

# Child Care Policy Research Consortium

## 2006 Meeting Overview

The 2006 Annual Meeting of the Child Care Policy Research Consortium was held April 24-26, 2006, at the Hilton Silver Spring Hotel in Maryland.

Each year the meeting themes are developed collaboratively by the consortium steering committee, the Child Care Bureau research team, and principal investigators of funded projects. In support of the Child Care Bureau's research goals to add to our knowledge about the efficacy of child care policies and programs in promoting the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) long-term outcomes of employment and self-sufficiency for parents, and positive learning and school readiness for children, the learning objectives for the 2006 Annual Meeting of the Child Care Policy Research Consortium were:

- (1) To deepen our understanding of challenges facing low-wage workers and the role of child care and child care subsidies in supporting self-sufficiency of the low-wage workforce.
- (2) To encourage critical thinking about child care policies and practices that respond to the needs of working families.
- (3) To better understand how to define, measure and improve child care quality across all settings and age groups.
- (4) To increase knowledge about the policy options States have regarding their CCDF quality funds and how they can be used in conjunction with other early childhood funds to best support children's school readiness and subsequent school success.
- (5) To provide learning opportunities to explore the policy choices that are supportive of both CCDF long-term outcomes.

The two- and-a-half day meeting was designed to elucidate emerging issues, understand what research will be needed in the next generation of policies, strengthen partnerships and professional relationships, and share new findings from research.

- Monday consisted of special meetings for project teams and steering committees, an orientation and professional development session for new Child Care Bureau research scholars, and a session on child care provider literacy, which examined emerging research and potential for designing an intervention and evaluation. Researchers of Color, a consortium of scholars working to improve research for minority populations, was also invited to conduct a special networking session with members of the CCPRC.
- Tuesday and Wednesday were devoted to plenary and breakout sessions covering the meeting themes as well as a discussion with the Associate Commissioner. Tuesday explored definitions and measures used when conducting research on key aspects of CCDF and Wednesday examined impact and new directions for

future research. Participants also informally discussed their projects, engaged in networking, and discussed issues during two poster sessions.

Plenary and breakout sessions were organized around the meeting themes to explore cross-cutting issues and summarize emerging knowledge. All of the products developed for this meeting - including, the agenda, participant list, detailed session summaries and associated documents, posters, and project descriptions are posted on the meeting website at [www.researchconnections.org](http://www.researchconnections.org)

#### Session 1, Opening Session (Plenary)

The opening session began with introductory remarks by the Child Care Bureau Associate Commissioner. The CCPRC co-chairs provided an update from last year's meeting and laid out the framework, goals, and activities for this year's meeting.

#### Session 2, Challenges of Conducting and Using Policy-Relevant Research (Plenary)

Building from last year, this keynote panel provided an overview and specific examples of the challenges of informing policy with research. The goal was to ground the meeting as a learning community that can grapple with these issues.

#### Session 3, Defining and Measuring Quality (Breakout)

This session explored commonalities and differences in definitions of quality as viewed from the multiple perspectives of child care and early education settings, provider qualifications, children's ages and backgrounds, and parents' goals for their children. What does quality mean in these different contexts? Are there congruencies that seem to hold true throughout? How can the diverse elements of quality be measured and translated into effective policies and programs? How can quality indicators be aligned across settings?

#### Session 4, Defining and Measuring Subsidies (Breakout)

This session focused on how national surveys have assessed two interrelated issues: how much families spend on child care and whether they get help paying for it through subsidies. Discussants provided an overview of how national surveys have defined and measured each of these issues and discussed some of the challenges involved in accurately capturing and using data. The audience participated in an open discussion of these issues and their implications for policy relevant survey research, reflecting upon ways that researchers might improve survey design to better capture child care expenses and subsidy use.

