

## A2: Measuring Child Care Access: Taking Stock and Ideating for the Future

Wednesday, June 28, 2023

10:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. | [Archives](#)

### 1. Descriptive Information

#### A2: Measuring Child Care Access: Taking Stock and Ideating for the Future

Understanding whether families have access to child care that meets their needs is a complex issue. There remain gaps in our understanding of access to early care and education (ECE), including how families' needs and preferences for child care interact with the availability of care. Additionally, barriers to access, such as cost, may vary by family or neighborhood characteristics. This session will provide reflections on what we know about critical family needs that impact access to ECE and share new strategies for supporting, measuring, and evaluating equitable access to ECE from a family-centered perspective.

Recently, research teams that have studied access in different states (South Carolina, Minnesota, and Florida) have developed different methods and frameworks (Child Care and Early Education Policy and Research Analysis, Child Trends) for measuring and characterizing the adequacy of the supply of child care. Through this session, attendees will discuss these different approaches, their suitability for answering different policy questions, and identify other ways to measure access and the data needed to feed them. The presenters and the audience will engage in discussion around possible improvements to access measures and data collection needed to support these improvements.

#### Presenters

**Herman Knopf**, University of Florida, Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies

**Patti Banghart**, Child Trends

**Vasanthi Rao**, University of South Carolina

**Dana Bell**, University of New Mexico

**Ashley Hirilall**, Child Trends

#### Scribe

Allison Wimmer

**Number of Attendees:** ~35

### 2. Documents/Presentations Shared (Please list any electronic documents, PowerPoint presentations, or web links used during the session.) **Collect presenter PowerPoints or other documents on the flash drive provided.**

- Measuring access: Alignment of families' priorities and characteristics of chosen care in Minnesota
- Centering Families Needs in Measuring Access to Child Care and Early Education
- Identifying, Measuring, and Describing Factors that Influence Access to Childcare
- Perspectives of New Mexico Families on Child Care Use, Needs and Preferences
- Child Care Access: Measurement Challenges
- Discussion Questions
- Session Description

### 3. Brief Summary of Presentations

#### Centering Families Needs in Measuring Access to Child Care and Early Education

Patti Banghart, Child Trends

- “How many tots per slot?” is a common way access is measured – ‘child care deserts’ are defined by more than 3 children per 1 spot in child care.
  - Access is more than available slots – that kind of analysis provides an inaccurate estimation of access
  - Not all slots are available to all families – factors like needed services, hours needed, cost, etc. can limit accessibility
- Access Framework – affordability, meets child’s needs, reasonable effort, supports child development
  - Does the supply match the needs and preferences of families? Who has access to what?
  - Most studies look at availability, affordability, supply, and use – they rarely consider constraints of supply and demand
    - Parents’ needs are not static
  - Equity is embedded; who has access to what?
  - Opportunities to improve our understanding of CCEE access
    - Measuring family demand and preferences
    - Measuring multiple access dimensions simultaneously
    - Understanding disparities

### **Perspectives of New Mexico Families on Child Care Use, Needs and Preferences**

Dana Bell, University of New Mexico

- How does family utilization/non-utilization of child care reflect constrained choices? For whom?
- Approach: surveyed families directly, learning what we couldn’t from administrative data
  - Gaps between the child care they want/need and actually use
- Significant political will/support in NM
  - ECE expansion in NM has bipartisan political support
  - Early childhood trust fund
- What would universal access look like that meets needs of diverse families and communities?
- What are families’ goals? How does subsidy fit into those goals?
- Many of those who had never used child care assistance (CCA) had never heard of it or thought they wouldn’t be eligible
- Main family goal is job/career, saving, school readiness, mental health
  - Child care is crucial for achieving those goals – many said CCA was helpful, though some said its help was limited because of copay strains or concern about eligibility
- Focused on child care use/preference of Tribal, Spanish speaking and immigrant/migrant families
- Components of access: setting, days & hours, hours per week, transport time, cost
- Mismatch between preferences and access – only 10% matched all 5 components of access, while almost 30% got 3/5
  - Setting was best match
- Culturally-specific needs: preference for care settings that introduce/maintain Tribal cultures, lack of trust in state-supported programs/centers
- Measuring family perspectives is time-intensive, relational, and ongoing – changing environmental factors make measuring awareness difficult – what is lag time for adjustments?

