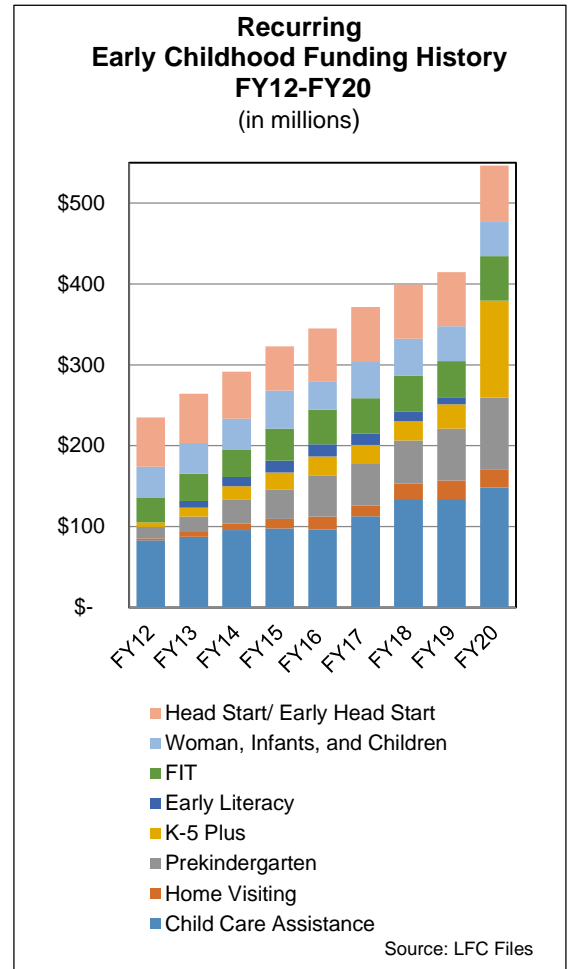


Quality services for at-risk children can impact their future educational and economic success. Recognizing the importance of such services, early childhood initiatives have remained a priority, even as the Legislature confronted difficult funding decisions in recent years.

LFC’s annual Early Childhood Accountability Report is intended to provide a system-wide look at key early childhood indicators across state agencies and consolidate information regarding expenditures and outcomes. The report provides trend data indicating mixed performance results on measures reported last year.

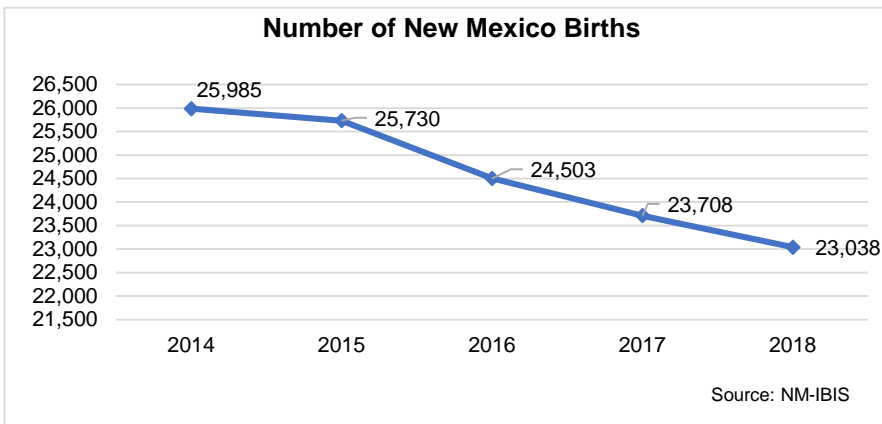
New Mexico’s early childhood care and education system begins prenatally and extends through age 8. Services for improving the health, safety, stability, and education of New Mexico’s children span several state agencies, including the Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD), the Department of Health (DOH), the Human Services Department (HSD), and the Public Education Department (PED). The newly authorized Early Childhood Education and Care Department will consolidate many of these services in FY21. Concerns regarding low or declining performance in key indicators such as the rate of repeat child maltreatment, immunization, and reading proficiency of low-income children have been raised. With this knowledge, the Legislature invested in multiple prevention and intervention strategies over the last several years, such as home visiting and prekindergarten.

Analysis for the 2019 Accountability Report found mixed performance related to programs in all agencies. Approximately 30 percent of New Mexico third grade students demonstrate readiness for the next grade level in reading or math. Health and safety indicators continue to show low performance. Declining birth rates and lack of coordination creates competition issues and quality may be adversely impacted by rapid expansion of programming. Given the state’s significant investment in programs to improve early childhood health and educational outcomes, analysis of key indicators is vital to ensure investments are meeting their intended goals.

