

QUALITY OF LICENSED CHILDCARE CENTERS IN NEVADA

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According to US Census Bureau, 66% of children under age six live in households with working parents.¹ In Nevada, the proportion of children under age six living in households with working parents exceeds more than half of the other states at 71%.²

With a high percentage of parents in the work force today, childcare is important in a family's life, especially since its services contribute to children's developmental skills.³ According to the Child Care Welfare League of America's standards of excellence for childcare services, "Child day care is to supplement and enhance the care, the attention to developmental needs, and the protection that children receive from parents."⁴

This issue brief discusses problems with childcare, childcare in Nevada, how to test the quality of licensed childcare centers, and how Nevada fares on the indicators. Much of the information is taken from a statewide study on childcare in Nevada by Eva Essa, a professor at UNR.

Childcare Problems

The childcare literature identifies several problems with childcare in the US; a few of these problems are summarized as follows:⁵

1. Low Quality: from a child-development perspective, most of the studies show that childcare providers provide mediocre-quality childcare. For example, many teachers don't engage with children unless they are crying.

- 2. Lack of Availability: most recent work finds that some forms of day care are not available, such as day care for disabled, special needs, or sick children.
- 3. High Cost: for low-income families, high-quality childcare centers or even low quality are expensive. Thus, many families can't enroll their children in these centers.
- 4. Low Earnings for Childcare Providers: workers in the childcare field earn a low income compared to workers with the same qualifications in other types of jobs.⁶
- 5. Parents' Lack of Knowledge: many parents are uninformed about the quality of their child's daycare.

Childcare in Nevada

(A) Ages of Children in Day Care Centers in Nevada

The following table shows the percentage of children at different ages in childcare centers in Nevada.

Table 1: Age, Number, and Percent of Children in Childcare Centers in Nevada

Age of Children	Number of Children at Childcare Center	Percent of Children at Childcare Center
Infants	1418	4%
Toddlers	5607	17%
Pre-Schoolers	15991	50%
Kindergarteners	4085	13%
School-Age	5143	16%

Source: Essa, Eva, *Who Cares for Nevada's Children – A Profile of the Demographic, Economic, and Quality Aspects of Childcare in Nevada*, 2002.

(B) Weekly Cost of Childcare Centers in Nevada

Childcare is expensive, and the data support the theory that the poor pay a higher percentage of their income for childcare than those in higher-income brackets.⁷ The cost data coming from childcare centers in Nevada show that the cost of childcare depends on the age of a child. Care for infants and toddlers is the most expensive, due to the ratio of children to staff needed for this group.⁸ The following tables summarize the weekly cost for childcare by age group in Nevada:

Table 2: Weekly Fees for Infants and Toddlers in Childcare Centers in Nevada

<i>Weekly Fees for Infants and Toddlers</i>	<i>Percent of Childcare Centers</i>
\$95 or less	19
\$96 - \$110	17
\$111 - \$125	16
\$126 - \$140	25
\$141 or more	23

Source: Essa, Eva, *Who Cares for Nevada's Children – A Profile of the Demographic, Economic, and Quality Aspects of Childcare in Nevada*, 2002.

Table 3: Weekly Fees for Pre-Schoolers in Childcare Centers in Nevada

<i>Weekly Fees for Pre-schoolers</i>	<i>Percent of Childcare Centers</i>
\$85 or less	31
\$86 - \$100	25
\$101 - \$115	23
\$116 - \$130	11
\$131 or more	10

Source: Essa, Eva, *Who Cares for Nevada's Children – A Profile of the Demographic, Economic, and Quality Aspects of Childcare in Nevada*, 2002.

Table 4: Weekly Fees for School-Age Children in Childcare Centers in Nevada

<i>Weekly Fees for School-Age Children*</i>	<i>Percent of Childcare Centers</i>
\$85 or less	31
\$86 - \$100	25
\$101 - \$115	23
\$116 - \$130	11
\$131 or more	10

* Before and after-school care

Source: Essa, Eva, *Who Cares for Nevada's Children – A Profile of the Demographic, Economic, and Quality Aspects of Childcare in Nevada*, 2002.

