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Early Start

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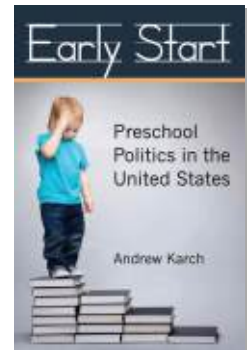
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4 | Venue Shopping, Federalism, and the Role of the States

One of the distinctive features of the American political system is the extent to which it decentralizes political authority. This institutional fragmentation can impede the adoption of expansive policies, but it also provides multiple access points for reformers. Frustrated in one institutional context, reformers can try to achieve their goals in another setting, a phenomenon known as venue shopping. Child development advocates were disappointed by Nixon's veto of the Comprehensive Child Development Act and their failure to override it, and many of them concluded that developing new congressional legislation would be an exercise in futility. The implausibility of success at the national level did not, however, eliminate the possibility of policy change. Instead, it simply meant that advocates would have to turn to another institutional venue to achieve their goals.

Congress continued to consider comprehensive child development legislation, but federalism allowed advocates to shift their focus to the state level. Supporters of a more expansive government role in early childhood education concluded that they needed "to pay a lot more attention to state governments than we have in the past."¹ The states were favorable terrain for their efforts, because state lawmakers were frustrated by their relatively limited role in the debate at the national level. Governors and other state leaders felt that the Comprehensive Child Development Act, with its controversial provisions for prime sponsorship, had essentially ignored the states. Some of them attributed this outcome to "the ineffectiveness of the representation of state interests and capabilities to Congress."² The Education Commission of the States (ECS) used a grant from the Office of Education to launch its Early Childhood Project. The project aimed to facilitate better communication between Congress and the states and to disseminate policy-relevant information to interested state-level actors.

The combined efforts of child development advocates and professional

associations like the ECS bore substantial fruit in the early to mid-1970s. States across the country established offices of child development to improve the administration and coordination of programs for the very young, funded social services for children who were too young to attend primary school, and established preschool projects. By the middle of the decade, the ECS could reasonably claim that the state-level momentum in early childhood education “has become increasingly purposeful and sophisticated. The capacity of the states to plan and provide services for young children and their families is clearly on the rise.”³ This state-level activity in the aftermath of Nixon’s veto did not result in the creation of a comprehensive child development program, but it reshaped the structure and politics of early childhood education over both the short term and the long term.

Early State-Level Activity and the Education Commission of the States

At a December 1972 conference, former South Carolina governor Robert McNair described his experience testifying before Congress on the Comprehensive Child Development Act. When McNair claimed that its provisions for prime sponsorship would lead to overlap and waste, the “response from several of the more vocal members of the House Select Subcommittee on Education was ‘But what have the states done in the early childhood field? Do you come to us with clean hands?’” McNair recalled, “Misplaced as I thought their emphasis was, it was difficult to answer—then.”⁴ The former governor’s reflections summarize one of the major themes of this chapter: the pace of state-level activity in early childhood policy picked up considerably in the early 1970s.

State governments were involved in early childhood policy before the debate over the Comprehensive Child Development Act, but their efforts were limited. Fueled by the National Kindergarten Association (NKA), a national umbrella organization, one arena of state-level activity was the provision of state funds for kindergarten. The NKA was structured as a national umbrella organization and included “broad representation from academia, elite society, and educational organizations” (Beatty 2001, 170). Its lobbying effort exemplified successful venue shopping. Thwarted in its effort to pass a national kindergarten bill, the group lobbied for universal public kindergarten in states and localities. In 1967, an ECS survey revealed that thirty-three states provided public funds to school districts

that instituted kindergarten programs. Several states mandated kindergarten as an integral part of their public schools. A 1967 Colorado law, for example, required schools to establish kindergarten by September 1970 to maintain accreditation, and a Massachusetts law passed that same year required kindergartens in every school district in the state by 1973.⁵ The movement toward universal kindergarten continued into the mid-1970s. At that point, it was an established public responsibility in most parts of the country, and the NKA board of directors “decided it had fulfilled its mission and dissolved the organization” (Beatty 2001, 175).

In the late 1960s, there were also hints of increased interest in child development more broadly. For example, in 1969, West Virginia received a small planning grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission. It used the grant to develop plans for seven regional demonstration centers in early childhood education, an important development in a state “with no specific planning being done in early education, no existing public supported early education programs to serve as models, a serious lack of certified early education teachers, and limited experience in interagency coordination and cooperation in the delivery of services to children.”⁶ The following year, two of the centers were funded by the same commission. Their successful operation led the legislature to fund the remaining five demonstration centers in 1971. On November 1, 1971, Governor Arch Moore issued an executive order that created the Interagency Council for Child Development Services.⁷ Even though these developments possessed limited reach, the speed with which they occurred in a state that had demonstrated limited prior interest in early childhood policy is striking.

