

POLICY BRIEF

Do Young Kids Count in Idaho?



Idaho KIDS COUNT



“Estimates of the return on investment of high quality early childhood programs for low-income children range from \$4 to \$7 for every \$1 spent.”

The Business Roundtable and Corporate Voices for Working Families

A REVIEW OF LEGISLATION AND LAWS

Over the last few decades, significant advances in various scientific fields have reinforced the importance of the early childhood years. For instance, neuroscience research shows the human brain has the greatest density of brain cells connectors (synapses) by age three, and reaches 90% of adult size by age five. At the same time, work and family life are changing. Record numbers of mothers with young children work outside the home and preschool children are more likely to be from poor families than they were 25 years ago.¹ These facts should have profound implications for parents, those who work with young children, and policy-makers.

This report examines the extent to which young children are a policy priority to the Idaho Legislature. The scope of the research consisted of surveying and analyzing legislation related to early childhood that could be compared to other states. It also reviewed existing laws as well as data that shed light on children’s well-being.

We used Utah as a point of comparison for the legislative survey since both states have somewhat similar demographic data. Legislation introduced from 2001 through 2004 was reviewed. Proposals that fell under one of three areas were included: Child Welfare (child abuse, foster care, adoption); Child Health & Safety; and Early Learning & Development. Parameters were set from birth to 7 years of age, so that we could include legislation that dealt with early primary grades, K-2.

LEGISLATIVE RECAP FOR IDAHO 2001-2004

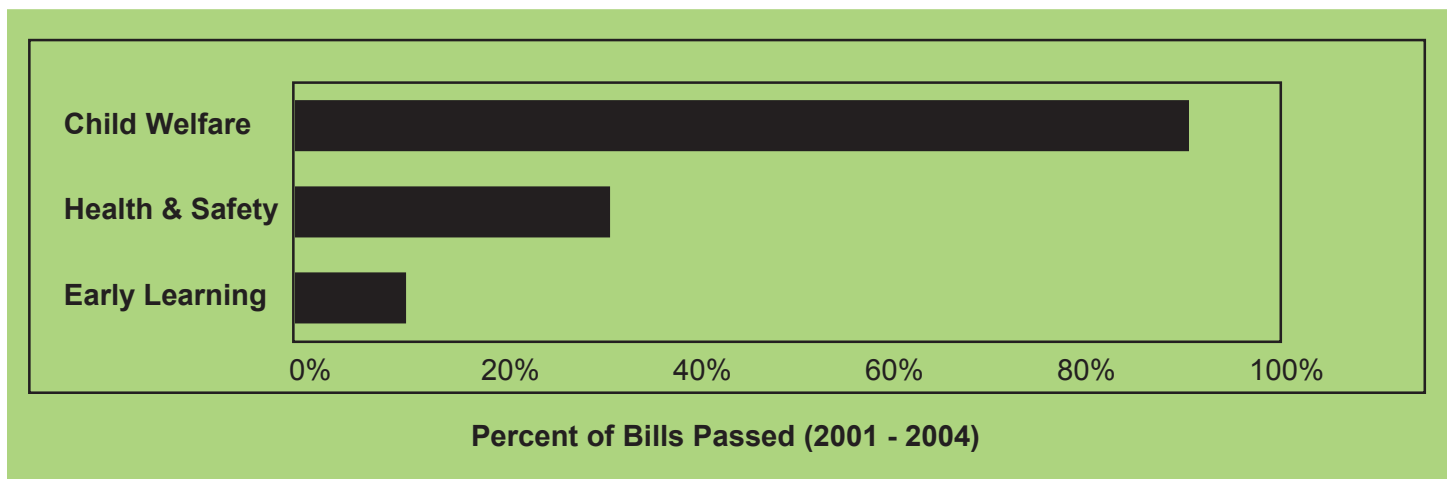
During this period, a total of 33 bills or resolutions that could enhance the early childhood years were introduced in the Idaho State Legislature. Of these, 14 or 42%, passed both houses and were implemented. Nineteen of the proposals (58%) originated in the Senate, even though there are half as many Senators as Representatives. Of the 14 bills or resolutions that passed both houses, seven were from the House and seven from the Senate.

¹ National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (2000).

Five bills passed the Senate, but were killed in the House. Four of these bills addressed Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) or school readiness programs. Only one, SB 1304 in 2002, made it to a vote of the full House, where it was defeated 20-47-3. This bill provided language to legally allow 4-year-olds to participate in Pre-K programs in public schools. It did not require school districts to offer such programs, nor did it set up any state funding mechanism, but recognized that some schools are offering these programs and paying for them with private or local funds.

