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# Unraveling the Complexity of Using Multiple Funding Sources in ECE:

## Early Study Findings on Head Start Program Strategies and Systems Factors

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### Intro & Background

Providing equity-driven, high quality early care and education (ECE) requires significant financial investment.<sup>1</sup> Currently, many ECE funding sources are not funded to a level that allows **all** age-eligible or income-eligible children to access high quality services. This leads to disparities in access and quality—particularly for marginalized groups, such as children in low-income households, children who are dual language learners, children with disabilities, and children who are Black, Indigenous, Latine, and other children of color.<sup>2,3</sup> One strategy to address this challenge may be to use multiple funding sources to support the cost of providing high-quality ECE. Yet, few studies have explicitly investigated the prevalence of using multiple ECE funding sources; strategies for combining funding at the program, local, or state levels; the policies that may encourage or inhibit the use of more than one funding source; or whether the use of multiple funding sources can support access and quality in ways that might address inequities that are based on factors such as race, language, income, and ability. Further exploration of these important dimensions could have critical implications for the allocation and flow of public resources, as well as the design of effective ECE policies, systems, and programs.

The [Financing for ECE Quality & Access for All \(F4EQ\)](#) project will address this need for more and better research evidence about the use of multiple funding sources to inform ECE policy and practice, with a particular focus on practices and policies of Head Start programs. The F4EQ project is a collaborative research venture led by NORC at the University of Chicago in partnership with The Children's Equity Project, Start Early, and consultant Margery Wallen, with funding from the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) at the Administration for Children & Families (ACF). The purpose of the project is to better understand the landscape of Head Start programs' use of multiple funding sources by:

- 1. Identifying common program approaches** to combining funding sources and describing their implementation;
- 2. Exploring potential associations** between program-level funding approach and program implementation, efforts to advance equity, and engagement with broader ECE systems;
- 3. Studying system-level approaches** to coordination of combining funding sources; and
- 4. Identifying the local, state, and federal conditions** that influence program leaders' decision making around using multiple funding sources and broader ECE systems engagement.

## Key Definitions

- 1. Funding sources** refer to the available sources of funding for ECE providers to implement ECE services, including federal dollars (e.g., Child Care and Development Fund [CCDF], Head Start, Title I, Child and Adult Care Food Program), public state and local dollars (e.g., state-funded pre-school or pre-K, tax revenue, grants, prevention initiatives) and non-public sources (e.g., tuition, private donations, grants, endowments).<sup>4</sup>
- 2. An ECE provider** is any organization providing direct ECE services to children birth through age five and their families. ECE providers may be situated in a variety of settings (e.g., center-based, district-based, home-based) and receive various types of funding (e.g., Head Start, CCDF, state pre-K).
- 3. Head Start program** is used to refer to an agency, or their delegate, that is a local public or private non-profit or for-profit entity designated by the Administration for Children & Families to operate a Head Start program to serve children aged three to compulsory school age, pursuant to section 641(b) and (d) of the Head Start Act. This also includes Early Head Start (EHS) programs, which serve pregnant people and children birth to age three. The umbrella of Head Start programs includes EHS, American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, and EHS programs that are part of EHS-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP) grants.
- 4. Combining funding sources** is an umbrella term for the various ways states and programs might use multiple funding sources to provide ECE services. Other related terms deployed in the field include braided, blended, layered, stacked, or coordinated funding. While each of these terms implies a slightly different approach to funding, we use “combining” or “combined” throughout the project to encompass the many ways of using funds from multiple sources.
- 5. Coordination of combining funding sources** refers to the supports, mechanisms, and activities that agencies at the state- and local-level implement to enable ECE programs’ use of multiple funding sources, as well as the ways in which individuals in those state- and local-level agencies make intentional decisions about how different funding sources can be used together.
- 6. Equity** in early childhood systems requires providing access to a full array of high-quality comprehensive services and supports to all children and families that result in positive outcomes regardless of race, socio-economic status, language, disability, or any other social or cultural characteristic. Actors within equitable early childhood systems (1) work closely with families and communities to reflect their identities/priorities, (2) acknowledge and rectify historical inequities in resource distribution, (3) identify and combat systemic bias, (4) deliver culturally and linguistically responsive and affirming services.

