

## Inside the Classroom Door: Understanding ECE workforce and classroom characteristics experienced by children in subsidized care

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### Project Description.

This is a secondary data analysis project that uses nationally representative data to understand variation in classroom and workforce characteristics across the full landscape of publicly-funded center-based early care and education (ECE) programs available to low-income families.

### Research Questions.

1. Are there differences in workforce characteristics (caregiver knowledge, skills, attitudes, experiences, and compensation) between ECE providers serving children in subsidized center-based care (CBC) versus unsubsidized CBC, school-based public pre-k, and Head Start?
2. Are there differences in classroom characteristics (materials, activities, instructional time and context) between ECE providers serving children in subsidized CBC versus unsubsidized CBC, school-based public pre-k, and Head Start?

**Sample.** Two nationally representative data sets were used: (1) the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), which sampled children born in the U.S. in 2001 and followed them into kindergarten, and which includes interviews with their preschool-year ECE providers in 20015-2006, and (2) the National Survey on Early Care and Education (NSECE) which sampled ECE providers in 2012. The analytic sample for the ECLS-B includes center-based ECE providers (and, when available, directors) serving low-income preschool-age children ( $N \approx 2,200$ ), and the analytic sample for the NSECE includes ECE providers in centers located in low-income areas ( $N \approx 1,100$ ).

**Methods.** Within each data set, we compare publicly-funded center-based ECE settings on a rich set of ECE

workforce and classroom variables. We compare community-based centers (non-Head Start, non-school-based pre-k centers; CBCs) serving children with federal child care subsidies, to Head Start, school-based public pre-k, and unsubsidized CBCs (CBCs serving children whose care was not funded via child care subsidies nor any other public funding stream we could identify). T-tests and chi-square tests were used to compare workforce and classroom variables across these 4 ECE types. We adjusted for multiple comparisons by controlling the false discovery rate (yielding more conservative alpha levels), and weighted all analyses to be nationally representative. We report significant contrasts within, not across, data sets because of differences in sampling units, measures, cohorts, and sample weights.

**Progress Update.** The research team has finished data coding and analysis, and is currently drafting manuscripts for publication and presentation at the national Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) conference in April, 2017. Results to be presented are summarized briefly below.

In general, teachers in subsidized CBCs had fewer qualifications, lower compensation, fewer professional supports, and greater mental distress than teachers in school-based pre-k and Head Start. Workforce characteristics were more similar for teachers in subsidized versus unsubsidized CBCs, although there was some variation. For example, in the ECLS-B, teachers in subsidized CBCs reported receiving more training or coursework specific to the care of children under 5, compared to teachers in unsubsidized CBCs; teachers in subsidized CBCs also identified more kindergarten readiness skills as important.

Regarding workforce characteristics, children in subsidized CBCs generally had fewer educational challenges than children in all other settings, and classrooms scored higher on indicators of structural quality such as student:teacher ratio. Additionally, the teacher-child relationship was reported to be more positive in subsidized classrooms than in Head Start and unsubsidized classrooms. However, subsidized classrooms reported more student and teacher turnover and fewer classroom materials than all other classroom types, and there were fewer referrals for ancillary services in subsidized classrooms relative to Head Start and pre-k classrooms (but more referrals relative to unsubsidized classrooms).

### **Implications for policy/practice**

Findings will inform state administrators and policymakers as they determine how to spend funds earmarked for quality improvement within the recently reauthorized Child Care and Development Block Grant. Results point to specific aspects of subsidized children's classroom experiences that might be well suited for quality improvement initiatives, including investments in classroom materials and learning activities, professional development and supports, and improved access to employer benefits and service referrals.

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