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The Use of Early Care and Education by California Families

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In 2009, just over 525,000 children were born in California, and that figure is expected to increase by an average of 6,500 births each successive year in the next decade (California Department of Finance, 2010). This paper describes the care arrangements for the approximately 2.8 million California children ages 0 to 5 who are younger than the age at which they would enter kindergarten. It uses two sources of representative data: the 2005 National Household Education Survey (NHES) and the 2007 RAND California Preschool Study. The focus is on nonparental care arrangements, whether they occur in a home-based or center-based setting. The paper also uses administrative data to calculate participation in the various publicly subsidized programs available to qualifying children and their families, updating earlier figures prepared by Karoly, Reardon, and Cho (2007).

This analysis serves to highlight a number of facts about the use of early care and education (ECE) in California:¹

- Most children are cared for by someone other than their parents on a regular basis before they enter kindergarten, starting with just under half of infants and toddlers and reaching 75 to 80 percent of preschool-age children.
- While the modal care arrangement for infants and toddlers is care by a relative in a home-based setting, most preschoolers are cared for in a center-based setting, at least part-time.
- California has an array of federal- and state-funded programs that subsidized the costs of care for about 355,000 children as of 2008, primarily those in families with low income. In that year, these programs served about 5 percent of the state's infants

and toddlers (or about 73,000 children), 18 percent of three-year-olds (or approximately 97,000 children), and 34 percent of four-year-olds (or nearly 185,000 children).

- Given funding levels as of 2008–2009, the existing subsidized programs were not able to serve the approximately 53 percent of children ages 0 to 5 who would have qualified on the basis of family income. Indeed, just 8 percent of income-eligible infants and toddlers were served by subsidized programs, a figure that increases to 34 and 65 percent of eligible three- and four-year-olds, respectively. As of June 30, 2009, nearly 150,000 children under age 6 were on the state's centralized waiting list for subsidized care.
- Overall, about 80 percent of the children of all ages (i.e., from birth to age 12) in publicly subsidized care arrangements were in licensed settings, either centers or licensed family child care homes as of 2008. The remainder were in license-exempt care. The California State Preschool Program and other Title 5 child development programs administered by the California Department of Education (CDE) exclusively serve children in licensed settings. Infants and toddlers are more likely than three- and four-year-olds to be in license-exempt settings.

Participation in Nonparental Care Prior to Kindergarten

Parents of preschool-age children rely upon a variety of arrangements to support their need for child care and to provide opportunities for their young children to socialize and learn before they enter formal schooling in kindergarten. This section considers the extent to which children participate in different types of nonparental care arrangements. The next section examines participation in publicly subsidized programs.

Where possible, we classify children based on their kindergarten entry cohort using California's

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¹ The timing of the survey and administrative data means that the data will not capture the effect of the Great Recession on the use of ECE in California overall, nor will they reflect the effect of the downturn on the eligibility for and funding levels of subsidized programs.

December 2 cutoff.² Thus, we group children with birth dates between December of a given year and November of the next year in the same kindergarten entry group because these children would be eligible to enter kindergarten together in the same class. We refer to children who are one year away from kindergarten entry as *four-year-olds*, although, depending on when that cohort is observed, some may be as young as age 3 or as old as age 5. Likewise, the group we call *three-year-olds* are two years away from entering kindergarten. These two groups can be thought of as preschool-age children. Those younger than these two cohorts are infants and toddlers, while those who are older are age-eligible to be in kindergarten or a higher elementary grade.

We rely on two sources of data to examine the use of regular nonparental care for kindergarten entry cohorts. The 2005 NHES collected information on regular care arrangements for children from birth up to school entry as part of the Early Childhood Program Participation Survey (ECPPS) (Hagedorn et al., 2006).³ We focus on the California sample in this nationally representative sample. Although the sample is not intended to be representative of the state of California, the nearly 1,000 children in the sample provide a close approximation to what we would expect in a representative sample. In addition, we also rely on data collected in the 2007 RAND California Preschool Study, which provides a representative sample of California three- and four-year-olds (i.e., two kindergarten entry cohorts) (Karoly et al., 2008). The 2005 and 2007 surveys are closely aligned in the way they collect information on nonparental care use, each allowing parents to provide information on up to three care arrangements with a differentiation between center-based care, home-based care (either the child's home or caretaker's home) by a relative, and home-based care by a nonrelative. Home-based care may be licensed family child care or license-exempt home care, but the two sources of survey data do not allow us to distinguish these two types of settings.

