

E2: Challenges and Opportunities in Studying Child Care and Development Fund Policy Levers' Effects on Early Care and Education Access

Thursday, June 29, 2023

1:45 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. | Archives

1. Descriptive Information

E2: Challenges and Opportunities in Studying Child Care and Development Fund Policy Levers' Effects on Early Care and Education Access

There have been several efforts funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation through the Child Care and Early Education Policy and Research Analysis project and other research partnerships to explore the association between state Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) subsidy policies and trends in outcomes for children, families, and providers. However, there is great variation in when and how states set and implement their subsidy policies, which makes it difficult to isolate how changes to specific subsidy policies are associated with child, family, and provider outcomes. Accounting for the ways in which states change and measure their subsidy policies and the goals underlying the changes is critical for these analyses but difficult to measure. This session will provide an overview of different approaches to studying the effects of policy levers, including a new case study template that can be used by state research partnerships to articulate the history, goals, and nuance around CCDF policy decisions in their state and the impact on outcomes for children, families, and providers. The research team from Maryland will describe the challenges of studying multiple simultaneous or near-simultaneous subsidy policy changes. Minnesota and Oregon will share their experiences using the case study approach, lessons learned, and insights for future CCDF policy analyses.

Presenters

Sarah Daily, Child Trends

Jing Tang, Child Trends

Patti Banghart, Child Trends

Megan Pratt, Oregon State University

Bobbie Weber, Oregon State University

Liz Davis, University of Minnesota

Scribe

Allison Wimmer

Number of Attendees: 18

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.**

- Challenges and Opportunities in Studying Child Care and Development Fund Policy Levers' Effects on Early Care and Education Access

3. Brief Summary of Presentations

Promoting Equal Access to High-Quality Early Care and Education in Maryland: Examining the Role of CCDF Policy Shifts over 5 Years

Jing Tang, Child Trends

- Research Questions:
- Providers' experiences
 - Did supply of child care change following QRIS participation requirements?

- Did the supply of child care change following the increased reimbursement rates & increased income eligibility thresholds
- Families' experiences
 - Are families who use scholarships participating in higher quality programs?

In 2015 providers must participate in EXCELS for scholarship children

2018 increased reimbursement rates

1. Navigating time-delay complexities: challenges in accurately evaluating policy impacts due to implementation lags
 - a. If we want providers to participate in QRIS to serve scholarship children, that takes time
 - b. Causality, decisions are hard to pin down. What causes a family to switch to a higher quality program?
 - c. Addressing data discrepancy linking data
 - d. Interrupted time series analysis (ITSA) helps us distinguish between underlying trends and changes specific to policy, and help communicate this to others
 - i. Didn't use ITSA to analyze families' use of higher-quality programs, because ITSA relies on a change that happens quickly after defined time points, and families' change in choice is more delayed
 - e. Policy changes led to increase in the number of providers serving scholarship children across all provider types
 - f. It became challenging to isolate the effect of individual policies
 - g. Understanding implementation timeline of the policies

CCDF Subsidy Policies and Outcomes: A state study template informed by national & state analyses

Sarah Daily and Patti Banghart, Child Trends

- How have characteristics of participating children, families, and providers changed over time? Subsidy payment policies? Specific policies?
- No consistent pattern of association between subsidy payment policies and trends in subsidy participation
 - No discernable changes in NJ or TN
 - NC saw positive trends despite fewer changes
 - Prompted a case study approach
- Multiple complications – many approaches to use, examining existing data without state context limited questions they could answer/conclusions – this led to the choice to conduct case study
- MN and OR pilot case studies led to development of CCDF conceptual model and state guide
- Guide – broken up into a series of steps
 - Step 1 - understand how outward factors—like the historical, state, and local context can influence CCDF policy implementation and outcomes.
 - Step 2 - series of questions to help states define the goals of their CCDF program
 - Step 3 - helps states describe changes to CCDF policies over time, better understand changes in family/provider participation
 - Step 4 - questions to help states explore program outputs related to access in the logic model, like participation trends, continuity, cost
 - Step 5 – seek input from families and providers directly, understand experiences
 - Step 6 – how are states meeting “outcomes related to equitable access” (aligning with access framework)

