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GLOSSARY of Early Care and Education Terms

Accessibility

In early care and education, the term refers to the availability of child care programs when and where a family needs it.

Accreditation

A process through which child care programs voluntarily meet specific standards to receive endorsement from a professional agency. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs (NAC) are among the organizations that offer accreditation programs for child care centers. The Family Child Care Association offers accreditation for family child care homes.

Affordability

The degree to which the price of early care and education is a feasible family expense. High-quality care may be available but it may not be affordable for a family with a low or moderate income.

Before/After-School Care

School-Age child care offers care to children enrolled in Kindergarten or above before and/or after school and during school holidays/vacations. Programs are licensed by the MSDE Office of Child Care. Programs may operate from a school building or other licensed facility.

Best Practices

A term used to denote the ways of delivering services that have been found through research or experience as the "best" ways to achieve desired outcomes.

Child Care

The care or supervision of a child when the child's parent has given the child's care over to another for some portion of a 24-hour-day as a supplement to the parent's primary care of the child.

Child Care Center

Child care provided in a facility that, for part or all of the day, provides care to children in the absence of the parent. Centers are licensed by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Office of Child Care (OCC). Programs that are licensed or otherwise authorized to provide child care services in a non-residential setting.

Child Care Tax Credit

A federal or state credit for the costs of care for a qualifying individual to allow you to work or look for work.

Child Development

The process by which a child acquires skills in the areas of social, emotional, intellectual, speech and language, and physical development, including fine and gross motor skills. Developmental stages refer to the expected, sequential order of acquiring skills that children typically go through. For example, most children crawl before they walk, or use their fingers to feed themselves before they use utensils.

Child Development Associate Credential (CDA)

A credential earned by an early childhood educator who has demonstrated skills in working with young children and their families by successfully completing an established credentialing process. The CDA process is administered by the Council for Professional Recognition.

Curriculum

A planned sequence of instruction incorporating the planned interaction of students with instructional content, materials, resources, and processes for evaluating the attainment of educational objectives. Curricula may be tightly standardized, or may include a high level of instructor or learner autonomy.

Developmental Milestone

A memorable accomplishment on the part of a baby or young child; for example, rolling over, sitting up without support, crawling, pointing to get an adult's attention, or walking.

Developmentally Appropriate

A way of describing practices that are adapted to match the age, characteristics and developmental progress of a specific age group of children.

Early Childhood Education

A branch of educational theory which relates to the teaching of young children up until the age of about eight, with a particular focus on education, notable in the period before the start of compulsory education

Employer-Sponsored Centers

A child care center located on-site or off-site which is sponsored by a corporation, business, or other employer. Slots are often reserved for employee children.

Family Child Care

The care given to a child younger than 13 years old or to a developmentally disabled person younger than 21 years old, in place of parental care for less than 24 hours a day, in a residence other than the child's residence and for which the provider is paid. Family child care is regulated by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)/Office of Child Care.

Household Income

Household income consists of a family unit of one or more persons living in the same household who are related to a householder by birth, marriage, or adoption PLUS all those living in the household that earn an income and contribute to the monthly expenses of the household.

In-Home Child Care/Informal Care

Child care provided in the child's home by relatives or non-relatives during the hours when parents are working. Non-relative caregivers are sometimes called nannies, babysitters and au pairs.

Infant/Toddler

In the State of Maryland, "infant" means a child under 18 months old. "Toddler" means a child 18 months old or older but younger than 2 years old.

Kindergarten

An instructional program for children who are 5 years old by September 1st of each academic year. Programs may be operated by a private or public school. Kindergarten is the year of school which precedes entrance to first grade.

Letter of Compliance (LOC)/License-Exempt Child Care

Legally operating child care that is exempt from the regulatory system of the state or community. Per state code 13A.17, A letter of compliance is a form of licensure that exempts the facility from having to meet certain staff qualification and program requirements. To be eligible for a Letter of Compliance (LOC) the program must be operated by a tax-exempt religious organization in school buildings exclusively for children who are enrolled in those schools, by whatever name known.

Licensed Child Care

Child care programs operated in homes or in facilities that fall within the regulatory system of a state or community and comply with those regulations. States have different levels of regulatory requirements and use different terms (e.g., licensing, certification, registration).

Parent Choice

Accessibility by parents to a range of types of child care and types of providers. The term often is used to refer to the CCDBG stipulation that parents receiving subsidies should be able to use all legal forms of care, even if a form of child care would be otherwise unregulated by the state.

Pre-Kindergarten

Publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs for eligible 4-year-old children administered by local boards of education or qualified vendors with the goal of providing learning experiences to help children develop and maintain school readiness skill. Local school systems shall enroll all 4-year-old applicants from economically disadvantaged or homeless families. Administered by local boards of education and regulated by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

Prior Care

The categories of early care and education are considered as they impact on school readiness. Prior care reflects kindergarten students' enrollment within 12 months prior to starting kindergarten.

Quality

Quality child care commonly refers to early childhood settings in which children are safe, healthy, and receive appropriate stimulation. Care settings are responsive, allowing children to form secure attachments to nurturing adults. Quality programs or providers offer engaging, appropriate activities in settings that facilitate healthy growth and development, and prepare children for or promote their success in school.

Regulated Child Care

Child care centers and family child care homes that comply with either a state's regulatory system or another system of regulation. A related term is "licensed child care," which often refers to a particular level or standard of regulation.

School Readiness

School readiness is often defined as children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life. School readiness starts with health and physical development, social and emotional development and cognitive development. School readiness includes children being ready for school, families being ready to support their children's learning, and schools being ready for children.

School-Based Child Care

Child care programs that occur in school facilities.

Sliding Fee Scale

A formula for determining the amount of child care fees to be paid by parents, usually based on income.

Standards (Learning)

Learning standards are concise, clearly articulated descriptions of what students should know and be able to do at a specific stage of their educational journey.

Subsidized Child Care

Child care that is at least partially funded by public or charitable funds to decrease its cost for parents.

Two-generation Approach

A two-generation approach provides opportunities for and to meet the needs of vulnerable children and their families together. The programs build education, economic supports, social capital, and health and well-being to create a legacy of economic security that passes from one generation to the next.

Unlicensed Child Care

Child care programs that have not been licensed and regulated by the state. The term often refers to informal family child care.

Vouchers

In the child care field, refers to a form of payment for subsidized child care. States often have different definitions regarding the exact nature of vouchers, and sometimes refer to them as certificates/subsidies.

Wrap Around Child Care Programs

Child care designed to extend hours of service between another early childhood program's hours and the hours that parents work.

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