The Education Commission of the States took several steps that highlighted its growing interest in early childhood education.⁸ In 1967, one year after its founding, the ECS “endorsed Early Childhood Education as a top priority education need in practically all the states.”⁹ Working with nine Washington-based professional associations, the organization put together a packet of materials that it mailed to key legislators and other select figures in each of the states.¹⁰ The packet included a cover letter announcing that “the staff of the Education Commission of the States stands ready to assist you” in developing early childhood programs.¹¹ At the organization’s annual meeting in 1968, ECS commissioners adopted the following resolution: “The value of and need for early childhood education has been established to such a degree that there is no longer any basis for questioning ‘whether’ early childhood education should be provided, only ‘how’ and ‘when.’”¹² They called on Congress to “increase early childhood education funds for disadvantaged pupils, provide incentives for more

state and local financial effort, and consolidate federal programs in this area.”¹³ ECS commissioners expressed similar concerns at a September 1968 meeting with the secretary of health, education, and welfare and the commissioner of education. They lobbied for a “functional block grant for early childhood education or some other effective means . . . to provide strong incentive for the inclusion of this level of education in all school systems.”¹⁴ By the late 1960s, the ECS viewed early childhood education as one of its top programmatic priorities.

ECS continued to work on early childhood education into the next decade. In 1970, ECS chairman and Utah governor Calvin Rampton formed a twenty-four-member Early Childhood Task Force. It published a report on program alternatives in child development in June 1971.¹⁵ In addition to providing state policymakers with basic data “on the most important alternatives for state-supported child development services,” the report contained several recommendations.¹⁶ It recommended using a comprehensive approach including children younger than three and their parents; instituting training programs for children and parents in their homes; and developing classroom programs for three-, four-, and five-year-olds through an expansion of Head Start. It also recommended that states establish credentials in early childhood education or provide for a specialization in early childhood education. Finally, it suggested that states develop sound principles of financing for their early childhood programs, so that “early childhood education is treated as an integral part of the state’s overall education program.”¹⁷

The second phase of the task force was known as the Early Childhood Project. Its purpose was to “provide assistance to the states to initiate or expand services for young children and their families through improved state coordination of delivery systems.”¹⁸ The project received an initial grant of \$92,814 from the U.S. Office of Education,¹⁹ and its activities included reviews of statewide activities, expert testimony, assistance in drafting legislation and executive orders, consulting and technical assistance, and the dissemination of policy-relevant information.²⁰ A related goal of the project was to serve as an “organized mechanism to express state concerns to the federal government.”²¹ The project had a horizontal component, facilitating information exchanges among state officials, and a vertical component, representing state officials at the national level.

The priorities of the Early Childhood Project shifted subtly in the aftermath of Nixon’s veto. One of its first endeavors was to develop a list of “target states” and assist them in initiating or expanding their early childhood programs.²² In August 1972, the task force reviewed the project’s first

few months and recommended priorities for its second fiscal year. It decided to move away from venue shopping and reduce its emphasis on target states. The thirty-three states that had asked to participate in the project faced similar challenges, so the task force concluded that it should focus on these common concerns and complete “draft model legislation for state use in setting up an appropriate structure for administering early childhood programs.”²³

The ECS also hosted conferences that facilitated information exchange among the states. The conferences “[brought] together people with decision-making responsibilities to analyze the issues which they all face and to evaluate the techniques which they are utilizing.”²⁴ They complemented the documents published by the commission and enabled state leaders to learn from one another’s experiences. The Early Childhood Project hosted its first conference on implementing state early childhood programs in December 1972. More than two hundred persons from thirty-seven states attended the conference, which featured several nationally known experts in child development.²⁵ A speaker from California who described a bill that had recently been signed into law by Governor Ronald Reagan explained, “[S]ome preschool and Head Start teachers were threatened by [our] approach. Although they worked for the program, they began to back away. . . . People sometimes have stakes in what is the status quo. They may vocalize on change, but they may be afraid.”²⁶ The feedback dynamic he described, in which reformers needed to accommodate actors with a stake in the status quo, foreshadowed future developments at the state and national levels.

The Early Childhood Project received a continuation grant from the U.S. Office of Child Development in 1973. It added “several new emphases to its ongoing program of assisting the states in improving their services to young children and their families.”²⁷ The project’s focus shifted to strengthening the family, early screening of handicapping conditions, child abuse prevention, day care licensing codes, and revenue sharing.²⁸ After receiving a fourth year of funding from the U.S. Office of Child Development, the Early Childhood Project sponsored three regional conferences in 1975.²⁹ Each conference lasted three days and was devoted to needs assessments, child abuse prevention, and day care issues. The conferences “were designed to provide technical assistance to state decision-makers.”³⁰ The commission retained its interest in early childhood education policy, but the conferences represented the last major undertaking of the Early Childhood Project, which disbanded in October 1975.³¹ Thereafter, the commis-

sion would pursue its goals without the formal institutional apparatus that the project represented.

