Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment in Early Childhood Education Policy: Examining Alignment Across State Systems

Jade Marcus Jenkins, UC Irvine

Moving to a More Aligned System: Working across Sectors to Improve Early Care and Education
CCEEPRC Annual Meeting 2019
Motivation: Curriculum as a policy lever to improve ECE

1. Curriculum Requirements
2. Early Learning Standards
3. Regulation
   • Licensing
4. Quality Rating and Information Systems (QRIS)
   • Assessment
   • Professional development supports
Conceptual Model for Curricula Policy

State Policy

Pre-k requirements

Preschool Curricula

Classroom processes /Quality

Child outcomes

Federal Policy

Jenkins, Whitaker, Nguyen, Yu, *forthcoming*
Nguyen, Jenkins, Whitaker, 2018
Jenkins, Duncan, Whitaker, Bitler, Burchinal, Domina, Jenkins & Duncan, 2017
Motivation: Curriculum in the State Policy Context

1. Curriculum Requirements
2. Early Learning Standards
3. Regulation
   • Licensing
4. Quality Rating and Information Systems (QRIS)
   • Assessment
   • Professional development supports
Motivation: Curriculum in the State Policy Context

1. **Curriculum Requirements**
2. **Early Learning Standards**
3. **Regulation**
   - Licensing
4. **Quality Rating and Information Systems (QRIS)**
   - Assessment
   - Professional development supports

3 Pillars of K-12 Education reform (Porter et al., 2008; 2012):
1. **Standards**
2. **Curriculum**
3. **Assessment**
State Policy
Pre-k & CCDF

Early Learning Standards

Preschool Curricula

Assessment/QRI

Classroom & Child outcomes

Licensing/ Monitoring
Motivation: Limited Research on State Early Childhood Systems

ECE dispersed across state agencies
  • Different government agencies responsible for different aspects of ECE policy (Kagan & Rigby, 2003; Waldfogel 2006; Witte and Trowbridge 2005; Jenkins & Henry, 2016)
  • Haphazard, idiosyncratic, incoherent (Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, Thornburg, 2009)

Disorganization hinders alignment and synergy of state policies
  “the haphazard funding, monitoring, and programmatic organization and infrastructure supporting efforts to foster young children’s developmental competencies in various settings undermines the capacity to deliver on that promise” (Pianta & Howes, 2009)
  • Some dispersion across agencies OK for kids outcomes, but not too much (Jenkins & Henry, 2016)
    → Coordination/alignment possible if limited number of agencies involved
    → Single organization may be “master of nothing”

Call for stronger connections and alignment at state and local levels
Research Questions

1. What are the curricula requirements for state preschool programs?
   a) Do states provide guidance in selecting curricula?
      • How much guidance?
   b) Are specific curricular packages recommended?
      • Which packages?
   c) Are requirements and guidance aligned across a state’s CCDF and Pre-k programs?

2. To what extent are preschool curricula or early learning standards included in state or local QRISs?
   a) Which packages?
   b) At what levels? (coming soon)

3. To what extent are QRIS responsibilities dispersed across state agencies?
   a) Are there patterns in managing agency types?
Data

50-state dataset from multiple sources, 2017
  • NIEER
  • QRIS Compendium
  • State CCDF and Pre-k program websites/plans

1. Curricula Policies for Preschool Programs (CCDF & Pre-k)
   • Requirements (Yes-No)
   • Support for selection & standards alignment
     • Specific Curricula packages (Yes-No; Curricula listed)
     • Guidance for selection (0-3 scale; None, Standards alignment, Strong guidance)

2. QRIS for Preschool Programs (CCDF & Pre-k)
   • Curricula incorporated into QRIS (Yes-No)
     • 43 States with operating QRISs
   • Standards incorporated into QRIS (Yes-No)
   • Governance & Dispersion: Number and type of managing agencies in QRIS
Curricula Requirements for State Pre-k and CCDF Programs

Are curricula required? Are specific curricula names listed?

Number of States

- Pre-K:
  - Are curricula required? 40
  - Are specific curricula names listed? 15

- K:
  - Are curricula required? 47
  - Are specific curricula names listed? 9
Curricula Requirements for State Pre-k and CCDF Programs

Are curricula required? 
- Pre-K: 40 states
- 31 states

Are specific curricula names listed? 
- Pre-K: 15 states
- 9 states
CCDF: Curriculum Guidance Scale

Legend

Comprehensive Tool or Specific Listed Curriculum

No Guidelines
QRIS Curriculum Status for Preschool Programs

No State QRIS

No curriculum requirements

Curriculum Guidance

Specific Curriculum Listed
Curriculum Listed for QRIS - Preschool

- **Creative Curriculum**
  - IL: 10
  - MA: 10
  - MN: 9
  - NJ: 9
  - NY: 9
  - NC: 9
  - OH: 9
  - OR: 9
  - CO: 9
  - FL: 9

- **High Scope**
  - MN: 4
  - IL: 4
  - FL: 4

- **Montessori**
  - MN: 3
  - OR: 3
  - OH: 3
  - NC: 3

- **DLM Early Childhood Express**
  - FL: 2

- **Opening the World of Learning (OWL)**
Types of Managing Organizations for QRIS

Note: States are not mutually exclusive because some states report more than one managing organization.
Summary and Discussion

• Little evidence of alignment across ECE state systems
  • Different curricular requirements for pre-k and CCDF; limited guidance
  • Standards not incorporated into QRIS
  • Little evidence state policies are evidence-based

• Substantial dispersion in QRIS; ECE overall
  • Dispersion of ECE offices at state level not strongly correlated with dispersion of QRIS responsibilities ($r=.31$)

• Infant-toddler patterns look very similar, but more limited data
Discussion

• Why is state ECE policy not more aligned?

• What would alignment look like at the state or federal level?

• What is the best way to measure alignment?

• Are states aligned to the right things?
Acknowledgements

Coauthors: Anamarie Whitaker, RAND Corporation
Jennifer K. Duer, UC Irvine

We gratefully acknowledge support for this research from UCI’s CORCL Small Research Grants and the School of Education.

Thank you!

jvjenkin@uci.edu