

Quality Indicators: Evaluation, Research, and Performance Measures

Description

The Office of Child Care is developing a common set of performance measures for States that would document and track use of CCDF funding over time to support an infrastructure for quality. The purpose of this breakout session was to inform the development of performance measures by drawing upon existing frameworks for research and evaluation of QRIS and other quality initiatives. The session began with a brief overview of the Office of Child Care proposal. Next, presenters from the Quality Initiatives Research and Evaluation Consortium (INQUIRE) provided an overview of logic models for quality improvement and how they might be used to select key constructs and research questions. Audience discussion focused on identification of quality indicators that are meaningful, feasible to collect and appropriate for different purposes (research, evaluation and performance measures).

Facilitator

J. Lee Kreder, Columbia University

Presenters

Andrew Williams, Office of Child Care (OCC)
Gail Zellman, RAND Corporation
Richard Brandon, RNB Consulting

Scribe

David Gottesman, National Center for Children in Poverty

1. Documents in Session Folder

- “Quality Indicators,” Andrew Williams
- “Challenges in Collecting Data on Quality,” Gail Zellman
- “Framework for a Data System to Assess State Efforts in Quality Improvement: Logic Model and Clusters of Potential Indicators,” Richard Brandon

2. Summary of Presentations

- **Summary of Presentation #1:** Andrew Williams
 - States are spending \$1 billion a year on quality improvement activities, but data aren’t available to demonstrate results; we must increase the focus on data to track quality.
 - OCC is proposing to report and track information about:
 - How States are using CCDF quality dollars.
 - The quantifiable outputs of these efforts.
 - Are these efforts effective in improving program quality and practitioner qualifications?
 - Are these efforts effective in improving child and family outcomes?
 - Constraints exist: flexibility allowed by the CCDF block grant results in significant variations in policy and practice across States.

- OCC proposes a new 3-step planning and reporting process for State CCDF quality activities:
 1. Self-assessment on current quality improvement activities.
 2. Goal-setting for quality improvement in the upcoming biennium.
 3. Reporting back on progress at the end of each fiscal year through a new Quality Performance Report.
- Four types of quality activities will be reported:
 - Licensing and health and safety standards.
 - Early learning guidelines.
 - QRIS/program quality improvement activities.
 - a. Financial and non-financial incentives
 - b. Consumer education
 - c. States without QRIS can still participate
 - Professional development/workforce initiatives.
- Information requested in proposed plan (for next biennium):
 - Identify types of data collected by the State.
 - Describe State-specific performance measures; states set their own performance measures and targets.
 - Describe plans for evaluation.
- Information requested in new Quality Performance Report (after each year):
 - Key data on results of quality activities (if available)—standard across all States; for example, with QRIS: the number of programs receiving on-site technical assistance; number of programs receiving financial support, etc.
 - Status on meeting State-specific performance measure targets.
- Looking to the future:
 - Intent is to move from solely measuring outputs to measuring quality outcomes and child/family outcomes.
 - Establish greater national consistency on data and measures.
 - Develop new national measures for CCDF (Government Performance and Results Act).
- How can researchers help?
 - Help States plan for improved data, performance measurement and evaluation.
 - Identify good performance measures.
 - Identify data elements that should be tracked.
- Clarifying questions/comments:
 - Recognition that not all States will be able to report all data elements initially.
 - Existing measures at national level, driven by available data, don't provide a good view of quality; new measures will be more accurate.
 - This Administration is emphasizing that all programs must demonstrate effectiveness.
 - *What are plans for technical assistance in order to carry out these activities?* The existing technical assistance network will be reinvented to help States in building QRIS and professional development systems.
 - Hope to have final version of the State Plan Preprint out in Spring 2011 in order for States to complete it by July 1, 2011.

- **Summary of Presentation 2:** Gail Zellman.
 - Federal and State governments have varying goals for performance data; however, Federal and State staff are motivated to improve the quality of care for both CCDF-subsidized children and all other children.
 - Federal Government interested in:
 - Monitoring use of CCDF funds.
 - Drawing cross-State comparisons.
 - Strengthening use of these funds as a lever for change.
 - States interested in:
 - Monitoring quality improvement activities.
 - Monitoring quality improvement goals.
 - Identifying policies that may need to change.
 - Cross-State comparisons require standardization of data:
 - Ideally, elements are defined so that data transcend State definitions; licensing standards can vary widely across States; and criteria for QRIS levels vary greatly as well (two stars in one state may be equivalent to four stars in another).
 - Standardization may rely on more molecular data in some instances: deconstruct licensing; may not be possible for some indicators, but still worth trying.
 - Although NAEYC accreditation is standard across States, accreditation may be too expensive for some States to support.
 - Several considerations need to guide selection of data elements:
 - Feasibility: Cost of data collection and frequency of data collection required.
 - Validity: Does the element measure what it's supposed to measure? For example, given the variation in higher education infrastructures across states, should the number of degrees granted represent a measure of quality? Look to expert opinions.
 - Reliability: Are the data being collected and reported in a consistent way? This is a major challenge across the 50 States. Are States using the same denominators? Are data collection techniques, training, and definitions the same?
 - Logic models can be very helpful in characterizing the goals of the data collection effort. For example, they can help determine which indicators should and should not be measured
- **Summary of Presentation #3:** Richard Brandon.
 - There are many different potential logic models. The version presented here is simple. In this model, the ultimate impact is improved child development outcomes, both overall AND with elimination of gaps in outcomes, through children's experience of higher quality early childhood education. (See PPT).
 - This logic model describes paths for both providers and parents beginning with inputs, through outputs and outcomes, to the ultimate child development impacts.
 - Ideal outcomes: Providers offer higher quality ECE, and parents demand/select higher quality ECE.
 - Outputs for providers: Clear standards and objective ratings, financial support and incentives, technical assistance, and professional development.
 - Outputs for families: Help in affording higher quality ECE, and information about the nature of quality and ratings.

