



Rural Child Care in Missouri: How to Improve it

policy brief

The Big Picture

- Missouri, like every other state, determines annually how best to spend money on quality improvements in the child care arena.
- Nationally, millions of dollars are spent training child care providers as part of the quality improvement effort often through one time workshops, classes and seminars.
- There have been no definitive studies on the effectiveness of using funds for workshops, classes and seminars of this type.
- There are few studies reporting on the conditions and characteristics of child care throughout rural America.

Project REACH

During 1997 and 1998, a large study called Project REACH (**R**ural **E**arly **C**hildhood Professional Development Initiative), was conducted in a series of interventions over a 16 month period in rural Missouri. The training and follow up was intensive, continuous and individualized. This study revealed that:

- The profile of rural child care providers in Missouri is significantly different from Missouri's urban child care providers.
- Prior to the training made available through Project REACH, most of the observed rural child care was rated as inadequate.
- Significant improvements in teaching practices, teacher beliefs and adult-child interactions took place as a result of the training provided through Project REACH.
- These improvements were sustained over time, up to a year after the Project REACH Initiative ended.

What Can We Learn from Project REACH?

We can learn about the most effective ways to make changes in the quality of child care being provided to all children in Missouri. To accomplish this, we need to:

- Provide a comprehensive approach toward child care training including:
 - group workshops;
 - individualized guidance;
 - on-site follow-through;
 - financial incentives;
 - participant involvement in designing the training; and
 - local authority involvement.
- Address the issue of low compensation rates in the child care field.
- Fund additional fine-tuned investigations into which specific features of training are associated with quality outcomes.

Policy Implications

Policy makers need to take a closer look at how training dollars are spent. The typical isolated workshop approach must be questioned. Intensive, individualized training improves child care quality quickly and that improvement can be maintained over time with less intensive intervention. This is the type of training that must be implemented right away. Although perhaps most costly in the short run, sustained and comprehensive improvements in the quality of care will positively benefit more children in the long run.

The Bottom Line

The powerful influence of the quality of child care on children's future intellectual and social development makes it imperative that comprehensive training programs be made available through rural communities.

Selected References

- Atkinson, A.M. (1994). Rural and urban families' use of child care. *Family Relations*, 43, 16-22.
- Cassidy, D.J., Buell, M.J., Pugh-Hoese, S., & Russell, S. (1995). The effect of teacher education on child care teachers' beliefs and classroom quality: Year one of the TEACH early childhood associate degree scholarship program. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 10, 171-183.
- Cost, Quality, & Child Outcomes Study Team. (1995). *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers, Public Report*. (2nd ed.). Denver: Economics Department, University of Colorado at Denver.
- Dunn, L. & Kontos, S. (1997, July). What have we learned about developmentally appropriate practice? *Young Children*, 52 (5), 4-13.
- Kontos, S., Howes, C. & Galinsky, E. (1996). Does training make a difference to quality in family child care? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 11, 427-445.
- Thornburg, K. R., Mathews, M. C., Espinosa, L. & Ispa, J. (1997). Perceptions of child care in rural America. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 13 (2), 109-124.

(Compiled by Lynn Malley, 1998; Updated by Kathy Thornburg and Becky Myers, 2005)

For more information, contact the Center for Family Policy & Research

The Center for Family Policy & Research is housed in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Missouri. The Center's mission is to create and disseminate research-based analyses to promote the well-being of families through informed public policy and programs.

Visit us on the web at <http://CFPR.missouri.edu>