



Child Care Quality for Children with Disabilities

Findings from the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium reveal the quality of experiences in inclusive care for children with disabilities and their parents.

policy brief

Background

In 2000, university researchers and state child care program partners in four states (Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska) initiated the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium (MCCRC). The focus of the Consortium's work is to conduct a multi-year study on a range of issues associated with child care quality. Across the four states, a random selection of 2,022 child care providers participated in a telephone survey. The providers represented licensed infant, toddlers, and preschool centers including Head Start and Early Head Start programs, license-exempt centers, and licensed and unlicensed family child care homes. Of the providers responding to the telephone survey, 365 were randomly selected for in-depth observations to assess program quality.

Inclusion and Young Children with Special Needs

National organizations have stated that young children with special needs are best served within community settings.¹ Federal law guarantees that young children with special needs have the right to attend community programs and receive specialized services for which they qualify in those settings.² These laws are designed to protect the rights of young children and their families and ensure access to developmentally- and individually- appropriate settings. Critical factors, however, such as the credentials of early childhood teachers and standards of care for young children with special needs, remain unaddressed. These factors are key to ensuring optimal experiences for young children who attend early childhood programs other than publicly supported early childhood special education programs.

Research Procedures and Findings

More than one-third of providers surveyed in four Midwestern states were found to include at least one child with a disability in their program. During telephone surveys, 36% of the providers reported serving at least one child with a disability. Among the early childhood programs that were observed, 52% of centers and 24% of the family homes included one or more children with a disability. In addition, 1,325 parents in these observed centers were asked to complete a survey about their experiences with child care. Of those families, 6% reported having a child with a disability.

Early Childhood Providers

The providers who care for at least one child with a disability were more likely than programs that were non-inclusive³ to:

- have more experience working with children (5 or more years);
- have specific child development training;
- have a greater number of training hours over the most recent 12-month period, and
- view their work as a career/profession or a personal calling, and less likely to see it as a job with a paycheck.

Observed Program Quality

The overall quality of care received by children is not significantly different in programs that were inclusive versus programs that were non-inclusive. However some differences were noted, by type of care, on the environmental rating instrument's subscales.

Preschools: Although inclusive and non-inclusive preschool centers were not significantly different in overall quality, there was a statistically significant difference on three subscales. The noted differences favored the inclusive centers on the following subscales: Space and Furnishings, Language and Reasoning, and Interaction.

Family Child Care Homes: A statistically significant difference, favoring the non-inclusive homes, was found on two subscales: Space and Furnishings and Language and Reasoning.

What Do Parents Say?

The Parent Surveys were divided into two groups representing parents who did and did not report having a child with a disability. The parent responses were compared and, although the two groups of parents are equally satisfied with their child care, the parents of children with disabilities tend to:

- be more selective, placing more importance on provider training/credentials, program accreditation, staff turnover rate, physical facilities and equipment, and the providers' willingness to accept subsidy payments and children with disabilities;
- be significantly happier with their formal parent-teacher conferences;
- report more stress related to child care, and
- experience a greater number of different care settings.

Recommendations for Policymakers

The results of this study indicate that parents with young children with special needs tend to be more selective in choosing child care. However, those parents also experienced more stress related to child care, which is likely to be related to the increased difficulty of finding care they perceived to be appropriate. To increase the number of appropriate community settings for young children with special needs the following policy recommendations are advanced:

- *Expand and facilitate partnerships among community agencies* to promote the capacity of a variety of early childhood settings to include children with disabilities. Supporting partnerships will increase providers' awareness of and access to available supports for inclusion.
- *Dedicate resources to training child care providers* to include children with disabilities. Training opportunities available to early childhood professionals should include information specific to responding to a broad range of developmental challenges and concerns.
- *Support efforts to increase teachers' child development training*. Programs that have teachers with more child development training appear to be more likely to serve young children with special needs. Assisting more providers in increasing their child development knowledge will increase the number of appropriate settings for young children with special needs.

References

1. National Association for the Education of Young Children, (1993). Position on Inclusion: Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (endorsed by NAEYC). http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/psinc98.htm.
2. Relevant public law includes The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997, P.L. 105-71 and The American's with Disabilities Act, 1990, P.L. 101-336.
3. "Non-inclusive" refers to programs that were not currently caring for any children with special needs.

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