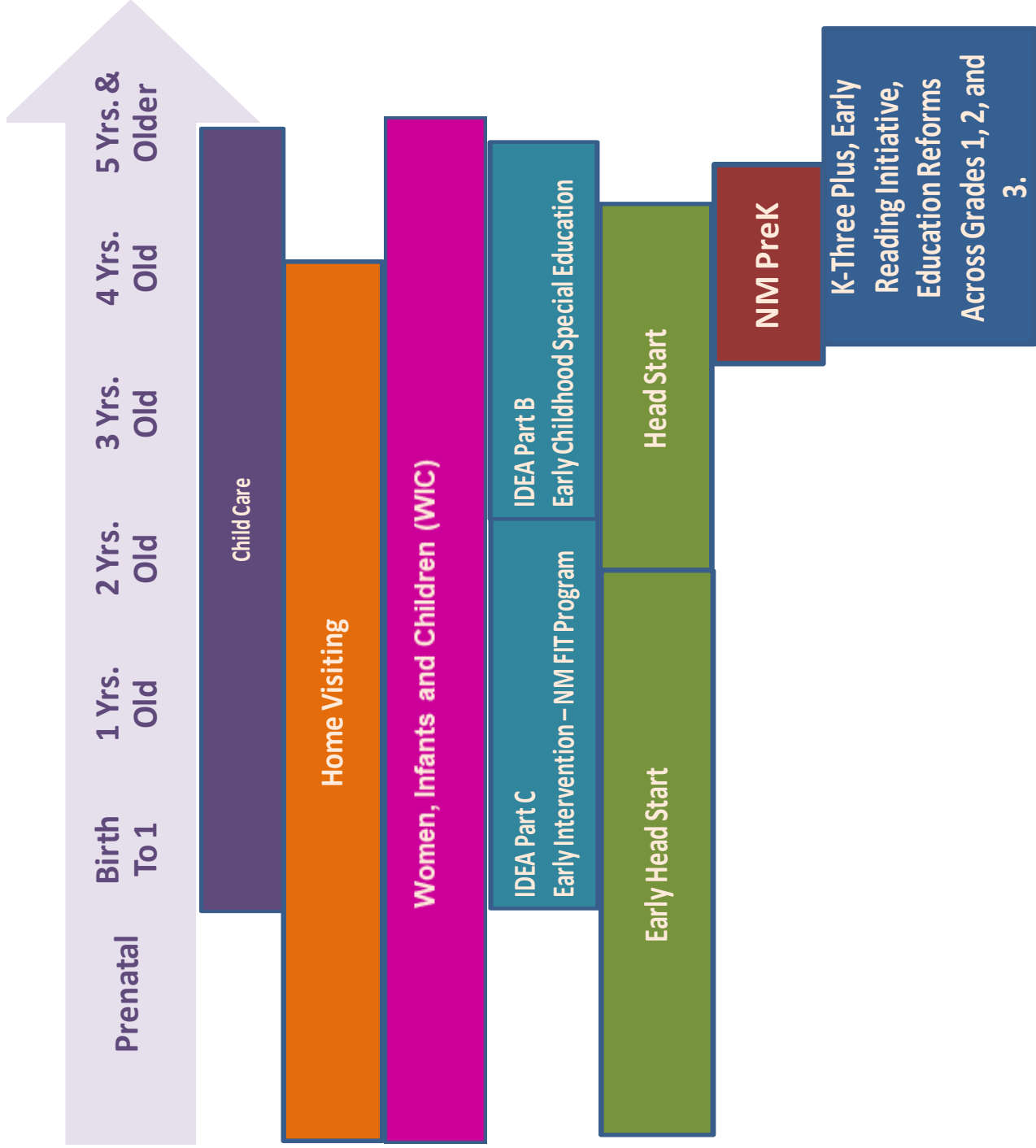


Early Childhood Program Issues and Impact

- **Home Visiting** expansion should be better targeted to high risk and high need areas. Medicaid home visiting have delayed expansion. Over last 2 years, there have been \$2.8 million unspent in home visiting dollars.
- **Childcare-** New Mexico pays higher rates for quality than most states without evidence of impact.
- **Prekindergarten** coordination and quality controls are needed to address potential reduced impact.
- **K-3/K-5 Plus** is more effective when implemented correctly.
- **Head Start** enrollment continues to fall and performance on key measures of teacher quality and service delivery are well below the national average and vary by state region.



New Mexico's Early Childhood Care and Education System



Early Childhood Accountability Report- 2019 Update

HEALTHY	Infant Mortality	Low Birth Weight	Immunization Rate	Early Access to Prenatal Care			
	2017	2017	2017	2017			
	6.2	9.5%	72%	64%			
	Per 1,000 children U.S. – 5.8 (2017)	2,241 children U.S. – 8.3% (2017)	U.S. – 70.4% (2017)	23,708 children U.S. – 77% (2017)			
	Same	Worse	Better	Better			
2016	6.2	2016	9%	2016	68.5%	2016	63%
Source:	CDC	DOH	DOH	DOH			

SAFE	Child Death Rate: Abuse or Neglect	Rate of Child Maltreatment	Rate of Foster Care Placement	Repeat Maltreatment			
	2017	2017	2017	2019			
	3.28	17.6	3.9	11%			
	Per 100,000 children U.S. 2.24	Per 1,000 children U.S. – 9.1	Per 1,000 children	U.S. Std– 5.4%			
	Worse	Worse	Higher	Same			
2016	2.24	2016	15.4	2016	3.8	2018	11%
Source:	ACF	ACF	ACF	CYFD/NCANDS			

READY TO LEARN BY KINDERGARTEN	Kindergarten Students Proficient in Reading on Istation Beginning of Year Test	Rate of Children Under 5 in Poverty	Kids Funded to Participate in Early Childhood Programs	Low Income 4-Year-Olds in Day Services	
	FY19	2017	FY19	FY18/FY19	
	18%	33%	78,201	77%	
	Baseline*		children	19,779 children	
	Better	Better	Better	Better	
2016	34%	FY18	73,871	FY17/18	73%
Source:	PED	Census	LFC Vol. 3	CYFD, ACF, & LFC	

EDUCATED 3rd Grade	Reading – All Kids	Reading – Low-Income Kids	Math – All Kids	Math – Low-Income Kids			
	2019	2019	2019	2019			
	27%	22%	32%	26%			
	Worse**	Worse**	Same**	Worse**			
	2018	28.5%	2018	25%	2018	32%	2018
Source:	PED	PED	PED	PED			

* Istation transitioned from three performance tiers to five performance tiers in FY19.

**In SY19 PED used the TAMELA rather than the PARCC as its standardized test.

Capacity and Coordination

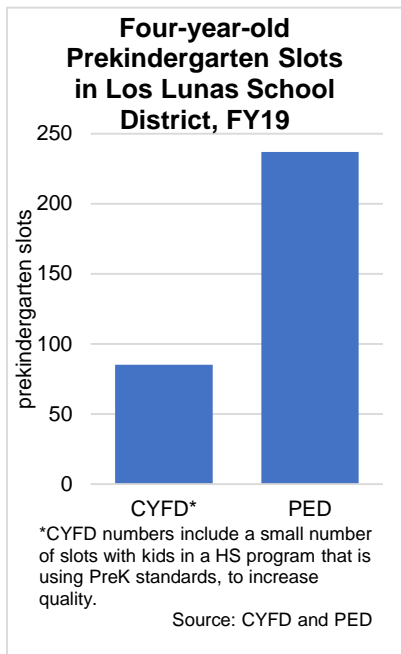
Youth Development Incorporated (YDI) reports asking the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) for assistance in addressing under-enrollment, citing the following:

“The competition for three and four year’s pre-school aged children is a challenge for private child care centers and Head Start programs across New Mexico. The public schools are actively engaging families to enroll into their preschool programs. Many times families will opt out for convenience not understanding the high quality standards of child care.”

Source: YDI board of directors meeting

Case Study: Capacity and Coordination

The Los Lunas Schools district has more slots than 4-year-olds, creating competition between CYFD and PED for prekindergarten. PED has the majority of prekindergarten slots, but most of these are half day creating the need for additional coordination.



Too often in New Mexico the early childhood system reflects competition among providers for children instead of coordination and collaboration. For example, multiple reports over the last several years identified the problem of increasing supply of 3- and 4-year-old slots for multiple programs (prekindergarten, childcare, Early Head Start/Head Start) combined with declining demand due to the dropping birth rate. In response, the Legislature will need to both reorient resources to improve programs and deploy limited state resources in a way that does not:

- Diminish teacher quality/qualifications;
- Decrease program fidelity and effectiveness; and
- Potentially crowd out federal funding.

