Stars Plus: Promoting Quality Improvement for Family Child Care Providers in QRIS using a Community of Practice Model
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Project Description.
The purpose of this project is to study family child care providers' perceptions and participation in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) and to evaluate the impact of a quality improvement framework that is uniquely designed to meet the needs of the family child care population. Nationally, family child care programs participate in QRIS and other state-level quality improvement efforts at much lower levels than center-based programs. This study seeks to address this issue by examining the experiences and perceptions of family child care providers relative to QRIS across two different state systems. Further, the implementation of a Community of Practice model of quality improvement with family child care providers will be studied over time to examine impacts on program quality.

Research questions.
(1) How do family child care providers experience QRIS efforts across the two state systems?
(2) What are the critical features of implementing a Community of Practice for family child care providers in a QRIS context?
(3) How does participation in a Community of Practice influence provider participation in QRIS and quality improvement over time?
(4) How does enhancing a family child care community of practice with curriculum-focused professional development impact program quality?

Sample.
This study is being conducted in two states, Delaware and Kentucky, and includes statewide administrative family child care data from both states. QRIS family child care data has been linked with licensing and subsidy data to examine patterns in participation. Eight focus groups (n=42 providers) have been conducted with family child care providers regarding their perceptions of QRIS. Four focus groups consisted of participating providers and four focus groups consisted of non-participating providers. Six cohorts of providers (n=48 providers) engaging in community of practice meetings are also participating in the study.

Methods. The study uses a mixed methods approach including quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Focus groups of participating and non-participating family child care providers will be conducted annually. Analysis of administrative data will also be conducted annually. The quality of family child care programs will be assessed every six months using a time series design.

Data collection measures and procedures
- *Semi-Structure Focus Groups*. Project specific focus group protocols will be developed to examine provider perceptions of QRIS, benefits and challenges of QRIS, and provider perceptions of quality. All focus groups will be audiotaped and transcribed for analysis.
- *Programs observations.* The *FCCERS-R* (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2007) is being used to assess global quality and the *CHELLO* (Neuman, Dwyer, & Koh, 2007) is being used to assess the quality of language and literacy environments.

- *Administrative Data*. Data from relevant state databases will be aggregated across the two participating states. A common data fields form will be developed to facilitate the merged dataset.

Progress Update.
The project is currently launching year 3 of implementation. Analysis of administrative data suggest participation of participation varies by state. Focus group findings of participators highlight the importance of financial benefits and a growing sense of professionalism as key rationale for family child care providers choosing to participate. Non-participators cite agency overload, a lack of clear benefits, unreasonable expectations, and personal timing as reasons for not yet joining the QRIS.

Implications for policy/practice
Knowledge of effective and appropriate quality improvement strategies for family child care providers can inform statewide systems design of QRIS and other quality improvement efforts. Family child care provider perceptions of quality and QRIS may assist states in more effectively engaging this population.

Implications for research
Family child care programs are an understudied caregiving context in the early childhood literature. Using mixed methods, this study will provide an in-depth examination of this population combining administrative and focus group data. Further, examining the quality of family child care programs over time will be a unique contribution to the field.

For more information:

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