

C1: Capacity Building in Research-Policy Partnerships: Lessons from the Field

Wednesday, April 17, 2019

4:00 p.m. – 5:15 p.m. | Penn Quarter A

1. Descriptive Information

C1: Capacity Building in Research-Policy Partnerships: Lessons from the Field

The delivery of high-quality early care and education (ECE) services requires coordination across many sectors. Effective partnerships between researchers and policymakers is one strategy that has shown promise in facilitating systemic support for ECE services that promote children’s developmental potential.

Panelists for this session have been selected based on their ability to provide diverse perspectives on the topic at hand. The first presentation will frame the conversation by highlighting various dimensions of a research/policy capacity building tool that can help lay the groundwork for research/policy partnerships. Subsequent presentations will highlight ongoing projects in New York City, Vermont and Massachusetts to: define capacity-building; share examples of capacity-building partnerships; provide an overview of partnership successes and challenges; and explore future directions in the field. Presentations vary in ways, including but not limited to, funding mechanisms, target populations, geography, area of expertise/experience (i.e. researcher or policymaker) and ECE setting type.

Facilitator

Chrishana M. Lloyd, Child Trends

Presenters

Teresa Derrick-Mills, Urban Institute | *Dimensions of Research Capacity-Building*

Kate Tarrant, New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute | *Dimensions of Research Capacity-Building*

Kyle DeMeo Cook, Education Development Center | *Building Vermont’s Universal Prekindergarten Research Partnership*

Erin Bumgarner, Abt Associates | *Capacity Building in Massachusetts: A Partnership Story to Promote the Quality Rating and Improvement System*

Scribe

Ryan Laychak, ICF

2. Documents Available on Website

[Bumgarner - Research & Evaluation Capacity Building](#)

[DeMeo Cook - Building Vermont’s Universal PreK](#)

[Derrick Mills - Center Supporting Research on CCDBG](#)

[Tarrant- Local Partnership in New York City](#)

3. Brief Summary of Presentations

- **Summary of Presentation #1:** *Dimensions of Research Capacity-Building, Teresa Derrick-Mills*
- This presentation focused on the work of the Center for CCDBG Implementation Research, funded by OPRE and supported by Urban Institute. The Center helps Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) lead agencies (states, tribes, and territories) that have received research grants from OPRE in building their research capacity.
- The presenter discussed organizational research capacity as a set of dimensions supporting doing research and using research through human resources, organizational resources, evaluation planning, evaluation literacy, organizational decision-making and learning benefits. The presenter noted that the Center had created a [self-assessment tool](#) to help the lead agencies determine where to focus in building their capacity to use research for planning, launching, implementing, assessing, and refining their initiatives.

- **Summary of Presentation #2:** *Capacity Building in Massachusetts: A Partnership Story to Promote the Quality Rating and Improvement System, Erin Bumgarner*
- This presentation discussed the partnership between Abt and the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). Abt interfaces with EEC staff across units/divisions and advises EEC on a number of priorities such as workforce development, preschool expansion and quality improvements including their QRIS.
- Abt supports EEC in revising its QRIS by making recommendations about criteria and scoring based on other states' designs and policies and gathering stakeholder input within EEC.
- Abt has also developed tools to facilitate implementation of the QRIS, such as the Continuous Quality Improvement Plan. Abt also helped revise the QRIS curriculum requirements. As part of this work, Abt conducted state scans to see how other states implement these requirements. The team discovered that many criteria look rigorous on paper but are very hard to implement in actuality.
- Abt is currently working with EEC to develop scoring rubrics that determine a program's overall rating.
- Some of the barriers discussed were: quickly evolving work, challenges in operationalizing priorities, developing criteria that are rigorous but attainable for programs, and making sure to have the flexibility for this evolving work.

- **Summary of Presentation #3:** *Building Vermont's Universal Prekindergarten Research Partnership, Kyle DeMeo Cook & Clare Irwin*
- This presentation focused on building Vermont's universal Prekindergarten program. The goal was to address research needs and inform policy and practice decisions during the implementation of Vermont's universal pre-K model (Act 166), began work on this project right as this legislation came into play.
- The members of this priority included: Vermont Agency of Education & Vermont Agency of Health and Human Services
- Nature of the partnership: funded an overseen by IES as one of ten partnerships led by the REL Northeast and Islands.
- Goal of the RELs is to conduct research and analytic technical assistance for state and local education agencies.
- Nature of Partnership: 1. Research study on the trends in child enrollment in Universal PreK. Included analysis of state administrative data leading to a final report. 2. Another research study on characteristics of prequalified Universal PreK Programs through survey development and analysis of state administrative data.
- Barriers included facilitating cross-agency collaboration, sustainability through membership changes, working closely with data staff and knowing the state policy context. The team is beginning to explore ways to sustain the partnership

- **Summary of Presentation #4:** *A local partnership to bridge research, policy, and practice in New York City, Kate Tarrant*
- The presenter focused on a research-practice-partnership in New York City called the New York City Early Childhood Research Network. Its goal is for NYC researchers and policy makers to collaborate to deepen understanding of early childhood quality and strengthen the workforce and support practices that will benefit children from birth through age 8. The partnership originated with funding from the Foundation for Child Development to examine the implementation of NYC's PreK for All with a focus on the workforce. This partnership includes NYC agencies staff and researchers with support from several local and national funders. Some of the objectives of this project included: attracting investments, building relationships and capacity among ECE researchers and policy makers and funders and practitioners, and promoting the work and partnerships
- The mechanics of this project included research partners contributing timely data and recommending solutions and policy partners contributing timely information about policy decisions and political context and constraints. Some of the barriers included building and maintaining relationships, shifting early childhood policy context, membership changes, and balancing diverse research approaches.

4. Brief Summary of Discussion

The discussion opened around the question of how did partnerships begin on the ground and how was that conversation begun? The panelists talked about the importance of knowing new policies being implemented on the state level and seeing how support could be provided to new legislation. Discussion centered around the idea of having conversations around whether a partnership would be valuable to the state. They stressed letting states be a part of the process of developing topics for the research and the idea of identifying the research activities involved in the research agenda over time. The group discussed not being afraid to try out different types of partnerships and alliances and the importance of figuring out who should be at the table (example: having a data person as a part of the conversation). The group also discussed the importance of being flexible, since the process is broad and being able to support agencies that come to you directly to help sort and address their research questions.

The group came up with some recommendations on the timing of bringing different levels of staff/programs/stakeholders to the table. The panelists talked about the importance of helping agencies think broadly about the key issues in play. This includes making sure to match up the proper research question with the right stakeholders and making sure the researchers have the right capacity to support the states where they are, and understand the time it takes to get through these conversations. Finally, the group discussed the importance of learning how to engage in conversation between both the research side and the policy side and understanding the implications of dialogue.

5. Summary of Key Issues Raised

- Research capacity-building is multi-dimensional covering more than the technical skills of designing and analyzing research.
- Importance of states doing research and using the research that is out there while also thinking about the supports to do the work by seeing what is already out there.
- Research and capacity building is often motivated by initiation of new programs, but it is an on-going need.
- Different types and sources of funding lead to variations in how the partnerships are organized and maintained.
- Some partnerships are individual pairings of agencies and research institutions, while others are groups of agencies and researchers.
- Importance of learning how to engage in conversations between the research side and the policy side