Unfortunately, the state continues to trail the nation in teacher qualifications, and program performance has also diminished for the most recent prekindergarten cohort. Taxpayers are investing more through increased rates for childcare and prekindergarten with unknown program quality and questionable impact. Previous LFC analysis failed to find educational impacts of childcare, and the 2018 cohort of children receiving prekindergarten saw less kindergarten readiness compared to previous years.

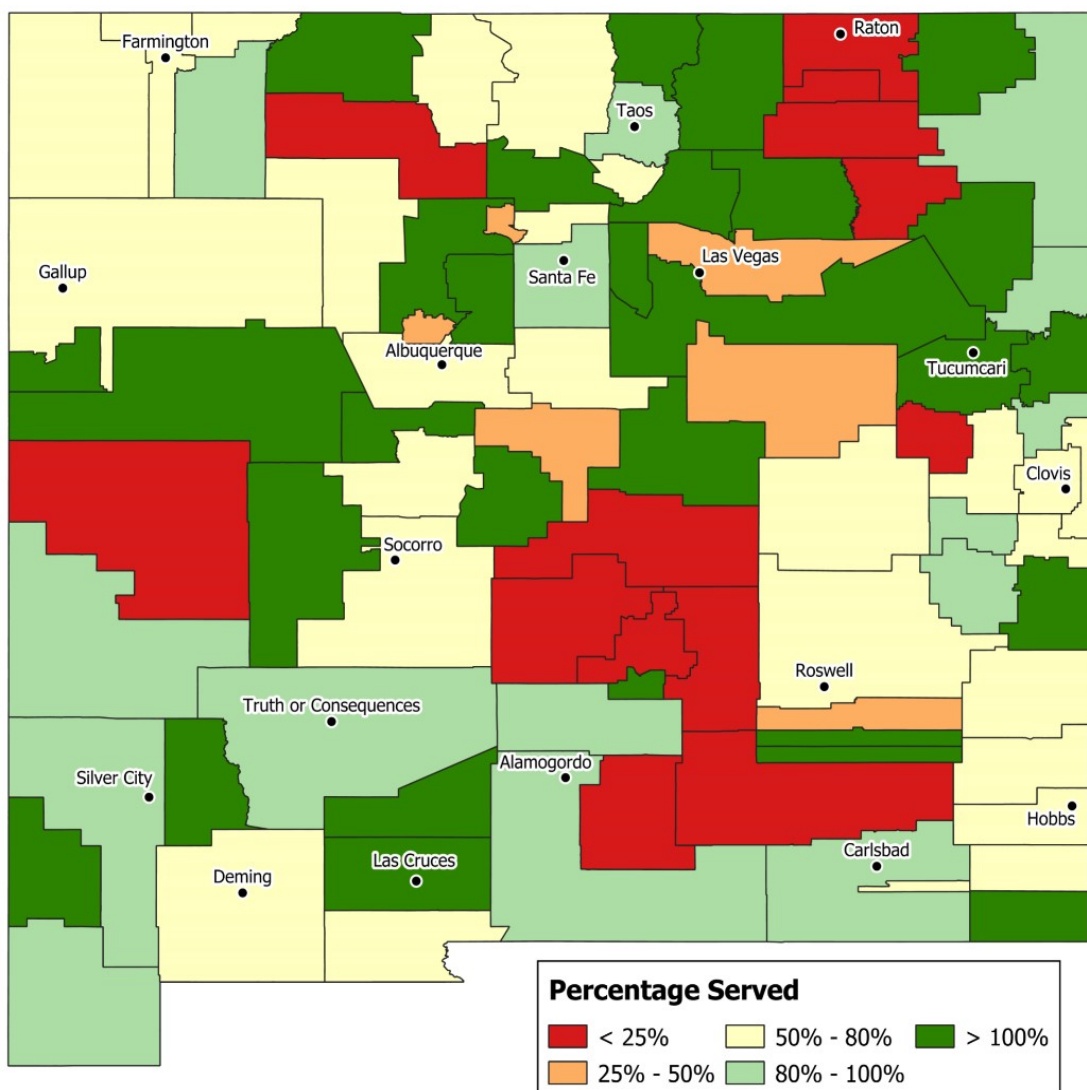
State funding may unintentionally be supplanting federal early childhood funding. In January 2019, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) notified YDI Head Start, one of the largest Head Start providers in the state, that enrollment for YDI Head Start did not meet required enrolment thresholds for four consecutive months. If a program is chronically under-enrolled, the program can potentially lose existing funding and be disqualified from competing for new funding opportunities. Interestingly, a YDI program that receives a partnership grant from ACF with a focus on collaboration and wraparound services was not under-enrolled, according to ACF.

As Head Start enrollment declines, more Head Start providers are moving to Early Head Start, which creates increased competition for 3 year olds, especially as New Mexico increases the number of state funded early prekindergarten slots. This continued competition also affects childcare providers. Note that as slots for children under 3 are examined, the state continues to have unfilled home visiting slots, with \$2.8 million in unspent home visiting dollars over the last two years.

Although many agree on the existing lack of coordination, efforts to increase coordination have yet to see success on a statewide basis. Entities such as the Children’s Cabinet, the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC), and the new Early Childhood Education and Care Department are all administrative structures that could provide coordination support. However, under the previous administration, the Children’s Cabinet activities slowed, and reporting diminished. In 2017, the Legislature passed Senate Memorial 23 requiring ELAC to study how to increase communication, coordination, and collaboration among early childhood service providers with findings and recommendations, however this report was not delivered. The state is also the recipient of a \$5.4 million federal preschool development grant, which is partially funding a needs assessment. Other ongoing multi-agency efforts such as the early childhood integrated data system are behind schedule and not yet fully implemented.

LFC staff examined data from participation in Head Start, childcare, and prekindergarten programs for the most recent year available. Previous LFC analysis estimated the number of slots for 4-year-olds in FY20 would exceed 80 percent of the population when considering all program types. When looking at coverage rates by school district, it becomes evident that some school districts are above even that threshold, with about one-third of districts at or above 100 percent capacity. While some areas of the state have too many slots, others do not have enough or any at all. Oversaturation of certain areas likely contributed to the 30 percent decrease in Head Start slots since 2012. Note that some oversaturated districts may still have difficulties filling slots due to transportation, eligibility, or other issues. Additionally, districts that are high population and/or geographically large might have pockets of oversaturation or gaps in service not reflected in the map. Additional analysis by smaller geographic area using boundaries such as census tracts could yield valuable information regarding capacity.