Minnesota & Oregon Analyses

Liz Davis, University of Minnesota and Bobbie Weber, Oregon State University

- Goal: study changes in subsidy policies and child, family, and provider trends over time with attention to state context in order to understand what leads to differences in the following program outcomes/outputs: enrollment, stability, type of care used
 - MN: looking at context – how administered, where housed. Talking to leadership. Importance of state legislature. How are other programs related. What is budget? How does that change?
 - Changing policy in same way can have different effects because of state contexts.
 - MN changes – number of families served has fallen 30% since 1999, changing demographics of children in low-income families
 - Declining number of TANF-related families (related to decline in TANF cases)
 - Increased number of centers and providers with quality rating

- Case study helped understand context/what else is changing over time – helped develop further hypotheses, and helped emphasize
- **Bobbie, OSU**
 - OR case study:
 - Context – shared leadership, goal to support employment and improve quality. No TANF transfer
 - Research partnership since early 1990s, state agencies, researchers, providers, sometimes parents
 - High copay
 - All subsidy stopped after employment/parents were told they'd have to pay back any subsidy taken.
 - One month in 2011, three months in 2016 of jobs each
 - Short subsidy spells
 - Movement from license exempt nonrelatives to licensed
 - Majority of children in home based child care (HBCC)
 - Working with state was essential, getting context on governance, budget, policy implementation was so helpful – stated and unstated goals, what they're trying to achieve
 - Accurate budget data was one of largest challenges
 - Budgets are approved but that isn't what gets spent – state agencies can move things around. Which makes expenditure data not worth the effort.
 - Viewed policies and outcomes together and over time – led to aha moments
 - Unwritten but deeply understood goal – serve the poorest person first. No one else before low income. Which has huge implications for people eligible for subsidy
 - Policies and budget interact and determine who is helped – what is the niche of people that CCDF will serve?
 - How do states compensate for insufficient resources – effects all interact
 - OR ran out of budget due to unsustainable generosity, leading to a waitlist. It's important to look at the policies over time. A decline of 39% afterwards – just looking at waitlist implementation misses context of previous policy generosity.
 - **Liz, University of MN**
 - State context is important, so is learning from other states
 - Aha moment – importance of the state goal
 - Both employment and education are in stated goal, but it's housed in DHS/emphasis on workforce. But because people working with the program within DHS cared a lot about supporting and improving quality they developed policies like QRIS and tiered reimbursement to support quality
 - Systems change – case studies are still important because it's helpful to know historical context

Audience question – what was relationship between researcher and state like? Did it change?

- Not changed, only possible because of a strong relationship.
- Looking over time WITH emphasis on policy interactions was something revealed complex interactions and delayed policy effects.

Bobbie – instability in employment can cause shorter spells, despite 12 month eligibility

4. Brief Summary of Discussion

Audience questions – when you hear from the state – who in the state are you connecting with?

One key person with high value/lots of knowledge

Need to look at lived experience of case worker

Perspectives of the case worker/attitude can have huge impact

Consider - What is communication to families about these programs? What information are they being given?

Liz – looking at trends over time across geography may reveal what is different about implementation around the state.

NM audience member: communication is huge, because the people handling it need to know/have capability – implementation problems might be confused for policy issues. Implementation can also have impact on access.

Case study guide:

- Presented in steps
- Goal to help states/providers/case workers/etc. think about goals, purpose. Examine major changes over time, understand historical context. Understand trends in participation, perspectives of involved parties, look at outcomes
 - Access framework
- Will be available soon – in the next few months. Fall-ish. Technical appendix, case studies/discussion guide, and key findings, and logic model/conceptual framework

Audience question – since budget tends to be tied to singular policy instead of a group of policies that interact, do you have anything in your assessment/tool to address this?

- Evidenced-based policy is ideal but not always in practice.

5. Summary of Key issues raised (facilitators are encouraged to spend the last 3-5 minutes of sessions summarizing the key issues raised during the session; bullets below are prompts for capturing the kinds of issues we're looking for)

- Delayed effects can complicate understanding and isolating policy effects
- State administration, history, culture, context can all significantly impact policy and implementation
- Supply/family needs are not static – need to look at changes over time, wholistically

Overall Purpose:

- Capture “flavor”
- Major focus
- New developments
- Controversial topics
- Implications for future research
- Any direct connection to current legislation

Next Steps:

- After the session, please review your notes for typos, complete thoughts, etc.
- Send finalized notes to CCEEPRC@icf.com