

Child Care Collaboration and Quality

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Project Description

This project explored the nature of state and local-level collaboration and its role in enhancing child care quality. The first phase of the project examined the nature of collaborations between the state Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) administrator, the state Head Start Collaboration Office Director, and the state administrator responsible for pre-Kindergarten oversight (where applicable). Our analyses focused on state-level administrators, activities, interactions, and goals and presented a national snapshot of trends and perspectives on policies that support or hinder collaboration. The second phase was an in-depth investigation in two states: Maryland and Vermont. Our analyses explored the relationship between collaborations and indicators of child care quality including the availability of comprehensive services for children and families.

Phase 1 Questions

1. Across all 50 states as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, what is the nature of collaboration (actors, activities, interactions and goals) between state agencies on issues related to child care and early education policies that promote access and quality?
2. To what extent do these strategies address care for infants and toddlers?
3. What are the barriers to collaboration at the state level?

Phase 1 Methods, Sample and Measures

The project analyzed existing administrative data and administered a web survey to CCDF administrators (N=56), Head Start State Collaboration directors (N=52), and where state-funded pre-K existed the state early childhood education specialist (N=41). The survey had questions about the frequency and quality of interactions and outcomes of relationships. It also included an adaptation of a validated instrument, Frey's Levels of Collaboration Scale (Frey, Lohmeier, Lee, & Tollefson, 2006).

Phase 1 Analyses, Results and Dissemination

Analyses highlighted variance in governance structures and the benefit of shared oversight among state agencies. Administrators also reported factors that facilitate collaboration, including regular meetings and aligned program objectives as well as factors that hinder collaboration such as conflicting program requirements. These findings were presented at three conferences and through two project documents: "A National Snapshot of State-Level Collaboration for Early Care and Education" and "State Policies and Practices Supporting Child Care for Infants and Toddlers." ACF highlighted the second brief in a partnership newsletter. EDC promoted the briefs on its website along with our team's past research on collaboration and partnerships. The research briefs and other related materials can be found at: <http://ltd.edc.org/resource-library/partnership>

Phase 2 Questions

1. How do key child care and early education agencies within specific states (Maryland and Vermont) collaborate? What are the most frequent agencies that are engaged in collaboration in each state?
2. What are the most frequent collaborations that exist among child care providers and other early education agencies in each state?
3. What is the relationship between collaboration at the provider level, in terms of accessibility of comprehensive services for children and families, structural indicators of quality, and provider involvement in quality improvement efforts?
4. What are the benefits of collaboration for providers?
5. What are the factors that predict higher levels of collaboration?

Phase 2 Methods, Sample and Measures

The second phase began with a survey to state agency respondents in Maryland and Vermont that was designed to develop a more comprehensive picture of interactions between state-level child care agencies and other agencies at the state and local levels.

To obtain data about provider-level collaboration, the team administered two surveys to a representative sample of child care providers (center-based, family child care, and school based) in each state with the aim of understanding the role of federal and state initiatives in promoting collaboration, characteristics of formal and informal collaborations among providers, and potential links between collaboration and indicators of program quality. The first survey was completed by 191 providers in Vermont (41% response rate) and 118 providers in Maryland (27% response rate). The second survey was completed by 211 providers in Vermont (47% response rate) and 158 providers in Maryland (37% response rate).

On the first survey, providers reported involvement with state initiatives and most respondents indicated participation with the state QRIS. Additional analyses found that providers rated formal collaborations higher on the authenticity subscale (Hicks & Larson, n.d.) compared to informal collaborations. On another scale (Thomson and Perry, 2009) providers rated informal collaborations as higher in overall quality. Providers also indicated that the biggest barrier to increased levels of collaboration was lack of time. These findings were presented as a poster at the National Research Conference for Early Childhood in July 2016 and in a brief entitled “Child Care Providers’ Collaborations with Formal and Informal Groups.”

Data from a second survey with questions regarding providers’ involvement in collaborations and structural indicators of quality demonstrated that providers engaged in formal collaborations supported through federal funds were similar to comparison providers with a few exceptions; those engaged in collaboration supported with federal funds had significantly higher QRIS ratings as well as other structural indicators of quality.

Progress Update

Phase I and Phase II data collection and analyses are complete. We presented findings at the CCEEPRC Conference in 2017 and 2018 at the 2018 National Research Conference on Early Childhood. We will be presenting new findings at the CCEEPRC Conference in 2019 and will post new briefs online in the spring 2019.

Since the conclusion of the grant, the Principal Investigator (PI) and co-PI— along with Stephanie Curenton-Jolly, associate professor at Boston University—have served as editors for a Special Issue of the journal *Early Education and Development* (EED). The [EED Special Issue on Early Childhood Collaboration](#) will be published in the Fall of 2019. Dr. Schilder and Dr. Broadstone co-authored a manuscript that is pending release in the forthcoming special issue.

Implications for Policy/Practice

The study identified specific features of collaboration that are associated with collaboration success and improved program quality. As states engage in collaboration with support of federal funding through the Preschool Development and Expansion—Birth through Five grants as well as the Early Head Start/Child Care partnerships, information on models of collaboration can inform policy improvements. Moreover, as the federal government and states seek to provide technical assistance and supports to those engaged in collaboration, findings from our study can be used by technical assistance providers. Findings from our studies can be useful to policymakers seeking answers to questions about the potential benefits of, as well as challenges to, collaboration for child care providers.

Implications for Research

In this study, we have used innovative methodologies to understand the nature of different types of collaborations. We have adopted existing measures of collaboration that have not yet been used with child care providers and have found that they yield interesting results. Our study can be used as a reference for those attempting to quantify collaboration and to understand how it occurs at different levels and across different parts of early childhood systems.

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