Percentage of 4-Year-Olds Served in Head Start, Childcare and Prekindergarten Programs by School District, 2018-2020



*Note: Analysis assumes each slot is for a unique child. However, previous LFC analysis highlighted there are at least 1,100 duplicate slots.
Source: LFC analysis of CYFD, PED, ACF Files

SAFE UNDER 5 YEARS OLD	Rate of Child Maltreatment-infants	Number of Victims Under 5	Percent of Kids in Foster Care Younger than 5	Child Maltreatment Death Rate
	2017 48.8	2017 3,219	2017 35%	2017 3.28
	Per 1,000 U.S. 25.3		U.S. 35%	Per 100,000 U.S. 2.27
	Worse 2016 42.5	Better 2016 3,298	Better 2016 38%	Worse 2016 2.23
Source:	ACF	ACF	ACF	ACF

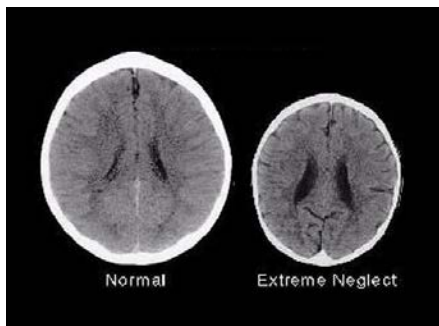
Child Welfare

With over 40 thousand reports of potential child maltreatment last year, child safety is one of the most important issues facing the state. Most child development happens in the early years (0-5), with much of the critical brain development for sensory information, language, and higher cognitive function occurring in the first five years of life. Young children also tend to be the most vulnerable and the most at-risk for child abuse. Childhood trauma can drastically affect child health, educational outcomes, and well-being, with some of these impacts lasting a lifetime.

Impact

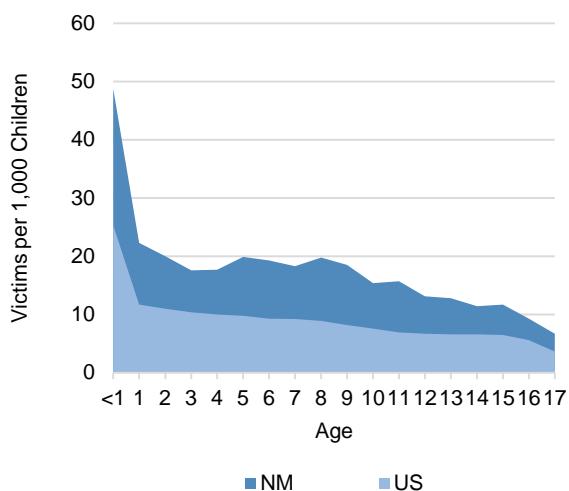
A large body of research finds long-lasting impacts of child maltreatment. Specifically, children exposed to extreme neglect have decreased brain development and emotional regulation. These children are also more likely to have long-term problems such as depression, suicide, substance abuse, and physical health problems. Research shows that three of every five New Mexico citizens has at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE).

CT Brain Scan of Normal 3-Year-Old Child and Neglected 3-Year-Old Child



Source: LFC Files

New Mexico Has Some of the Highest Young Children Victimization Rates in the Nation

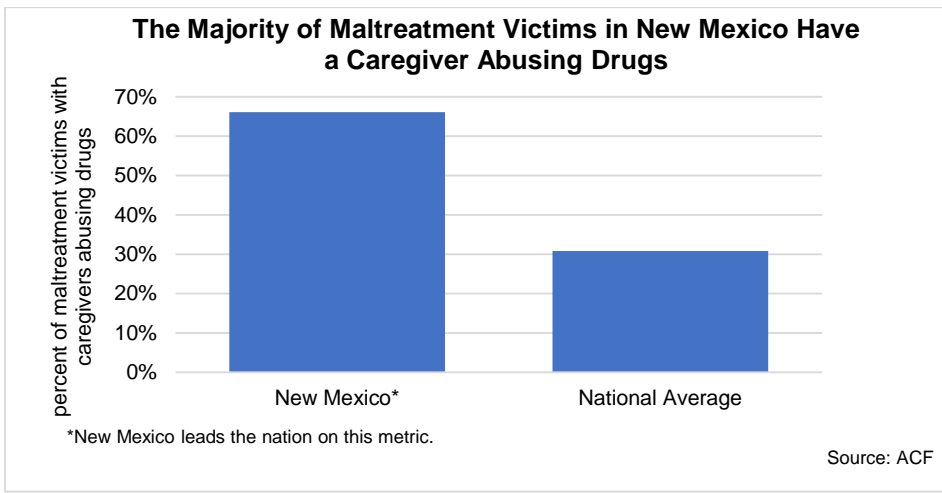


Source: US DHHS ACF

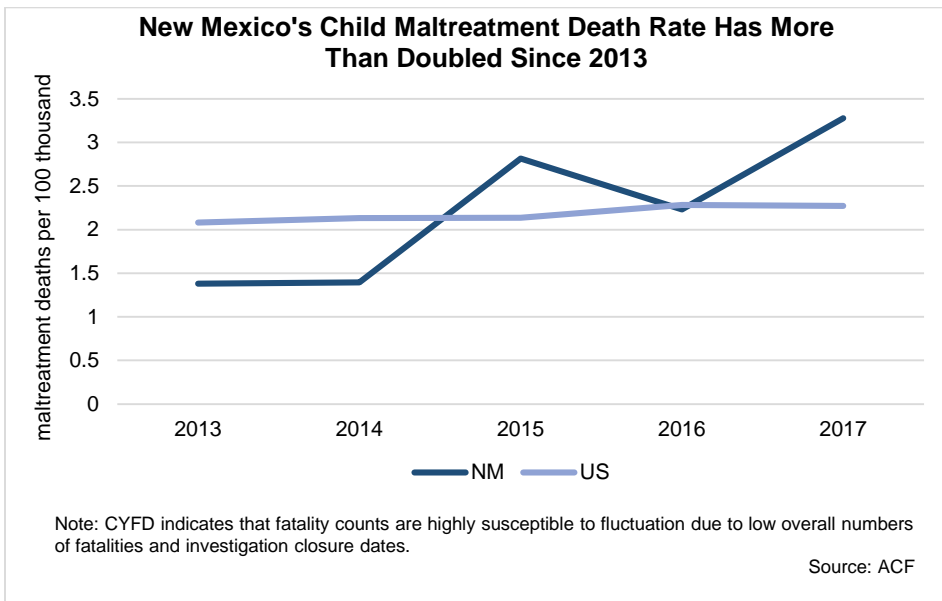
Issues

Unfortunately, New Mexico has one of the highest victimization rates in the nation for young children (0-5). In New Mexico, about 1 in 20 children under the age of 1 will be a victim of child maltreatment this year, compared to 1 in 40 nationwide. New Mexico sees significantly higher maltreatment rates for young children, potentially reflecting lagging performance in other key outcome areas including health, education, and well-being. According to ACF, New Mexico's overall victimization rate has increased by 36 percent since 2013, but the victimization rate for young children increased at a faster rate with victimizations, rising by 55 percent for children under one.

