

## Assessing the Impact of Child Care Subsidy on Program Access and Quality: Evaluation Planning

**Project Team:** PI: Jennifer Dalton; Research Assistant: Stephanie Lieber; Experts: LuAnn Faulkner-Schneider and Lesli Blazer; Senior Advisor: Deborah Phillips PhD

**Grant or Contract Number:** Child Care and Development Block Grant Implementation Research and Evaluation Planning Grants 90YE0189

**Period of Funding:** October 2016 - March 2018

### Project Description

The 2016-2018 Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) State Plan for Oklahoma details the state's implementation steps to address the requirements included in the 2014 reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act. There are aspects of the Act that will require changes in state policy and/or additions to existing services. Additionally, there are existing policies and initiatives that, in the past, did not have sufficient capacity to be rigorously evaluated.

This phase I project will support planning and development of evaluation work that will lay the foundation for assessment of key aspects of Oklahoma's CCDF subsidy program. The project is also intended to lay the foundation for future evaluative work that will contribute knowledge about the efficacy of ECE programs, including child care subsidies, in achieving recent federal goals and priorities such as increasing access by low-income families to high-quality ECE programs and promoting the healthy development and school readiness of children served.

The key aspects of this study is to: (1) examine how parents use information about subsidized programs to select care; (2) explore possibilities for supporting providers as they self-assess their programs' quality and promote continued quality improvement; and (3) refine a data system to describe where subsidy recipients receive care, the alternatives considered and, for non-recipients, which alternatives they pursued among other early childhood education and care (ECE) programs.

### Research Questions

- How do parents use information about subsidized programs to select care?
- What are the potential possibilities for supporting providers by providing a tool they can use for self-assessment to establish program quality and promote continued quality improvement on the same level of quality as the current Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) provides?
- What data best describes what subsidy recipients receive care, what alternatives were considered, and what alternatives were investigated for non-recipients for ECE programs?

### Sample

In conjunction with our partnership with Georgetown, a partnership with Tulsa's Head Start, Educare, and public Pre-k programs will be the primary sample for pilot testing, implementation and general sample to explore the research questions.

Data for website usage is collected through OMES (Oklahoma's IT agency) for understanding consumer education. This data is comprised of website link clicks, frequency of website visits, bounce rate and average time spent on each page.

### Methods

Objective 2 (Understanding Consumer Education): A detailed comparison was completed between the previous Child Care website and the revised website to understand in depth the changes that were implemented to make the website more user friendly for parents who are looking for programs. Data will be collected prior to the revisions going live and post, data will be collected through OMES.

Objective 3 (Supporting Continuous Quality Care): Priority areas - such as: variables involving space and furnishings, personal care, language and activities, among others - covered under current ECERS assessments for program quality will be identified and feasibility moving forward will be assessed. Potential alternatives will be researched, including remote observation strategies. These strategies will be investigated through a detailed, comprehensive literature review to determine the best fit for a self-assessment tool that can be used for quality monitoring and improvement for providers.

Objective 4 (Refining Data Systems): Combine data from the Adult and Family Services (AFS) subsidy recipient database and Oklahoma's child care provider database (CCMAS), in addition to developing a parent self-survey, to investigate how child care was selected and the alternatives that were considered when they made their decision.

#### **Progress Update**

To date Objective 2 comparisons have been made and OMES data has been compared to determine if traffic on the website has changed. The comparisons were inconclusive as the data provided was extremely generalized and did not have a way to separate out staff from public usage.

For Objective 3, the comprehensive literature review and recommendations have been given to the Oklahoma Child Care division for consideration and implementation.

An initial review of available data elements for Objective 4 has been completed. Research on merging data from multiple systems is ongoing.

#### **Implications for Policy/Practice**

While the current project aims to lay a foundation for future work, eventually the research will lead to knowledge about the efficacy of early childhood education and care.

This foundational work is key to understanding the selection of child care both for subsidy recipients and non-recipients and to better understand the way information is delivered and used for child care

choices. Also, this research will influence policy and implementation of information on the child care websites based on behavioral economics and consumer education theory.

#### **Implications for Research**

This study will lay the foundation for future research and implementation, specifically in self-assessment for quality rating and improvement with providers, a better understanding of the process for child care selection and the impact of the Child Care and Development Fund Block Grant 2014 reauthorization on website standards, information provided and if these changes improve the delivery and use of information.

#### **For more information:**

At this time, there is no formal documentation available related to this project. The Child Care Services website is <http://www.okdhs.org/services/cc/Pages/ChildCareMain.aspx>.

#### **Contact**

Jennifer Dalton  
Project Director and PI  
Programs Manager  
Oklahoma Department of Human Services  
Office of Performance Outcomes and Accountability  
Jennifer.Dalton@okdhs.org  
405.521.2907

Federal Project Officer:  
Meryl Barofsky  
Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation  
Administration for Children and Families  
202.441.5541  
meryl.barofsky@acf.hhs.gov

Project Specialist:  
Alysia Blandon  
Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation  
Administration for Children and Families  
202.205.8386  
alysia.blandon@acf.hhs.gov