Table 1 shows the tabulations from these two data sources, with the NHES California data in panel A (and plotted in the figure) and the RAND California study data in panel B. Overall, these data indicate that just under 50 percent of infants and toddlers in

California were in regular nonparental care, a figure that rises to 71–75 percent for three-year-olds and 79–81 percent for four-year-olds. When estimates are available for both data sources, there are some differences in the point estimates, but they are generally small and within the confidence intervals (which are larger for the NHES estimates given their smaller sample size). The bottom line is that about half of California infants and toddlers were in regular care arrangements, while about four out of every five preschool-age children were cared for by someone other than their parent on a regular basis (see the figure).

Table 1 also documents that the modal arrangement for infants and toddlers was care by a relative, whereas the three- and four-year-olds were most likely to be in center-based care. (Since children can be in multiple care arrangements, the sum of the shares in each setting will not equal the total share in some type of nonparental care.) Indeed, among infants and toddlers in care, the vast majority were in a home-based setting (which may be licensed or license-exempt) with either a relative or a nonrelative caretaker, whereas the dominant form of care of the preschool-age group was a center-based program.

Given the possibility of multiple care arrangements, Table 2 uses both data sources to classify California children who are in some form of nonparental care, either by where they spend the most hours in a given week or by using a hierarchy in which those in any center-based care are classified as being in that category first, followed by relative or nonrelative care in a home setting, based on where they spend the most time. For infants and toddlers, there is little difference in the distribution of care arrangements using these two methods. Under either approach, just over 40 percent of those in care were with a relative in a home setting.

When we move to the two older age groups, we see that nearly 77 percent of three-year-olds and 88 percent of four-year-olds in nonparental care (based on the NHES data) were in any center-based care, but that just 72 percent and 80 percent of these two age groups, respectively, spent the most hours in a center setting. Thus, as children get closer to entering school, the vast majority spend at least some hours during the week in a center-based program, even if they spend more hours in a home-based setting. This is consistent with the part-day nature of many preschool programs (e.g., California State Preschool, Head Start). Because many parents need full-time care in order to work, families combine arrangements, often a part-day center-based preschool program with home-based care for the remainder of the day.

² The 2010 Kindergarten Readiness Act (SB 1381) moves the California kindergarten birth date cutoff to September 1 over a three-year period (moving the date one month earlier each year) starting in 2012. The December 2 cutoff applies to the period covered by our data.

³ The ECPPS module has been discontinued as a component in the NHES. So the 2005 survey is the most recent year for which the information on care arrangements was collected.

Table 1
ECE Arrangements for California Children by Kindergarten Entry Cohort:
2005 NHES and 2007 California Preschool Study

Measure	Zero- to Two-Year-Olds	Three-Year-Olds	Four-Year-Olds
A. ECE arrangements for all California children in the 2005 NHES			
Any nonparental care (%)	45.9	74.8	81.0
ECE by setting type			
Any center-based ECE (%)	13.2	57.4	71.0
Any relative care (%)	23.4	23.5	25.6
Any nonrelative care (%)	17.0	10.9	7.9
N (unweighted)	571	204	193
B. ECE arrangements for children in the 2007 RAND California Preschool Study			
Any nonparental care (%)	–	71.1	78.8
ECE by setting type			
Any center-based ECE (%)	–	50.7	66.8
Any relative care (%)	–	21.8	19.0
Any nonrelative care (%)	–	12.5	13.9
N (unweighted)	–	1,016	1,009

SOURCE: Author’s analysis of the California sample from the 2005 NHES ECPPS and 2007 RAND California Preschool Study.
 NOTES: Tabulations are weighted. In the NHES, the four-year-old age group includes those born between December 1999 and November 2000 so they were either age 4 or 5 when the survey was conducted between January and April 2005. The three-year-old cohort includes those born between December 2000 and November 2001, while those in the youngest cohort were born in December 2001 or later. In the RAND California Preschool Study data, kindergarten entry cohorts were defined using the state’s specific kindergarten entry cutoff of December 2. Dashes indicate that data are not available.

