

Identifying Ways for the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care to Support Children's Stable Access to High Quality Early Education and Care Through the Use of Subsidies

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Project Description

Decades of research have demonstrated the potential benefits of children's participation in high quality early education programs (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, & Barnett, 2005; Yoshikawa et al., 2013).

Subsidized access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) as funded by the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) provides states an opportunity to ensure that children most at risk due to poverty, homelessness, and family instability have stable access to high quality ECEC.

Policy research suggests that access is often inconsistent, with children frequently cycling in and out of care and moving from provider to provider (Lowe, Weisner & Geis, 2003; NCCP, 2002). Families that demonstrate the most need, with lower parental education, more unstable jobs, and lower incomes, are often the ones showing the greatest instability in access and care arrangements (Ha, Magnuson, & Ybarro, 2012).

This grant has provided the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) in Massachusetts an opportunity to plan an evaluation of policy changes to meet the requirements of the CCDBG Act of 2014 that may improve stability of access and care.

As part of the planning process, EEC was particularly interested in understanding the stability patterns of different groups of families and also in understanding the quality of programs participating in the subsidy system and the enrollment stability experienced by these programs. The descriptive data generated by this study has supported the planning of an evaluation to consider the impacts of recent policy changes on

both stability of access and care for children and enrollment stability for programs.

Research Questions

Because questions about stability of access for families have been answered as a part of a separate study funded by OPRE (Child Care Research Partnership Grant), this study focused on questions about program quality and enrollment stability.

- What is the quality and range in quality (i.e. QRIS levels, accreditation, licensing history, etc.) of the programs attended by children receiving subsidies and do these quality indicators differ by various provider characteristics, including participation in a family child care system or an umbrella organization, such as a YMCA running multiple programs?
- What is the rate of program exits (subsidized children leaving programs) experienced by providers in the subsidy system? Are there differences in the rate of program exits by type of provider? What is the return rate (subsidized children returning to programs) experienced by providers in the subsidy system? Are there differences in the return rate by type of provider?

Sample

For question 1, we used an administrative dataset that includes all licensed providers open and operating without any licensing issues that children who received subsidies used from April 2011 to April 2014. This included providers of income-eligible children, children of families receiving cash benefits from the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent

Children (TAFDC), and children in the Department of Children and Families (DCF) supportive care. The question 1 analytic sample included 13,277 providers.

For question 2, we used an administrative dataset that includes child-level data for all children participating in the subsidy system between September 2013 and August 2014 (two school years). This child-level dataset was converted into a provider-level analytic dataset containing information on all providers serving at least one subsidized child during the period September 2013 to August 2014. The question 2 analytic sample included 5,556 providers which were open throughout all of this timeframe.

Methods

Descriptive statistics were provided for all question 1 pilot analyses, including cross-tabulations of two or more variables.

For question 2, we conducted descriptive analyses including bivariate statistics (e.g., annual program exit rate by each provider characteristic).

We then conducted multivariate regression analysis to examine provider characteristics and the extent to which each characteristic is associated with either the subsidized program exit rate or the subsidized child return rate.

Progress Update

These analyses identified that more programs serving subsidized children were participating in the MA Quality Rating and Improvement System than those who do not serve subsidized children.

They also identified high levels of “churn” of enrolled subsidized children, with turnover rates between 41 to 45 percent on average.

Implications for policy/practice

These findings highlight both the strengths and challenges faced by programs in Massachusetts serving children receiving childcare subsidies. These providers are well represented within higher levels of quality as measured by the state’s QRIS, but also face high levels of enrollment turnover. It provides a foundation for understanding the current state of provider stability in Massachusetts prior to the implementation of several key state level policy changes in response to the CCDBG Act of 2014.

Implications for research

These findings highlight the importance of understanding the impacts of state subsidy policy on programs. The research also makes a key contribution to the field by developing and testing two measures of enrollment stability.

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