#### Session 5, Defining and Measuring Early Childhood Professional Development: State and Systems Perspectives (Breakout)

Participants focused on current efforts to define and measure professional development in state-level systems (spearheaded by the Definitions and Measurement of Professional Development Workgroup sponsored by the Child Care Bureau). Discussants shared the status of those efforts, explored how they

have helped us better understand the early care and education (ECE) workforce in terms of professional development and needs, and discussed areas where additional coordination and alignment are needed. Session participants were asked to react to current work and to share their own experiences and barriers in pushing this effort forward.

Session 6, Defining and Measuring Self-Sufficiency: The Role of Child Care Costs (Breakout)

This session examined various definitions of self-sufficiency, considering short-term outcomes such as increased employment, earnings and income, as well as long-term outcomes such as meeting and sustaining a poverty threshold, dependence on public assistance, investments in educational related activities, and long-term earnings growth. The discussion recognized the strengths and limitations of surveys and administrative records as measurement sources. The costs and benefits of each source were explored, paying particular attention to recall bias and measurement error inherent in survey reports and the more limited but more complete information collected in administrative records data. Concrete examples from each discussant's research were presented. The discussion also featured the roles of child care costs and subsidies in definitions and measurement of self-sufficiency and touched upon child care expenditure and consumption.

Session 7, Changing Demographics and Research with Diverse Children and Families (Plenary)

The goal of this plenary panel was to highlight recent changes in the population of children and families and better understand the challenges of researching diverse families, children and providers. A demographer discussed emerging population trends and their implications. Researchers described tools and approaches used on specific projects to more accurately portray diversity and overcome measurement biases.

Session 8, Employers and the Low-Wage Work Force (Breakout)

The aim of this session was to gain a better understanding of how employers support (or do not support) low-wage workers and their families. Topics of discussion included: benefits, work schedules and workplace flexibility, work and child care interruptions, welfare reform, and economic development.

Session 9, State Child Care Subsidy Rate Setting Policies (Breakout)

Market rate surveys are intended to ensure that child care subsidy programs give low-income families access to care that meets their needs. This session focused on key decisions that states make in setting maximum payment rates:

- Number of rate categories (some states have almost 150 distinct rates);
- Conversions of payment modes (such as from weekly to monthly); and
- Creating rate areas (states are experimenting with ways to define geographic

rate areas).

Findings on rate-setting practices from a survey of the market-rate survey practices of states, territories, and tribes were used to frame a discussion of the pros and cons of rate-setting options states have. Discussants and participants identified questions research could address in order to support state rate-setting decisions.

Session 10, Factors Associated with Obtaining Child Care Subsidies (Breakout)

This session focused on research findings concerning factors associated with initial subsidy access, as well as related findings on why subsidies sometimes are not obtained. Participants were encouraged to read *Predictors of Child Care Subsidy Use*, a literature review by *Research Connections* prior to the session.

Session 11, Issues and Challenges: Measuring Quality in Quality Rating Systems (Breakout)

The goal of this session was to understand the complexity of issues related to state-level quality assessments. Participants discussed implications of measuring quality in quality rating systems across the range of settings and age groups (infant/toddler, preschool, school-age); use of research; the challenges of using currently available measures of quality; and the applicability of those measures to quality rating systems (QRS).

Session 12, Supporting School Readiness through High Quality Care (Plenary)

This plenary panel painted a broad picture of how states are working to improve the quality of early care across the range of systems, programs, and setting types. The panel discussed how quality supports school readiness and provided examples from promising state initiatives. Panelists focused on the CCDF and its goals for subsidized child care services and outcomes.

Session 13, Understanding Child Care in the Regional Economy (Plenary)

CCDF policy focuses on expanding access, supply and quality in child care for low-income working parents. However, it is also part of a broader system of child care supports. As employers and economists become more interested in the role of child care as social infrastructure for economic development, there will be increased pressure to better integrate CCDF programs with other government (tax or education) policies and private employer supports. Panelists in this session outlined the challenges and opportunities on the horizon.