At both state and local levels, there are ongoing efforts to coordinate ECE funding from various sources and provide guidance regarding whether and how different funding sources can be used together. It is important to note that every funding source comes with its own distinct set of policies, procedures, and standards to which providers must adhere. These include guidelines about which children and families are eligible to receive programming or services paid for by those funding sources, how those services are delivered, the qualifications and requirements of staff, and how to prioritize delivery of services among eligible children and families. As researchers explore how ECE providers approach using multiple funding sources, it will be beneficial to simultaneously examine state-level approaches and structures. This multi-level perspective will allow the ECE field to better understand how contextual factors such as state and local ECE investments and formal and informal guidance inform decisions about combining funding.

While there is interest in this topic across all ECE programs, the F4EQ project is particularly interested in how Head Start programs approach the use of multiple funding sources. Within the broader ECE provider landscape, 3,459 Head Start programs across the nation provided comprehensive services to children and families in low-income households in 2022.<sup>5</sup> Head Start is one of the largest ECE programs nationally, receiving a total of nearly \$12 billion in the 2023 federal budget and reaching more than 800,000 children and their families in 2022.<sup>6</sup> Yet, Head Start is distinct from other ECE programs like

child care and public pre-Kindergarten (pre-K) in its purpose, design, funding, and administration. The primary difference is Head Start's focus on comprehensive early learning, health, nutrition, and family support services designed based on the priorities and needs of local communities.<sup>7</sup> Thus, of particular interest to the F4EQ project—and the ECE field more broadly—is if and how Head Start leaders approach the use of Head Start funding in addition to one or more other funding sources to provide high quality, comprehensive services for children and families and whether this combining advances equity in those settings.

In this brief, we share early findings from the F4EQ project. At the time of this publication, the project team has completed a literature review, a policy scan of key national and state policies related to ECE programs' use of multiple funding sources, and key informant interviews. Through these activities, we sought to (1) better understand the reasons why Head Start programs choose to seek multiple funding sources and to combine those funds to support programming and (2) identify what factors encourage the decision to combine funding and what factors make combining funding harder. The findings that emerged from this work shaped the F4EQ project's design of national surveys to inform future discussions about federal and state ECE funding (especially for Head Start) and related implications for ECE policies, systems, providers, structures, and practices (see **Figure 1 on p. 4 for an overview of the F4EQ early project activities**).

*These early findings may be of particular interest to those working in ECE programs and systems, including Head Start Collaboration Office staff, national and regional training and technical assistance providers, Head Start and Early Head Start grant and program administrators, administrators of state and federal early childhood funding, and state and federal policymakers.*

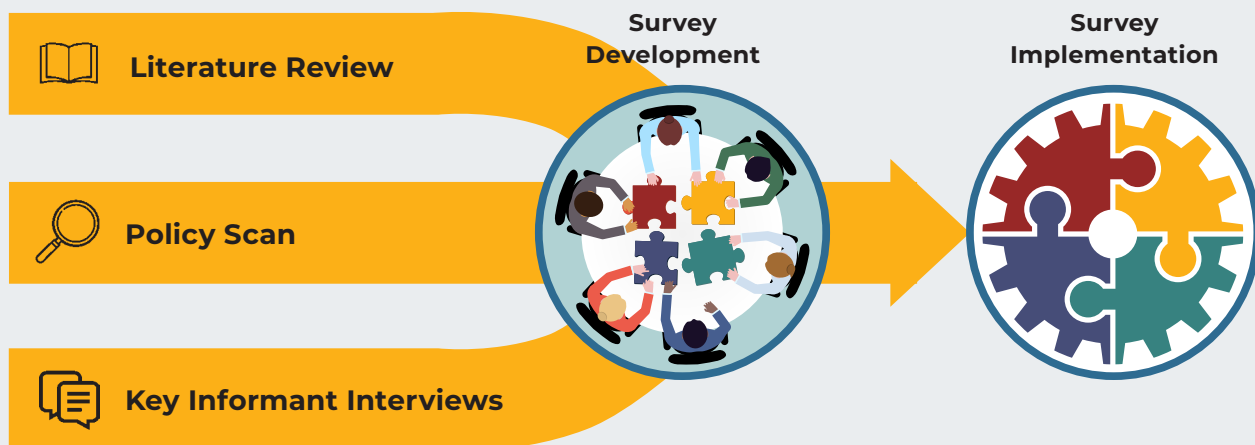


## F4EQ Guiding Research Questions:




The findings presented below are guided by the following overarching F4EQ project research questions.

