

**Child Care Policy Research Consortium Annual Meeting  
Renaissance Washington, D.C. Hotel  
April 13–16, 2004**

**SESSION 18**

**Focus on the Family: What should the next generation of research look like from the perspective of family needs, choices, and outcomes?**

*What are the most critical information needs of policymakers, providers, and parents about the demand for and utilization of child care and early education? What new research and routine data collection will be needed to provide the answers? What methodologies and models are now available or emerging? Where do the information needs of parents, providers, and policymakers intersect around issues of demand? For example, how can issues of family needs, decision-making dynamics, type and quality of care used, and family outcomes be examined from these three perspectives? How can state data and research capacity be strengthened in this area?*

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**Guiding Principles**

- Family gets limited attention in research, yet research shows family impact effect sizes on child outcomes are large.
- Within the family area, there is an overly large focus on parent employment versus family well-being.
- How can we build a subsidy system that supports a broad set of family outcomes, which include but are not limited to employment?
- Need to look at family experience as a whole—from all of the services they need. Families with children with special needs are canaries in the mine; when they are not being heard, it is indicative of the experience of all families. We need to move beyond silo-service perspectives.
- Research about families should include families. Families need to be at the table.
- Funding across agencies would be of benefit. Cross-system research may be of benefit.

**Research Questions (Unprioritized)**

- Multiple systems affect families: workplace, child care, health, health insurance, TANF, food stamps, Medicare, education, tax system, and others. We never go after workplace.

- o How do we add workplace into the systems we traditionally address?
- o How can we address system effects on families in a comprehensive way?
- o We need to reframe the way to study systems so that we see effects in a more holistic framework.
- o One of the ways in which the workplace does not work is in scheduling. How does child care connect to nontraditional hours?
- How do systems programs such as TANF, subsidies, housing... interact to create barriers and opportunities for families? What is the best package of supports for families?
- What case can we make for the continued support of the subsidy system—for both parents and children?
  - o What can we argue is related to the use of the subsidy?
  - o Which of these can we measure?
  - o How would we change the subsidy system to improve child and family outcomes?
- What are the dynamics of choice?
  - o How does subsidy affect choice—the need to look across the income spectrum?
  - o How does information constrain choice?
  - o There are number of constraints on choice (supply, information, finances...). What can policy do to reduce constraints?
- Making information available to parents: What will they find most useful in making choices?
  - o Do the parents want information?
  - o What parents want what information at what time?
  - o What are the most effective ways to make the information useful to parents?
- Stability of care: What are the norms? We need to understand these in the family context. We need to understand multiple arrangements.
- What are the effects of universal Pre-K and parental leave on family functioning, family well-being, and employment outcomes?
- What are parents' perceptions of quality?
- What are the patterns of child care use? What would it take to produce State- and local-level supply and demand data on a consistent, timely, and regular basis?
- What would it take to improve the quality of State administrative subsidy data?
- What would be the most effective means for government to help finance child care?
  - o How does one determine the cost-benefit of early care and education?
- How can part-day programs meet the needs of families?
- Increase understanding of child care of school-age children?
- What is the role of child care programs in helping support the parent/child relationship?
- What can we learn from how parents with children with special needs manage—more research on the “canaries in the coal mine”?
  - o What are special population children's experiences telling us about the experiences of other children?
  - o Learn from the success stories: What are the supports that have helped them?

- Can we come to consensus about the child, family, and community outcomes that we should measure?