

2011 STAM – CCPRC Meeting
Plenary Session 1
November 16, 2011, 8:45-9:45 am

Building Pathways and Partnerships to Support Children’s Development

Description

The Office of Child Care (OCC) has outlined a vision for child care excellence that prioritizes *pathways and partnerships* to increase access to high-quality care and education for more low-income children. Each of the innovative initiatives described in this plenary session represented an example of a strategy that works toward this goal. Presenters provided a brief overview of the purposes and outcomes of three initiatives. The discussant synthesized key lessons across the initiatives and highlighted the implications for policy and research.

Facilitator

Mary Beth Jackson, Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

Presenters

Tom Layman, Illinois Action for Children
Kathryn Tout, Child Trends

Discussant

Martha (Marty) Zaslow, Society for Research in Child Development and Child Trends

Scribe

Violeta Mora, Child Care State Systems Specialist Network

1. Documents in Session Folder

- “Minnesota School Readiness Connections (SRC) Pilot Project;” Erika Gaylor, SRI International
- “Community Connections Preschool Program: Evaluation Highlights;” Tom Layman (Handout)
- “Community Connections: Home-Based Child Care and State-Funded Preschool;” Tom Layman
- “Taking a QRIS to the Next Level;” Kathryn Tout, Rebecca Starr, Tabitha Isner, Sarah Daily, Shannon Moodie, Laura Rothenberg, and Meg Soli
- “Building Pathways and Partnerships to Support Children’s Development;” Marty Zaslow
- “Child Care Assistance Program: School Readiness Connections Pilot Project Overview;” Minnesota Department of Human Services (Handout)

2. Summary of Presentations

- **Summary of Presentation #1:** Tom Layman
 - *Overview of Community Action Agency Community Connections in Illinois—Home-Based Child Care Providers as Community Assets.* This program builds on the

- flexibility and commitment of local providers to incorporate a school readiness component into their programs. In Illinois, 47 percent of Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) families choose home-based child care.
- The basic approach is simple: 3 – 5 years olds are transported to part-day, prek programs; teachers visit home-based providers to extend the curriculum; and with preschoolers in prek, providers have time to focus on infants and toddlers. Parents and providers meet at the center monthly. The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) reimburses the home-based providers; the State prek program pays Illinois Action for Children \$4,000 per child per year.
 - An implementation evaluation with structured stakeholder interviews found that strengths include: (1) Access to state prek for children in home-based child care settings; (2) Participants believe that children are learning, and teachers are well regarded. Challenges included issues with teacher-provider visits, model specificity, extending the preschool curriculum, infant-toddler programming and scheduling and cancellation procedures. A detailed program description plus the full evaluation is available at www.actforchildren.org.
 - *The Minnesota School Readiness Connection (SRC)* is a pilot project authorized by legislation. The goal of the project is to support quality in programs in the CCAP system. The project provided funds to incentivize programs to promote continuity of care, promote school readiness and quality of programming, and continue to support parents' employment and children's school readiness. The project is funded by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS).
 - Under the SRC pilot, absences were not counted and hours authorized responded to the parent's participation requirements. Fourteen high-quality providers were selected to participate in the pilot and a total of 364 children participated for an average of 9 months. Families were eligible to participate if they were receiving subsidies, were in authorized activity, and had a child age 5 and under.
 - Selected Findings: 36% of participating programs had a designated staff member to connect families with services in the community. Fifteen percent of families were referred for developmental screenings and other services. 93% of programs used the Work Sampling System (WSS) results to design goals and lesson plan for children. Cost per child per year of SRC services averaged \$2,870 (above the regular average CCAP costs per child). DHS leveraged the existing CCAP authorization and payment processes for SRC.
- **Summary of Presentation #2: Kathryn Tout**
 - Kentucky has one of the oldest QRIS programs in the nation, and with a decade of implementation history, the State wanted to take their QRIS to the next level.
 - All areas of Kentucky STARS for Kids NOW were reviewed on key issues: density of participation, rating levels of participants, effectiveness of technical assistance, and use of the system by parents.
 - Key questions included: How do STARS quality standards align with other quality frameworks? What rating process and structures will produce a valid rating? How can STARS technical assistance be enhanced?

- The evaluation employed a collaborative process to identify research questions and a used a multi-method approach to identify strengths in the current system on which revisions and changes can be built. Selected findings include:
 - Quality standards: Standards are aligned with some domains, but there are opportunities to improve. New standards could address curriculum, assessment, screening and referral, and provisions for children with special needs.
 - Rating Process: Providers were interviewed to learn which standards are most challenging, which standards they meet above their current level, and which new standards they could meet. Data was used to examine the level providers would achieve under four alternative rate structures (points and hybrid structures).
 - Revising the Rating Structure. What “weight” should be assigned to new standards/indicators? Is it important to know rating levels within quality categories, or is an overall rating preferred? How important is it that each level be transparent? What balance is preferred between simple and complex? How do parents understand a rating that is complex?
 - Outreach to Parents. A household survey of parents was conducted to learn about preferences and recognition of STARS. Although only 17% of parents recognized the name “STARS for Kids NOW,” 2/3 of parents reported that they would use a STARS rating to select a provider. The survey suggested that parents who are in the process of making an early care and education decision should be targeted. Marketing efforts should be aligned with parent values about early care and education.
- In summary, a process evaluation can inform regular review of a QRIS and highlight areas for revision or refinement. The recommendations for system changes will have implications for cost, staffing and support. It is important to have a plan and a timeline in place for making system changes.
- **Summary of Presentation #3: Marty Zaslow**
 - Marty indicated that her role was to talk about partnerships and principles in the three studies. Each is child focused, family friendly, and fair to providers.
 - Partnerships between policymakers and researchers are important, and require reciprocal communication, listening and talking to each other. Important questions come from the policymakers as well as researchers. When the data comes back, both groups need to be involved to make sure the data is accurate, and that any gaps are identified.
 - Each of the three projects manifests three principles:
 - *Child Focused*—The Illinois study made it possible for children to participate in a high-quality program which they would not normally experience. In the Minnesota School Readiness Connections research, there were changes in the ways teachers interacted with children and families.
 - *Family Friendly*—The Community Consortium project respected the work schedules of families. Kentucky STARS considered both the percentage of parents who recognized STARS (17 percent) as well as those who would use STARS to select a child care program for their children.
 - *Fair to Providers*—Community Connections of Illinois had home-based providers who did not lose subsidy payments when children participated in preschool, and

they had input to connect children's activities in the home care with those in preschool. Kentucky STARS identified that providers participating in QRIS may be reaching higher quality indicators.

- Mary Beth Jackson, the State Child Care Administrator from Kentucky, added that she was happy to highlight the STARS research partnership with her entire team. Kathryn came in with the preliminary results and shared them with the entire team.

3. Summary of Discussion with Presenters and Participants

- *Are you giving TA to the providers in your study?* Tom Layman: This is an area that needs development. We have IT specialists who work with the providers. We do give some TA, but we have more work to do in this area.
- *When you showed the costs per child, it was a third higher than the regularly-funded Minnesota subsidy. How do you balance serving children for longer versus serving more children?* Shannon Rudisill: The project was expensive at a time of financial crisis. It didn't take money away from other children. It was a pilot of a small group of children, legislatively mandated. Not all families needed this additional boost. It is hard to translate this into what it would cost to serve more children. Comment from Helen Blank (National Women's Law Center): With low Minnesota reimbursement rates, it isn't a huge amount of increase per child, given where the current rates are.