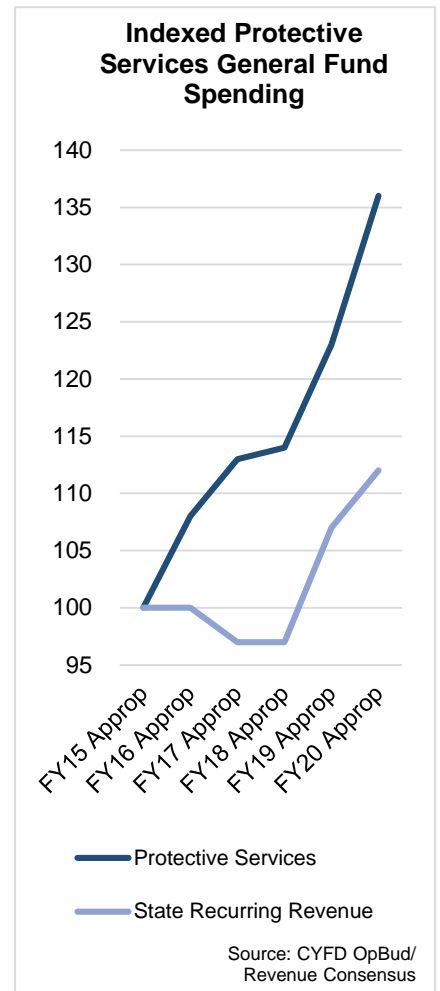
Many New Mexico families struggle with social issues such as substance use disorders, inadequate housing, and parental incarceration, potentially contributing to child maltreatment. New Mexico leads the nation in child maltreatment victims with a caregiver who is abusing drugs, yet lags behind the nation in delivering preventative and early intervention services. Our youngest children are the most vulnerable.



When a family does not receive prevention or early intervention services to address the root causes of child maltreatment they can spiral out of control, leading to adverse outcomes including repeated reports of abuse, removal from the home, termination of parental rights, or even death. Half of child fatalities resulting from maltreatment are children under the age of one. The child fatality rate has risen in New Mexico in recent years and is above the national average. New Mexico reported 16 fatalities from child abuse or neglect in 2017, a 45 percent increase over 2016.



LFC staff have published research on what works to improve child safety. Top programs include different forms of home visiting, evidence-based in home services, and an approach called alternative response, which creates a pathway for families encountering the system to be evaluated and receive services if there is no imminent risk to safety. The Legislature continues to fund home visiting and in 2019 passed legislation creating a framework for alternative response. Additionally, the federal government is creating incentives for states to move money from the back-end of the system to the front-end to fund efforts in prevention and early intervention. However, additional efforts are needed, particularly to prevent abuse and neglect for our most vulnerable population, young children.



HOME VISITING		Average Percent of Family Goals Met	Parents Progressing in Positive Interactions	Average Yearly Number of Home Visits	Well-Child Exams
FY19	FY20	FY19	FY19	FY19	FY19
\$20.1 Million	\$22.4 Million	33%	46%	12	95%
5,300	5,900	(N= 2,620 families)		(N=5,129 families)	(N= 1,112 children)
		Better	Same	Worse	Worse
		FY18 26% CYFD	FY18 46% CYFD	FY18 13 CYFD	FY18 96% CYFD

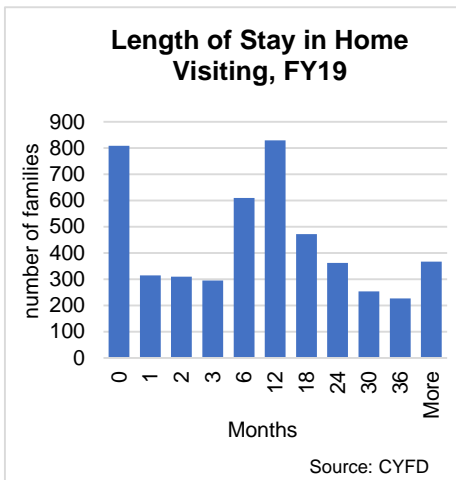
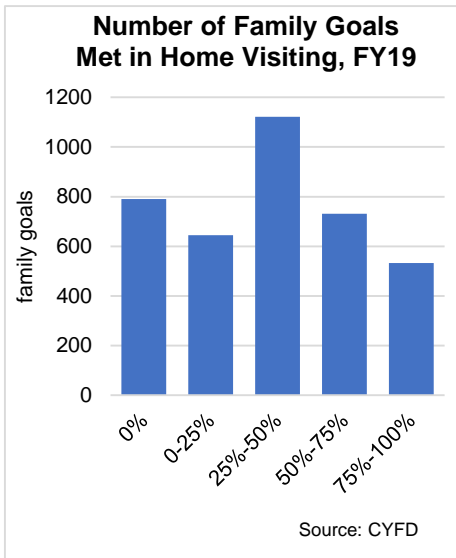
Source:

Home Visiting

Home visiting is an intensive parent education program. Some types of home visiting programs, shown to effectively reduce child abuse and improve health. This voluntary program provides family support and basic parenting skills critical to improving childhood outcomes during pregnancy and through the first few years of a child's life.

Impact

Previous reports by CYFD show a higher percentage of children in home visiting receive well-child visits compared to children on Medicaid who do not participate in this program. This is particularly relevant as half the individuals participating in home visiting services are on Medicaid and earn only about \$20 thousand a year. Evidence-based home visiting programs in New Mexico continue to show a positive return on investment and positive child outcomes. This year, more families are succeeding in meeting their program goals and are staying in the program longer.



CYFD recently moved to using a system with varied intensity levels and DOH is implementing a universal light-touch home visiting program in the South Valley. In addition to the above programs, New Mexico recently started Medicaid home visiting services. Currently, two agencies contract with all New Mexico Medicaid managed care organizations to provide Nurse Family Partnership or Parents as Teachers. The two evidence-based early childhood home visiting programs recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and available in Bernalillo, Curry, and Roosevelt counties. There are 44 total families enrolled in Medicaid home visiting currently. HSD is awaiting Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services approval to remove the restriction on the number of counties in which the home visiting project can be implemented, as well as the number of potential members who can be served by home visiting services. As the program continues to expand, CYFD and the Medical Assistance Division are working with Taos Pueblo to expand services to Taos County.