- 1** What **funding approaches** do **Head Start programs** use to support the cost of programming?
- 2** How are Head Start programs' funding approaches related to **program implementation** and **efforts to advance equity**?
- 3** What are the **system-level approaches, structures, and supports around coordinating multiple sources of ECE funding** that may inform Head Start programs' **(a)** use of multiple funding sources, **(b)** integration within broader ECE systems, and **(c)** efforts to advance equity?  
*These systems-level approaches, structures, and supports may be at the federal, state, regional, county, or local level and may include financing **policy levers** (e.g., requirements, regulations, standards) and **enabling conditions** (e.g., governance structures, mindsets, the political will to coordinate ECE funds).*
- 4** How are Head Start programs' funding approaches related to those system-level approaches, structures, and supports around coordinating multiple sources of ECE funding identified in Research Question 3?

**Figure 1: Overview of F4EQ Early Project Activities**



## Methods

-  **Literature Review:** The team identified relevant content through a systematic search using key terms to identify a range of publication types in peer reviewed and gray literature sources. As a starting point, the team identified and analyzed four previously published literature reviews on ECE funding and financing systems. The team then supplemented these reviews with an analysis of an additional 8 peer-reviewed studies, 7 of which contained empirical data, and 15 grey literature documents (such as reports, briefs, and other reputable literature not published in peer-reviewed journals or books). Across the literature, there was limited empirical evidence (by “empirical”, we mean studies that used data to systematically investigate the methods and impacts of combining multiple ECE funding sources). None of the empirical studies we found in our search examined barriers or enablers to combining multiple funding sources or the impact of specific policies associated with each funding source.
-  **Policy Scan:** To deepen our understanding of the ECE financing landscape, the team then conducted a policy scan and policy landscape analysis. We reviewed Head Start policies alongside state CCDF and state pre-K policies in a sample of 20 purposively selected states (see **Appendix A for selection criteria**). The team also completed a comprehensive analysis of documents (including legislative documents) related to ECE and child care financing policies in four states (for additional information about the selection of states and procedures for the policy landscape analysis, see **Appendix A**).
-  **Key Informant Interviews:** In addition, the team held interviews with 15 key informants that included five Head Start program leaders and ten ECE leaders at the state and regional/federal levels in roles like state-level ECE administrators and regional Head Start consultants. The key informants were selected and interviewed from a larger pool of those likely to be most knowledgeable about policies on using multiple funding sources and practices within their respective Head Start program, state, or regional/federal level. The sample was purposively constructed to represent diversity across several key metrics, primarily Head Start region and a state’s inclusion in the F4EQ team’s related policy scan (see **Appendix A for methods**).





*It’s difficult when the feds and state are looking at different program eligibility requirements. A family can be eligible for Head Start but lose eligibility for child care assistance. We can’t remove a family from the program because of the discrepancy, so [we] need to figure out how to make up that gap.”*


**F4EQ HEAD START PROGRAM** Key Informant



# Key Early Findings

## What We Learned and Remaining Gaps in Knowledge

This section highlights what we learned through the early activities of the F4EQ project and then presents the knowledge gaps that remain. Findings are presented by theme and then method. Findings that emerged from the F4EQ’s literature review are indicated by a book icon , from the policy scan are indicated by a magnifying glass icon , and from key informant interviews are

indicated by a chat icon . Utilizing these three methods, we sought to initially capture what the field already knew in relation to the common approaches, policy levers, and enablers and barriers to combining or coordinating multiple ECE funding sources. Importantly, these early findings informed the F4EQ project’s national survey design discussed in the “Next Steps” section. We caution readers that these findings may be limited by the targeted scope of the literature review and the sample of states identified for the policy scan.

## Theme 1: Approaches to Using Multiple ECE Funding Sources

### Key Early Findings and Evidence

**Approaches to using multiple funding sources looked different across ECE providers, though Head Start programs often relied on a set of common sources.**



Aside from CCDF and state pre-K, Head Start programs appear to most frequently use Title I and the Child and Adult Care Food Program funds alongside their Head Start funds.<sup>8</sup>



All five informants from Head Start programs reported using multiple funding sources. Key informants consistently reported several common ECE funding sources for providers, including CCDF, state pre-K, city or regional pre-K, foundation grants, program endowments, local prevention initiatives, and family co-pays.

### Remaining Gaps in Knowledge



Further investigation is needed to understand how providers decide which additional funding sources to pursue, as well as implementation approaches to combining funding.