ECE Arrangements for California Children by Kindergarten Entry Cohort: 2005 NHES

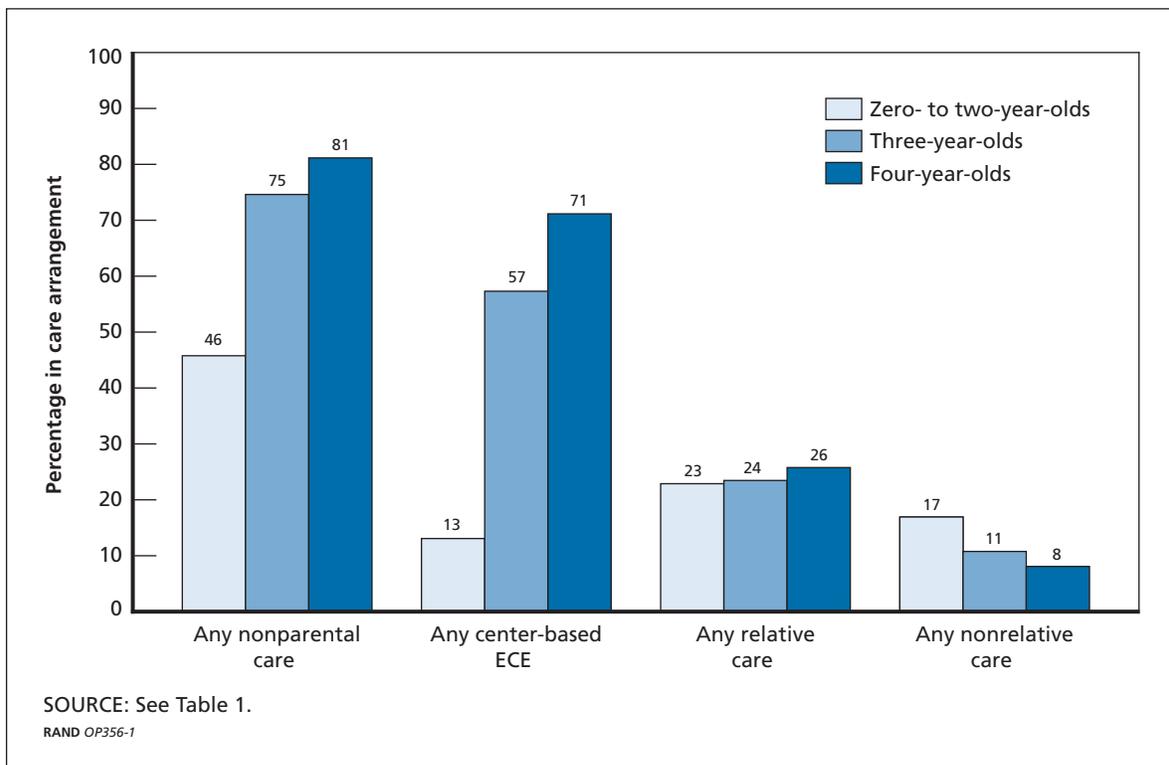


Table 2
ECE Arrangements for California Children in Any Nonparental Care by Kindergarten Entry Cohort:
2005 NHES and 2007 California Preschool Study

