

Impact of PreK Expansion on Child Care for Low-Income Families: Changes in Supply and Configuration of Child Care

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Project Description.

Researchers at Education Development Center, Inc., together with our colleagues at Rutgers University, are engaged in a study funded by the Office of Planning Research and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This study is designed to address questions about the association between prekindergarten (preK) expansion and the supply and quality of child care for low-income families. We are conducting a longitudinal investigation to identify changes in the supply of child care and in the quality of care for low-income working families across different types of providers and for different ages of children.

Research Questions.

Our study is designed to address the following research questions:

- 1) How do changes in state preK funding relate to the overall supply of child care and in the supply of child care for the children of low-income families? How does this change over time differ based on whether the county predominantly delivers preK through public schools or through child care and Head Start providers?
- 2) How does the configuration of the child care market change over time as preK programs expand?
- 3) How is expansion of preK programs related to the quality of child care? How do expanded preK programs affect the quality of child care available to low-income families?

Sample. We analyzed data from three different sources to address our research questions: 1) Survey data collected from directors of a randomly selected sample of child care providers in New York and Ohio; 2) Resource & Referral (R&R) data obtained from the four target counties in our study (Albany and Niagara,

New York; and Cuyahoga and Franklin, Ohio), and qualitative data collected from key informants in the states and counties. The survey data included a sample of 353 child care centers, approximately half of whom were participating in the state preK program and half served as comparison centers. The R&R data from the four target counties included all licensed child care centers between 2008 and 2010. Key informant interviews were conducted with 34 individuals across the selected states and counties and included state agency personnel, directors of district preK programs, and directors of child care programs and other community-based organizations.

Methods. The study used a mixed methods approach including quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

CCR&R databases. To answer questions about changes in the supply of child care, we obtained databases from the four target county child care resource & referral agencies. The databases include all licensed child care centers from 2008 through 2010.

State administrative databases. To answer questions about the configuration of the child care market, we obtained state child care subsidy data and data on the number of children enrolled in state preK programs during the study period.

Survey of Indicators of Quality. To answer our questions about changes in the quality structural indicators of quality in the child care market, we collected data using a telephone survey. This survey was administered at two points in time using a repeated cross-sectional design.

Progress Update. We are in the process of finalizing our analysis and completing our final report. Specific issues or findings that we will be able to address in November 2011 at the CCPRC Annual Meeting

include data on the associations between preK expansion and the supply of different types of child care. We have also examined how expansion of preK relates to the quality of child care available to low-income families.

Implications for policy/practice

Knowledge about the association between changes in pre-Kindergarten funding and policies and the child care market can inform state child care and prekindergarten policies. Findings related to child care providers that are offering prekindergarten services can inform child care provider practice.

Implications for research

This study analyzed data from a number of different databases. We encountered challenges cleaning and

coding the R&R data from the four target counties and in creating comparable variables from state administrative data. We developed strategies to overcome these challenges. From our key informant interviews, we obtained insights into the nature and dynamics of the child care market that helped us refine our analytic models and understand the implications of the findings.

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