Forces for and Obstacles to Change at the State Level

The presidential veto provoked responses in other institutional venues that provided the basic framework within which American early childhood policy subsequently evolved. It spurred a series of reactions and counterreactions that had a profound effect over both the short term and the long term. Increased activity at the state level was especially significant. This activity was driven by two forces whose convergence produced various policy changes across the country. Child development advocates represented the first force. Their desire for a departure from the status quo and their pessimism about the prospects for change at the national level led them to search for more-favorable political terrain in the states. State officials represented the second force. Frustrated by their inability to influence the national debate, state-level actors, working through such organizations as the ECS, devoted considerable time and attention to the issue of child development.

In the early 1970s, Milton J. E. Senn conducted dozens of interviews with the individuals involved in what he called the “child development movement.” A common topic in these interviews was the role of the states in early childhood policy. Several interviewees described increased state activity as desirable. A former Republican staffer called for “voluntary efforts” at the state level and argued that a state-based strategy was more likely to be successful: “It’s quicker than having to wait for federal legislation, which is always then going to have the same specter of socialism about it, and . . . that’s going to turn off more people who need persuading.”³² Another Republican staffer added, “I’m pretty much convinced that the only way that we’re really going to see a nationwide network of the kinds of services that children need is probably to come at it . . . through the localities and through the states [and] through the local school systems.”³³ These points of view reflected the emerging Republican consensus that the states should have a prominent role in any child development bill.

Others agreed about the role of the states. A staff scientist at the Foundation for Child Development stated bluntly, “I think the state situation has to be taken into account. If there is a child development bill, the states cannot be left out completely.”³⁴ An attorney working with the Children’s Defense Fund, which had been founded by Marian Wright Edelman in

1973, predicted, “The day is coming when we are going to accomplish at least as much, if not more, at the state level, because the federal government has in so many areas done such a miserable job and wasted so much money; at least that’s the way people feel.”³⁵ Similarly, Provost Nicholas Hobbs of Vanderbilt University, a child psychologist, claimed, “[The states] are becoming increasingly important, and they should become important—money will flow through state governments.”³⁶ Thus actors with diverse backgrounds and political perspectives viewed the states as an increasingly viable institutional venue for the development of child development policies.

Importantly, many state officials were open to the idea of expanding early childhood education programs. Several forces contributed to their openness. The debate over the Comprehensive Child Development Act brought heightened attention to the issue, raising its political profile at the state level. Marian Wright Edelman explained the political ramifications of these congressional developments, “It made the states aware there really was a constituency out there, which is one of the things you shouldn’t forget. . . . It showed them there’s gold in their mines in terms of money for them. . . . [and] they now want to talk to us more and more and are inviting us to more and more of their meetings.”³⁷ The ECS Early Childhood Task Force, made possible by financial support from the Carnegie Foundation, institutionalized this state-level interest. Through its contribution and “perhaps unknowingly,” the foundation “set up a group that has become very important in the state interest in early childhood development.”³⁸

The congressional debate was also significant due to the content of the bill that the president vetoed. As has already been mentioned, many state officials were frustrated with their lack of input. They believed, with some justification, that the Comprehensive Child Development Act had privileged local governments and community organizations over the states. Many state officials were interested in early childhood policy as a way both to improve the lives of young children and to defend state prerogatives against national encroachment. The states therefore provided favorable political terrain for those who were frustrated with developments at the national level and wanted to find a new institutional venue in which to pursue their goals.

The fifty states did not offer equally favorable political terrain for the proponents of expanded governmental activity, however. Advocates seemed more likely to succeed in some states than in others. For this reason, one component of the venue shopping of the early 1970s was an assessment of potential target states. A major goal of the ECS Early Child-

hood Project, as has already been described, was “providing assistance to selected target states in initiating or expanding their early childhood programs.”³⁹ For the ECS to become involved in a state, its governor had to request such assistance with the backing of the chief state agencies administering early childhood programs. By April 1972, twenty-nine states had asked to be considered for selection as target states, an enthusiastic response that illustrated the state-level interest in this issue. The commission relied on several criteria in making its final determination, but the first criterion listed in one newsletter, “state commitment to early childhood services,” was revealing. With its goal of beginning intensive activity in no more than four states by October, the organization sought to build on existing state-level activity.⁴⁰ This strategy was later employed by universal preschool advocates in the 1990s and early 2000s.