- Essential inputs for providers: Reliable rating scales and raters, outreach to ensure high participation, funding and public support, prompt and stable payments to providers, registry to track staff qualifications, and funding of technical assistance and professional development.
- Essential inputs for families: Financial assistance structure, public information programs to inform parents about ratings and quality, and outreach to ensure parent awareness and participation.
- Questions and comments:
 - *Is the intent that this model would apply to any quality framework? Yes.*
 - *What about States where subsidies are seen as a tool to get parents to work rather than as a quality mechanism?*
 - *States with limited resources are concerned that they may not be able to finish work on performance measures by the June 30 State CCDF Plan deadline. States won't be required to report on measures until December 2012. For States concerned about not meeting the deadline, this could be seen as an opportunity to improve quality indicators. (If other States are doing it, State legislatures may feel more compelled to act.)*
 - *What kind of feedback should be given to OCC that might be helpful in reaching the desired goal? Or in addressing the lack of consistency across States? States could share insights on their difficulties in gathering specific indicators; how they assess whether or not CCDF funds are being used effectively and leading to good outcomes for children and families; and how they work with partners to achieve consensus on goals and objectives for a quality system, while balancing costs.*
- Cluster of potential indicators for discussion:
 - QRIS: Provider participation rate; number/percent of children and providers by quality-level; and change in average level of quality.
 - Financial incentives and support: Amount of funding including base plus incentives, terms/conditions; and the number providers/staff receiving incentives.
 - Technical assistance: Number/percent of providers receiving consultation, monitoring, coaching, and mentoring; quality; and impact of technical assistance.
 - Professional development and training: Scope of offerings; number/percent of providers and staff participation; qualification of trainers; and the impact of PD/training.
 - Workforce characteristics: Qualifications, experience, age, compensation, and observed quality.

3. Summary of Discussion with Presenters and Participants. Discussion focused on potential indicators, working from the above clusters:

- Not all States have QRIS systems. Even in states without QRIS, we need to think about the performance of the whole system including financial incentives, technical assistance, professional development/training, and workforce characteristics, rather than particular elements; think systemically.
- We want to see data linked to good outcomes rather than inputs, but is our research good enough to do this? Also, what about States that have gone in different directions and may not be able to answer the questions being asked?
- If States are currently revising their data systems, how should they be built? These will be very difficult to revise a second time.

- Would it be helpful for some groups of researchers to make a list of basic data elements, such as who's participating, how many programs, etc? A survey instrument to gather baseline information from each State on which of these basic elements it collects may be helpful and help States find out where things are going.
- It's very challenging for the Federal Government to gather information from 50 States at the same time, and it's difficult for many States to gather information:
 - Baseline information, gathered one State at a time, is very labor intensive.
 - States have State-specific data and variables.
- Professional development and training:
 - Lots of definitional differences, but similar meanings.
 - What is and is not feasible to collect?
 - Training is not always training (two-hour training vs. 40-hour training vs. attending college courses); how can this be defined?
 - Must base this on size or percentage of workforce.
 - Idea: To what degree does professional development incorporate individualized professional development planning/advising?
 - Very hard to use numbers due to the lack of a common denominator; percentages require comprehensive data. Without common denominators, numbers will mean different things from State to State.
 - We may need to start with yes-and-no data, and then move to questions about size and scope.
- This is also a data capacity question.
 - How capable are States to collect these data? Capacity to collect could also serve as a performance measure.
- For the initial template, States are being asked to report on what measures work for them. During the first round, the goal is to get a baseline of where States are; overtime, we will see what progress is being made; and eventually, we hope to move toward national consistency.
- Can we talk about set of indicators that are most relevant for States to collect, even if States aren't collecting them now?
- *Where does new data collection money come from?* States can use CCDF quality dollars and new systems can be funded through CCDF as "non-direct services" like administrative costs. The Administration has proposed increased funding for CCDF to help support these new ideas.

4. Key points

- States are willing to participate, but they want a combination of enough time and communication around participation. States want some background information about anticipated State capacity and basic data elements that would be useful to gather.
- Need to deal with commonality vs. individuality, i.e., narrow set of agreed-upon measures, but also State-specific State performance plans, measures, data capacity plans. Input is needed about this.
- Envision cascading information, starting with "Do you collect this data?" and working from there, until we begin to gather data and to add denominators. This is the beginning of a process that will take time.