Measure	Zero- to Two-Year-Olds	Three-Year-Olds	Four-Year-Olds
A. ECE arrangements for California children with any nonparental care in the 2005 NHES			
ECE by arrangement with most hours (% distrib.)			
Main arrangement: center-based	25.7	71.6	79.5
Main arrangement: relative	43.1	22.9	17.3
Main arrangement: nonrelative	31.2	5.5	3.2
ECE by arrangement hierarchy (% distrib.)			
Any center-based ECE	28.7	76.7	87.6
Main arrangement: relative	41.3	19.9	9.4
Main arrangement: nonrelative	30.0	3.4	3.0
N (unweighted)	267	146	165
B. ECE arrangements for children with any nonparental care in the 2007 RAND California Preschool Study			
ECE by arrangement with most hours (% distrib.)			
Main arrangement: center-based	–	62.8	77.2
Main arrangement: relative	–	24.9	12.1
Main arrangement: nonrelative	–	12.3	10.7
ECE by arrangement hierarchy (% distrib.)			
Any center-based ECE	–	71.2	84.7
Main arrangement: relative	–	19.5	6.6
Main arrangement: nonrelative	–	9.2	8.7
N (unweighted)	–	723	859
SOURCE: Author's analysis of the California sample from the 2005 NHES ECPPS and 2007 RAND California Preschool Study. NOTES: Tabulations are weighted. In the NHES, the four-year-old age group includes those born between December 1999 and November 2000 so they were either age 4 or 5 when the survey was conducted between January and April 2005. The three-year-old cohort includes those born between December 2000 and November 2001, while those in the youngest cohort were born in December 2001 or later. In the RAND California Preschool Study data, kindergarten entry cohorts were defined using the state's specific kindergarten entry cutoff of December 2. Dashes indicate that data are not available.			

Participation in Subsidized ECE

As discussed in Karoly, Reardon, and Cho (2007), just over half of preschool-age children in California qualify for one or more subsidized care programs based on having family income below the state-defined income cutoff. Yet, the number of funded slots is not sufficient to serve all eligible children. Nevertheless, it is instructive to understand how the use of subsidized ECE varies with age and the types of settings children are in.

The array of federal- and state-funded child care and early education programs is listed in Table 3, along with estimated or actual enrollments in total and separately, by kindergarten entry cohorts, based

on administrative data as of the fall of 2008.⁴ The estimates in Table 3 show that for that year, these programs served nearly 515,000 children up to age 12, although this may be an overestimate given that some children receive subsidized care from two or more

⁴ See Karoly, Reardon, and Cho (2007) for a detailed discussion of each of these programs. The programs in Table 3 exclude various local programs, such as those funded through county First Five offices and other county-specific programs. Again, see Karoly, Reardon, and Cho (2007) for details on these local programs, which served a relatively small number of children in the time period covered by Table 3. The table also excludes several other funding streams that provide early learning and development services such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. See Children Now (2010) for details on these other programs.

Table 3
Enrollment in Total and by Age in Publicly Funded ECE Programs in California, October 2008

Program	Ages Served	Enrollment by Kindergarten Entry Cohort (N)					Distribution by Cohort (%)		
		Zero-to Two-Year-Olds	Three-Year-Olds	Four-Year-Olds	Five-Year-Olds and Above	Total ^a	Zero-to Two-Year-Olds	Three-to Four-Year-Olds	Five-Year-Olds and Above
Federal programs									
Title I Preschool	3 and 4	0	1,511	4,836	0	6,347	0	100	0
Early Head Start/ Head Start	Mostly 0-4	9,827	31,756	57,245	2,212	101,039	10	88	2
Federal total ^a	-	9,827	33,267	62,081	2,212	107,386	9	89	2
CalWORKs and AP									
Cal-Learn	Mostly 0-4	497	8	8	0	513	97	3	0
CalWORKs Stage 1	Mostly 0-12	16,147	8,109	7,347	32,009	63,612	25	24	50
CalWORKs Stage 2	Mostly 0-12	14,093	7,077	6,412	27,937	55,519	25	24	50
CalWORKs Stage 3	Mostly 0-12	6,143	4,118	5,034	39,518	54,813	11	17	72
AP	Mostly 0-12	6,136	3,500	3,661	18,473	31,770	19	23	58
CalWORKs and AP total ^a	-	43,027	22,806	22,456	117,937	206,227	21	22	57
State child development									
State Preschool part-day	3 and 4	0	19,801	63,385	2,507	85,693	0	97	3
State Preschool full-day	3 and 4	0	1,100	2,334	318	3,752	0	92	8
PKFL part-day	4	0	0	7,960	0	7,960	0	100	0
PKFL full-day	4	0	0	543	0	543	0	100	0
General CCD	Mostly 0-12	15,224	20,061	26,305	26,217	87,807	17	53	30
Migrant CCD	Mostly 0-12	989	567	624	453	2,633	38	45	17
Cal-SAFE	Mostly 0-5	4,075	19	18	0	4,112	99	1	0
Latchkey (extended day)	Mostly 5-12	0	0	9	8,315	8,324	0	0	100
State child dev. total ^a	-	20,288	41,548	101,178	37,810	200,824	10	71	19
Total ^a	-	73,142	97,621	185,715	157,959	514,437	14	55	31