Issues

Implementing Medicaid home visiting has several potential problems delaying expansion. These include: hiring staff; ability of programs to pay startup costs prior to billing for Medicaid services; familiarizing providers with administrative processes; families referred do not always enroll; difficulty referring families during the first trimester of pregnancy; and recruiting providers to do both CYFD and Medicaid home visiting services. Home visiting continues to have unused slots. As shown in the graph of average length of stay, many families do not continue services after their initial visit. CYFD and HSD should work to identify why families leave the program and how to better retain them.

Amount of Home Visiting Dollars Unspent FY16-18 (in thousands)

	FY17	FY18
Total Contracted	\$12,224.34	\$12,003.55
Expenditures	\$10,557.32	\$10,792.82
Unexpended Amount	\$1,667.02	\$1,210.73

Note: FY19 amount is currently being audited and not available.
Source: LFC Files

CHILDCARE ASSISTANCE		Kids Attending 4 or 5 Star Center	4-Year-Olds Attending Childcare	Average monthly copay as percent of monthly income	Low Income Childcare Participants Proficient in Reading by 3 rd Grade
FY19	FY20	FY19	June FY19	FY19	FY19
\$134	\$149	48%	2,694	5%	19%
Million	Million			Federal Rec: <7%	
21,300	TBD*	Better	Higher	Same	Better
		FY18 43%	FY18 2,371	FY18 5%	FY18 18%
					All low income students- 22%
		CYFD	CYFD	CYFD	CYFD

*TBD due to proposed rule changes which may effect income eligibility.

Source:

Childcare Assistance

The childcare assistance program is a subsidy program for families with children between the ages of 6 weeks and 13 years whose families make less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level and who work or attend training and education programs. Childcare is not an entitlement program and is funded through a combination of federal block grants (Childcare and Development Fund, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and state appropriations (general fund).

Impact

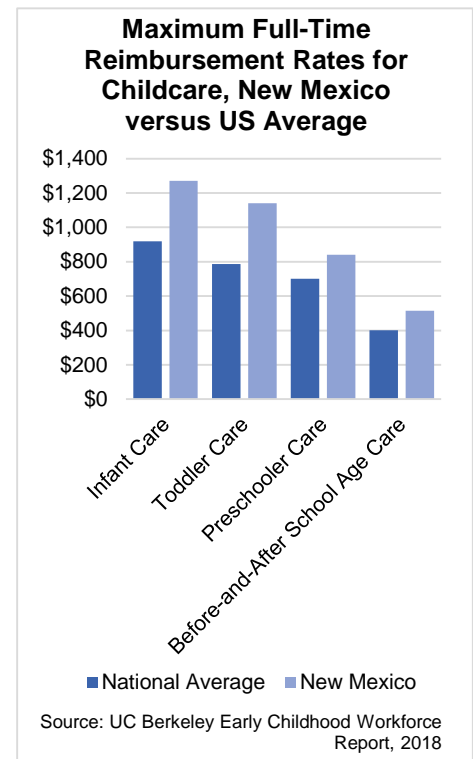
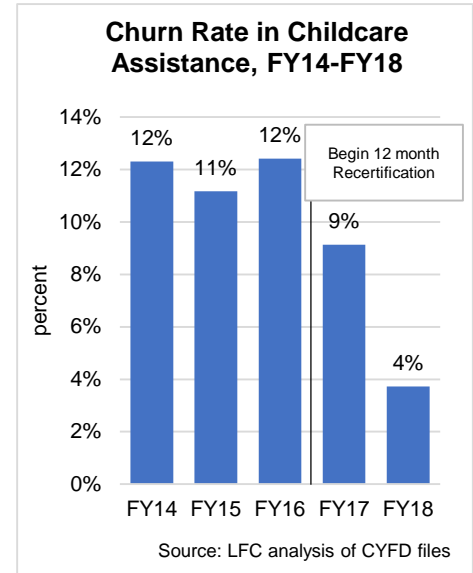
New Mexico has some of the highest maximum reimbursement subsidy rates in the country, with uncertain outcomes. With such high rates, the state may be less able to serve more children, who could enroll if the income eligibility is expanded.

More families are staying in childcare assistance for the full length of their certification, decreasing the churn rate for the state. LFC examined the number of re-entries and case openings by family. It appears that after the change to 12-month recertification in FY17, churn has decreased. In 2015, 88 percent of families entered childcare assistance only once over a 12 month period, while in 2018, 96 percent of families entered only once. This decrease in the churn rate may be partially responsible for the higher enrollment in childcare in 2018.

Issues

CYFD recently proposed rule changes to allow families to continue to receive subsidy until their income reaches 250 percent of the federal poverty level, rather than having families exit at 200 percent of the federal poverty level. This increase in eligibility could add additional costs to childcare, as more families will be able to stay enrolled in the program. This is expected to cost the state between \$23 and \$26 million. If New Mexico promulgates these rule changes, it will have one of the highest income eligibility rates in the country; according to a 2016 GAO report, only 11 states have income eligibilities above 200 percent of the federal poverty level. However, New Mexico has one of the lower median household incomes in the country, and only 20 percent of eligible children in New Mexico are currently enrolled in childcare assistance. As childcare does not have clear outcomes it is uncertain what the state is getting for this added expense.

In addition to changing eligibility rates for childcare, the proposed rule changes will be discussed in public on August 29. As proposed they would require all licensed and registered childcare providers to check if parents are on sex offender registries. This is not a federal requirement as federal rules focus on background checks for provider staff and residents in childcare homes only.



