

Sneak Preview: ED, HHS To Tout Parent Training and Info Centers

(The following is excerpted from a recent [Thompson Grants Compliance Expert](#) article.) The departments of Education (ED) and Health and Human Services (HHS) plan to conduct more outreach to promote ED's Parent Training and Information Centers, among other resources, to help children and parents with disabilities obtain services from state and local child care providers, according to a recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report recommendation.

Federal early education program surveys show that about 2.2 million children aged 5 and under, and 3 million parents of children in this age group, have a reported disability. Congress asked GAO to review barriers children and parents with disabilities face in accessing child care services. It reviewed federal child care data; assessed federal laws, regulations and HHS and ED documents; conducted site visits at 12 federally funded child care providers in four states; and conducted numerous other interviews with parents and other stakeholders.

GAO found that many factors limit child care options for parents of children with disabilities, including a limited supply of child care programs; few programs within the proximity to the family or where transportation is available; programs that are not affordable, including those that accept child care subsidies; and few programs that are equipped to serve families with disabilities.

"In some cases, even if there were available child care programs, parents said programs expressed reluctance to admit their children with disabilities once the program learned about the severity of their child's disability or their needed accommodations," GAO explained. "Other programs told parents they were unable to care for their children. In some instances, child care programs were reluctant to retain children already attending once they had been diagnosed with a disability, according to parents."

Even once enrolled, children with disabilities, or even the parents themselves, faced barriers participating in child care programs. These included physically inaccessible

facilities, disabled children's exclusion from activities for disabled children, inappropriate suspension and expulsion from programs for disabled children, early intervention and special education services that were provided off-site, delays experienced by disabled children in receiving early intervention and special education services, and safety concerns.

The federally funded child care providers GAO interviewed noted that they have taken steps to better support children and parents with disabilities, including modifying facilities such as hallways and parking; implementing universal developmental screening; implementing and training staff on strategies to support children with disabilities (e.g., working with occupational therapists to help children develop fine motor skills); and offering language services to bilingual and immigrant families. However, these providers also faced their own challenges such as resource constraints (e.g., shortage of child care staff and specialists, space and funding), as well as difficulties communicating with families, particularly when attempting to have sensitive conversations about disabilities.

(The full version of this story has now been made available to all for a limited time [here](#).)

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