In addition to recognizing that their probability of success depended on the specific states in which they pursued their goals, child development advocates realized that they would need to clear many of the same hurdles they had confronted in Congress. First, government programs designed to assist families with young children were likely to be characterized as intrusive. An ECS report explained, “Attempts to support and guide the direction of family efforts in childrearing can quickly raise fears for the sanctity of the family. Some persons and groups feel such efforts to be an intrusion into private life, bordering on socialism.”⁴¹ One consultant attributed resistance to day care licensing standards in Massachusetts to Americans’ “strong strain of ‘rugged individualism’ that makes [them] uncomfortable with authority.”⁴² As a result, advocates often described government programs as a “supplement to the family that does not try to replace the family.”⁴³

Supporters of an expanded governmental role in early childhood policy believed that they could overcome this cultural predisposition by framing their proposals as maintaining or even expanding parental choice. They therefore prioritized flexibility and the availability of diverse options. One advocate argued, “We can no longer allow the myth to continue that developmental goals can be achieved only through center arrangements.”⁴⁴ The availability of center-based and home-based care was the subject of much discussion, and the appropriate role of the public school system further complicated this issue. Many child development advocates agreed with commissioner of education Terrel Bell, who argued that “the neighborhood elementary school ought to assume a new role as a source for delivery of services for children in the neighborhood.”⁴⁵ Indeed, the appropriate locus of control over child development programs became a central element of the congressional debate of the mid- to late 1970s.

The cost of child development programs represented a second hurdle to their enactment. At a December 1972 conference, Edward Zigler, who had served as the first director of the Office of Child Development and had been involved in the administration of Head Start, described preschool programs as expensive and concluded, “If this society had all of the money in the world, a universal preschool program would be to my liking. . . . When I think of all the problems of children in this country and all the problems of the schools, one more year of early education does not seem terribly important. It should not be a high priority.”⁴⁶ The cost of early childhood education and care was also an issue for targeted and less-comprehensive state programs. A December 1975 ECS report noted, “Day care is perhaps the service most in demand and most expensive to provide.”⁴⁷ It proposed several ways to fund this service, including giving tax credits to industry, providing small business loans for persons wishing to start new centers, setting up centers as part of the high school curriculum, making creative use of federal funds, and adding day care to a kindergarten program. Program cost had been a pressing issue during the congressional debate, and it also bedeviled lawmakers at the state level.

The issue of parental involvement generated considerable controversy. Reformers hoped state programs would enable parents to become more involved in their children’s lives. They feared that a lack of continuity between program and home would prevent the programs from reaching their potential. Some advocates called for state programs modeled on Head Start and community action projects.⁴⁸ Most advocates agreed about integrating parents into any child development program, but they disagreed on the amount of authority parents should exercise. Should parents have jurisdiction over such issues as budgeting, staffing, and program design? How should the membership and administrative responsibilities of key decision-making committees be determined? Some educators argued that parental involvement required a partnership between parents and professionals. One program administrator explained, “To me, the problem is not that parents don’t care or want to work with us. Too often, I’m afraid, they are stiff-armed by school administrators; they aren’t welcomed or wanted. We educators must take the initiative in reaching out a hand to bring parents in to share in significant policy decision making.”⁴⁹ Generating a desirable level of parental involvement preoccupied policymakers and professionals alike as they debated how to proceed.

Another area of concern was overlap and duplication among existing federal and state programs. The director of Florida’s new Office of Early Childhood Development explained, “[W]ithin the many federal and state

programs, there is much overlapping and much duplication of effort; confusion, frustration, and reduction of benefits have resulted.”⁵⁰ He was due to leave his post after only one year, and he said that one of his biggest challenges was to “draw in enough state agency people and people from the private and public sector so that . . . they will pick up the ball and run with it.”⁵¹ His experience illustrates how supporters of policy change must often generate “buy-in” from existing stakeholders if they are going to be successful. The challenge of program fragmentation would become more difficult over time and represented both an administrative obstacle and a political obstacle to major change.

In sum, the institutional structure of the American political system enabled advocates to turn to the fifty states. Nevertheless, this shift in venue did not guarantee success, and advocates had to think carefully about both the objectives they would pursue and the terrain on which they would pursue them. Several states took action in early childhood policy in the years immediately following Nixon’s veto, but the policy shifts that resulted did not create state-level programs that were as ambitious as the Comprehensive Child Development Act. One widespread policy change, in fact, was a bureaucratic reform whose goal was simply to improve the coordination and delivery of services to young children and their families.