### Key Early Findings and Evidence

**Equity was not commonly highlighted or integrated into program approaches to combining funding or research design.**



Few studies clearly defined how programs make funding decisions regarding equity, such as how they may use funding to serve populations that have been marginalized or how they allocate resources to support racially and/or linguistically responsive practices in their ECE services.

### Remaining Gaps in Knowledge



There is a need for research that explores if and how programs coordinate funding to equitably reach and serve priority populations (e.g., children with disabilities, children who are dual language learners, and children experiencing homelessness and/or in the foster care system).

## Theme 2: Common Reasons for Using Multiple Funding Sources

### Key Early Findings and Evidence

**Some ECE providers felt they needed more than one funding source to implement comprehensive, high quality care.**



Several qualitative studies and research briefs found that programs seek out multiple funding sources to increase program quality and expand services. This includes increasing workforce and career development opportunities for staff and expanding comprehensive services and wrap-around supports.



Informants echoed the need to combine multiple funding sources to increase program quality. Informants from Head Start programs as well as those who serve in state-level roles reported that providers need more than one funding source to fully support the cost of the holistic, comprehensive, high quality ECE services they want to provide for children and families.

**Using more than one funding source may help improve access to comprehensive ECE services to meet the needs of local communities and marginalized groups.**



Available literature suggested programs often use multiple funding sources to increase access and provide comprehensive child and family services for communities with low financial resources. Providers also combine funding to increase the number of hours children have access to ECE programming to better support the needs of families.<sup>9</sup>



Additionally, key informants from Head Start programs reported relying heavily on unrestricted funds (i.e., dollars that can be used without limits for any purpose that aligns with the program's objectives) to “plug” funding holes for expenses that were not supported by their main funding sources. These key informants expressed that combining targeted funding with unrestricted funding sources helps increase access for families. For example, additional dollars mean providers could increase the number of families (even those not eligible for Head Start) receiving Head Start-like services. Or, providers could be supplying higher dosages of additional services for families or staff.

### Remaining Gaps in Knowledge



There is a need for additional research on the specific reasons why ECE providers combine funding from more than one source. This includes which costs they are trying to cover or goals they are trying to meet through these efforts (such as advancing access, quality, or equity).



***It's challenging to provide all the services required without braiding or blending. Braiding enables [programs] to create a more comprehensive program with safety nets."***

**F4EQ STATE-LEVEL** Key Informant



## Theme 3: Enablers and Barriers to Using Multiple Funding Sources

### Key Early Findings and Evidence

**Variation in requirements or restrictions across different ECE funding sources presented challenges to providers using more than one funding source.**



Findings from the literature suggested that variations in funding requirements often presented challenges to programs when combining different funding sources.<sup>10</sup>



We observed this variation in our policy scan. All 20 states included in the policy scan had state CCDF and state pre-K funding requirements that differed from Head Start requirements across several categories.<sup>11</sup> In most cases, Head Start had more service delivery requirements than CCDF and state pre-K.



Key informants noted that unaligned, or even conflicting, requirements across ECE funding sources created barriers for programs in both beginning to combine ECE funding sources and maintaining these efforts. Most informants from Head Start programs cited eligibility as the primary area of variation across funding sources. They also noted discrepancies in requirements for teacher educational attainment and lack of parity with wages of local school district pre-K-12 grade educators.



Two out of seven state-level informants said, in their experience, provider staff felt unable to meet the expectations of multiple funding sources. This may have resulted in providers not bringing in a new funding source because of misalignment that exists between the requirements of differing funding sources.

### Remaining Gaps in Knowledge



Further clarity is needed to identify the federal, state, local, or program funding mechanisms that might support or create a barrier to using multiple funding sources.

There is a need for more clarity regarding how state and local agencies approach setting requirements for ECE funding sources (e.g., how to access funds, allowable or restricted uses), and whether they purposely align these requirements. This could have implications for whether ECE providers combine various funding sources, which ones, and how easy or difficult it is for them.



***If you're braiding funds, you may be braiding three different salary scales, three different benefits packages, three different days off or number of [working] days. You can have teachers in the same building that are compensated differently for doing similar work."***

**F4EQ HEAD START PROGRAM** Key Informant





## Theme 3: Enablers and Barriers to Using Multiple Funding Sources

### Key Early Findings and Evidence

**Challenges in combining multiple funding sources appear to increase administrative burden, costs, and effort for providers.**



The differing policies and program governance across funding sources may contribute to uncertainty about whether, how, and when programs are allowed to combine funds. For example, requirements regarding eligibility, service delivery, and allowable expenses varied, which may mean providers must put in increased effort to understand and manage expectations across funding sources. Specific requirement areas with substantial differences included teacher-child ratios and staff qualifications, family work requirements, service duration, and income eligibility.