### **Child Care Access – Measurement Challenges**

Vasanthi Rao, University of South Carolina

- There is a need for numbers to help states create goals, create a baseline for progress monitoring and evaluation, and communicate with legislators
  - Which geographical area to use? The same area could have a 66% deficit or surplus of availability depending on what you use (example: census tract vs county level data)
  - Census tracts are meant to measure roughly equal population, not geography
  - What do you use to determine child care demand? 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)? National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)? Demand – total number of children/how many need child care? For example, 33% is 1 slot for every 3 children
    - What happens if you include relative care? Does that alleviate child care demand?
  - Not all child care demand comes from work-related reasons – educational or social enrichment – should they be counted as part of child care demand?

- South Carolina based on census data in which there is a child in a home in which both parents work

### **Measuring access: Alignment of families' priorities and characteristics of chosen care in Minnesota**

Liz Davis, presenting on behalf of Ashley Hirilall, Child Trends

- Examine effectiveness of policies and practices aimed to promote the multiple dimensions of access for families – looking to understand those using subsidies
- Applied the access framework to a family's experience
  - What are families' preferences?
  - Are those preferences met?
  - Composite score – was it a priority, preference, or neither – did priorities or preferences align with current Arrangement – score measures misalignment
  - “priority” = crucial
  - Higher points for misalignments – priority misalignment weighted higher
  - 3 groups – low, moderate, high alignment – looked at characteristics of each group
  - Lower alignment scores more likely to receive assistance, earn less, be persons of color, would not recommend their provider

### **Identifying, Measuring, and Describing Factors that Influence Access to Childcare**

Herman Knopf, University of Florida

- Does we have enough supply to accommodate demand?
- Index of child care access looks at infrastructure and utilization
- Thesunshineportal.com
- Utilization rates
- Can look at availability vs demand based on quality level – higher quality are in shorter supply than low quality
- Subsidy users are a small fragment of society – if it's bad for those drawing subsidy, how bad is it every day life?
- Data is collected from providers via form broken down by age.
- Not everyone enrolled, waitlist available – might be a labor shortage related ordeal.
  - Can use this to provide targeted information?
- Can CCDF families afford child care?
  - Providers routinely charge the difference between their actual price and subsidy
  - Average monthly parent obligation, percent of household income, federal affordability standard
  - Multiple children = overall price increases/percent of income but actual cost per child is lower

### **4. Brief Summary of Discussion**

- Re: Florida – have you added family perspective? Is there a way to capture family perspective with existing data?
  - Looking at administrative data doesn't give you the WHY, just what happened
  - We need to talk to parents to understand the why behind their decisions – need to talk about how to do it consistently/sustainably through time – how to comprehensively reach out to families without sucking the budget dry
    - Combining access measures using administrative data and maps – take this to communities and get their perspective. If we start from a family survey, does that seem to align with maps/data? Where does it align? Where does it NOT align?
    - Asking families to answer what their ideal situation would look like could be difficult
    - Work demand + non-work demand – family care. Policy answer changes based on what kind of demand is present. Are we trying to change the system for people who HAVE care but less than ideal, or reach the people who don't have anything that works?
    - Mandating data collection at the school district level could give us a lot of data.
    - Desire capacity – ARPA data – how many infants do you INTEND to serve/want to serve. For some providers, their intention is to serve their licensed capacity, or more, or less.
      - More – non-standard hour care.
  - How much of family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care is preferential vs necessity? If supply changes, would that change too?
    - Be careful of terminology – relative care seems to be preference vs FFN is necessity
    - Refugee/immigrant populations would still use relative care – work requirements are pushing them towards formalized care

- Tribal communities – travel restraints, lack of local supply, work etc.
  - How do you survey/understand that informal relative care and get at the real numbers?
    - Point in time research? NM is supporting regional family council coalitions – feedback loops from that may not be as systemic but could be useful
- If supply vs demand preferences are SO misaligned that families give up, are they being captured? Things may look more aligned. Families who had care were surveyed – they still had significant misalignments – but it's missing those that couldn't find anything.
  - Parents aren't looking at it checklist style, but holistically
  - Are there certain misalignments that are more tolerable than others?
    - Example the priority vs preference measure
- Open source tool developed in Illinois – thinking about tools and code so that it can be shared with other states.
  - Would help with consistency – a widely used tool would help with that

## 5. Summary of Key issues raised

- The Access Framework helps put family needs - affordability, meets child's needs, reasonable effort, supports child development – into perspective re: what access means
- Understanding how supply does – or doesn't – meet family child care needs/preferences is essential
- Getting family input is important for understanding demand
- Administrative data can't measure everything – how do we incorporate family perspective into data, especially in a way that state administrators can use?