Offices of Child Development

The heightened interest in the education and care of young children led dozens of states to establish offices of child development in the early and mid-1970s. This administrative reform addressed the programmatic fragmentation that scattered services for children and their families among five or six different agencies. The relevant agencies included health departments responsible for immunizations, education departments offering special education, and welfare departments administering a range of child and family services. Advocates of expanded governmental activity viewed the creation of state offices of child development as an indication of “an increasing awareness of the need to coordinate services to children and families, and to allocate public funds in ways that will enhance family viability and ensure the maximum development of human potential.”⁵²

Several factors contributed to the creation of state offices of child development. The congressional debate over the Comprehensive Child Development Act played a crucial role. In a 1973 interview, Marian Wright Edelman explained, “Since [the veto], the states have understood that

there is going to be child development one way or another and they ought to get in it. And you have a lot of states now beginning to open up their offices of child development. I think it's more style than substance."⁵³ Another advocate was more sanguine about the benefits of these administrative changes, calling the offices "one of the good things that's come out of the veto."⁵⁴ He claimed that even if states did not establish the comprehensive programs advocates preferred, the mere existence of the offices meant they would be prepared if the national government became willing to send them money for child development programs. A September 1973 ECS report mentioned that very possibility and suggested that state lawmakers designate the office as the state's prime sponsor for any child development programs authorized by Congress. Such a designation, it argued, "provides a way for a state to be ready to take advantage of federal legislation which may be enacted at some future date, if a state wishes to be in that position."⁵⁵

Other national developments contributed to the creation of state offices of child development. In the mid-1970s, an ECS report claimed that this activity could be attributed to "a combination of ideas, forces and events." Contributing factors included the creation of Head Start and other programs in the mid-1960s, a continuing increase in the number of working mothers in the United States, the 1970 White House Conference on Children and Youth, and the initiation of the federal Community Coordinated Child Care program.⁵⁶ In addition, the Nixon administration had established the Office of Child Development within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1969. The creation of state offices of child development mimicked administrative developments at the national level.

While the national debate brought heightened attention to the need for a coordinating agency at the state level, some of the earliest state activity occurred in the period leading up to Nixon's veto. A 1969 amendment to the Appalachian Act enabled the Appalachian Regional Commission to fund child development programs. Several states took advantage of these funds to create interagency committees for child development. The Arkansas Governor's Council on Early Childhood Development was created through an executive order in 1969,⁵⁷ and a December 1971 executive order established the Mississippi Child Development Council.⁵⁸ Other interagency committees were created legislatively. In 1971, the state legislature in North Carolina passed a bill establishing that state's Governor's Advisory Commission on Children and Youth.⁵⁹ These and other agencies "helped to create interest in other states, provided the impetus for action

by serving as specific examples of the need for planning and coordination and served as models from which the [office of child development] concept evolved.”⁶⁰

State-level interest in the coordination of early childhood services soon became national in scope. It took on a standardized form as more states referred to the agencies as offices of child development. One of the first states to do so was Idaho, where Governor Cecil Andrus established the state’s Office of Child Development by executive order in November 1971. It was located in the Office of the Governor, which gave it the “clout, rights, and privileges” associated with the state chief executive, as well as “the necessary interdepartmental support for reorganization and coordination of children’s services.”⁶¹ In Colorado, an executive order created the Governor’s Commission on Children and Youth, in a state where “until recently there were no efforts to coordinate existing early childhood programs or develop a comprehensive state plan.”⁶² In 1972, Massachusetts established its Office for Children within the Executive Agency of Human Services. One of that office’s goals was to assure “the sound and coordinated development of all services to children.”⁶³ In Minnesota, a planning group began to develop recommendations for the governor about how to “create a mechanism within state government for coordination of child development and child care programs, research, training, and technical assistance.”⁶⁴

The movement to establish state offices of child development gained additional momentum in 1973. By January, the ECS had published a booklet containing model legislation that had been drafted by the commission’s Early Childhood Task Force. A separate newsletter described the bureaucratic reform as an administratively desirable way for the states “to demonstrate their willingness to take the initiative in child development programs, rather than being put in the position of reacting to federal legislation.”⁶⁵ This portrayal, combined with the commission’s advice to designate the office as a prime sponsor for any congressional child development programs, illustrates how state officials had become more assertive about their role in early childhood policy. This assertiveness had not been evident during the debate over the Comprehensive Child Development Act. Only two years later, state officials viewed themselves as key stakeholders in this policy arena and mobilized to protect their prerogatives.

