looking at the agencies where you have rated your interactions as No Interaction or Networking, why does your agency have less contact with these particular agencies around issues of child care access and/or quality?” The list consisted of the following factors: (a) Lack of pre-existing relationship between myself and other agency leads; (b) Lack of pre-existing relationship (formal or informal) between our agencies; (c) Lack of well-defined roles and responsibilities; (d) Lack of regular meetings; (e) Insufficient time to engage with others outside of carrying out my primary job responsibilities; and (f) Lack of overlap between agency objectives and work/strategic plans.

collaboration, but several were mentioned repeatedly—the development and implementation of a QRIS, shared agency oversight, and participation in the ECAC (see select quotes below).¹⁴

“[Shared agency oversight] leads to frequent opportunities to have ‘just in time’ conversations and identify overlapping work.”—*CCDF Administrator*

“[Shared agency oversight] provides the opportunity to meet on a daily basis [to] plan and strategize [in order to] be consistent with policy recommendations to the Head Start and child care communities.”—*CCDF Administrator*

“One person/agency in charge of us all—[we] don’t have to ‘sell’ our collaborative work in separate bureaucracies.”—*Early Childhood Specialist*

“Participation in the state ECAC has led to greater cooperation and collaboration at the state systems level and has provided [the] opportunity to increase understanding and [address] potential barriers to collaboration.”—*Head Start Collaboration Director*

“The work with the ECAC makes a great impact on the services provided for children and their families. The council is so well-rounded and diversified in its membership... . Strategies are developed for the entire state, and people are less likely to work in a siloed situation.”—*Head Start Collaboration Director*

“[QRIS] brings together a variety of provider types under the same set of standards and promotes the recognition of quality in a variety of settings.”—*CCDF Administrator*

These open-ended responses illustrate what happens “on the ground” when collaboration takes place across child care, Head Start, pre-K (where applicable), and other relevant early care and education entities. The Child Care Collaboration Study will explore these pathways—from state-level collaboration to services provided to children and families—in two states in the coming year.

Summary of Key Findings

These findings are based on a national survey of three key state-level leaders of early care and education programming: CCDF Administrators, Head Start Collaboration Directors, and Early Childhood Specialists (in states with public pre-K programs). The final response set included 92% of all state CCDF Administrators and Head Start Collaboration Directors (N = 48), and 61% of state Early Childhood Specialists in charge of the state pre-K programs (N = 25).

- Approximately one-third of states housed the agencies primarily responsible for early care and education programming and policies—Head Start State Collaboration Office, child care, and state pre-K (where applicable)—within the same state agency.
- Governance structures where there is co-location appear to provide the maximum opportunity for coordination of policies and regulations. Our analysis grouped states according to whether there was full, partial, or no shared co-location. In those states where the three agencies responsible for early care and

¹⁴ The research team conducted a content analysis of these open-ended responses to identify and code the most frequently cited facilitators of collaboration. Of the 89 open-ended responses to this question across all three respondent groups, 17 (19%) mentioned governance, 15 (17%) mentioned QRIS, 7 (8%) mentioned ECAC, and 4 (4%) mentioned RTT-ELC. Numbers and percentages were based on the total number of responses rather than respondents, because many respondents listed more than one factor.

education were *not* housed within the same state agency, the state agency administrators reported lower levels of collaboration with each other compared with states where there was full or partial co-location.

- Early Childhood Specialists reported serving in their role for a longer duration compared with Head Start Collaboration Directors and CCDF Administrators, while CCDF Administrators had somewhat higher turnover, compared with the other two groups.
- Head Start Collaboration Directors were least likely to “strongly agree” that their roles were clearly defined.
- Regarding the highest communication frequency of at least once per week, the greatest consistency across respondent groups related to communication with the Head Start Collaboration Director. Over half of both CCDF Administrators and Early Childhood Specialists reported that they communicated with the Head Start Collaboration Director at least once per week; likewise, over half of Head Start Collaboration Directors reported that they communicated with both CCDF Administrators and Early Childhood Specialists at least once per week.
- On the relationship quality scale, Early Childhood Specialists rated relationships with their state counterparts higher than other respondents rated relationships with them, but no respondent group had an unfavorable perception of their relationship with their other early care and education counterparts.
- Among the facilitators to collaboration listed on the survey, the importance of regular meetings, pre-existing relationships between agencies, and the overlap between objectives and work or strategic plans were chosen most frequently by respondent groups overall.
- Across all three early care and education state roles, a majority of respondents selected “conflicting program requirements/regulations” as a barrier to collaboration, and a majority of CCDF Administrators and Head Start Collaboration Directors selected “funding constraints” as an additional barrier.

Implications

Results from this study demonstrate that collaboration may be measured by the relationships and networks of interactions among the key state agency administrators responsible for early care and education programs and policies. Across the country, individuals in these roles are coordinating their activities within their respective states, but it appears as though few states have achieved a full “collaboration” level of interaction among these key agencies, which would involve sharing ideas and resources, communicating more frequently, and making decisions jointly. Future research studies could examine whether state-level leaders’ abilities to achieve their goals for enhancing early care and education access and quality differ depending on whether their agencies interact at the “coordination,” as opposed to the “collaboration,” level.

The survey findings also identified a set of factors that can act to facilitate or constrain collaboration. The relatively high percentage of early care and education leaders who have been in their roles for less than three years highlights the importance of job turnover on potential collaboration, including communication and the development of relationships among early care and education leaders, as well as on agency representatives’ institutional knowledge of past and current collaborative efforts. Another key factor that may inhibit collaboration is the presence of “conflicting program requirements/regulations,” as reported by CCDF Administrators. Systematic examination of these conflicting requirements and regulations that may inhibit collaboration could be addressed by regulations and policies put forth by the recently reauthorized Child Care and Development Block Grant Act. Thus, there is the potential to better support collaboration at the state level through new regulations, as well as through existing state initiatives and activities, such as the role of state Early Childhood Advisory Councils (ECACs), state Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS), and shared agency oversight by states. By reducing barriers while encouraging facilitators, it may be possible to move inter-agency interactions to the higher “collaboration” level.

The findings presented here are part of a larger study that aims to understand collaboration at the state and local levels and identify linkages between collaboration and increased access to, and quality of, early care and education

programs. The second phase of the Child Care Collaboration Study involves studying two states (Vermont and Maryland) in greater depth, to explore how collaboration among state-level administrators influences collaboration among local child care providers and their involvement in statewide initiatives and with local agencies that serve children. To address these study goals, the second phase will involve surveys to state early care and education agency leaders, surveys to a sample of providers in each state, and the use of social network analyses. By identifying models of collaboration, the study's results may add to the set of tools available to states to improve their systems of early care and education for young children and their families.

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For more information about the Child Care Collaboration Study, please contact co-Principal Investigators Gary Resnick at gresnick@edc.org and Meghan Broadstone at mbroadstone@edc.org.

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