When reviewing the types of bills that were introduced in Idaho, those in the Child Welfare category passed at a much higher rate than those in the two other areas. (See Table 1) Of the ten proposals in this area, nine passed (90%). Of the 13 bills related to Child Health and Safety, four passed (31%). Finally, out of the ten bills pertaining to Early Learning & Development, only one passed: SB 1116aa which set statewide goals for reading assessment in grades K-3 in 2001. Only one of these ten bills originated as a House bill.

TABLE 1: OUTCOME OF IDAHO LEGISLATION



LEGISLATIVE RECAP FOR UTAH 2001-2004

During the same years, the Utah Legislature introduced a total of 27 bills affecting young children. Of these, 17 or 63%, passed both houses and became law. Of the 27 bills introduced, 17 originated in the House of Representatives. Of the 17 bills that passed, 7 were House bills and 10 were Senate bills. One bill that would require more nutritional food in school vending machines has been introduced in the Utah House for the last several years. It passed the House in 2003 but failed in the Senate. During these four years, only two bills related to early learning were introduced and one of them, HB 145aa, passed in 2001. Similar to a bill which passed in Idaho the same year, this bill set a goal of 90% or more of all third graders reading at grade level by the end of the third grade in 2006 and provided for reporting of reading achievement in lower grades.

Though Utah appears to have a higher rate of passage of bills that affect early childhood well-being, this may be misleading. According to child advocates in Utah, several of the bills that have been passed in recent years could have a negative effect on children’s health and safety. For instance, SB 208aaSaaH, passed in 2003, changed the warrant requirements for removing a minor from home, making it more difficult to remove a minor without parental consent, unless there are “exigent circumstances.” It was opposed by child advocates in Utah.

SURVEY OF EXISTING EARLY CHILDHOOD LAWS

In reviewing laws already in effect, Oregon was added to the mix, in order to show comparability among three states. Table 2 examines some aspects of the legal framework for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Child Care, Pre-School (Education for 3 and 4 year-olds) and Child Safety for Idaho, Oregon and Utah.

TABLE 2: CURRENT LAW/REQUIREMENTS

	IDAHO	OREGON	UTAH
CHIP Provisions			
Family Income Eligibility	150% FPL	185% FPL	200% FPL
Covers Pregnant Women	No	Yes	No
Child Care Regulation			
Infant/staff ratio (18 mo.)	6 to 1	4 to 1	4 to 1
Maximum group size	Not regulated	8	8
Child/staff ratio (3 yrs.)	12 to 1	10 to 1	12 to 1
Maximum group size	Not regulated	20	24
Child Care Assistance			
Family Eligibility	150% 1998 FPL	150% FPL	56% state median income
Monthly income-family of 3	\$1,706	\$2,305	\$2,347
Pre-school			
State support for Head Start	\$1.5 million in TANF funds for extra slots	\$25.6 Million in State funds	No
State support for Pre-school	No	Yes, private non-profits that meet requirements may also receive funds	No
Child Safety			
Child Safety Restraint Requirements	Child must be properly restrained in car safety seat that meets federal motor vehicle safety standards	Child must be properly restrained in car safety seat that meets federal motor vehicle safety standards	Driver shall provide for protection of children by using a restraint device for each child as prescribed by manufacturer
Age and/or weight	Under 4 years of age and less than 40 pounds	Under 6 years of age and less than 60 pounds	Under 5 years of age
Type of Violation Offense	Secondary	Primary	Secondary

In terms of existing law, Oregon places a higher priority on early childhood well-being than either Idaho or Utah. It is the only state of the three to cover pregnant women under CHIP. (In Idaho in 2003, HB 201 would have extended coverage to pregnant women but did not make it out of House H & W Committee.) Both Oregon and Utah require lower child/staff ratios in child care than Idaho, especially for infants. They also set maximum group size for young children in these facilities, while Idaho doesn't. In the area of Child Care Assistance (funded with federal Child Care Development Funds and a required state match) for low income parents who are working or training for work, both Oregon and Utah allow more families to apply for assistance by setting eligibility at a higher income level. With Idaho's cut-off at 150% of 1998 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) instead of current FPL, participation is restricted to families at much lower income levels than most states²

² Idaho Office of Performance Evaluations, *A Review of the Idaho Child Care Program* (November 2002)