By February 1973, twelve states, in every region of the country, had created offices of child development. They included Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Massachusetts, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, and West Virginia.⁶⁶ In May, Louisiana gover-

nor Edwin Edwards signed an executive order establishing an office of early childhood development within the department of education. Similar executive orders were being considered in Washington and Utah.⁶⁷ Several states considered the administrative reform during their 1973 legislative sessions. Legislators in Colorado introduced a measure that “closely followed the model legislation drafted by the ECS Early Childhood Project.”⁶⁸ Similar bills were introduced in Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, Missouri, and New York, and the Hawaiian legislation was enacted into law in June. Supporters attributed this outcome to the obvious need for reform, the involvement and support of key administrators, and “a policy commitment on the part of the governor to the basic concept incorporated in the legislation.”⁶⁹ State-level activity continued into the summer, as conferences on child development were held in Arkansas and Louisiana.⁷⁰

Fourteen state offices of child development existed by July 1973, with all but one of them established in the previous two years.⁷¹ That year, administrators in twelve states voted to create the National Association of State Directors of Child Development. The newly elected president of the professional association explained that its two primary objectives “would be to exchange information and promote child development programs and related services in all states, and to strengthen the voice of the states in setting national policies in those areas.”⁷² The group soon began to pursue its second objective. Its members unanimously endorsed a resolution calling on President Nixon to name a permanent director of the Office of Child Development; the post had been vacant for over a year. The directors also “voted to develop legislative criteria to be used to measure the acceptability of federal child development legislation,” agreeing to meet in December to adopt guidelines.⁷³ The creation of the professional association and its early activities illustrate the increased assertiveness of state officials in this policy arena.

State activity continued in 1974. That year’s volume of the Council of State Governments *Suggested State Legislation* included the model legislation developed by the ECS.⁷⁴ A law establishing an office of child development gained enactment in Tennessee, and similar legislation was considered in Arizona, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, and West Virginia. The Tennessee statute granted the new office “broad authority for comprehensive child development programs for children under six.”⁷⁵ In Massachusetts, the legislature endorsed the Children’s Budget, which provided eighteen million dollars in new state monies for children’s services throughout the state. It funded an expanded pre-

school program for the physically handicapped and included five hundred thousand dollars to “finance the first year of new demonstration day care projects designed for children from all families . . . on a sliding scale basis.”⁷⁶ The governor of Idaho broadened the scope of that state’s Office of Child Development to include all human services programs.⁷⁷ Child development advocates suffered a setback in Florida, however. The legislature refused to appropriate any funds to that state’s Office of Early Childhood Development, effectively terminating its operations.⁷⁸

The widespread establishment of state offices of child development was important for both policy and political reasons. In policy terms, the offices were viewed as a way to coordinate the planning and delivery of services for young children and their families and to ameliorate the programmatic fragmentation and duplication that characterized existing arrangements. The goal of this administrative reform was to “use the existing governmental structure more effectively and to control increasing expenditures by reducing the duplication of services and directing state planning toward a preventive orientation.”⁷⁹ Proponents believed that the offices would help coordinate the work of state and local agencies and the public and private sectors, enabling states to use their manpower and financial resources as effectively as possible.

The political impact of the state offices was equally significant. They signaled heightened state interest in early childhood policy and gave state officials an institutional foothold through which they could attempt to defend their perceived interests. The founding of the National Association of State Directors of Child Development was important, as was the establishment of the Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education in April 1974. These professional associations promoted the exchange of policy-relevant information among interested parties and lobbied for programs at the state and national level. A September 1975 letter illustrates the latter dynamic. Writing to one of the congressional champions of child development legislation, the former president of the National Association of State Directors of Child Development argued that the states deserved a more prominent role in such legislation. Focusing on the state offices, he claimed, “[W]hile much of the movement in the states is of recent vintage, it is significant. I respectfully urge you to give every consideration to encouraging these efforts by providing support . . . for those states that have shown their good faith and capability to do statewide planning and coordination.”⁸⁰ State lawmakers could also point to several other steps that gave them a stronger stake in this policy arena.

Other Policy Changes at the State Level

The establishment of state offices of child development illustrated how more states needed a bureaucratic apparatus to coordinate early childhood services. State governments were increasingly active. Both the number and size of state early childhood programs grew considerably during the early to mid-1970s. States conducted “needs assessments” to determine the ideal and present levels of services available. They provided public support for various forms of prekindergarten services and developed certification requirements for prekindergarten teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators. These policy shifts did not establish comprehensive child development programs, but they nevertheless gave state officials an expanded stake in this policy arena.