How to Test the Quality of Licensed Childcare Centers

The National Association for Educating Young Children defines a quality childcare program as one that meets the needs of and promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of children and adults (parents and staff) involved in the program.⁹

The Pennsylvania State University highlighted thirteen indicators which could be used to test for the quality of a childcare program that aims to protect children from harm.¹⁰ See Table 5.

How Does Nevada Fare on the Indicators?

- **Child Health:** The national rate for children without health insurance in year 2000 was 12%; the rate in Nevada was 17%. The national rate for 2-year-olds who were immunized in year 2001 was 79%, the rate in Nevada for the same year was 74%.¹¹

- **Staff-to-Child Ratio:** The staff-to-child ratio in childcare centers depends on the age of the child. The following table summarizes the ratio requirements by the state of Nevada, and the actual ratios in Nevada childcare centers found by Essa.¹²

Table 5: Description of the Indicators

Indicator	Description
1. Child abuse prevention indicator	Fewer instances of abuse occur in childcare programs than in homes or residential facilities. A program should do the following to help curb child abuse: increase caregiver support (such as high staff-to-child ratios), provide enough breaks; inform caregivers of their legal responsibilities and their rights and protections under the law; focus on positive behavior; evaluate the program with feedback to staff; provide enough training opportunities; and offer social support, parent networking, child reading advice, & informal counseling to troubled parents.
2. Immunizations indicator	Young children in childcare face an increased risk of getting infectious diseases as compared to older children and adults. Immunizations help protect children during childhood and for the rest of their lives. Reviewing and monitoring childcare center records increase the reported rate of correctly immunized preschool children.
3. Staff-to-child ratio and group size indicators	Two of the best indicators for determining the quality of a childcare program are staff to child ratio and group size. These two indicators significantly affect many other health and safety issues, such as the transmission of disease being greater when there are more children and adults present. These two indicators improve the care-giving behaviors of staff and the safety of children. And on the mental-health and school-readiness side, more secure attachments occur with higher staff child ratios and smaller group sizes.
4. & 5. Staff (Director and Teachers) qualifications indicators	Educated and trained caregivers are more likely to promote the physical and mental health, safety, and cognition of children in their care. Experienced and educated directors more appropriately monitor their staff. College-educated care givers encourage children more, show more teacher direction, and engage in less restrictive behavior. They are more likely to continue in childcare work, which impacts turnover and helps with attachment and bonding with young children.
6. Staff training indicator	Directors' and caregivers' training hours in the first year should be 30 hours a year and then 24 hours a year after that. Staff training programs help to reduce the transmission of infectious diseases, reduce accidental injuries in childcare centers, and help to better ease a positive learning and socialization environment. Trainings should build on one another and involve the participants in learning. Mentoring programs are a good example of such training.
7. Supervision/discipline	Proper supervision will lessen behavioral problems, such as being disruptive and unruly and decreasing injury rates. Discipline, if used inappropriately such as controlling behaviors, punishment, verbal reprimands and corporal punishment will have children acting out and being disruptive. These types of behaviors should not be occurring in a childcare program.
8. Fire drills indicator	Children under the age of 5 are 2xs more likely to die from fire than other childhood age groups. Kids' Safe program has shown to be an effective way of teaching young children fire safety.
9. Medication administration indicator	Children in childcare are more likely to be taking medications because of the increased illnesses associated with being in childcare. With over-the-counter medications written permission of the parent or guardian and instructions from a physician are required. There are many standards and licensing requirements for this indicator. A program needs a written policy and clear procedures on giving medicine, and proper storage, and has designated staff to administer.
10. Emergency plan/contact indicator	Staff needs to be prepared for emergency situations and injuries by having completed first aid and CPR training; by having emergency medical policies and procedures in place; and by having critical information on children and staff readily available in an organized, easy to use file. Accurate contact names and phone numbers, preferred hospitals, copies of insurance, parent/guardian signatures authorizing emergency care, and information on allergies should be kept as a minimum.
11. Outdoor playground indicator	Most childcare injuries occur on outdoor playgrounds. Most injuries are caused by falls. Lowering the height of playground equipment and providing more resilient playground surfaces can reduce injury risk in childcare centers.
12. Inaccessibility of toxic substances indicator	Many potentially toxic materials can be found in childcare centers, such as pesticides, art materials, cleaning agents, fuel by products, cigarette smoke, building materials, improperly fired ceramics, and ground soil. Children differ from adults in susceptibility. There are several prevention and management tactics for environmental hazards in the childcare center, such as knowing the building materials and products used in the center and potential hazards, and being familiar with the local health department if their assistance is needed.
13. Hand washing/diapering indicator	Hand washing is the best way to interrupt the transmission of infectious diseases. Infrequent washing of children's or providers' hands will cause higher frequency of respiratory illness. Childcare programs must provide continuous training, technical assistance and mentoring assistance in hand-washing procedures.