In early childhood education, Oregon is significantly ahead of Idaho and Utah. Established in 1987, the Oregon Head Start Pre-K Program is modeled after the federal Head Start program. State funding of \$25.6 million is provided to all federal Head Start grantees, as well as some private, nonprofit groups that do not receive federal funds, but meet required standards. Though Idaho uses \$1.5 million in Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) federal block grant funds to make more Head Start slots available to eligible children, Idaho and Utah are among 12 states nationally which do not provide any state funding for Pre-K programs.³

Oregon law also provides protection for a wider age range of children while riding in automobiles by requiring proper safety restraints up to 6 years of age. It is also a primary offense for violating the law, i.e. a driver may be stopped in Oregon if a young child is not restrained in a proper seat.

CHILD WELL-BEING DATA COMPARISON

This report also reviewed indicator data available from Kids Count⁴ and Every Child Matters for Idaho, Oregon and Utah.

TABLE 3: CHILD WELL-BEING MEASURES

	IDAHO	OREGON	UTAH	NATIONAL
Child Welfare				
Children in Poverty: 2001	15.0%	15.0%	11.0%	16.0%
Children in Extreme Poverty: 2001	6.0%	6.0%	4.0%	7.0%
Children reported as abused: 2002	3.5%	4.8%	4.0%	
Families with children headed by single parent: 2001	25.0%	29.0%	17.0%	28.0%
Female-headed families receiving child support/alimony	52.0%	41.0%	48.0%	35.0%
Child Health				
Children without health insurance: 2001	13.0%	11.0%	10.0%	12.0%
2 year-olds who were immunized: 2002	74.0%	75.0%	80.0%	79.0%
Low-birthweight babies: 2001	6.4%	5.5%	6.4%	7.7%
Infant mortality (deaths per 1000 live births): 2001	6.2	5.4	4.8	6.8
Child death rate (deaths per 100,000 ages 1-14): 2001	25.0	18.0	20.0	22.0
Early Childhood Learning & Development				
Children not enrolled in pre-school: 2000	63.1%	58.7%	59.7%	
4th graders who scored below basic reading level: 2003	36.0%	37.0%	34.0%	38.0%

Idaho's rates are better than Utah or Oregon in the following areas: indicators of child abuse cases reported; the percentage of female-headed families that receive child support or alimony.

Oregon scores better than Idaho and Utah with regard to the rate of babies born with low birth-weight, the child death rate.

Utah rates better than Oregon and Idaho for the following: the percent of children in poverty and extreme poverty; percent of children headed by a single parent; the percent of two-year olds immunized; the infant mortality rate and the percent of 4th graders scoring below basic reading level.

³ National Institute for Early Education Research, *State Preschool Yearbook* (2004) <http://nieer.org/yearbook/states/>

⁴ Source of data with national references is *Kids Count Data Book 2004*; source of data without national references is *Every Child Matters* web site.

SUMMARY FINDINGS

When compared to Oregon and Utah, young children in Idaho appear to come up on the short end of the stick. On most measures of child well-being, either Oregon or Utah rate higher. In two areas Oregon and Utah rank very close to each other and ahead of Idaho—children without insurance and children not enrolled in pre-school. Thus a child in either of these two states would be more likely than one in Idaho to have health insurance and to be enrolled in pre-school as a three or four-year-old.

The protection and benefits of current law are better for young children in Oregon than in either Utah or Idaho. In terms of legislation introduced in recent years, Idaho, to its credit, has been considering legislation dealing with early learning, including four bills on pre-kindergarten. During the same years, no bills were introduced in Utah on the topic of pre-school. Oregon already authorizes pre-school, as well as providing over \$25 million annually in state funds for Head Start and similar programs that meet requirements.

Though there is growing acknowledgement that the early childhood years lay the groundwork for later success in school and life, those bills that are most directly related to providing opportunities for young children—those addressing Early Learning & Development—had just a 10% chance of passage in the Idaho Legislature. Bills that had the greatest chance of passage were those that dealt with Child Welfare, i.e. child abuse, adoption or foster care, of which 90% passed and became law. Bills having to do with health and safety of young children passed at a rate of 31%. These percentages compare to an average rate of passage of approximately 50% for all non-appropriation bills introduced in the Idaho Legislature during the 2001-2004 legislative sessions.