SOURCE: Author's analysis of California Department of Social Services (CDSS) (2007a, 2007b) and unpublished data provided by the California Head Start Association and CDE.

NOTES: Age groups are defined by kindergarten entry cohorts. Numbers in italics denote enrollment figures that were imputed or have imputed components. Title I Preschool enrollment is for the 2008-09 school year. Head Start enrollment is funded enrollment for FY 2009 and includes Early Head Start, Head Start, and Migrant Head Start. The Cal-SAFE figures are for the 2008-09 school year. All other figures are for October 2008. Numbers may not add to totals because of rounding. CalWORKs = California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids; AP = Alternative Payment; PKFL = Prekindergarten and Family Literacy; Cal-SAFE = California School Age Families Education; CCD = Child Care and Development. Dashes indicate not applicable.

^aRow totals for individual programs are unduplicated. Cumulative totals across programs may include duplicates if children are served by multiple programs.

programs at the same time.⁵ While many of these subsidized care options are available for children starting at birth and continuing to age 12, some of the programs—Title I Preschool, Head Start, State Preschool, and Prekindergarten and Family Literacy—are primarily funded to serve three- and four-year-olds. With the expanded number of spaces available to children in those two age cohorts, slightly more than half of all subsidized enrollments are estimated to have served children one or two years away from entering kindergarten. Just 14 percent of subsidized enrollments went to infants and toddlers, while the remaining 31 percent went to after-school care for those in kindergarten and beyond.

Accounting for the size of each annual kindergarten entry cohort, the enrollment figures in Table 3 imply that, as of 2008, 5 percent of all infants and toddlers were in subsidized care, compared with 18 percent of three-year-olds and 34 percent of four-year-olds.⁶ If we use the estimate provided by Karoly, Reardon, and Cho (2007) that 53 percent of three- and four-year-olds are eligible for subsidized ECE based on income, the figures in Table 3 imply that 34 and 65 percent of eligible children in these two age groups, respectively, actually receive subsidized care. If we make the reasonable assumption that the same eligibility rate applies for infants and toddlers, just 8 percent of eligible children in that age range were in subsidized care. The unmet need for subsi-

dized care is captured in the number of children on the Centralized Eligibility List (CEL), which, as of June 30, 2009, totaled just over 66,000 children up to age 3 and another 83,000 children ages 3, 4, and 5 (CDE, 2009).⁷

Children in subsidized care may be in either licensed or license-exempt care, depending on the program. License-exempt subsidized care is an option under Cal-Learn, the CalWORKs stages, and the Alternative Payment program. Early Head Start and Head Start also provide some funding for a home-based option, which we also classify as license-exempt care. Children in licensed settings may be either in a center or family child care home.

As shown in Table 4, overall, about 80 percent of children of all ages (i.e., from birth to age 12) in subsidized care in California were in licensed settings as of 2008. This share is as low as 37 percent for Cal-Learn and 42 percent for CalWORKs Stage 1, programs that serve young mothers still in school or mothers just coming onto welfare, respectively—two groups of parents arguably in need of the more flexible care arrangements afforded by license-exempt care. The share of children in license-exempt settings was zero for the full complement of state-funded Title 5 child development programs. Most of these programs subsidize care in center-based programs, although General Child Care and Development and Migrant Child Care and Development both also support a small number of children in licensed family child care homes. Given the age distribution of children across subsidized programs, as seen in Table 3, infants, toddlers, and school-age children were more likely than preschool-age children to be in license-exempt settings (i.e., the youngest and oldest children are more heavily concentrated in CalWORKs and the AP program, where license-exempt care is more common). ■

⁵ The issue of duplicate counts in Table 3 is discussed in more depth in Karoly, Reardon, and Cho (2007). Based on unpublished data provided by CDE for the programs they administer, the duplicates are just 1 to 2 percent of the total. However, there is more duplication in the counts between Head Start enrollments and CDE-funded enrollments (e.g., State Preschool), since many children are funded for part-day by Head Start and the remainder of the day by a state-funded program. The double-counting could be as high as 30,000 children for the three- and four-year-olds when such blended funding is employed.

