

2020 Legislative Action on Early Care and Education

Each year, legislatures across the country consider hundreds of bills aimed at improving the lives of young children and their families. The National Conference of State Legislatures' Early Care and Education team [tracks](#) introduced and enacted legislation on child care subsidy and quality; early childhood financing; early childhood governance; home visiting; prekindergarten and school readiness; the prenatal period, infants and toddlers; early care and education workforce; and 'other' to capture relevant legislation not falling into one of these categories.

State legislators introduced approximately 604 bills with approximately 57 bills in 21 states signed into law. Significantly fewer bills were introduced and enacted in 2020 due to legislative session disruptions caused by the pandemic. As many as 24 states suspended or adjourned their legislative sessions by mid-April due to health and safety concerns. Legislators from [23 states and three US territories](#) reconvened for special sessions later in the year mostly focused on responding to COVID-19.

Despite the unique hurdles of 2020 legislative sessions, the 57 enacted bills outlined in this report signal that early childhood policies and programs remain priorities for many state lawmakers. Child care legislation accounted for over half of these enacted bills that focused on increasing health and safety standards and expanding access to child care. Six states passed legislation related to background checks. Legislation in several states—Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, Virginia and Vermont—aimed to stabilize the child care field amid the ongoing public health crisis with targeted funding to the early childhood workforce. States also prioritized early educators by increasing compensation (Florida [HB 5001](#), Washington [HB 2619](#)), aligning credentials (Colorado [HB20-1053](#)) and expanding affordable professional development opportunities (Washington [HB 2556](#)).

Several states took steps to measure and improve the quality of early learning in state-funded prekindergarten classrooms. Legislation sought