Source: Fiene, Richard, "Licensing-Related Indicators of Quality Child Care," *Child Care Bulletin*, Issue 28, 2003.

Table 6: Staff-to-Child Ratio in Childcare Centers in Nevada

<i>Child</i>	<i>Staff-to-Child Nevada Requirement</i>	<i>Staff-to-Child Nevada Childcare Centers</i>
Infants	1:4	1:8
Toddlers	1:6	1:8
Preschoolers	1:10	1:13
School-aged	1:15	1:20

Source: Essa, Eva, *Who Cares for Nevada's Children – A Profile of the Demographic, Economic, and Quality Aspects of Childcare in Nevada*, 2002.

Comparing columns two and three in Table 6 reveals that ratios in Nevada childcare centers are not consistent with state requirements

As for the group size, the state of Nevada does not designate the maximum number of children to be placed in a group, as long as the staff-to-children ratio is satisfied. Although, it is important to remember that the childcare literature suggests that small group size would be better for the developmental outcomes of children.¹³

• Staff-Directors' and Teachers' Qualifications: the qualifications required for a person to work in a childcare center in Nevada are:¹⁴

- Be 16 years or older
- Be able to summon help in an emergency
- Be qualified emotionally and physically to carry out a program

Nevada does not require childcare providers to have a college degree. But without an education providers may lack the skills needed to contribute to the healthy development of children.

In Nevada 11% of teachers in the childcare centers hold bachelor's or master's degree in early childhood education, and 11% have an associate degree, which are considered low rates.¹⁵ Fifty-two percent of directors have an educational background in early childhood, but

only 33% of them completed a course in personnel management. Since the main job of directors is to guide and help staff in childcare tasks, one can conclude that this disadvantages the contribution to the healthy development of children.

• Staff Training: Nevada offers many training opportunities for childcare staff to count toward the 12 hours of in-service training that all staff must fulfill each year. Training is offered through public and private agencies such as: Nevada Institutions of Higher Education, the Children's Cabinet, and the Economic Opportunity Board.

One-fourth of the teachers in these childcare centers have used "Caring 4 Kids Modules." Most of the teachers used informal training (for example, workshops).

The following table summarizes the involvement of teachers in various childcare training opportunities:

Table 7: Teachers and Childcare Training Opportunities in Nevada

<i>Opportunity</i>	<i>Percent of Teachers Who Participate in Training</i>
Training provided by childcare center	76%
State or local conferences	50%
Workshops sponsored by University of Nevada Corporation Extension	53%
Workshops sponsored by others	68%
Caring 4 Kids modules	26%

Source: Essa, Eva, *Who Cares for Nevada's Children – A Profile of the Demographic, Economic, and Quality Aspects of Childcare in Nevada*, 2002.

The rate of staff turnover in Nevada is high (35% to 45%) which is attributed to low pay and lack of benefits. The ratios, however, are similar to those of neighboring states.¹⁶

Choosing Good Childcare

Research tells us that our children's healthy development depends on safe and positive experiences during the first few years of life. If you are a parent who works during your child's early years, choosing good childcare is one of the most important decisions you will ever make.

To help you make the right choice for your child, researchers have identified indicators to think about when choosing a childcare program.

- Visit several different childcare programs before you decide which one is best for your child.
- Call each childcare program and schedule an appointment for your visit. Once you are there, stay for at least an hour to watch activities, check the surroundings, and ask questions.
- Ask if a program follows guidelines. If so, it is more likely to be a safe and healthy place for your child.
- Check the state of Nevada for other guidelines to help ensure health and safety in childcare programs.

Considering these guidelines can help you find a place where you feel comfortable leaving your child.

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