

Frontiers in Child Care Research
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SESSION 1

**Assessments and Measures That Support Linkages Among
Early Care and Education Programs**

Assessments and measures that provide data about quality and costs across early care and education programs can support linkages among these programs. How can assessment and measurement approaches support linkages that strengthen the early care and education system as a whole? What data, including cost data, are needed by policymakers in considering policy decisions that support linkages? The session will highlight the experience of Ohio in linking their child care and other early education programs and research that looks at cost and quality issues.

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Overview of the Session

- Discuss how one State (Ohio) is supporting assessment, measurement, and finance systems that promote linkages among child care and early education programs
- Learn about a model for measuring costs across child care and early education programs
- Discuss challenges and lessons learned regarding ways assessment and measurement systems can support linkages, and what is involved in moving from the conceptualization of linked systems to actual, operational linkages
- Discuss participants' (State and Federal Government, researchers, others) experiences in dealing with linkages between programs
- Discuss what is involved in balancing accountability with flexibility
- Discuss why assessments, measure, and financing systems matter
- Discuss how alignment of assessments, measures, and financing systems can enhance quality

Questions to keep in mind:

- What are your experiences?
 - Balancing accountability versus flexibility
 - Moving from conceptualization of linked systems to operational linkages
- What are the implications of working across child care and early education programs for research methods?

Why is this topic so important?

- Differences in assessment systems, measurement, and financing systems that are aligned across programs have the potential to enhance the quality and seamlessness of services

Jamie Gottesman

How Ohio has been creating a more streamlined system:

- Two State agencies:
 - Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS)
 - Ohio Department of Education (ODE)
- Multiple programs:
 - Child Care Subsidy Program—administered by ODJFS
 - Step Up to Quality (new collaboration between the two State agencies; with a new quality rating system)
 - State Prekindergarten (Pre-K) Program
 - Early Education Initiative (similar to many States' pre-K programs)
 - Originally called Ohio Head Start
 - Mirrored Federal program and performance standards
 - Originally followed eligibility criteria
 - Originally given only to Head Start programs with the provision that they partner with child care providers (center-based and family child care)
 - Originally funded from Ohio's general revenue funds
 - Since 2001, funded out of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
 - Between 2001 and 2004, eligibility set at 185 percent of poverty
 - Providers could blend Ohio Head Start funds with CCDF dollars to provide quality enhancement for eligible children
 - ODJFS transferred funds and worked collaboratively with ODE to administer the program
 - Head Start Plus
 - Began in 2004
 - Followed some of the Federal program performance standards
 - Contracts given to Head Start agencies partnering with other providers or consortia of child care providers (center-based and family child care)
 - Administered collaboratively by ODJFS and ODE

- All providers were required to provide comparable systems-level data, classroom data, and child-level data (Each provider is required to provide regular data to ODJFS, participate in Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) observation with two independent verifiers, and provide “Get It, Got It, Go” child-level data)
- Participating providers included child care centers, family child care providers, and Head Start providers
- All were required to provide similar data, regardless of the program type
- New Early Learning Initiative (NELI)
 - Plans to modify Head Start Plus and create a new Early Learning Initiative
 - Will use TANF dollars, administered by the ODE
 - ODJFS and ODE have had conversations about the types of systems-level data, program-level data, and child-level data that should be collected from all programs, regardless of the type that will be participating in the new programs
 - Goal of the new assessment and measurement systems is to collect data that will allow leaders to answer questions about program quality

Ingredients of an aligned measurement and assessment system in Ohio:

- Strong history of collaboration between child care and Head Start
- Ohio consistently used research to inform its work (Craig Ramey, Ed Zigler, Rick Brandon, et al.)
- Leaders from ODJFS and ODE (Ohio is a BUILD¹ State) worked together to enhance systems building
- Developers looked at Lynn Kagan’s “policy matters” strategies
- State developed a common framework for defining quality across programs, but are now backtracking and rethinking some decisions made early on
- Ohio had many successful partnerships between child care and Head Start—but had lot of contentiousness in the past year as well. Some lessons had to be learned the hard way

How do we define and measure quality?

- Ohio began by asking the question: What is the quality we want to give all kids in terms of both structural and process quality?
- Ohio then worked toward obtaining conceptual agreement on quality

Background on Head Start Plus:

- Ohio was long known as a leader in State-funded Head Start
- As political climate changed, there was a need to move toward new funding options and embrace child care and broader ECE community—thus, Head Start “Plus” was created

¹ For more information on the BUILD initiative, please visit <http://www.buildinitiative.org/>

- State early education funding through State TANF dollars was used to fund a new partnership program
- Eligibility is up to 185 percent of poverty
- Competitive RFP bid led to some contention
- Several sites are in public school settings (family child care providers can be subcontracted)
- The majority of providers were existing Head Start programs
- Starting July 1, 2005, Head Start Plus will be called Ohio's Early Learning Initiative
- 4,700 kids are being served (out of possible 10,000)—many were lost to 35-hour-per-week work requirement, which has since been dropped

During the development of Head Start Plus, policy matters that were examined:

- What is important to measure?
- Is it possible to develop a process to examine the operational details?
- What is the quality-level desired for children, measured in terms of structure and process?

