



What Contributes to Quality in Early Childhood Programs?

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. 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, toddler, and preschool centers, license-exempt centers, and licensed and unlicensed family child care homes. Of the providers responding to the telephone survey, 365 were randomly selected to participate in classroom observations to assess program quality.

Research Findings

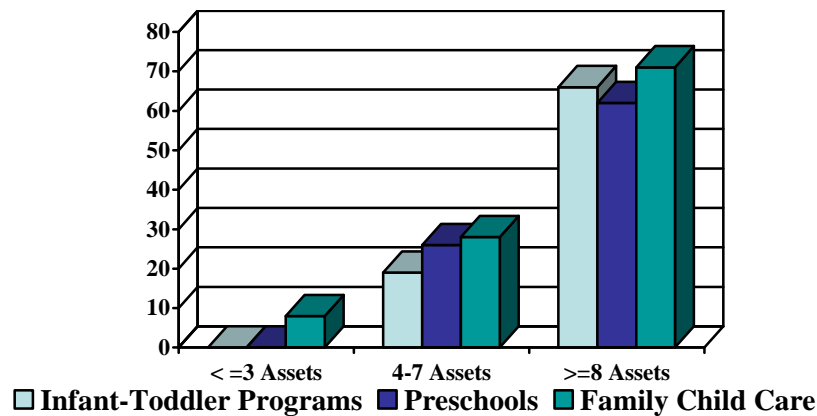
This study indicates several teacher characteristics and other aspects of early childhood programs are directly related to overall program quality. A total of 14 "assets" were identified as being critical factors contributing to program quality across all forms of child care. These characteristics were summed to create the *Asset Index for Child Care Providers* (See next page).

Early childhood programs were observed to assess quality and programs considered "good" received at least 5 on a 7 point scale.¹ As indicated on the graph, less than 10% of providers with 3 or fewer assets were observed to provide "good" quality care. In a similar manner, less than 30% of providers with 4-7 assets provided "good" quality care. However, when a program had 8 or more assets, over 60% were observed to provide "good" quality care.

Previous research studies have noted the importance of the "quality" rating of the early childhood setting: the positive relation between the observed program quality and child outcomes (e.g., measures of child development such as cognitive, language, and social and emotional development). Children who attend higher quality early childhood programs tend to have higher scores on measures of child development.²

policy brief

Percentage of Early Childhood Programs Achieving a "Good" Quality Rating Based on the 14 Asset Index for Child Care Providers



What are the 14 assets in the *Asset Index for Child Care Providers*?

Twelve assets are consistent across all forms of child care (infant-toddler programs, preschool programs, and family child care homes). In addition, there are two assets unique to center-based care and two assets unique to family child care homes. Fourteen total assets represent the individual provider and program characteristics that relate to overall program quality.

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| <i>The provider has completed...</i> | 1. A 1-year degree or more (>13 years) |
| | 2. A Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate |
| | 3. At least 24 hours of child care-related training a year |
| | 4. An “intensive training” (multi-day curriculum training) |
| <i>The provider has....</i> | 5. Attended a recent child care or early education conference |
| | 6. Conducted a formal conference once/year with every parent |
| | 7. Participated in a CPR & First Aid training within the past 2 years |
| | 8. Earnings higher than \$12,500 a year |
| <i>The program is....</i> | 9. Using a curriculum |
| | 10. An accredited program (e.g., <i>National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Association for Family Child Care</i>) |
| | 11. Following the Head Start Performance Standards in partnership with an Early Head Start or Head Start program |
| | 12. Participating in the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program |
| <i>For Centers only...</i> | 13. Providing health insurance for employees |
| | 14. The director talked with the provider about her progress as a professional |
| <i>For Family Child Care Homes Only...</i> | 13. The provider is licensed |
| | 14. A support person visited the provider |

Policy Recommendations

Based on these research findings, it appears specific work can be done to increase the quality of child care by addressing certain provider and program characteristics. It is recommended that statewide efforts be made to increase program quality by:

- ***Requiring all providers who receive federal child care subsidies*** to acquire a minimum number of assets.
- ***Providing quality improvement funds to target specific assets*** so providers and programs can obtain 8 or more assets.

References

1. To measure early childhood program quality, we used nationally recognized research instruments: *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS): Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R)*; *Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS)*. Possible observed quality ratings range from 1 to 7, with ratings from 1 to 2.9 indicating poor care (does not meet basic custodial care needs); 3 to 4.9 being minimal (meet basic care and safety needs); and 5 to 7 indicating good-to-excellent care (provides developmentally appropriate, personalized care, and has good materials for children’s learning). The *Asset Index for Child Care Providers* was developed by analyzing the statistically significant relationships between many individual provider and program characteristics and the observed program quality.
2. Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., Burchinal, M.R., Clifford, R.M., Culkin, M.L., Kagan, S.L., Yazejian, N., Byler, P., Rustici, J., & Zelazo J. (1999). *The children of the cost, quality, and outcomes study go to school: Executive Summary*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center.

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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.

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