

**Young Children with Special Needs and the Child Care Subsidy System:
Are They Receiving the Intended Benefits?**

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Background: The intent of the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is to increase access to quality care for low-income families with young children. The CCDBG Reauthorization of 2014 prioritized low-income children with disabilities as they are an especially vulnerable population. We analyzed the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), a nationally representative sample of young children with and without special needs, to gauge the use of subsidies to access care and the types and quality of care used by these families when participants were infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

Findings: *Young children with special needs are not consistently benefitting from the subsidy system.*

1. Throughout early childhood, children with special needs are less likely to access subsidized child care.
 - Families with toddlers access subsidized care more than parents of infants or preschoolers. Families of preschoolers least likely to access subsidized care.
 - Families least likely to access subsidized care are non-English households, have married parents, multiple siblings or non-working moms.
2. However, use of subsidy increases the likelihood of using non-parental care, either home or center-based.
 - Children with unmarried parents and larger families most likely to access care.
3. Subsidized children with special needs spend more hours in care than non-subsidized children with special needs.
 - Subsidized toddlers and preschoolers with special needs spend more time in home-based care while non-subsidized toddlers and preschoolers with special needs spend more time in center-based care.
4. Use of subsidy does not insure access to quality.
 - Global quality is adequate for toddlers but not for preschoolers.
 - Child:adult ratios are higher than recommendations.
 - Children who are black, have unmarried parents and larger families are less likely to access quality care.

Recommendations: How can young children with special needs reap intended benefits from the subsidy system?

- Address inequities in accessing subsidized care for subsidy-eligible children with special needs.
- Ensure subsidy-eligible children with special needs receive quality care.
- Address barriers parents and providers face in finding and supplying quality care.

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