Demographic changes spurred state officials to conduct “needs assessments” in their jurisdictions. Rising numbers of working mothers demanding day care for their children, in combination with troubling trends in nationwide infant mortality and poverty rates, led some observers to conclude that American children faced increasingly problematic conditions. The goal of a needs assessment was to generate practical knowledge about what children needed in a particular jurisdiction. More than a simple service inventory, a needs assessment typically began with a statement of such broad goals as the ability of all children to realize their cognitive potential. It then discussed a potential service that would contribute to the achievement of the goal and compared its availability to the number of children in the state who would benefit from it. This process was intended to assess the desirability of expanding existing programs and establishing new ones. Those conducting a needs assessment were encouraged to think about how they were going to implement its results. Coalition building and convincing the broader public that the needs merited a governmental response were crucial elements of a successful assessment. In addition, a needs assessment would only become a viable plan of action if it ranked the needs it identified and accounted for the political and fiscal realities of the state in which it was conducted.⁸¹

Needs assessments, in sum, combined a statement of goals with data on the status of children and families. Their goal was to give “state policymakers and the public . . . a clearer idea of what services and programs exist, what further resources are needed and what kinds of services are desired.”⁸² At its 1967 annual meeting, the ECS adopted a resolution calling on the states to conduct something like a needs assessment. It stated, “Each state is urged to set up a broadly-based task force to study the avail-

able resources and recommend the commitments necessary to establish a comprehensive program of educational experiences for all preschoolers in the state.”⁸³ Needs assessments were supposed to be comprehensive, incorporating health care and other issues in addition to education. Many states conducted needs assessments over the next decade, often under the auspices of the councils and offices of child development described in the previous section. The assessments were especially common in the aftermath of the debate over the Comprehensive Child Development Act. A May 1976 report stated, “The majority of the states indicate that they have initiated or completed some type of assessment procedures within the last three years.”⁸⁴ Many of the assessments focused on services for young children and their families.

A few examples illustrate the wide range of social services examined by needs assessments. In Alabama, the Interdepartment Coordinating Committee for Early Childhood Development conducted a study in approximately half of the state’s counties on the need for health, nutrition, educational, and social services for children between the ages of one and six. In Arkansas, the Office of Early Childhood Planning conducted a statewide needs assessment of services for children from birth to age eight in such areas as early education, child care, and health care. Indiana’s state committee for the Community Coordinated Child Care program conducted a statewide survey to assess the status of licensed day care centers for children between the ages of three and five. The Child Development Planning Project in Minnesota carried out a statewide analysis of the full range of services available to children from birth to age six. In Utah, the Office of Child Development conducted a statewide needs assessment survey of day care services, preschool and kindergarten education services, and child welfare services for children from birth to age eight.⁸⁵

The widespread performance of needs assessments illustrates the heightened state-level interest in early childhood policy. In the early to mid-1970s, many states also funded social services for children who were too young to attend primary school or established preschool projects. Needs assessments were significant not only in and of themselves. They also reflected a broader interest in policy change and, in some states, helped bring about such change. The ECS, because it viewed early childhood policy as a top programmatic priority, carefully tracked these changes through various reports and surveys that provide a useful lens through which to view state-level activity.

A 1972 survey examined state spending patterns and certification requirements. It asked about kindergarten and preschool programs and

concluded that “public support for kindergarten and other early childhood services is growing.”⁸⁶ It found that forty-two states provided some form of state aid for kindergarten. State aid for prekindergarten was limited; only twelve states offered some form of public support. It was more common for states to provide “pre-first graders” such state-supported services as medical and dental care, nutritional programs, or special programs for the handicapped. At least thirty states offered such services, which were typically targeted at the economically disadvantaged or the handicapped. Certification requirements for preschool teachers and administrators, which existed in twenty-four states, also signaled increased interest in early childhood policy. The survey tracked the number of colleges with degree programs in early childhood education and the number of junior or community colleges with associate degree programs.⁸⁷ In terms of public funding, services, and certification requirements, state involvement in early childhood policy was widespread.

The ECS conducted a follow-up survey two years later. Its results suggested additional movement between 1972 and 1974, and a report on the survey concluded that “public support for kindergarten and other early childhood services continues to grow.”⁸⁸ This growth was more evident along some dimensions than others. Even by 1974, for example, state funding for prekindergarten programs was “still the exception rather than the rule.”⁸⁹ Only eleven states (California, Georgia, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia) provided public support, which represented a slight decline. However, the number of states offering “pre-first graders” other state-supported services, such as medical and dental care, nutritional programs, or special programs for the handicapped, rose from thirty in 1972 to thirty-eight in 1974. The certification of professionals working in early childhood was also slightly more common. Half of the states required certification for prekindergarten teachers and administrators by 1974, while the number of states requiring certification for prekindergarten paraprofessionals rose from two to six.⁹⁰

The certification of paraprofessionals garnered significant interest in the early 1970s and led to the creation of the child development associate (CDA) credential. The U.S. Office of Child Development and three early childhood organizations developed the credential. Motivated by “the growing need for skilled child care workers to provide quality programs for young children in the United States” (Hinitz 1998, 88), they assumed that the skills needed to work with children were not related to a specific number of credit hours in formal college-level courses but could be ac-

quired through a properly structured training program.⁹¹ A consensus on the original competency standards was reached in 1974, even though critics argued that it was “too oriented toward the needs of educational programs such as Head Start and preschools, and shortchange[d] the personal, affective requirements of a round-the-clock day care center.”⁹²

