

Early Care and Education Governance

Governing [early care and education systems](#) is complex, with multiple agencies overseeing several programs and services that are funded at the local, state and federal levels. These programs and services all contribute to early development, but often operate separately — [making alignment, coordination and funding distribution difficult](#). This fragmentation impacts states' abilities to provide equitable, cohesive and high-quality supports for young children and their families to ensure strong foundations are developed for school readiness.

To address fragmentation, states are required by the [Head Start Act](#) to have early childhood advisory councils. [Several states](#) also have children's cabinets or other oversight entities.

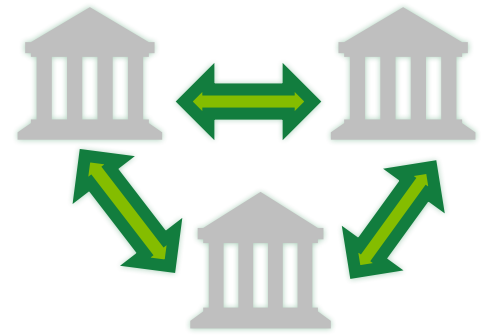
The early care and education components of the ECE system include [Early Head Start/Head Start, state preschool](#), and the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#), Parts B (ages three and up) and C (infants and toddlers), and the [Child Care Development Fund](#). High-quality child care is generally supported through a [quality rating and improvement system](#). Additional comprehensive services include [home visiting](#) and [early childhood mental health consultation](#).



9 states have **created** a new entity to oversee several early care and education components.



13 states plus District of Columbia have **consolidated** several agencies or programs into an existing entity that oversees multiple components.



28 states have agencies that provide programs and services that require a **coordinated** approach between agencies.

State EXAMPLES

CREATED



In 2019, **New Mexico** passed [SB 22](#) creating the Early Childhood Education and Care Department, with the aim of creating “a more cohesive, equitable and effective early childhood system in New Mexico.” Using the state’s Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five [needs assessment data](#), the department “coordinates a continuum of programs from prenatal to five and ensures that families in every corner of the state can access the services they need.”

CONSOLIDATED

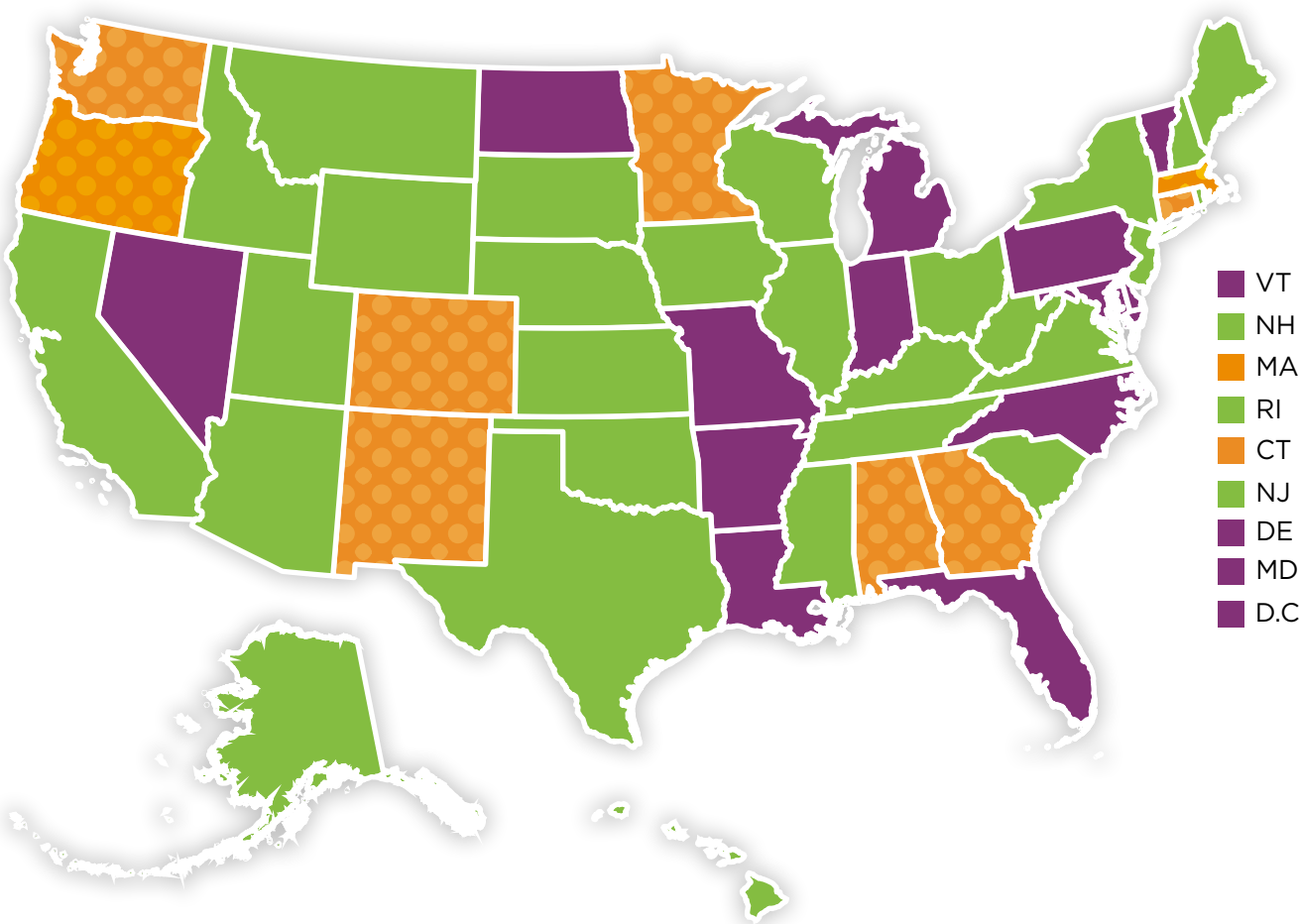


In 2021, **North Dakota** enacted [HB 1416](#), which merges offices and programs encompassing child care, preschool and pre-K, home visiting, early intervention and professional development that support families and children birth through five to better serve them and provide more efficient and effective government leadership. [HB 1466](#), passed during the same legislative session, represents new state investment in high quality early experiences for children that is focused on the year before they enter kindergarten.

COORDINATED



In 2017, **Hawaii** converted their early childhood advisory council into an advisory board (Early Learning Board) that oversees the Executive Office on Early Learning and is responsible for promoting collaboration across agencies and stakeholders serving young children. The Early Learning Board also advises the governor and makes recommendations to the Legislature.



Since January 2022, at least 70 early care and education governance bills have been introduced in 30 states.

Key Questions for Policymakers Considering Governance Changes

Once priorities for the early care and education system are established, the following questions may be considered:

- What process will the state use to determine whether change is needed?
- What are the state's critical functions?
- How should states work with communities?
- What capacities do states need, and how should they be configured?
- If the state decides change is worthwhile, how will the change be managed?

These questions are adapted from [Getting There from Here \(full report and decision guide\)](#).