



**BOLD  
THINKERS  
DRIVING  
REAL-WORLD  
IMPACT**

**Education, Youth & Families**

# Early Childhood Care and Education

The first five years of a child's life comprise the most dynamic period for their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Children who experience developmentally, culturally, and linguistically responsive early childhood education programs are more likely to build a strong foundation for success in school and life. While there have been many improvements in creating a more seamless, well-financed, and equitable system, challenges remain, including:

- Families can't afford care, hampering their ability to work and limiting their choices;
- Early childhood educators continue to earn extremely low wages, resulting in high turnover and staff shortages;
- Providers are not reimbursed for the real cost of care, putting their fragile businesses at greater risk;
- The quality of care and early learning is highly variable, especially for infants and toddlers; and
- Equity issues grounded in race, ethnicity, language, income, and disability create untenable stratification in access to quality programs and compensation for educators.

At Abt Associates, we work with federal, state, and local agencies, nonprofit organizations, higher education institutions, and philanthropies to create effective, and well-funded systems that address access, affordability, quality, and compensation. We help unpack persistent challenges, develop and share tested innovations, and bring forward research and evidence-based examples of “what works.” Our expertise includes tailored evaluations, data collection and analysis, policy analysis, and strategic guidance. All of our work is centered on the voices of families and practitioners, with a focus on removing the systemic barriers of race, language, and culture within the early childhood education system and in the greater society.



## Featured Projects

### NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

The term “access” covers many issues—distance, availability, affordability, age of children served, and parent preferences. We have helped clients understand issues of access through tailored approaches relevant to their needs. For example, in New Hampshire, Abt created an [interactive map](#) of providers to illustrate child care deserts and the inadequate supply of early care and education providers. For Rhode Island, we conducted a [family needs assessment](#) to understand families' knowledge of, access to, and experience with programs.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE PREPARATION AND SUPPORT

As qualifications requirements grow more rigorous, early childhood educators need professional supports and financial assistance to advance their careers and fair compensation. Abt has extensive experience conducting research on workforce needs, both within the early childhood sector and beyond. Recently, we conducted a statewide early childhood [workforce needs assessment](#) and review of research and policies on workforce issues to help Rhode Island plan for improved staffing and quality for its birth-to-five programs. Abt also provided Delaware with a review of its early childhood professional development system with policy change recommendations including a proposal for a new career lattice. We are also helping the new Early Childhood Innovation Center in Delaware design a new, comprehensive early childhood educator scholarship program.

For a statewide nonprofit, we are providing analysis for the development of a salary scale for early childhood center directors and non-academic staff. For the U.S Department of Labor, Abt conducted a [meta-analysis](#) of the impact of 46 career pathways programs, including the [early care and education workforce](#). The study's findings help inform how career pathways increase educational progress while indicating that compensation improvements are still an area for focus.

## INSTRUCTIONAL, CLASSROOM, AND PROGRAM QUALITY

The quality of early childhood education programs matters, and Abt has engaged in numerous studies to inform better policies and practices for quality at all levels. For the [Migrant and Seasonal Head Start study](#), Abt examined the relationship between program characteristics and child/family well-being as well as the impact of instructional practices. As part of that study, we created a new observational tool—the MSHS Cultural Items and Language Use Checklist—and collaborated with program directors to be part of a Community Consultant Group. As part of the [Variations in Implementation of Quality Initiative \(VIQI\) project](#), Abt observed classroom quality in programs across

the country, focusing on identifying key dimensions of quality, as well as the drivers that facilitate or inhibit successful implementation of quality-strengthening interventions. In partnership with Harvard University as part of the [Early Learning Study at Harvard \(ELS@H\)](#), Abt is in the sixth year of following a cohort of 3- and 4-year old children in Massachusetts from formal and informal early education settings into their elementary grade years, examining how early care settings and quality plays a role in children's long-term development.



## EVALUATIONS OF IMPACT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Real-time, meaningful evaluations help classrooms, programs, and systems improve. At Abt, we use cutting edge approaches to measure program impact and implementation. For the [MA Early Childhood Support Organization \(ECSO\) initiative](#), whose goal is to empower program leaders to build their organizational capacity and improve the learning environment, Abt is evaluating the initiative's implementation and impact on leaders, educators, programs, and children across Massachusetts. Part of that effort has involved the creation of an interactive online dashboard that allows the clients and partners to track real-time implementation supports and classroom/program data to monitor and adjust progress and work accordingly. Abt's impact findings from the [Massachusetts Preschool Expansion Grant evaluation](#) helped inform state and local program and policy development. We have also been conducting the [Program Performance Evaluation](#) of the New Hampshire Preschool Development Grant Birth through five (PDG B-5) since 2020, which involves monitoring and evaluating the implementation and outcomes of grant activities and supporting the University of New Hampshire with continuous quality improvement throughout the grant's lifecycle.

## Meet Abt's Early Childhood Education Experts

Abt's experts bring a wide range of experience and expertise.

LEARN MORE <https://www.abtassociates.com/ECEExperts>

## For More Information

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## Pursuing Equity. Looking for the Intersections. Driving Real-World Impact.

Abt Associates is a global consulting and research firm that combines data and bold thinking to improve the quality of people's lives. We partner with clients and communities to advance equity and innovation—from creating scalable digital solutions and combating infectious disease, to mitigating climate change and advancing economic growth.

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