Session 14, Research on Quality and School Readiness (Breakout)

This session examined different state experiences with measures of child outcomes for school readiness, professional development standards, and their intersection with program quality across the various programs serving pre-school children. Participants examined how states are defining and measuring school readiness, how state early care and education (ECE) systems include school

readiness, and whether aspects of program quality can be linked to children's improvement in school readiness skills.

Session 15, Supporting Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care (Breakout)

This session presented the latest findings on family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care from a group of Child Care Bureau-funded projects completed during 2005. The first half of the session included presentations by researchers. The second half was a focused discussion leading to greater understanding about the dynamics of demand, supply, and quality in this sector by comparing findings from four states: Georgia, Illinois, Minnesota, and North Carolina.

Session 16, Web of Child Supports: Child Care Subsidies and the Use of Other Work Supports (Breakout)

Over the last ten years the United States has attempted to transform low-income assistance into work-support. The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), Food Stamps, and Medical Assistance programs are all intended to help low-income workers maintain stable employment. The length of allowable participation varies across these programs based on family, child, and program characteristics. Research suggests that families in many states participate in CCDF for only short “spells.” The goal of this session was to better understand this puzzling phenomenon and its interrelationship with participation patterns in other work-support programs. Panelists explored what is known about spells of CCDF use and what has been learned from studies of participation in CCDF, Food Stamps, and Medical Assistance.

Session 17, Coordination among CCDF, Head Start, and Pre-Kindergarten Programs (Breakout)

This session explored how coordination among early childhood programs such as the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), Head Start, and state-sponsored pre-kindergarten programs may be improving program quality and child outcomes. The discussion continued exploration of gaps revealed in last year’s meeting and began to formulate strategies for more focused and cross-cutting research.

Session 18, Interagency Update of Findings from Major Studies (Plenary)

Members of the Federal Good Start, Grow Start Interagency Workgroup discussed recently released findings from the National Head Start Impact Study, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Department of Education studies (IES, OSEP), and HHS studies (NICHD, CCB).

Session 19, CCDF Subsidies and Parent Employment Patterns (Breakout)

This session examined recent research on the relationship between child care subsidies and maternal work outcomes in the low-wage labor market. Discussants commented on recent findings synthesized in *Parent Employment and the Use of Child Care Subsidies*, a new Review of Research prepared by Child Care & Early

Education *Research Connections*, and shared additional findings from their own work. Discussion focused on what we as a research and policy community can learn from this important research, what questions we should be asking next, and how we should ask them.

Session 20, Impact of Professional Development Interventions (Breakout)

This session explored what is being learned about effective ways to increase caregiver and teacher competencies across the range of early childhood settings. The role of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) dollars in promoting professional development was examined, as were the interrelationships among professional development, quality of care, and children's learning. Early findings from the seven states in the Quality Interventions for Infant Care and Education (QUINCE) project and the separate child care subsidy evaluation were discussed.

Session 21, Child Care Providers at the Intersection of Subsidy Policy, Quality, and Families' Needs (Breakout)

Child care providers play a multi-faceted role, as they directly serve children and families, determine the quality of care that children actually receive, and are the recipients of public subsidy funding and other initiatives. This session highlighted what we know from recent studies focusing on issues of quality, subsidy policies, and families.

Session 22, Welfare, Work and Child Care Among Single-Parent and Unmarried-Couple Families (Breakout)

The session began with a description of the patterns of child care use by socio-economic status and marital status recently documented using data from the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF). This introduction set the stage for understanding the differing patterns of care among children in the very low-income (vs. higher income) segment of the population and among single parent vs. married couple or unmarried two-parent families. Discussants briefly presented their most recent findings from work using data from experimental studies of welfare and employment programs and the Fragile Families study. These findings focused on the relation between increased employment, child care use, type and stability of care settings, and children's outcomes between very low-income single parent and unmarried couple families.

Session 23, Discussion with the Associate Commissioner (Plenary)

The annual consortium meeting ended with a brief summary of the week's work and an informal dialogue with the Associate Commissioner.

CCPRC Annual Meeting  
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Overview

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