
Evaluating Quality Initiatives

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Background

- 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
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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 \Rightarrow challenges for synthesizing results and lessons learned
- Multiple targets of QRS (children, families, programs, markets) \Rightarrow different goals and timeframes for change
- Emphasis on different subgroups \Rightarrow linked to structural features, supports and incentives
- Systems change \Rightarrow 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
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