

State: Massachusetts

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Quality of Subsidized Child Care Providers and Children's Care Stability: Implications for Early Educational Outcomes

Stable access to high quality child care is essential to support positive child development and parental employment, yet our previous partnership study and CCDBG evaluation study conducted in Massachusetts show a significant disparity and variation in access to high quality care among subsidy-receiving children and child care providers experiencing high turnover rates of subsidy-receiving children. Recent evaluation research in MA also points to quality differentials between Preschool Expansion Grant-supported classrooms (higher quality) and subsidy-supported classrooms (lower quality). Based on these results, the instability and lower quality of subsidy-receiving children's care arrangements are the top concerns of the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), since both factors influence children's development. It is a crucial time for EEC to deeply examine the links between quality, care stability, and child outcome in the subsidy system, to inform its ongoing quality improvement investments and approaches.

Addressing both the quality and stability of subsidized children's care arrangements to improve child development outcomes is at the heart of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014, mandating a 12-month eligibility period rule that allows for 3 months of job search and a greater percentage of CCDBG funding spent on quality initiatives, licensing regulations, and quality standards. Massachusetts has a long history of engaging in quality improvement efforts (QRIS since 2011). The state is currently engaged in implementing new background check requirements and strengthening training requirements for subsidized providers. New initiatives focused on building workforce quality are currently being launched (e.g., *StrongStart to Program Quality*).

Despite these investments, variation in quality among subsidized child care providers in MA (as is the case in other states) is expected to be high, and the links between quality of care, stability of care arrangements, and child development outcomes have not been well understood and established. The primary goal of this project is to provide a sound knowledge base to support the state's efforts to improve subsidy-receiving families' access to high quality, stable care that can lead to positive child development. The proposed study is a three-part quantitative study. First, we focus on the availability and quality of subsidized providers, before and after CCDBG, to examine changes in the availability and quality of subsidized care providers in MA. Second, we collect new primary data on multiple dimensions of quality for subsidized care providers to understand the extent to which children have stable, high quality care, and the relationship between multiple dimensions of quality and stability in subsidized care arrangements that can directly inform quality improvement efforts through professional development. Lastly, we pilot an approach to study how both quality of subsidized care providers and stability in subsidized care may affect child development outcomes, by linking subsidy program data to child educational outcome data. This proposed study will build upon a strong partnership that has developed over the past six years between the university research team from Boston University and Brandeis University and EEC. The proposed research will involve active collaboration among partnership members to produce high quality evidence and disseminate findings broadly.