Children in Low-Income Families Are Less Likely to Be in Center-Based Child Care

Higher-income children were more likely to be in center-based arrangements in 2002, while low-income children were more likely to be in relative care. Given recent evidence that quality center-based care may play a role in enhancing school-readiness, the disparity between low- and higher-income children in the use of center-based care may represent a missed opportunity to assist low-income children in becoming school-ready. While the differences in the use of center-based care may reflect different preferences between low- and higher-income families, it may also mean that low-income parents choose free or inexpensive relative care due to cost considerations or the inadequate supply of affordable, quality center-based options.