In May 1975, the ECS Early Childhood Project distributed a report tracking state-level policy shifts in early childhood policy. Based on various sources, the report listed legislation on “the very young and education” that passed in 1974. Seventeen states established preschool projects or began preschool activity that year. This count provides a conservative estimate of state-level activity, because it does not include bills that were vetoed, failed, or were carried over or bills that fell into related categories. Even this conservative estimate indicates the breadth of state action in the aftermath of the presidential veto. Most of the projects were compensatory in nature and served disadvantaged populations. They did not provide universal access to preschool or related services. For example, the primary purpose of a Connecticut project was to provide a learning experience for preschool children with learning disabilities. A project in Illinois provided an early intervention program for three- and four-year-old children who exhibited sensorimotor, language, or conceptualization delays or disorders or social affective disorders. Maryland provided early childhood services to the hearing impaired and the visually impaired. A North Dakota project supplemented the minimal services available to preschool children in the rural northwestern region of the state, with a special emphasis on serving the learning disabled.⁹³ These projects illustrate the widespread interest in early childhood programs but suggest that most policy initiatives were targeted rather than universal.

In the fall of 1975, the ECS conducted a telephone survey whose goal was to “determine what the priorities for young children were, some of the major barriers to meeting those priorities and predictions of future trends.”⁹⁴ One to three persons were interviewed in each of the states about their top priorities. Day care, cited as a priority in thirty-nine states, ranked as the third-highest priority overall. A report on the survey mentioned that one obstacle to increased day care funding was the “reluctance of some legislators to authorize programs that might ‘take the child away from the home,’” explaining that some state legislators did not accept “a mother’s right to work.”⁹⁵ It suggests that the state-level debate over day care funding echoed the themes that were prevalent during congressional discussions of child development.

Respondents identified several areas of concern with respect to exist-

ing programs. They worried about the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of their service delivery systems and about fragmentation and duplication of services. Worried about not having sufficient staff to administer the expanding state programs, they advocated additional training programs for in-house staff. Many respondents also cited such barriers to implementation as insufficient capabilities for data collection and a lack of public awareness. The activities described in this chapter, such as the creation of state offices of child development and the performance of needs assessments, sought to address some of these concerns.

The foreword of the report touched on the states' relationship with the national government. It acknowledged that "the federal government is setting the top priorities for children in the United States," but it was highly critical of national policymaking.⁹⁶ According to the foreword, national government activity and funding helped set state political agendas, but these national priorities "are not arrived at systematically" and "are far from comprehensive."⁹⁷ Furthermore, the foreword noted that the tendency of national agencies to bypass state governments and work directly with localities promoted additional fragmentation, duplication, and inefficiency. Combined with the examples cited elsewhere in this chapter, the tone of the foreword suggests a new assertiveness among state officials in early childhood policy.

Conclusion: The States as Stakeholders

By the mid-1970s, the states had become a major locus of policymaking activity. Some supporters of the early childhood movement nevertheless remained frustrated with the pace of policy change. At the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children in November 1975, the ECS Early Childhood Project arranged a symposium for educators and state leaders. Many members of the three-hundred-person audience "expressed great frustration in trying to accomplish concrete gains in early childhood programs."⁹⁸ Their efforts had not led to the development of the kind of widespread, comprehensive programs they felt were necessary in order to serve the needs of young children and their families, and one panelist even suggested that the early childhood movement may have passed its peak. There were legitimate reasons for this frustration. By December 1975, services like early health screening, family counseling, preschool, and day care were "available in only a limited number of communities and usually only to families on welfare or otherwise

deemed likely to require welfare assistance in the future.”⁹⁹ Those who felt that most American families needed access to these services were dismayed by their limited availability.

Focusing solely on the limited reach of state-level early childhood programs, however, fails to recognize their short- and long-term significance. Offices of child development and preschool projects gave state officials an increased stake in this policy arena, and some observers speculated that these tentative initial steps were a sign of things to come. One observer predicted that “the trend over the last four, five years toward looking more to the states is probably . . . going to go further.”¹⁰⁰ Indeed, that was the goal of many of the state lawmakers who worked through such organizations as the ECS in their efforts to expand the governmental role in early childhood policy. They hoped heightened state activity would demonstrate to doubters in Congress and elsewhere “that the states have not only the will but the capacity to play a major role.”¹⁰¹ The Comprehensive Child Development Act had largely bypassed the states, and state officials were determined not to be overlooked in future legislation. Thus the venue shopping of the early 1970s altered the political contours of the broader debate over early childhood policy, establishing an increasingly powerful stakeholder whose preferences would have to be taken into account.