INQUIRE Discussion of Quality Improvement and QRIS Research – August 10, 2020

1. Descriptive Information

INQUIRE Discussion of Quality Improvement and QRIS Research The Quality Initiatives Research and Evaluation Consortium (INQUIRE) is a CCEEPRC workgroup that includes researchers, state and federal data analysts and administrators, funders and other stakeholders who are interested in research on ECE quality measures, quality improvement strategies, children's experiences in high quality ECE programs and strategies to build ECE systems that support high quality programs. This affinity discussion will offer attendees the opportunity to learn about ongoing research on quality improvement and quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). Participants will have an opportunity to share and discuss emerging findings, lessons learned, and pressing research needs. The discussion will help generate ideas for future INQUIRE conversations. All are invited and welcome to join the discussion and to learn more about INQUIRE.	**Facilitators** • **Kathryn Tout,** Child Trends • **Kelly Maxwell,** Child Trends **Scribe** • **Katie Caldwell,** ICF

2. Documents Available on Website

- INQUIRE: Quality Initiatives Research and Evaluation Consortium Presentation

3. Brief Summary of Presentations
- **Summary of Presentation #1:** Kathryn Tout and Kelly Maxwell
  - The Quality Initiatives Research and Evaluation Consortium (INQUIRE) is a workgroup within CCEEPRC. The workgroup is supported by OPRE with funds set aside for research in the Child Care and Development Block Grant.
  - Purposes of INQUIRE:
    - Identify new and timely issues relevant to early care and education quality and quality improvement initiatives;
    - Develop and exchange resources for policymakers and other researchers, synthesize and interpret research findings; and
    - Serve as a learning community to support high quality research and evaluation on early care and education quality.
  - The workgroup typically meets quarterly for webinars as well as giving presentations and producing written products.
  - The purpose of today's discussion is to spark a conversation and sharing of ideas around defining and improving quality, particularly in light of our current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - Discussion prompts for today's small group discussion
    1. Defining quality in the ECE system
       - Core elements of quality
       - Views of parents and providers
       - What research is needed?
    2. Approaches to improving quality
       - Strategies used during COVID
       - Lessons learned now that might influence ongoing quality improvement approaches
       - What research is needed?

4. Brief Summary of Discussion
   Each small group had a representative share what was discussed with the larger group.
   - States shared that they were working on changes to their child care system prior to Covid-19 that are now either being held up or significantly changed by the pandemic.
     - One state shared that because of the pandemic they are placing a greater emphasis on supporting children's social emotional development.
     - Another state is examining how to redefine quality within the context of all cultures.
     - Participants expressed concern about losing sectors of child care providers because of the impact of the pandemic and how this will affect families if they cannot access the care they need.
   - Due to the pandemic, technical assistance (TA) and monitoring are now done virtually as opposed to in person monitoring visits.
     - There is concern for children who may be at risk for maltreatment and wanting to make sure there are eyes on them (which is easier to do with in-person visits).
     - Some centers didn't have the hardware to go virtual, so how are they doing now after months of the pandemic?
     - Some considerations were shared on needed TA:
       - The CDC has provided structural quality information that is helpful, but more is needed.
       - There is a need for infant and toddler teachers to focus on health, but they also need to be responsive to the needs of the children. What does that look like in this environment?
       - How to support the adults who are responding to the children; the adults have psychosocial needs that have to be met.
   - It is very difficult to define quality.
     - Should there be a solid definition overall?
     - Each environment may necessitate different quality measures.
     - Accreditation may be a way to look at quality.
     - Quality can also be looked at in different ways: health and safety, curriculum, etc.
     - Some strategies that were shared:
       - State partnerships that align quality with emergency preparedness.
       - One state is reframing their QRIS to include more provider input to be more relevant. Looking into how to maintain quality improvement but make it less prescriptive.
       - Peer to peer support and coaching have helped staff feel supported.
   - Definition of quality has really changed in the last couple of months.
     - Some current quality considerations include:
       - Structural quality- are they open and able to stay open?
       - Are they able to support the social emotional needs of students?
       - Can the provider support distance learning?
   - Directions states are heading:
     - Recognition that we've seen health and safety as the minimal for quality standards but now it's in the forefront for high standards.
     - There is some thinking about the tension between education qualifications for teachers versus real world experience in light of equity issues.
   - Discussion also addressed equity.
     - How are QRIS incorporating equity?
       - One state has introduced a statewide rubric that includes equity.
       - In light of the pandemic, one strategy could be to use stabilization grants that could be flexible to supporting quality.
   - Participants offered ideas about core elements of quality: interactions and curriculum, environment, business and leadership abilities, the ability to implement changes, family partnerships and engagement.
     - Ideas were shared about what research is needed: what makes the most effective ECE leadership?
     - Also, racism research related to ECE.

- The group discussed issues through the pandemic lens and racial justice lens.
    - Are video classroom observations valid and can they be validated?
    - Are research instruments racially equitable?
    - Structural issue:
        - Having access to masks or facial protection where you can see the caregivers face as this highlights the issue between safety and need for teacher-child interactions.
        - The current situation with the pandemic lends itself to a national experiment on the importance of caregiver ratios and child outcomes.
        - Additionally, trauma informed practice and care in this environment is important.

Highlights:
- There is an increased emphasis on health and safety within the ECE community.
- Remote learning is playing an important role now, and the field is figuring out both how to offer it for children as well as support providers virtually.
- Social emotional support for children is a key quality concern.
- How to have family engagement during a pandemic?
- Important to turn to providers to glean their thoughts on what quality looks like in different child care settings.

5. Summary of Key Issues Raised
- Examples of ideas shared for future research relating to quality:
    - What makes the most effective ECE leadership?
    - The intersection of racial equality and quality in ECE.
    - Are video observations and other virtual monitoring valid?
- Technical assistance is needed to help providers maintain health standards for providers and children while still being interactive and responsive with children, particularly in an infant and toddler setting.
- Quality ECE is difficult to define and measure. The pandemic is causing the field to re-think the important constructs of quality—and how best to measure quality.
- Because of the pandemic, many states are reevaluating their QRIS as well as placing temporary holds on requirements and monitoring visits