NEW MEXICO PREKINDERGARTEN		Low Income PreK Kids Proficient in Reading at Beginning of K	PreK Kids Proficient by 3 rd Grade - Reading	PreK Kids Proficient by 3 rd Grade - Math	4-Year Olds in NM PreK
FY19	FY20	FY18	FY18	FY18	FY18
\$64 Million	\$88.5 Million	15%	29% (N=4,728)	34% (N=4,725)	38% (N=9,716)
11,300	12,822	No PreK: 14%	No PreK: 27% Low Income PreK: 25%	No PreK: 32% Low Income PreK: 30%	
		Baseline	Better	Better	Better
		FY17 27%	FY17 33%	FY17 34%	
		PED/Istation	PED/PARCC	PED/PARCC	PED/CYFD

Source:

Prekindergarten

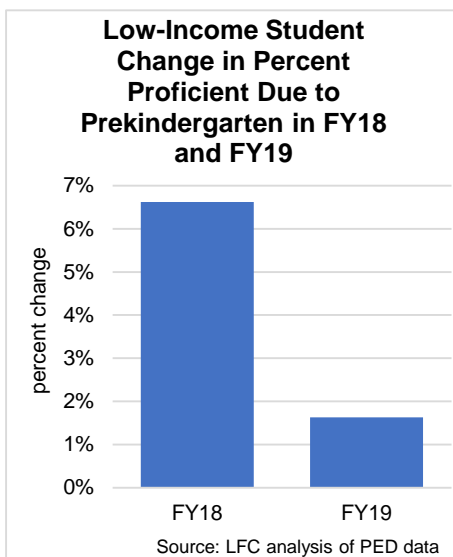
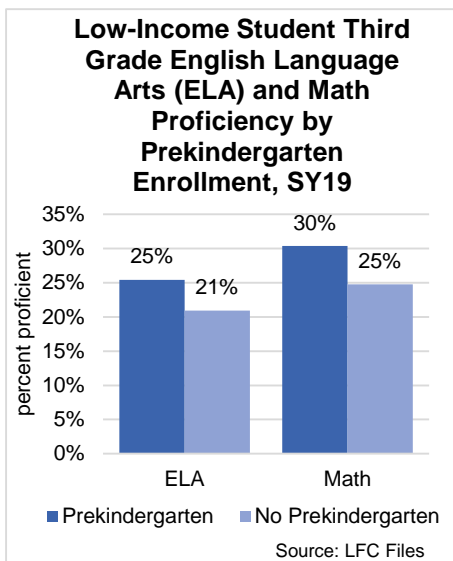
New Mexico prekindergarten is an early education program for 3- and 4-year-olds implemented by the Children, Youth, and Families Department (CYFD) and the Public Education Department (PED). The program is available to families for half-day or extended-day services. In FY19, over 11 thousand children received prekindergarten services, including extended day services.

Impact

The LFC has consistently found prekindergarten programs improve math and reading proficiencies for low-income 4-year-olds, lower special education and retention rates, and lessen negative effects of mobility. LFC has also found prekindergarten programs deliver a positive return on investment for New Mexico taxpayers based on improvement in test scores through the 11th grade. Low-income students who participated in prekindergarten performed better on third grade reading and math assessments than peers not participating. Rapidly expanding prekindergarten programs and lack of coordination for early childhood programs may lead to quality issues and oversaturation of services in some areas. Reduced impact on kindergarten beginning of year reading assessment performance seems evident for the most recent prekindergarten cohort. The effect of prekindergarten seems weaker than it has been the last two years. In previous analyses, prekindergarten has had a positive effect on test scores regardless of students' low-income status. However, this year, prekindergarten only had an effect for low-income students. Current analysis does not control for a variety of factors, so while not definitive, this analysis may be a warning sign that focus should be put towards measuring and improving quality.

Issues

Despite significant barriers to expansion, New Mexico is close to providing sufficient funding to ensure all low-income 4-year-olds receive at least some type of early education through childcare assistance, prekindergarten, or Head Start. The state needs to better coordinate programs to prevent oversaturation for one age group while other age groups are underserved. New Mexico could consider shifting more prekindergarten funding to 3-year-olds or encouraging Head Start programs to shift more services to Early Head Start. Additionally, prekindergarten programs must remain of high quality to preserve the positive impact it has on student performance. CYFD is no longer using ECERS to measure the classroom environment, making it difficult to assess program quality.



K-3 PLUS EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR		Percentage of Students in 20 Day Programs vs. 25 Day Programs	Average Days between End of K-3 Plus and Beginning of School Year	Eligible Students Enrolled	Kindergarten Students who Participated in K-3 Plus at Benchmark on Istation
FY19	FY20	FY18	FY18	FY18	FY18
\$31 Million	\$120 Million (Projected)	25 Day: 84% 20 Day: 16%	14 High: 46 Low: 3	32%	25% No K-3 Plus: 17%
Summer 2019 23,155	Summer 2020 23-87 thousand (Projected)	Higher	Lower	Better	Worse
		FY17	FY17	FY17	Baseline
		25 Day: 85% 20 Day: 15%	15 High: 31 Low: 5	22%	
		PED	PED	LFC Files	LFC Analysis of Istation

K-3 Plus and 4-5 Pilot

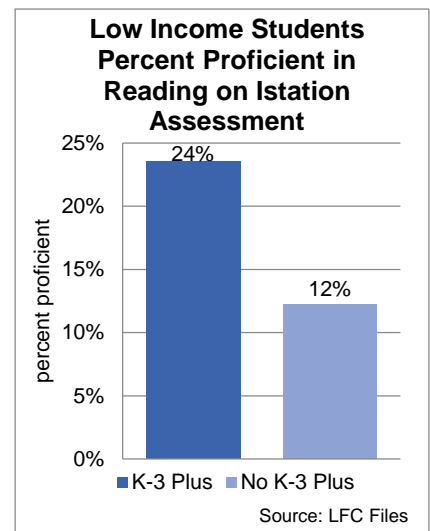
Research has identified “time-on-task,” the time students spend in the classroom actively engaged in learning, as greatly impacting student learning. The state implemented the K-3 Plus program – an extended school year program for kindergarten through third-grade students – in 2007. The Legislature later expanded the program to fourth grade and fifth grade in the form of a four-year K-5 Plus pilot program. Most recently, in 2019, the Legislature made K-5 Plus an ongoing program.

Impact

K-3 Plus is scientifically shown to improve student performance relative to peers when programs are executed correctly. Students who participated in K-3 Plus in FY18 before entering kindergarten the same year were more likely to be at benchmark on the Istation assessment than students who did not attend K-3 Plus. One quarter, or 25 percent, of K-3 Plus students were proficient or above on Istation in the beginning of kindergarten, compared to 17 percent of students who were not in a K-3 Plus program. The benefits of K-3 Plus are even more pronounced for low-income students, where 24 percent of low-income students were at benchmark after participating in K-3 Plus compared with 12 percent of low-income students who did not participate in the program. The kindergarten readiness findings are similar to the Utah State University independent, scientific evaluation of the K-3 Plus program, published in 2015. The evaluation assessed students over four years and found students enrolled in K-3 Plus the summer prior to kindergarten were more ready for school and outperformed their peers.