Questions and issues raised by the new system:

- **Standards**—*some* but not *all* of the Federal Head Start standards are used in Ohio. This leads to questions about whether the program actually is comparable to Federal Head Start. (Funding for Ohio's program is solely State TANF money, used both to expand existing federally funded programs and to fund new programs.)
- Resentment over competitive bids and whether any priority is given to previous grantees
- Question from session participant: Is Ohio State child care money going primarily into Head Start and Head Start Plus, whereas other States are putting their money into Pre-K?
Answer: Yes. Rather than start another Pre-K program, Ohio put its money into providing full-day, full-year care through partnerships with child care and Head Start – TANF is the funding source.

Insights from Ohio experience:

- Rather than a "single system" model, we need to move toward thinking of "many systems working together"—reflecting the new understanding that a "collision" of systems is not as useful as a "collection" of systems working together in the best interest of kids
- To align these systems, we considered:
 - *Political climate*—how can State bureaucratic systems become more agile to function in this climate?
 - *Constituents*—as a "welfare State," in Ohio there was resistance to paying out so many TANF dollars for child care – Head Start is a vocal constituency; child care is not that organized as a constituency

- *Resources*—Resources are always shifting, so flexibility and agility are key
- We utilized existing funding to balance efforts that support both welfare reform and school readiness by:
 - Having a diverse delivery system
 - Honoring parent choice and delivering it at the point where the children are (in the Head Start setting, or in child care setting, etc)
 - Funding on a per-child basis
 - Improving parents' options (took out the 35-hour-per-week requirement)

Ohio conceptualized an aligned system:

- Child care—where the kids and families are
- Public Pre-K—where the best professional development is
- Head Start—where the most comprehensive services are

How can we begin to respect one another's definitions of quality, given that there is no consistent measurement across systems?

Different measures used in Ohio:

- Head Start uses Program Review Instrument for Systems Monitoring (PRISM)
- Child care uses Early Childhood Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R)
- Public Pre-K uses ELLCO and Get It, Got It, Go (measures literacy and fluency)
- Ohio added an early learning column in the "Step Up to Quality" framework and embedded ELLCO and State standards into that tier—to have credibility and to ensure that children enter kindergarten ready to be successful
- The idea is that Early Learning Initiative and the Step Up to Quality initiatives will require each of these measures to create an aligned system that answers questions about the services offered, the classroom climate, and the early literacy environment, rather than selecting a single measure

What else is important to support linked measurement systems?

- Support policies to ensure comparable family/child initiatives
- Use contracts to leverage alignments
- Obtain counties/local governments' understanding and support
- Align monitoring and review policies
- Strengthen early learning systems, e.g., staff qualifications, curriculum, child assessments, guideline implementation
- Increase incentives and supports to address quality
- Embed these indicators and benchmarks in the Step Up to Quality guidelines

Ohio's Step Up to Quality Measurement System

- Step Up to Quality is designed to answer the question: How do you really know that the stuff that we put together really buys us anything?
- Environmental ratings will use ECERS-R, and align to the benchmarks
- Providers know little about curriculum, planning, and assessment

- Staffing ratios criteria in Step Up to Quality are problematic; many providers find it costly to reduce ratios—this will be reflected in new rating system
- Each participating provider is eligible for T.E.A.C.H. and small maintenance and early learning grants—but while they are eligible for many supports they are still anxious to improve their ratings
- Ohio will look at Get It, Got It, Go and its relation to how long children have been in different types of care

Richard Brandon

Goals of his presentation:

- To briefly discuss some issues in Ohio and some broader themes
- Then get into broader audience discussion

Two sets of system linkages:

- Across ECE settings
- With other early services

Across ECE programs:

- How do you get common standards for process quality (inputs, costs)?
- Lynn Kagan and Richard Brandon looked at how structural quality produced outcomes for kids

Basis for:

- Common hourly or annual reimbursements
- Quality rating systems/tiers
 - Quality standards can be the basis for differentiating levels of reimbursement
 - However, tiers are only effective in raising quality system-wide if reimbursement rates are tied to the actual costs implied by the higher tiers, otherwise we get into issues of economic segregation

Issue of Economic segregation

- There is wide agreement that economically segregated child care is bad, especially for low-income children.
- This was explored in Dr. Brandon's study of Head Start partnership centers in Ohio
- Head Start centers (all identified as delivering high-quality service) were asked to participate in a detailed cost analysis
- Findings:
 - Across the five centers, there was a 40 percent cost differential
 - All centers were spending 1/3 less than the State Head Start maximum reimbursement rate (on an annual cost-per-child basis)
 - Head Start centers do not adjust staffing levels as much to meet the needs of kids because they are more committed to providing full-time employment than to being flexible in staffing

