Evaluating Quality Initiatives

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States implementing a variety of quality improvement initiatives including Quality Rating (and Improvement) Systems (QRS)

- 17 States have statewide QRS and many more have pilots or systems in development

Need for a forum to identify and discuss key implementation and evaluation issues

Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) sponsored a 2-day roundtable in April, 2008
Purpose of this Presentation

- Provide an overview of the QRS Evaluation Roundtable
- Report on key themes from the meeting
  - Program design and goals
  - Evaluation
- Describe plans for follow up to the meeting
Participants

- Teams from 9 States with State, local or pilot QRS
  - State Administrator/designee and evaluator
  - CO, IN, MN, MO, OH, OK, PA, TN,
- 30+ researchers working with other States
- Federal staff
  - Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation
  - Child Care Bureau
  - Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation
Laying a Foundation for Evaluation

- Use of a logic model or theory of change will strengthen planning and evaluation:
  - Articulates underlying assumptions of how program activities will link to results
  - Helps stakeholders develop realistic expectations
  - Identifies potential unintended consequences of program activities
Themes: Program Design and Goals

- Meaningful differences in QRS design and structure ⇒ challenges for synthesizing results and lessons learned
- Multiple targets of QRS (children, families, programs, markets) ⇒ different goals and timeframes for change
- Emphasis on different subgroups ⇒ linked to structural features, supports and incentives
- Systems change ⇒ QRS as a quality “hub”
Themes: Evaluation
Use of logic models

- Explicit or implicit logic model? States are at different stages in development.
- Agreement that logic models could help in development of research strategy
  - Tracking participation of programs, families
  - Validation of quality levels
  - Assessing change in quality over time
  - Examine links with child outcomes
Outputs and outcomes

- **Outputs** are what is done, **outcomes** are a result of what is done
- Some states emphasize outputs, some outcomes and some both
- Importance of a feedback loop: Output data can inform modifications to program design
  - Caution against too many changes in a pilot period – difficult for providers and parents to absorb
The Cost of QRS

- States would like information on the cost of QRS implementation and evaluation.
- Need to balance cost of evaluation with the cost of quality improvement, incentives, and provision of information for parents.
- States are concerned about the cost of maintaining QRS over time.
- States are concerned about passing on the cost of quality improvement to parents, especially low-income families.
Common evaluation strategies

- Some similarities in research questions and approaches across States
  - Survey of parent awareness of QRS
  - Survey of providers’ reactions to QRS
  - Validation of quality levels
  - Examination of fall to spring change scores on measures of children’s school readiness and linking change to program quality level
Unintended consequences

- Importance of using research designs that capture unintended consequences
- Examples
  - Movement of low-income families from regulated to unregulated care
  - Exit of licensed providers from the market
  - Rise in the cost of care as quality goes up
Potential to synthesize State findings

- Implementation lessons
- Validation of QRS levels
- Parent perspectives
- Effective quality improvement strategies
- Useful methods for examining
  - Market changes
  - Parent decision-making
  - Children’s outcomes
Follow Up

- Forthcoming paper summarizing QRS Evaluation Roundtable
- OPRE QRS Research Consortium
- OPRE-funded research project