Question: “What does the research say about different governance structures at the state level for early childhood special education programs for children aged 3 to 5? Is there evidence that seamless or separate systems support better outcomes?”

Response:
Thank you for your request to our Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Reference Desk regarding evidence-based research on different governance structures at the state level for early childhood special education programs for children aged 3 to 5, and whether there is evidence that seamless or separate systems support better outcomes. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 RELs that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask A REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Northwest research protocol, we conducted a search for evidence-based research on different governance structures at the state level for early childhood special education programs for children aged 3 to 5, and whether there is evidence that seamless or separate systems support better outcomes. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, Google Scholar, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team has not evaluated the quality of the references and resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. The search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here. References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. The research references are not necessarily comprehensive and other relevant research references may exist. In addition to evidence-based, peer-reviewed research references, we have also included other resources that you may find useful. We provide only publicly available resources, unless there is a lack of such resources or an article is considered seminal in the topic area. If links to resources do not automatically open when clicked, copy the URL and paste it directly into a browser to access.

Research References

From the abstract: “This Education Trends report examines the different structures and strategies--including the creation of state offices, the consolidation of others, and
collaboration and coordination across several state agencies--used in the states to govern early education. State examples and policy considerations are included to provide insight and help address the many challenges policymakers face when coordinating and aligning early childhood education.


From the document: “There is no single answer to the question: What governance structure can create an early learning system and manage the system efficiently and effectively? What works in one state and for one system-building purpose may not work in another state, or in the same state for a different system building purpose. In fact, to truly build an early learning system, multiple planning and governance structures are likely to be needed—at the state level, at the community level, and over time. While there is no single answer, there are rules of thumb to consider and helpful models to examine in developing these planning and governance structures.”


From the abstract: “In 2015, the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children released a position statement on leadership in early intervention and early childhood special education (EI/ECSE). Division for Early Childhood emphasized the importance of developing and supporting high-quality leadership within and across all levels of EI/ECSE service systems. Moreover, there was a call for related research because of the paucity of related research in the field. This cross-sectional survey was designed to address this call. The study expands on an earlier investigation designed to gain an understanding of the competencies needed to be an effective leader at any level of the EI service system under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C. Using a network-sampling approach, participants in the study described here were recruited from the population of individuals who were engaged, at any level in the EI/ECSE service delivery systems under the IDEA (Part B-619 and Part C). A sample of 820 individuals completed an Internet-based questionnaire. A factor analysis yielded 6 knowledge areas and 5 competency areas considered necessary for effective EI/ECSE leadership. The 6 knowledge areas comprised child development, evidence-based practices, state laws and regulations, family-centered approaches, federal laws and
regulations, and group processes. The 5 competency areas comprised Professional Learning, Effective Relationships, Shared Responsibility, Data Use, and Effective Communication. The study results suggest avenues for further examinations of leadership within the EI/ECSE service systems.”


From the abstract: “The Early Learning Challenge (ELC) program awarded more than $1 billion in four-year grants to 20 States to implement comprehensive and cohesive high-quality early learning systems that support young children with high needs and their families. A key lever in making these improvements was the enhancement of States' Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). A QRIS is designed to measure, rate, and disseminate information about the quality of the early learning and development programs that participate in the QRIS. Through ELC, States worked across agencies to improve, or in some cases, reinvent their QRIS. This report summarizes the progress ELC States made since the program began in 2012. It includes selected examples of key initiatives States undertook to create a comprehensive system of high-quality programs for young children and their families. Specifically, it looks at States' efforts to refine their QRIS; examine progress elements (including early learning standards, screenings, and assessment systems); engage and support families; support the early learning workforce; enhance early childhood data systems; and foster community connections. The content was drawn from States' ELC Annual and Final Performance Reports. As a result of the efforts States have undertaken, it can now be said that more children with high needs are enrolled in high-quality programs and more programs participate in the States' QRIS. States made progress in developing and strengthening their comprehensive early learning and development systems. States used the ELC program to make advancements and drive positive changes in their early learning and development systems, often in the face of significant challenges. Other States are benefiting from these experiences and lessons as they work on improving their own systems.”