Several key informants at both the program and state level reported tensions around these misalignments. They suggested that the burden of figuring out how to successfully implement each funding source's specific policies and procedures fell heavily on programs. Key informants from Head Start programs reported that programs received little or inconsistent guidance from funders. For example, programs might spend additional time and effort tracking funds separately so that they can report them separately.

### Remaining Gaps in Knowledge



It is necessary to understand the amount of time and resources administrators spend on addressing varying requirements and how that impacts their primary responsibilities.



*It's difficult when the feds and state are looking at different program eligibility requirements. A family can be eligible for Head Start but lose eligibility for child care assistance. We can't remove a family from the program because of the discrepancy, so [we] need to figure out how to make up that gap."*

**F4EQ HEAD START PROGRAM** Key Informant



## Theme 3: Enablers and Barriers to Using Multiple Funding Sources

### Key Early Findings and Evidence

**Governance structures and integration of Head Start within other state ECE funding sources, like state pre-K or state CCDF implementation, seemed to affect whether and how programs combined funding.**



Key informants from Head Start programs and at the state level reported several barriers to combining funding, such as varying levels of autonomy in their decision-making and ability to craft flexible approaches and financing policies within their agency's governance structure. Conversely, some state-level key informants identified Head Start's inclusion in a unified state ECE quality improvement system as an enabler to coordinating funding.

### Remaining Gaps in Knowledge



There was limited documentation on what the relationship between state governance structure and Head Start integration looked like across the nation and whether greater integration of Head Start into state ECE efforts had any association with Head Start programs' approaches to and experiences with combining funding. We heard from a limited number of informants about this issue, but we lack systematic information about this potential enabler or barrier.

### Key Early Findings and Evidence

**Guidance for how to combine ECE funding sources was limited in official regulations and requirements.**



Our broad policy scan found limited evidence of documented policies at the state or agency level (i.e., legislation, administrative rules, regulations, or code) related to combining funds at the ECE program level. However, a deeper look at policies and legislation in four specific states (Arizona, Iowa, Louisiana, West Virginia) showed that even without documented policies, these states encouraged coordination and collaboration across programs and service types by providing informal guidance, tools, and training on how to use ECE funds to best meet the needs of communities and serve the greatest number of eligible children and families.



Despite evidence of tools and supports in some states, key informants at the Head Start program and state levels expressed a lack of targeted support and guidance related to combining funding sources..

### Remaining Gaps in Knowledge



There is a need to better understand the availability and quality of guidance and direct supports related to combining funding as well as how program and state leaders access these supports.

## Summary

Through our three initial project activities—a literature review, policy scan, and key informant interviews—we learned that the use of multiple funding sources was common among Head Start programs to support program quality and access. We also found that there were several common sources of funding often used in combination with Head Start, including CCDF and state pre-K. Findings across these study activities suggested that differences in funding source requirements presented ECE programs with challenges around combining funding, leading to hesitation for programs that wish to use more than one funding source. The early findings also helped us pinpoint overarching knowledge gaps that require further investigation about whether and how Head Start program and state-level leaders carry out financing strategies that incorporate multiple funding sources.

Importantly, there was a lack of research about how Head Start programs allocated resources from more than one funding source in ways that supported their program goals. None of the Head Start program leaders who served as a F4EQ key informant explicitly reported using a particular funding source to reach a specific Head Start program goal or to serve a specific marginalized group, though studies identified in the literature review reported access and quality as outcomes that motivated programs to combine funds.<sup>12</sup> Few studies, however, empirically examined quality and access as outcomes—that is, whether using multiple funding sources enhanced quality, access, or other targeted outcomes. Furthermore, equity was not commonly highlighted as a stated program goal related to combining funds nor were increased equity in quality, access, or outcomes emphasized in the research studies reviewed in the literature. These findings lead to questions about *motivations for, approaches to, and outcomes associated with combining funding.*

## Next Steps

Informed by these early findings, we developed nationwide surveys to capture the use of and context around combined funding approaches in Head Start programs—specifically if, how, when, why, and with what other funding sources Head Start programs combine funding. These surveys will allow us to learn more about programs' experiences with combined funding approaches, including:

- The motivations for using multiple funding sources;
- How different approaches to combining funding may meet different needs of programs and the families and children they serve;
- The specific enabling factors that support programs in making decisions to best meet the needs of the populations they serve; and
- The structures, resources, and capabilities needed to support combined funding approaches.

