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The Market for Quality Child Care:
Supply, Demand and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS)

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Grant or Contract Number: 90YE0169010

Period of Funding: 2015–2017

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Project Description

This study, *The market for quality child care: Supply, demand and quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS),* will draw on several data sources, including the National Survey of Early Care & Education (NSECE), to explore whether QRIS are promoting fair and equal access to high quality care. Specifically, the aims of the study are to examine how cross-state variation in the structure of QRIS (e.g., financial incentives offered to providers, methods used to promote public awareness of QRIS to parents) relates to: (1) the *supply* of quality early care and education, and (2) parents' *demand* for quality early care and education. The study will also examine whether the supply of and parental demand for early care and education operate similarly or differently based on individual- and community-level characteristics (e.g., proportion of children who are low income, the density of minority and/or immigrant families). The study team includes Dr. Erin Bumgarner and Dr. Michael Lopez (PIs), Dr. Todd Grindal (Director of Analysis), along with independent consultants, Dr. Lisa Gennetian (New York University), Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan (Columbia University), and Dr. Terri Sabol (Northwestern University).

Research Questions

This study is centered around three primary research questions, including:

1. Is the *supply* of quality ECE (as measured by staff qualifications, use of curricula, planning time, and participation in professional development activities) greater in states with specific QRIS components focused on promoting supply (e.g., financial incentives for providers to participate in QRIS, technical assistance supports), compared to states without these specific QRIS components?

2. Is the *demand* for quality ECE (as measured by whether parents gathered information on ECE quality in their search process, and whether quality was a main reason parents selected the care arrangement) greater in states with specific QRIS components focused on promoting demand (e.g., number of methods used to promote public awareness, whether resources are provided in languages other than English), compared to states without these specific QRIS components?

3. To what extent, if at all, do the relationships between QRIS and aspects of the supply of and demand for quality ECE *differ for low-income and culturally/linguistically diverse* families and communities?

Sample

Our analyses draw on multiple publicly-available, nationally-representative data sets, among which the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) will serve as a primary data source. The analyses will use data files from three of the four nationally representative NSECE surveys: the household survey, center-based care provider survey, and the workforce provider survey. The household survey included 11,629 adults (67% response rate), the center-based care provider survey included 8,265 providers (78% response rate), and the workforce provider survey included 5,556 employees (81% response rate).

Methods

The research team will use several analytic techniques to answer the three questions within this study. All analyses will be conducted in

STATA 14 using the *svy* command to account for the complex survey design of NSECE data. First, we will use simple descriptive analyses to explore cross-state variation in supply and demand-focused QRIS components. Next, we will use regression analyses to explore associations between supply and demand-focused QRIS components and the supply and demand-focused dependent variables for each of the research questions, respectively.

Progress Update
The study team is currently finalizing the Analysis Plan, requesting restricted use state ID data from NSECE, and submitting the IRB application.

Implications for policy/practice
Through our outputs and dissemination activities, we expect to make contributions to the early care and education field by providing preliminary evidence of whether QRIS assumptions surrounding supply and demand are indeed supported by empirical data. Further, providing preliminary information on differential impacts of QRIS on diverse populations addresses huge equity concern that is on the top of the child rights policy agenda. By addressing the underlying QRIS supply assumptions, the study aims to also be responsive to the Child care and Development Fund (CCDF) goal of affording states the flexibility needed to develop ECE programs and policies that best suit the needs of children and parents within that state. Further, by exploring the underlying QRIS demand assumptions, this study also aims to inform CCDF's mission to promote parental choice and helps parents make decisions about ECE that best meet the needs of individual families.

Implications for research
This study offers several innovative approaches that span the analysis and dissemination activities. First, this study will utilize the newly available NSECE dataset. This dataset is the first of its kind, offering a nationally representative portrait of the ECE landscape. We will also combine NSECE data with other extant datasets – some of which were also funded by ACF (e.g., the QRIS Compendium). Combining these datasets will improve our ability to conduct high quality analyses that are contemporary, and yet seek to

test long-held assumptions about state-funded QRIS.

Furthermore, this study offers conceptual innovation by taking a different approach (i.e., a market-based approach) to validating QRIS. This study will help the field learn about the variability in QRIS and how such variability impacts supply and demand outcomes. Indeed, these findings will provide valuable information about parent choice in diverse markets, and how market failure may impede the fundamental theory of QRIS, a factor not accounted for in much of the QRIS design. This will contribute to the small but growing body of QRIS research, which is largely state-based. The proposed study, in using nationally representative data, will enable much richer comparisons.

For more information
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