From the abstract: “A strong early childhood system that is well funded, fully coordinated, and highly accountable is essential to a state's long-term economic health. Significant research during the past decade has identified short- and long-term benefits to children, families, and communities when young children arrive at school healthy and ready to learn. Therefore, Hawaii's Early Learning Council commissioned this study of current fiscal resources to provide a detailed account of federal and state expenditures on programs supporting children, prenatal to age five, and their families in the state. The report also highlights the key role private dollars and parent fees play in the funding mix for early childhood services and supports. It summarizes how funds align with Hawaii's
 framework for an early childhood system; which agencies control key funding sources; and to what extent funding comes from federal, state, or private sources. In addition, the report analyzes how funding sources and financing strategies are and can be used to support Hawaii's goals for young children. Appended are: (1) Publicly Funded Programs Supporting Children, Prenatal to Age Five, and Their Families in Hawaii, by State Agency; (2) Funding Landscape for Children, Prenatal to Age Five, and Their Families in Hawaii; (3) Public Funding for Key Services Provided to Children, Prenatal to Age Five, and Their Families in Hawaii; and (4) Summary of Parent Fee Methodology and Results.”


From the abstract: “Developing an effective and efficient early childhood state system will involve efforts to support program quality and a highly qualified professional workforce based on clearly articulated standards for child development and school readiness. This kind of system improvement will rely on collaborative governance, integrated data to drive and measure improvement, and sustained resources. Governors are uniquely positioned to communicate their vision for an effective system and prioritize this work over time. To ensure they are leading "ready states" where young children are supported by a comprehensive, high-quality early childhood system, state leaders can take six actions. These actions are: (1) Coordinating early childhood governance through a state early childhood advisory council (ECAC); (2) Building an integrated professional development system; (3) Implementing a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS); (4) Developing a longitudinal and coordinated early childhood data system; (5) Aligning comprehensive early learning guidelines and standards for children from birth to age 8 with K-3 content standards; and (6) Integrating federal, state, and private funding sources. Governors who adopt these strategies will take significant steps towards improving school readiness, closing the achievement gap, and reducing high school dropout rates. Particularly in this fiscal climate, the investment of public dollars in building a comprehensive early childhood system can bring about strong returns. Ultimately, this commitment will position states to nurture the next wave of learners, workers, and parents who will shape future generations.”


From the document: “The Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems, the DaSy Center, was funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to provide technical assistance (TA) to states to support them in developing or enhancing Part C and Part B Section 619 (Part B 619) data systems. TA also will assist Part C and Part B 619 state agencies in participating in the development of integrated early childhood data systems and longitudinal data systems in their states. To inform the DaSy Center's work,
the Center collected information about the current status of Part C and Part B 619 state data systems, priorities for improvement, and areas where the states would like TA. State Part C and Part B 619 coordinators, their respective data managers, and other state staff completed an online survey over the summer of 2013. Responses were obtained from 94% of the 50 states, DC, and Puerto Rico for Part C and from 96% for Part B 619. This report summarizes what was learned about the current status of Part C and Part B 619 data systems and where states are in moving to improve their data systems.”


*From the abstract:* “State policymakers are increasingly focused on closing the achievement gap and preparing all students to succeed in school and life. However, college and career readiness begins long before students enter high school or even a classroom. Differences in children's abilities appear as early as the first year of life, and research has shown that targeted interventions during the early childhood years can narrow the "school readiness gap." By ensuring that data are accessible and stakeholders have the capacity to use data appropriately, coordinated state early care and education (ECE) data systems will promote data-driven decision making to improve the quality of ECE programs and the workforce, increase access to high-quality ECE programs and, ultimately, improve child outcomes. The 10 ECE Fundamentals outlined here provide the foundation for answering the critical questions that policymakers seek to answer. By taking these steps, states will ensure that stakeholders, from policymakers to parents, have access to the types of information that will allow them to make informed decisions.”


*From the document:* “Building and sustaining high-quality early intervention and preschool special education systems is a complex and ongoing process for state agencies. To support states, the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA Center), funded by The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), has developed a framework that addresses the question, “What does a state need to put into place in order to encourage/support/require local implementation of evidence based practices that result in positive outcomes for young children with disabilities and their families?”


From the abstract: “This article presents findings from two early intervention agencies examining how administrative structures affect providers' ability to serve families of young children with disabilities. Based on previous research identifying three administrative structures (i.e., vision/leadership, organizational climate, and resources), this article illustrates the relationship between administrative structures, provider practices, and family supports and services. Findings include (a) the role of administrators' knowledge and vision influencing provider practices, (b) the importance of organizational climates that foster partnership and peer support for implementing and evaluating practices, (c) the effects of resource allocation decisions on family supports and services, and (d) the need for accountability to ensure effective practices and family supports and services.”