These surveys will also yield information about the implications of funding source requirements, staff and time resources spent on cost allocations, access to support and guidance on combining funds, systems-level governance structures, and the correlation between using multiple funding sources and provision of supports for priority populations served by Head Start.

Head Start program staff, state and federal ECE leaders, and others can look forward to reviewing findings from the nationwide survey findings which will be publicly available on the [F4EQ page of the OPRE website](#) in the second half of 2025. The resulting insights from this descriptive study will generate beneficial new knowledge about Head Start's use of multiple funding sources within broader ECE systems, including potential enablers and barriers. Furthermore, the F4EQ project will identify promising approaches or bright spots that inform program strategies and policy levers by which the coordination of ECE funding may support the equitable delivery of more accessible, higher quality, comprehensive ECE services for young children and their families.

## **Subsequent F4EQ Project Activity:**

### **Two nationwide surveys launched in early 2024.**

- 1** One survey asked all Head Start programs (inclusive of all grant recipients and delegates) about topics such as program characteristics, current funding sources, motivations for and decisions around combining funding, and state/local context. We specifically aimed to reach program staff, such as directors and finance managers, who are involved in decision-making about how funding sources are allocated to expenses, knowledgeable about the budgeting and reporting processes, and involved in ensuring the organization complies with rules and regulations.
- 2** A second survey collected data from ECE state administrators, focusing on three respondents from each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia: the Head Start Collaboration Office director, the lead state pre-K administrator, and the lead CCDF administrator. The questions focused on topics such as the integration of Head Start into state ECE policies and decision making, state decisions and approaches to coordinating funding at the state level, supports offered to programs around using multiple funding sources, and state leader perspectives and beliefs on the goals of coordinating ECE funding.

# Appendix A:

## Overview of Methods



### Literature Review

The Financing for Early Care and Education Quality and Access for All (F4EQ) project was launched to fill gaps in the research base about Head Start programs' approaches to using multiple funding sources and Head Start's integration into the broader early care and education (ECE) system at state and local levels. The F4EQ team conducted a literature review to identify what the field still does not know and consider how our project could help fill those gaps. That literature review sought to identify what research exists about how Head Start programs combine funding, how states or local communities coordinate Head Start funding with other ECE funding sources, and the ways in which using multiple funding sources supports program implementation and goals—in particular, how combining funding sources supports access, quality, and equity.

The team first searched for existing recent reviews of the literature and published reports that provided information about the landscape of funding and financing systems in ECE. The team identified and analyzed four research reviews in the grey literature (i.e., non-peer-reviewed resources such as technical reports and policy briefs) and one peer-reviewed publication about the landscape of ECE financing that provided the foundation of this review.<sup>13, 14</sup>

The F4EQ team then searched the existing grey and peer-reviewed literature for any additional relevant articles, studies, and reports to add to our review. We used the search terms listed in **Table A-1**. In total, we found 24 relevant peer-reviewed and grey literature documents (16 grey literature and 8 peer-reviewed literature documents).

**Table A.1:** Key search terms used to scan the peer-reviewed and grey literature.

#### Head Start Specific

- Head Start partnerships
- Head Start financing
- Head Start and pre-K funding
- Head Start and child care funding
- Head Start and QRIS funding
- state funded Head Start
- Head Start and quality rating and improvement systems
- mental health and Head Start funding
- TANF and Head Start
- health and Head Start funding
- nutrition and Head Start funding
- Medicaid and Head Start
- WIC and Head Start
- Child and Adult Care Food Program and Head Start
- Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships and funding Head Start and IDEA Funding

#### General ECE Funding

- braiding, blending, layering funding in early childhood systems
- early childhood education financing
- early education braided funding exemplars
- Early care and education funding models
- wrap around services
- mixed-delivery systems early education
- shared services and early education
- Birth to five funding systems
- Preschool Development Grants
- Title I preschool funding models

#### Adjacent Systems

- full-service community schools funding models
- community action agency funding models

Once we identified all relevant publications, the team extracted key information from all publications, including:

- methodology
- terminology and definitions related to combining funding
- intended audience (e.g., policymakers, ECE program administrators, researchers)
- type of funding sources used (e.g., Head Start, Early Head Start, CCDF, Preschool Development Grant)

- level of combining or coordination (e.g., local, state, national sources)
- barriers and enablers of using multiple funding sources
- access implications
- quality implications
- equity implications
- key findings and gaps

The team then reviewed the information for themes across publications and gaps in the literature.



