

Work Towards Developing New Quality Measures

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Child Trends

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Context for the Contents of this Presentation

- Roundtable on Developing the Next Wave of Quality Measures for Early Childhood and School-Age Programs held January 23-25, 2008
- Sponsored by OPRE and ASPE/ DHHS
- 44 researchers and 20 federal partners
- Primary focus on research issues rather than applications for policy and practice, though these issues framed meeting and were returned to at the end

Purpose of Quality Measures Meeting

- Identify strategies for developing and strengthening measures of quality
- Develop guidance documents for the field and funders
- Acknowledge exciting developments in research
- Discuss new developments and their implications for quality measurement

Questions Addressed by Each Working Group

- Why is the domain important to measure?
- What important new work is emerging?
- What are the implications of new work for measurement?
- What are the strengths and limitations of current measures in this domain?
- What is the potential for strengthening measures?
- How should measurement in this domain address issues of age, setting, culture, language and ability?

Key Themes from Working Group Discussions

Language and Literacy

- Important constructs:
 - oral language
 - letter/word knowledge
 - phonological awareness/phonemic awareness
 - general/world knowledge
 - early writing
- Strengths:
 - many measures with established reliability/validity
- Limitations:
 - No one measure covers all five key constructs
 - Measures for children under two are limited
 - Concerns cultural and linguistic appropriateness, especially for non-native English speakers

Math, Science and Cognition

- Important constructs:
 - executive function or self-regulation
 - flexibility of thinking
 - spatial relations
 - classification and patterning
 - inquiry or investigation
- Strength:
 - Acknowledgement of the importance of the domain is growing
- Limitations:
 - Lack of measures that link to child outcomes
 - Infrequent natural occurrence; provide materials or setting?
 - Lack of teacher/caregiver content area knowledge

Social and Emotional Development

- Important constructs:
 - Approaches to learning and academic regulation
 - Social competence
 - Emotional competence
 - Maladaptive behavior
- Strengths:
 - Emerging body of descriptive and intervention research
 - Strong starting points in existing measures
- Limitations:
 - Difficult to determine unit of analysis
 - Changes with age in underlying construct
 - Existing measures may not sample important time periods

Health, Safety, Nutrition and Physical Activity

- Important constructs:
 - Physical health
 - Physical activity
 - Nutrition
 - Oral health
 - Social and emotional health
- Strengths:
 - Existing checklists to guide practice
- Limitations:
 - Need to resolve index vs. scale issue
 - Need to catch up with new research (for example, on physical activity and nutrition)
 - May need large samples to find associations between practices and child outcomes

Families

- Important constructs:
 - Parent involvement
 - Quality of parent-provider relationship
 - Outreach to parents
- Strengths:
 - Inclusion of this domain in state Quality Rating Systems
 - Research base for school-age children
- Limitations:
 - Research linking family involvement and child outcomes in early childhood is limited
 - Reliance on report rather than observation

Professional Development

- Alignment of professional development inputs ⇨ quality measures ⇨ child outcomes
- Balancing demands for more in-depth professional development (as suggested by in-depth quality measures) with practitioners' needs and expertise
- Development of approaches that address cultural and linguistic diversity among families and practitioners

The first is really the front and center goal today which is the need to establish clear links between professional development that is offered, the quality measures that are observed and/or reported on and the links between them to children's outcomes. Bob Pianta raised this issue early in the meeting and it was revisited by every working group and in the integrative policy session

Within the working groups, there was also acknowledgement that the increasing demands on practitioners/teachers/caregivers in early childhood education are not consistent with the education level of the workforce. There are unique challenges when attempting to foster improved language or improved math skills if the teacher is not familiar with the developmental science behind the practices.

Also need to recognize that teachers/caregivers work across diverse settings often with mixed age groups.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, is the recognition that measurement systems and strategies need to address the cultural and linguistic diversity of children, families and practitioners

Follow-up Steps

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- Meeting Proceedings
- Research-to-Policy/Practice Briefs
- Meeting on Evaluation of State Quality Rating Systems held April 23-24

Attendees are state representatives, their evaluators, and other researchers
Goal: Provide a forum for identifying research questions, strategies and potential for developing cross-state collaborations