Public investment fails to reflect what we now know about brain development in young children. The fiscal analysis report, *Early Learning Left Out: An Examination of Public Investments in Education and Development by Child Age*, found that the vast majority of public investments in education and development occur after the first five years of life.⁵

Legislative action in Idaho confirms the conclusion of this report. Out of over 70 bills related to education that were introduced in the 2004 session, only two had to do with early learning. In the last four years, only ten bills were introduced on the topic of early learning, and of these, only one passed, a bill in 2001 which set statewide goals for reading assessment in grades K-3. Also out of those ten bills, only one originated in the House. This in contrast to the overall percentage of bills introduced: e.g. in the 2004 legislative session, 61% of the bills introduced *originated* in the House.

Resolutions, which do not require the Governor's signature to take effect, are more easily passed than bills. They express the sentiment of the legislature, do not change the law, and usually do not require an expenditure of state funds. The only resolution related to young children and not requiring an expenditure of funds that didn't pass both houses was HCR 43 in 2002. It called for a study by the Board of Corrections of the female offender/newborn baby dilemma in an effort to promote better care of these children and to reduce recidivism. It passed the House, but was held in Senate Judiciary Committee. These types of proposals provide an opportunity for educating legislators with little investment or risk.

An exception to easy passage of resolutions noted above is a concurrent resolution which calls for a *legislative study* in the interim between sessions. The fate of these resolutions, once they pass one house, are determined by leadership during the last weeks of the session, when those chosen are moved to the floor of the other house for a final vote. Only a small percentage of those introduced receive final approval. SCR 107, which proposed a legislative study on School Readiness in 2001, was the only proposal dealing with children in the four years reviewed. It did not receive the approval of leadership to move forward.

⁵ Voices for America's Children and Family Policy Center: *Early Learning Left Out: An Examination of Public Investments in Education and Development by Child Age* (February 2004).

CONCLUSIONS FOR IDAHO

- There is a need for building understanding of the importance of early childhood development in the Idaho Legislature. Because 90% of the bills introduced from 2001-2004 on early learning and development originated in the Senate, particular attention should be paid to relevant House committees. Also, the Senate Education Committee, in which early learning proposals reviewed were introduced, has a new Chairman and five out of its nine members are new to the committee this year.
- A Child Advocacy organization would be helpful in positive consideration of bills which enhance the early childhood years. Such a group could work to educate legislators on the needs of young children and act as a catalyst especially once a bill is passed by the house of origin. For instance, after a Senate bill passes the Senate, it moves to the House where it gets assigned to a committee and the entire process (committee hearing, etc.) starts over. Because of the press of business, especially toward the end of the session, the sponsor in the originating house sometimes doesn't have time to coordinate testimony and encourage letters or calls of support on the "other side of the rotunda." An advocacy group could serve as a resource to the legislative sponsors in helping shepherd a bill through the process. Both Utah and Oregon have such groups—*Voices for Utah Children* will soon be celebrating its 20th anniversary and *Oregon First for Children* was started in 1991.
- Encouraging the introduction of interim study proposals that deal with early childhood issues would provide an opportunity to educate leadership on the importance of those issues. If an interim study related to early childhood were adopted, it would provide some legislators with an opportunity for more in-depth study of the importance of these early years of children's lives.

RESOURCES

- The Business Roundtable and Corporate Voices for Working Families, *Early Childhood Education: A Call to Action from the Business Community* (2003)
- Annie E. Casey Foundation, *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, State Profiles of Child Well-Being (2004)
- Every Child Matters Education Fund: <http://www.everychildmatters.org/>
- Idaho Office of Performance Evaluations, *A Review of the Idaho Child Care Program* (November 2002)
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety: http://www.hwysafety.org/safety_facts/state_laws/restrain2.htm
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, *Building the Foundation for Bright Futures: Final Report of the NGA Task Force on School Readiness* (2005) http://www.nga.org/center/divisions/1,1188,T_CEN_EDS,00.html
- National Child Care Information Center: <http://nccic.org/statedata/statepro/>
- National Institute for Early Education Research, *State Preschool Yearbook* (2004) <http://nieer.org/yearbook/states/>
- National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (2000)
- Voices for America's Children and Family Policy Center, *Early Learning Left Out: An Examination of Public Investments in Education and Development by Child Age* (February 2004)

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Sue Reents achieved her bachelors degree from the University of Oregon and has completed advanced work in public administration and law at Boise State University. She also attended the Leadership College for Women Legislators in North Carolina. She served as an Idaho State Senator, and has worked as a legislative and policy advisor consultant with an emphasis on public health. She has an extensive history of public service in the field of human rights and child advocacy.