## Policy Scan

The F4EQ project team also completed a policy scan. For this, we reviewed policies and requirements across three funding sources (Head Start, state pre-K, and state Child Care Development Fund [CCDF]) across 20 states. We looked for information we hypothesized might influence whether or how an ECE program combined multiple funding sources. The scan addressed two key research questions:

1. To what extent are key state-funded ECE program requirements consistent with Head Start requirements in the same policy area?
2. Across all three funding sources, what ECE funding policies exist on how to combine funds, including relevant supports or restrictions?

We selected a sample of 20 states in which to conduct the scan using the following process. First, we narrowed the list to states with state-funded pre-K programs, as we were specifically interested in comparing Head Start policies to state-funded pre-K policies. Out of those, we intentionally selected a sample of 20 that provided variability along the following characteristics:

- Head Start region
- Presence of state-funded Head Start
- Presence of Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP) grants
- Whether other state ECE programs are housed in the same agency as the Head Start Collaboration Office
- Reach of state funded pre-K
- Centralized versus local governance structures

- State size and urbanicity based on state population

**Table A-2** shows the characteristics in the order that we prioritized them along with our approach to choosing states with each characteristic. Our final 20-state selection is shown in **Table A-3**.

To systematically document policies, we searched for policies and requirements related to federal (Head Start Program Performance Standards; HSPPS) and state-level (CCDF and pre-K) funding sources. For each funding source, we pulled out specific information about the policies and requirements related to:

- **Workforce Qualifications and Supports** (such as salary requirements and staff qualifications by title)
- **Financing Policies** (such as regulations, barriers, and/or supports for combining funding; funding mechanisms such as grants, contracts, vouchers, etc.; family co-pay requirements; provider reimbursement requirements)
- **Quality Standards** (such as teacher-child ratios, extended day and/or year, access to infant and early childhood mental health consultation, policies related to expulsion and suspension, transportation requirements)
- **Eligibility Requirements** (such as priority enrollment for dual language learners, children with disabilities, children experiencing homelessness and/or in the foster care system; family income)

**Table A.2: State Characteristics and Sampling Priorities for Policy Scan**

State Characteristic	Sampling Priority or Approach
Presence of State-funded Pre-K	States without State-funded Pre-K were excluded
Head Start Region	Selected two states per region
Presence of State-funded Head Start	Selected one state with State-funded Head Start and one state without per region
Presence of Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Grant	Prioritized states that are EHS-CCP grantees <sup>15</sup>
Governance Structures	Selected mix of governance structures based on state-level location of ECE offices (whether they are housed in the same agency as the Head Start Collaboration Office) and whether state has centralized or local governance structure
Reach of State-funded Pre-K	Prioritized states with higher reach (i.e., higher proportions of children are funded by state-funded pre-K)
State Size and Urbanicity	Within above priority characteristics, maximized mix of size and urbanicity (ensuring inclusion of states that are largely rural)

**Table A.3: State Selection for Policy Scan**

Head Start Region	Selected State 1	Selected State 2	Selected State 3
1	Massachusetts	Maine	—
2	New York	—	—
3	Pennsylvania	West Virginia	—
4	Alabama	Georgia	North Carolina
5	Wisconsin	Illinois	—
6	Oklahoma	Louisiana	—
7	Iowa	Kansas	—
8	Colorado	Utah	—
9	Nevada	Arizona	—
10	Oregon	Washington	—

We began by identifying information from existing databases. We specifically looked for Head Start policies in the HSPPS, state CCDF policies in the 2019 CCDF Policies Database<sup>16</sup>, and state pre-K policies in the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) State of Preschool Yearbook 2021 reports. For policies or requirements that we could not find in any of these sources, we referred to 2022-2024 State CCDF plans and individual state pre-K guidelines.

After documenting state requirements under each category (workforce, financing policies, quality standards, and eligibility requirements), we assessed whether Head Start and individual state-level policies under state pre-K and state CCDF funding sources were similar or different from each other.

As we reviewed existing information from these data sources, we found that finance-related requirements and policies were not well

documented. We therefore conducted a second round of review that focused on federal policy guidance and information memoranda from the Office of Head Start (OHS) and state-level

documents published by entities such as state early learning councils, state agencies, and state and national policy organizations for four states: Arizona, Iowa, Louisiana, and West Virginia.