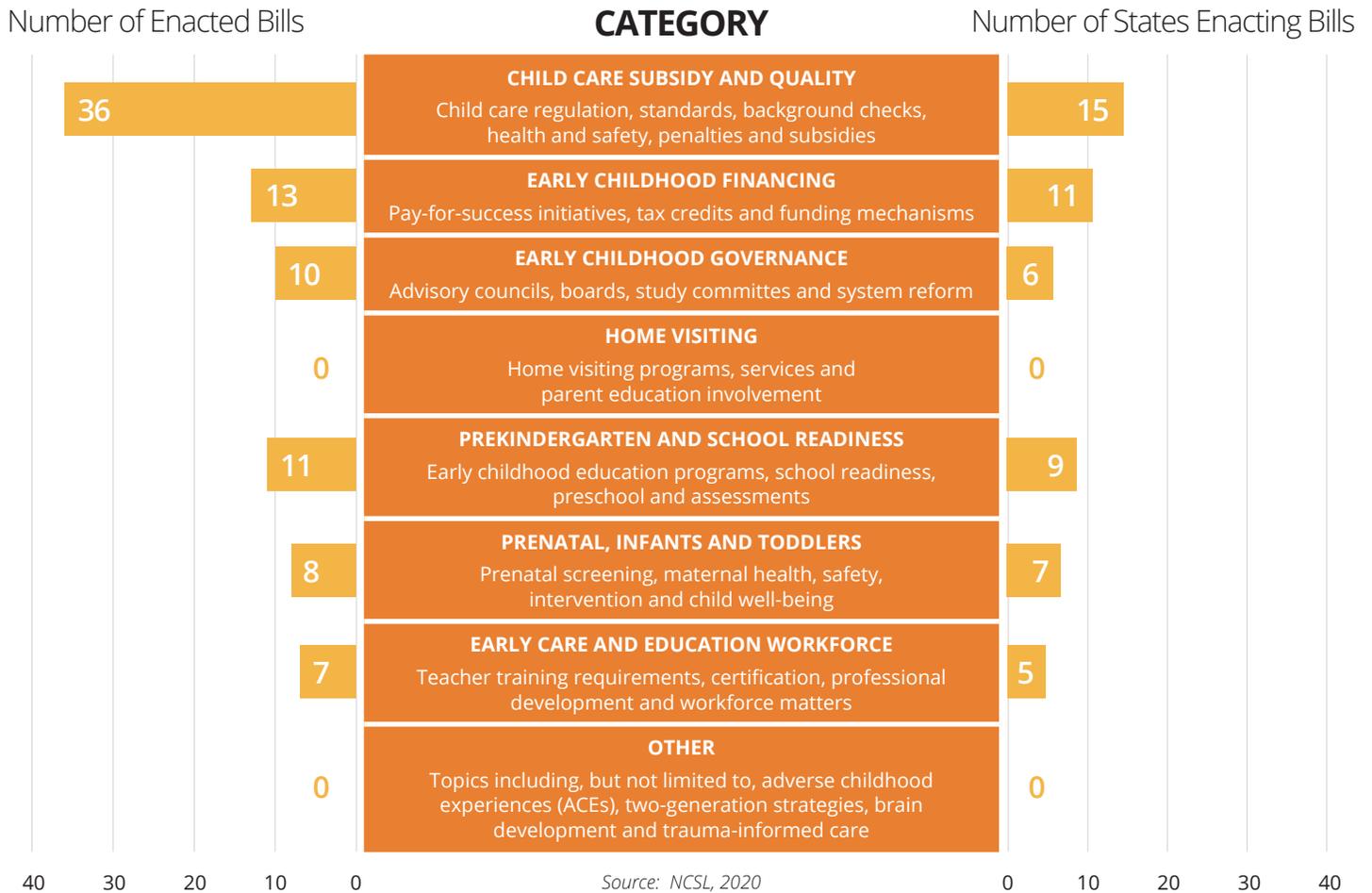


to reduce class sizes (Florida [HB 5001](#)), prohibit the use of expulsions and exclusionary discipline practices (Minnesota [HF 33](#)), incentivize providers to increase quality (Washington [SB 6483](#)), evaluate program effectiveness (Utah [HB 99](#)) and include early learning within school improvement plans (North Carolina [HB 1050](#)).

Policymakers also prioritized services for pregnant women, infants and toddlers in seven states. Legislators passed bills to support healthy births through increased access to prenatal care (New Jersey [SB 2021](#)) and doula services (Virginia [HB 826](#)). New York state lawmakers passed a comprehensive prenatal-to-three bill funding nutritional programs for women, infants and children; infant recovery centers; and early intervention services ([SB 7500](#)). Lawmakers in Florida ([HB 5001](#)) and Oklahoma ([HB 4153](#)) passed legislation to fund early intervention services for children under age 3 with developmental delays. Although 22 states considered home visiting legislation, none of these bills passed.

Legislators continue to grapple with the infrastructure and administration of programs serving young children and families. Six states passed bills altering the governance of early childhood programs and services. The Virginia legislature perhaps made the most sweeping changes with the creation of a new Office of the Children's Ombudsman ([SB 578](#)) and mandate for a unified early childhood care and education system ([HB 1012/SB 578](#)). Louisiana extended the life of its Early Childhood Care and Education Commission ([HB 251](#)). Other bills transferred the administrative authority of early childhood initiatives between state offices (Hawaii [HB 2543](#), Washington [HB 2787](#)), and established work groups or task forces to delve deeper into early childhood issues and provide recommendations (Virginia [HB 826](#), Washington [HB 2556](#) and [HB 2711](#)).

At least 11 states—Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Maine, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Utah, Virginia and Vermont—passed targeted funding measures to support early childhood programs. Legislators in Maine allowed communities to tap into an existing revenue source through tax increment financing to help cover costs for child care facilities (HP 1402) while New Mexico lawmakers created a brand new fund with an annual appropriation of \$20 to \$30 million dedicated to early childhood education and care.



Note: The total number of enacted bills does not add up to what is listed here due to bills that address multiple topics.

Beyond the scope of early care and education, young children’s families and broader communities also influence their development. Please visit the following NCSL legislative databases for additional bill tracking information:

- [Maternal and Child Health](#)
- [Preschool-3rd Grade](#)
- [Child Welfare](#)
- [Housing and Homelessness](#)

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