

Maine Child Care Program Quality Study

Michel Lahti, PhD, Muskie School of Public Policy, University of Southern Maine

Kris Michaud, MA, Maine Department of Health and Human Services

Allyson Dean, MA, University of Southern Maine

Alan Cobo-Lewis, PhD, University of Maine, Orono

Carolyn Drugge, MA, University of Maine, Farmington

Funded by US DHHS, ACF, OPRE - Grant ID Number:90YE0105

Child Care State Data Capacity and Research Project

2009 – 2012

Project Description.

This project consists of two components, one focused on program quality comparing programs enrolled in Maine's Quality Rating System (QRS) to those not enrolled. The other component is focused on use of child level assessment information to improve program quality. The purpose of the first component is to increase knowledge about improvements to program quality over time considering influences due to enrollment in the Maine Quality Rating System (QRS). Programs enrolled in the QRS receive additional supports than those programs not enrolled in the QRS. This study component also includes a focus on a set of programs enrolled in the QRS and contracted by the state DHHS to provide child care services to low-income working parents. Baseline data was collected in 2009 and follow-up data is being collected in 2011. The aim of the second study component is to explore the kinds of approaches to assessments that are used with infants and toddlers in higher quality programs. Authentic child level assessment is a standard in the QRS and this case study research will increase knowledge about how this standard is being met and or what barriers exist to meeting this standard.

Research questions.

- *What are the differences in program quality between child care programs enrolled in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Quality Rating System (QRS) and child*

care programs not enrolled in the Maine DHHS Quality Rating System?

- *What is the impact of federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) quality funding and subsequent supports on improving the quality of care available to and utilized by low-income working parents through contracted child care sites?*
- *How are individual programs that serve infants and toddlers meeting the authentic assessment standard of the Quality for ME system?*

Sample. For the program quality study component there are two separate samples. One is a randomly selected sample of programs consisting of programs who were selected to enroll into the QRS (n=27) and those that were asked not to enroll in the QRS (n=20). Due to the small sample size that resulted from the random selection process, a second sample is being developed through the use of administrative data and propensity score matching. This sampling plan consists of two treatment groups; (1) child Care providers who were enrolled in the Quality Rating System on July 2009 and (2) child care providers who joined the Quality Rating System between July 2009 and December 31, 2010. The comparison groups are (1) child care providers who joined the Quality Rating System on or after January 1, 2011 and (2) child care providers who never joined the Quality Rating System but are enrolled in the Maine Roads to Quality Provider Registry which tracks education levels, training and technical assistance. For the authentic assessment study

component, a purposive sample of high quality programs (n=8) were selected based on program type.

Methods. For the program quality study component, the following types of data are collected from each site: (1) classroom observation data using the relevant Environmental Rating Scale, (2) self-report from child care provider / teacher on perceptions of quality, (3) anonymous parent self-report questionnaire concerning program quality and services, and (4) administrative data from state agency licensing files, teacher registry files and QRS enrollment information as applicable. These randomly selected sites are observed at baseline (2009) and the approximately 24 months later for a follow up period (2011). For the additional sample concerning program quality, an analytic technique, propensity score matching (Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983) will be used to create groups (providers who are enrolled in the Quality Rating System and others who are not enrolled in the QRS) that match on a number of background variables. The groups will then be compared using administrative data such as state licensing compliance data, Quality Rating System enrollment data, and provider training and education data to measure differences in quality between the programs. Finally, for the multi-site case study on authentic assessment with infants and toddlers, qualitative methods are used through purposive sampling and then through content analysis of the non-numeric data relevant to observing how providers / teachers conduct authentic assessment and how they use that information to improve program quality.

Progress Update.

For the program quality component, all baseline and follow up data has been collected from the randomly selected sites. Data analysis and final reporting will be done by end of September 2012. For the use of propensity scoring in a further attempt to compare program quality differences between sites enrolled in QRS and those that are not, data collection is complete as of May 2012. This administrative data, from both state agency files and the state level Registry file on provider education and training, was very difficult to clean and transform in order to use in the analyses. Data analysis and final reporting will be done by end of September 2012. The study design was guided by a thorough review of the

literature on child care quality indicators, including the relationship of structural quality and process quality. In addition, USM research staff worked with researchers at Georgetown University to assist with the study design and analyses. Maine state agency licensing program managers and staff have ranked the severity of licensing violations and a system for collecting and categorizing licensing violations from the licensing inspection reports has been developed. The study component on use of authentic assessment with infants and toddlers is complete and findings are being disseminated.

Implications for policy/practice.

The study component on program quality is yielding important descriptive information about program characteristics expected to relate to quality. The implementation and evaluation of Maine's Quality Rating System involves extensive use of administrative data. This project is testing the feasibility of using propensity score matching with existing administrative data. This analytic technique may provide another method to investigate differences between groups through the use of administrative data. Information on program quality is important for planning and monitoring. It is critical to help describe the quality of child care programming in particular for families with low incomes. In addition, analytic work of this nature making use of the state's administrative data adds value to the host's of the data systems as the data cleaning and transforming processes can result in more accurate data for the host agency. For the authentic assessment multi-site case study, findings are being used to identify what may be "best practices" for infants and toddlers. In addition, findings may be used to influence training and education programming for providers.

Implications for research.

States that have implemented Quality Rating Systems are interested in evaluating the impact of the QRS and the support systems that have been developed to improve quality. Recruitment of programs to volunteer to be randomly selected for enrollment into the QRS resulted in a very small sample. Pursuing a comparative study through use of propensity score matching with administrative data may provide another tool for researchers seeking to find out more about the effects of QRS enrollment. The multi-site case study approach appeared to work

well for the exploratory purpose of the study on the use of authentic assessment with infants and toddlers. Much more descriptive work is necessary to better identify how this approach to assessment is implemented in various child care settings.

Contact

Michel Lahti, PhD
Muskie School of Public Service
University of Southern Maine
Phone: 207-228-8541
Email: mlahti@usm.maine.edu