

PROJECT BRIEF

Refine and Expand OCDEL's Early Childhood Research Agenda
Project Team: Sue Polojac, Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), Chad Dorn, Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC)
Grant or Contract Number: 90YE0194
Period of Funding: 2017-2018

Project Description

The use of direct service contracts and grants is a strategy designed to advance the goals of the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). Direct service grants and contracts have the potential to stabilize child care by providing consistent enrollment and funding abilities as well as increase the supply of high quality early learning services. Currently, this funding strategy is under-utilized by Pennsylvania. Early childhood leaders in the commonwealth are seeking input regarding effective funding implementation strategies surrounding direct service contracts and grants.

Goals of this project include establishing the data necessary to understand both where and how direct service contracts and grants could be incorporated in order to increase access to high quality, early learning services. The project will combine administrative data sets to develop supply and demand estimates for each Pennsylvania county. Assessing Pennsylvania's capacity to implement contracts and grants through the examination of existing infrastructure and initiatives is another goal of the project. This information gathered from both the data and assessments will be utilized to inform policymakers on appropriate utilization of contracts and grants. The data will also identify the areas of need whereby grants and contracts could be applied to close the gaps for high quality, early learning services.

Research Questions

- How does access to high quality early learning services vary across Pennsylvania's counties?
- How can Pennsylvania effectively use contracts and grants to make high quality early learning services more accessible to all families throughout the commonwealth?

Sample

The demand side will be calculated using U.S. Census data for children ages 5 and below. More specific subgroups will also be used to examine the demand for those particular groups in each county. These subgroups will include, but are not limited to, children ages five below and living with a single parent, children ages five and below and living below federal income distribution guidelines, and children ages five and below with all available parents working. Supply side information will combine multiple administrative data of OCDEL's early learning services.

Methods

First Research Question:

To determine how access to high quality early learning services varies across Pennsylvania counties the project will focus on the following actions.

- Collect administrative data to identify the early learning programs operating in each county by program type and quality rating system identification, and licensed capacity?
- Develop demographic profiles of young children and families with young children for each county based on U.S. Census data.
- Conduct supply and demand gap analysis for each county.

Second Research Question:

To identify the best policies and practices to consider while planning to implement contracts and grants the project will focus on the following actions.

- Assess Pennsylvania's capacity to implement grants and contracts to increase access to high quality early learning programs.
 - Potential to link contracted services to other quality improvement efforts.
 - Identify scope of services and performance standards.
 - Determine the essential monitoring and accountability controls needed to maintain the program's integrity.

Progress Update

The primary activity to date has been the preparation of the multiple administrative data sets for mapping and analysis. Additionally, the research partnership created from this project catalyzed greater collaboration between complimentary research initiatives taking place at OCDEL. Information sharing and strategizing has been formalized between this research project and work to evaluate the recently revisioned Keystone Stars program and the design and future implementation of the Early Learning Resource Centers.

Implications for policy/practice

This project will provide information to policy makers and program administrators at the state and local level surrounding effective ways to incorporate direct service contracts and grants throughout Pennsylvania. Policy and program administrators can utilize this information to increase access to high quality early learning services in geographic regions of Pennsylvania where gaps exist or among specific populations.

Implications for research

This project will enhance the ability for researchers to combine Pennsylvania's multiple administrative data sets with U.S. Census data. The information will provide a better understanding of the distribution of early care and educational opportunities for young children. It will also provide information surrounding the characteristics of families across the Commonwealth and their access to high quality early learning services.

For more information

Additional information on OCDEL related research and reporting can found at the following website:
<http://www.ocdelresearch.org>

Contact

Sue Polojac
Director, Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge
OCDEL
333 Market St. 6th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126
717-265-8911
spolojac@pa.gov

Chad Dorn
Director of Evaluation and Data
PAEYC
5604 Solway St.
Pittsburgh, PA 15217
412-421-3889
cdorn@paeyc.org

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 Bandon
Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation
Administration for Children and Families
202-205-8386
alysia.bandon@acf.hhs.gov