⁶ These estimates should be viewed as upper bounds given the possibility of double-counting in the enrollment figures. The double-counting is more of an issue for those three- and four-year-olds who may be in both Head Start and a state-funded program. If we assume that the double-counting affects 30,000 children distributed proportionately across three- and four-year-olds, based on their Head Start enrollments, the overall enrollment rate in subsidized care is too high by 2 and 3 percentage points for three- and four-year-olds, respectively.

⁷ In the most recent CEL update, CDE provided a somewhat different age breakdown, reporting that about 60,000 children up to age 3 and 64,000 children ages 3 and 4 were on the waiting list as of June 30, 2010 (CDE, 2010).

Table 4
Participation by Care Setting in Publicly Funded ECE Programs in California: October 2008

	Enrollment by Care Setting (N)					Distribution by Setting (%)			
	Licensed			License-Exempt	Total ^a	Licensed			License-Exempt
	Total	Center	FCCH			Total	Center	FCCH	
Federal programs									
Title I Preschool	6,347	6,347	0	0	6,347	100	100	0	0
Head Start	92,779	90,436	2,343	8,260	101,039	92	90	2	8
Federal total ^a	99,126	96,783	2,343	8,260	107,386	92	90	2	8
CalWORKs and AP									
Cal-Learn	191	-	-	329	513	37	-	-	63
CalWORKs Stage 1	27,427	-	-	37,134	63,612	42	-	-	58
CalWORKs Stage 2	33,087	13,306	19,781	24,264	55,519	58	23	34	42
CalWORKs Stage 3	29,059	11,738	17,321	27,501	54,813	51	21	31	49
AP	23,777	9,283	14,494	8,938	31,770	73	28	44	27
CalWORKs and AP total ^a	113,541	-	-	98,166	206,227	54	-	-	46
State child development									
State Preschool part-day	85,693	85,693	0	0	85,693	100	100	0	0
State Preschool full-day	3,752	3,752	0	0	3,752	100	100	0	0
PKFL part-day	7,960	7,960	0	0	7,960	100	100	0	0
PKFL full-day	543	543	0	0	543	100	100	0	0
General CCD	87,931	79,583	8,348	0	87,807	100	91	9	0
Migrant CCD	2,651	2,250	401	0	2,633	100	85	15	0
Cal-SAFE	4,112	-	-	0	4,112	100	-	-	0
Latchkey (extended day)	8,324	8,324	0	0	8,324	100	100	0	0
State child dev. total ^a	200,966	-	-	0	200,824	100	-	-	0
System total ^a	413,633	-	-	106,426	514,437	80	-	-	20

SOURCE: Author's analysis of CDSS (2007a, 2007b) and unpublished data provided by the California Head Start Association and CDE.
 NOTES: Numbers in italics denote enrollment figures that were imputed or have imputed components. Title I Preschool enrollment is for the 2008-09 school year. Head Start enrollment is funded enrollment for FY 2009 and includes Early Head Start, Head Start, and Migrant Head Start. The Cal-SAFE figures are for the 2008-09 school year. All other figures are for October 2008. For Early Head Start and Head Start, children in combination option programs and the locally designed option were assumed to be in licensed center-based programs. This affects no more than 5 percent of Early Head Start enrollments and 1 percent of Head Start enrollments, or just 1.2 percent of total enrollment in Head Start. Percentage distribution is based on the total, which includes duplicate counts. FCCH = family child care home. Dashes indicate that data are not available.
^aRow totals for individual programs are unduplicated but do not equal the total across columns because some children may be served in multiple care settings within the same program. Cumulative totals across programs may include duplicates if children are served in multiple programs.

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