Recent legislation expanding K-5 Plus and increasing funding and eligibility also requires districts implement the program correctly. LFC analysis shows when students participate in both K-3 Plus and prekindergarten programs, whether or not the K-3 Plus program is implemented correctly, or with fidelity, impacts student achievement. For purposes of this analysis, higher fidelity programs were no less than 25 days, and the K-3 Plus program ended no earlier than two weeks prior to the first day of the regular school year. Medium fidelity programs implemented only one measure of fidelity.

Low-income students in higher fidelity K-3 Plus who were also in a prekindergarten program were more likely to be proficient in reading on Istation



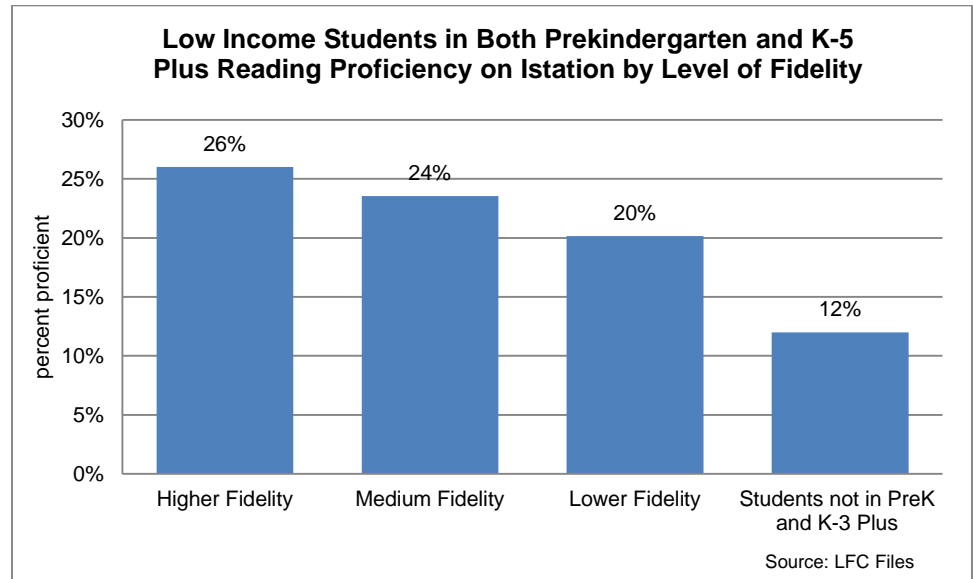
K-5 Plus Levels of Fidelity

Higher Fidelity – programs no less than 25 days and programs that end no earlier than two weeks prior to the first day of the regular school year.

Medium Fidelity – programs implementing only one of the two measures described in higher fidelity programs. Either the program has no less than 25 days or the program ends no earlier than two weeks prior to the first day of the regular school year.

Lower Fidelity – programs not implementing either of the two measures described in higher fidelity programs. The programs are less than 25 days and the programs end more than two weeks before the first day of the regular school year.

than students in lower fidelity programs or programs that did not implement any fidelity measures. Data was not available to measure whether or not K-3 Plus programs kept students with the same teacher they had for the regular school year, which would have been an additional measure of fidelity.



Issues

There is concern the K-3 Plus program may not be implemented correctly at all schools. For increased gains from K-3 Plus throughout the school year:

- Programs must be no less than 25 days long, regardless of the length of the instructional day;
- Programs must end no earlier than two weeks prior to the first day of the regular school year; and
- Programs must keep students with the same teachers they have for the regular school year.

Many school districts indicate it is difficult to keep students with the same teacher in K-3 Plus and the regular school year.

NEW MEXICO HEAD START	4-Year-Old Enrollment	Teachers with Bachelor's Degree	Families Receiving Parenting Services	Well-Child Exams
Federal Funds FY19 \$69.5 Million	FY18 3,297	FY18 36%	FY18 33%	FY18 92%
	Lower FY17 3,486	Better FY17 35.1%	Lower FY17 37%	Better FY17 88%
Source:	ACF	ACF	ACF	ACF

Head Start

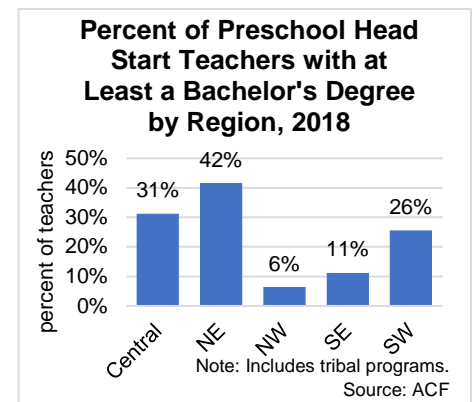
Head Start and Early Head Start are federal programs to promote school readiness of children under age 5 from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Head Start programs also provide health, nutrition, social, and other services for qualifying children and their families. The services may be provided in a center, school, family childcare home, or a child's own home. Head Start funding is provided directly to providers, bypassing state agencies. CYFD has no administrative role in Head Start but houses one federally-funded staff member to act as the state's Head Start collaboration director. If New Mexico Head Start met the national average or standards, the state could see higher enrollment and increased benefits.

Impact

Federal standards define high-quality Head Start programs partially by teacher qualifications. New Mexico continues to lag behind the nation on Head Start teacher qualifications. Nationally, 75 percent of teachers have a bachelor's degree or higher. However, to date, New Mexico has 36 percent of its Head Start teachers meeting this requirement, a slight increase for the first time in four years. Additionally, teacher qualifications vary depending upon Head Start location in the state, with only 6 percent of teacher in the Northwest region having at least a bachelor's degree while 42 percent of teachers in the Northeast have at least a bachelor's degree. One reason for low bachelor's degree rates is many qualified teachers may prefer to enter into the K-12 system because of higher pay and better benefits, especially after legislated teacher raises authorized in the 2019 session.

Issues

Head Start enrollment has fallen 30 percent since 2012. A 2013 LFC evaluation of early childhood programs noted a lack of coordination among Head Start programs and other early childhood services hurt access to programming in some counties. This lack of coordination continues with the number of Head Start slots decreasing as the number of other early childhood program slots increase. The number of 4-year-olds participating in Head Start decreased for the sixth year, with 12.5 percent of 4-year-olds attending Head Start programs (that number increases to roughly 15 percent when tribal Head Starts are included). As the state increases prekindergarten programs, it may be unintentionally crowding out Head Start programs. Head Start programs should have similar standards to prekindergarten. The state needs increased coordination between Head Start and prekindergarten to ensure New Mexico uses available federal dollars. There continues to be an increase in Early Head Start slots as Head Start slots decrease. Early Head Start capacity is its highest in eight years. Since this federal program serves around 7,500 children each year, and does not use state money, the state should focus on improving the quality of the program using its licensing and oversight powers.



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