From the document: “During the past decade, the federal, state, and local governments, along with early childhood experts and advocates, have been giving increasing attention to reducing the fragmentation, uneven quality, and inequity that characterize early childhood programs and services. A constant thread throughout this work is the proposition that governance is an essential ingredient for building a system that can bolster all the important elements necessary for children’s healthy development and learning. In this exploratory study, we tried to gain insight into the status of efforts to build governance into comprehensive early childhood systems.”


From the abstract: “National policy affects local practice in a variety of ways and through a variety of mechanisms. In this article, the authors examine what has been learned from Individuals With Disabilities Education Act's (IDEA) two early childhood (EC) programs about the power and limitations of policy as a lever to improve the lives of young children. Ecological theory provides a useful framework for understanding how IDEA directly and indirectly influences the provision of services to young children with disabilities and their families. Experience implementing Part C and Part B Preschool for 25 years not only confirms the power of the law's vision but also reveals some barriers to
effective nationwide implementation. Implementation issues in four areas are discussed: access to services, the quality of services, cost and funding, and outcomes. The current move to build coordinated and integrated EC systems in states presents new opportunities and new challenges in these areas for IDEA's early childhood programs.”


From the abstract: “The purpose of this brief is to provide a set of recommendations for state leaders who may be examining or reconsidering their state’s early childhood care and education (ECCE) mixed delivery governance structure. These recommendations arise from work that American Institutes for Research (AIR) did with Illinois as part of the Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five (PDG B-5) initiative.


From the abstract: “The landscape of financing early childhood education in the U.S. is complex. Programs run the gamut from tuition-supported private centers to public programs supported by federal, state, or local funds. Different funding streams are poorly coordinated. The federal government funds several major targeted programs that are available only to specific subgroups of children. States have also tended to offer targeted programs, though in recent years several states have committed to serving all children at age 4. Types of finance models used in state preschool initiatives are examined in detail, and future opportunities to build a more cohesive system are explored.”


From the abstract: “Policy and public management scholars have long theorized about the fragmentation of policy governance across numerous agencies, yet the effects of concentrated or dispersed governance on outcomes of the target population are largely unknown. Child policy is a policy field where dispersion has raised particular concerns, leading several states to consolidate governance for children’s programs in recent years. After presenting arguments both for and against the dispersion of policies across agencies, we estimate the effect of dispersion of state-level early childhood education policy governance on children’s reading skills. Using a unique nationally representative, longitudinal data set of young children merged with rich state-level data, we use instrumental variables estimation to address potential endogeneity of state governance
policies. Our findings indicate that there is a significant positive effect of dispersed governance on children’s reading skills in kindergarten. The returns to dispersion diminish above four agencies. Future research in this area should explore the specific mechanisms through which policy governance affects child outcomes.”


*From the abstract:* “The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center was charged by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs from October 2001 through September 2006 to develop, implement, and evaluate an approach to technical assistance (TA) that would result in sustainable systems change in state early intervention and preschool special education programs served under the early childhood provisions of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Both process and summative evaluations were conducted over the 5-year contract period. The TA Model for Long-Term Systems Change was found to result in improvements in state and local infrastructures, personnel development systems, practices, and outcomes for children and families. The resulting model is a legacy that Pat Trohanis leaves to the field of technical assistance.”

Full text available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0271121419831766

*From the abstract:* “The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center used a rigorous 2-year collaborative process to develop, test, and revise a conceptual framework for high-quality state early intervention (EI) and early childhood special education (ECSE) systems. The framework identifies six critical components of a state system and what constitutes quality in each component. This new conceptual framework addresses the critical need to articulate what constitutes quality in state EI and ECSE systems. The framework and companion self-assessment are designed for state leaders to use in their efforts to evaluate and improve state systems to implement more effective services for infants and young children with disabilities and their families. This article describes the contents of the framework and the processes used to ensure that the framework incorporated current research, was relevant to all states, and was useful for systems improvement.”

From the abstract: “Early care and education providers are subject to monitoring by multiple agencies and organizations. In this brief provides an overview of monitoring and the major early care and education monitoring systems. It then offers possible goals for a coordinated monitoring system and describes some approaches to addressing those goals. Eleven dimensions that are important to consider in planning monitoring coordination efforts are also described. The efforts of two states, Ohio and Rhode Island, that are working to coordinate their early care and education systems are highlighted. The appendix provides an overview of eight major early care and education monitoring systems.”