## Key Informant Interviews (KII)

The project team interviewed 15 key informants, practitioners who were knowledgeable about the topic of coordinating financing in ECE, to ask questions related to each of the project's three primary research questions. Key informants worked across the different levels of ECE policy and practice (program, state, and federal). Informants were purposely selected as those most likely to be knowledgeable at their level and to represent diversity of perspective based on several key factors, such as Head Start Region and whether their state was included in the project's policy scan.

- At the **program** level, we spoke with informants from Head Start programs. These included five individuals employed by five different community-based Head Start service providers in four states. Their titles included Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Impact Officer, Chief [Early Care and Education] Officer, and Executive Director.
- At the state level, we spoke with seven individuals from five different states. Two individuals were

their state's Head Start Collaboration Director, and the rest worked in a variety of state early education departments as administrators of different state-controlled funding sources. One of the interviews included three informants: one Head Start Collaboration Office director and two state ECE program administrators. All three of these informants were counted individually.

- At the **federal** level, we spoke with three individuals who provide consulting and/or training and technical assistance services to Head Start Programs.

Interview topics included state structures and governance, coordinated funding models and approaches, decision-making, benefits and challenges of bringing together multiple funding sources and other additional information. Each level of informant had a uniquely tailored set of questions that were most relevant to their understanding of ECE finance policies and implementation.

## Endnotes

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community context. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 30(B), 316-326. doi: [10.1016/j.ecresq.2014.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2014.01.001); Hirpa, D.A. (2021). Exclusion of children with disabilities from early childhood education: Including approaches of social exclusion. *Cogent Education*, 8(1), 1-20. doi: [10.1080/2331186X.2021.1952824](https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2021.1952824)

4. To contain the scope of early project activities, the review of the knowledge base, policy scan, and key informant interviews did not focus on the following funding sources: early childhood special education or early intervention services under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Medicare, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Although funds from these sources can support services to young children and their families, they are not generally administered directly by ECE programs.
5. **Office of Head Start. (2023, September 29).** Program information report: *Summary report – 2022 – national level*. Head Start Enterprise System. <https://hses.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/pir/reports>
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9. **Gonzalez, K., & Caronongan, P. (2021).** *Braiding federal funding to expand access to quality early care and education and early childhood supports and services: A tool for states and local communities*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/early-childhood-braiding>
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11. States in the policy scan included Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maine, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin.
12. **Banghart, P., Cook, M., Bamdad, T., Carlson, J., & Lloyd, C.M. (2019).** *Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships: Annotated bibliography*. Child Trends. [https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/EHS\\_CCP\\_Annotated-Bibliography\\_ChildTrends\\_January2019.pdf](https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/EHS_CCP_Annotated-Bibliography_ChildTrends_January2019.pdf)
13. Research reviews from gray literature included:  
**Caronongan, P., Kirby, G., Boller, K., Modlin, E., & Lyskawa, J. (2016).** Assessing the implementation and cost of high quality early care and education: A review of the literature (Report No. 2016-31). *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/assessing-implementation-and-cost-high-quality-early-care-and-education-review>  
**Bernstein, S., Reid, N., Harrington, J., & Malone, L. (2022).** Head Start's interaction with federal, state, and local systems (Report No. 2022-12). *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED622889.pdf>  
**Maxwell, K., Warner-Richter, M., Partika, A., Franchett, A., & Kane, M. (2019).** The connection between head start and state or territory early care and education systems: A scan of existing data (Report No. 2019-73). *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*. [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/ccepra\\_head\\_start\\_and\\_ece\\_connections\\_aug\\_2019.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/ccepra_head_start_and_ece_connections_aug_2019.pdf)  
**National Research Council. (2015).** *Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation*. The National Academies Press. <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/19401/transforming-the-workforce-for-children-birth-through-age-8-a>
14. **Peer-reviewed landscape analyses included: Hustedt, J. T., & Barnett, W. S. (2011).** Financing early childhood education programs: State, federal, and local issues. *Educational Policy*, 25(1), 167-192.
15. States with EHS-CCPs are currently identified to the best of our knowledge. Sampling may be updated when we have a more accurate list of these states.
16. 2019 was the last year for which data was available through the CCDF Policies Database at the time of data extraction (Summer 2022).

# Unraveling the Complexity of Using Multiple Funding Sources in ECE: Early Study Findings on Head Start Program Strategies and Systems Factors

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