- Issue of economic segregation versus integration: if you are serving moderate-income kids who are getting fewer dollars than Head Start kids, the money is blended and the average amount is spent on all kids—funding streams may be separate but in practice, they are combined—so Head Start funds are subsidizing non-Head Start-eligible kids to raise quality for all (however, this is just an INFORMED GUESS, as dollars cannot actually be tracked that far down)

Questions to raise:

- Links to Social, Health Services (SHS):
 - In mixed income settings, how many children need SHS? Does it make sense to fund direct SHS from limited ECE monies or tap into entitlements?
 - Conclusion: in financing to promote linkages, common standards and expectations are essential
 - Danger of economic segregation—unless we move to a universal system (which is not likely to happen soon) how do you avoid promoting a universal segregated system? Properly structured, tiered reimbursement can provide a realistic way of doing this
 - Key is to maximize funding from multiple sources, while maintaining common standards

Open Discussion

- The hang-up for States in the Federal regulations for Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) rates is reimbursing the maximum rate set. But States get around that by using the quality enhancement money to increase the money available.
- There are rules, there is revenue, and there is practice. Programs put all the money in the same pot and try to hire the best providers to serve all the children (Head Start and subsidy children)
- How do you avoid political backlash to providing a “Cadillac” system for the poorest families, but not for middle- or marginal-income families?
 - This is a perennial issue and one that each State has to deal with.
 - A related issue is that when different programs set their eligibility cutoffs separately but their funding is combined through linkages, it may have an effect on spending per child. Where set eligibility levels are set determines cost per child, and those ratios are extremely politically sensitive.
 - The Federal Government wants to serve more children at lower costs and so the question is: What is the right cost per child, and what is the right way to go about determining this?

Burning Questions for Research

- Does turnover increase when staff does not have access to full-time work with benefits? Do competitive bids increase turnover?

- More research is still needed on turnover
 - We do not know what it takes to promote staff stability
 - We do not know whether full-time employment is a plus or a minus
 - The labor market has changed, so it is not necessarily predictable
 - We cannot rely on 20-year-old data
 - Research needs to be done in context of a particular community's needs
- Education Development Center studied Federal and State partnerships throughout Ohio and found:
 - Centers in partnerships have greater turnover (voluntary and involuntary)
 - Qualitative data showed that when centers engaged in partnerships, some teachers did not meet the standards
 - As teachers gained more education, the centers in the partnership were more likely to offer professional development and training
 - Some of the teachers moved to Head Start or other programs where they could make more money
- In studying kids across all of these settings, was it difficult to get people to participate? How did you get common identifiers to look across these settings?
 - There have been multiple studies. Rather than look at administrative data, we randomly selected centers and used unique identifiers. Now we are collecting data on the children to look at school readiness. The studies are complementary, involving the collection of ECERS data across studies and sites.
 - Centers were randomly selected with data from the center director, parents, and teachers. Now the children are being directly measured. This is going on in cooperation with the new Early Learning system in Ohio.
 - Coordinating efforts in the State is one thing, but coordinating with Federal studies such as the Head Start National Reporting System is another thing. The centers get “measured out.”
- Is there political support and money to fund such a linked system?
 - Interest is greater when there is more confidence in it being fully funded
 - In building cross-system linkage with public education, how do you tap into the “mother lode” of K-12 funding without affecting the delivery system?
- “Mixed” versus “linked” systems: on the ground, funds and programs are being mixed more than they are being neatly coordinated—thus moving from concept of “blended” funding to “braided” funding
- Getting representation from State Departments of Labor: how employment influences parent choice (or lack thereof) needs to be part of the discussion

- Where programs sit in the State government matters. In Texas, the child care program is within the labor department. This means they have been closer to some of the labor issues involved in child care, but they also have had to work harder to create linkages with early education and Head Start
- Is there a danger in what is being done with quality ratings and assessment?
 - There has been a lot of correlational research, but things are being done piecemeal—for example, looking at ELLCO but not doing anything about increasing early math or social/emotional skills, or, increasing education but not increasing wages or benefits
- Are we destroying the reliability and validity of the measures in a way that previous research has not done?
 - That is why things like Quality Interventions for Early Care and Education (QUINCE) are needed. (see session #4)
- How do you measure what it costs for programs to move from one level to the next?
 - This kind of work is being done by Ohio State University, where they are looking to see where the different centers fall out and the access to the support
 - Questions being investigated include: Which centers use the most support? How can they move to the next steps?

Post-Session Discussion with Jamie Gottesman and Rod Southwick

State leaders want to support child care directors and teachers in their efforts to improve quality. One way this is being done is by using instruments like the ELLCO and ECERS as self-assessment tools. These instruments are not designed as self-assessment tools, but we want the child care providers to know how we define quality and what we want them to achieve. Currently, we do not have self-assessment instrument for providers to use that are aligned with the research tools.