From the abstract: “Early care and education (ECE) can have a positive effect on many aspects of children's development, including the language, literacy, mathematics, executive functioning, and social-emotional competencies needed for a smooth transition into kindergarten and later life success. But for many families, high-quality ECE is out of reach. California has established a range of programs to support the development of children from birth to age 5, but these programs are uncoordinated, insufficient in scope, and of variable quality. This report provides California policymakers with a comprehensive overview of the state's ECE system, describing its administration and funding, access to care, program quality, and data limitations. State policymakers should consider the following five questions in light of the findings in this report: (1) How can California move from a patchwork of disconnected programs to a more unified ECE system?; (2) How should California increase the availability of high-quality, full-day ECE programs that meet the needs of children and families?; (3) How can California more sustainably fund ECE programs?; (4) How can California continue to improve quality and supports for all ECE programs?; and (5) How can California improve its data systems to inform strategic decision making? This report provides some of the background information policymakers need to begin answering these questions so that they can create a system that will better serve California's children.”


From the document: “Early childhood governance refers to a state’s organizational structure and its placement of authority and accountability for program, policy, financing, and implementation decisions for publicly funded early care and education for children from birth to age five. Governance also comprises the traditions, institutions and processes that determine how power is exercised, how constituents are given voice and
how decisions are made on issues of mutual concern to an array of stakeholders. States have increasingly sought to develop new governance structures that consolidate authority and oversight of programs and services under one roof. Because current systems of early childhood governance are typically dispersed through multiple agencies and departments, an effective model of governance should create coherence, foster accountability and transparency and improve quality and accessibility.”


*From the document:* “Foresight Law + Policy has been studying governance in the early childhood field with the goal of supporting a field-wide improvement strategy. This work builds on existing resources that describe different governance models in states and identifies benefits and drawbacks of those models in different policy areas. In addition to updating those analyses, this project has involved a deeper study of the processes of governance change, identifying key questions states should wrestle with and providing better information about the tradeoffs inherent in answering those questions. In doing so it draws on early childhood systems theory, behavioral economics, and other education policy resources. It also focuses on identifying capacities that states may need as they consider how to move forward in their governance efforts. Through April 2020, information and insights were collected from a total of 89 informants, mostly in individual conversations. Some conversations involved two or three informants together, typically colleagues from the same organization. The interviews included leaders from 27 states, both inside and outside government, as well as national experts.”


*From the abstract:* “A number of states have made ambitious governance changes that involve creating new agencies focused on early childhood programs and services for children from birth to age four, or consolidating multiple early childhood programs into the same agency. These governance structures can offer multiple benefits, but states that have been through the process have emphasized that the transition is not easy. This 2013 framework from the Build Initiative offers governance models, state examples, recommendations, and more.”


*From the abstract:* “Early education has emerged as a critical issue for state policymakers, who during the 2015-16 fiscal year alone invested nearly $7 billion in programs for our country’s youngest learners. Although there is considerable research on
the elements of high-quality preschool and its many benefits, there is little information available to policymakers about how to convert their visions of good early education into on-the-ground reality. This report fills that gap by describing and analyzing how four states--Michigan, West Virginia, Washington, and North Carolina--have built high-quality early education systems. It is based on reviews of policy documents, studies, and data in each state, as well as observations of programs and interviews with 159 individuals, including policymakers, program administrators, providers, teachers, parents, advocates, and researchers. These states exemplify an array of promising practices that are designed to meet a state's needs and to satisfy its priorities.”

Methods

Keywords and search strings
The following keywords, subject headings, and search strings were used to search reference databases and other sources:

(“Early childhood special education” )

(“Early childhood” AND “special education”)

“Preschool special education”

Governance

“Administrative structures”

“Lead agency”

State

Agenc*

Department

Databases and resources
We searched ERIC for relevant resources. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Additionally, we searched Google Scholar and EBSCO databases (Academic Search Premier, Education Research Complete, and Professional Development Collection).

Reference search and selection criteria
When we were searching and reviewing resources, we considered the following criteria:

Date of publications: This search and review included references and resources published in the last 11 years (since 2010).
Search priorities of reference sources: Search priority was given to study reports, briefs, and other documents that are published and/or reviewed by IES and other federal or federally funded organizations, as well as academic databases, including ERIC, EBSCO databases, and Google Scholar.

Methodology: The following methodological priorities/considerations were given in the review and selection of the references:

- Study types: randomized control trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, and policy briefs, generally in this order
- Target population and samples: representativeness of the target population, sample size, and whether participants volunteered or were randomly selected
- Study duration
- Limitations and generalizability of the findings and conclusions