

PROJECT BRIEF

Washington State CCDBG Research Planning Project
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Project Description

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), the designated state lead agency for the administration of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds and programming, is conducting the Washington State CCDBG Research Planning Project.

In our extension of the Washington Phase I project we make use of administrative data, linking data sets on subsidy families, children, and providers. The preliminary analyses completed in Phase I of this project has helped inform examination of the impact of policy changes on continuity of care for children and provider stability, with a specific focus on vulnerable populations. Policy changes of interest include 12-month eligibility and required QRIS participation for licensed providers serving subsidy children who are not yet school age.

This research planning project will help inform a Phase II application to implement the planned research project.

Research Questions

The main goal of the Phase I project has been to determine sufficiency of data availability to answer questions of interest, to define metrics/measures for the outcomes and populations of interest, and plan for a Phase II implementation grant. Vulnerable groups include children/families receiving subsidy and childcare providers serving subsidy families in rural areas, those who are non-English speaking, and those from communities of color. In addition, we define vulnerable groups of children who experience housing instability and those involved in the child welfare system.

Sample

The Research Planning Project includes all of the children receiving subsidy care a year before implementation of policy changes and a year following implementation of policy changes.

Methods

The Research Planning Project has produced descriptive analyses, bivariate comparisons, and regression analyses to inform and determine the best approach for the main research project. In the Phase II Research Project, we hope to build on the initial analyses conducted during the planning phase and will make use of quasi-experimental methods such as difference-in-difference to answer the main questions of impact of policy on the outcomes of interest.

Progress Update

During the planning phase DCYF's research team has refined definitions and measurement around the primary outcome constructs (child continuity, provider stability, and vulnerable groups), constructed preliminary datasets, conducted preliminary analyses, and built capacity to conduct the necessary applied research.

DCYF researchers have refined measures of child continuity and conducted preliminary analyses using longitudinal administrative data to explore the association between the patterns of child care subsidy participation and developmental outcomes among children who would later enroll in the state's preschool program for children from low-income families. Using this approach, researchers identified three primary measures of child continuity that will be used in Phase II work (total months served, maximum continuous spell length, and total number of interruptions), and also identified an additional vulnerable group of children who change providers

across zip codes, and those involved with the child welfare system.

We conducted preliminary provider stability analysis using data from Fiscal Year 2012 – Fiscal Year 2016 to licensed childcare providers who are 1) currently serving subsidy children each year; 2) exiting the subsidy market each year; and 3) entering the subsidy market by a range of provider characteristics.

These analyses indicate that there is a downward trend in the number of subsidy providers in the state serving children who are not yet school age, confirming previous observations of the larger population of licensed providers. In addition, the analyses show that the decrease has been greatest among licensed family home providers.

This level of detail on subsidy providers was not previously available in DCYF in a dataset that could be analyzed to address these questions. This level of detail is necessary to answer questions related to the impact of the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) mandate policy requiring participation among licensed providers serving subsidy children not yet school age.

Implications for policy/practice

Research on the impact of federal and state childcare policy changes on the continuity of care for children and on stability providers (their continued participation on the subsidized childcare market) will inform potential adjustments to these policies. This work provides an opportunity to contribute to policy given the focus on vulnerable children, families, and providers.

Implications for research

This project will contribute to the childcare research literature in multiple ways. For example, by explicitly linking the concept of childcare continuity in the subsidized childcare literature to developmental outcomes of children links childcare and early learning in an important way anticipated by the CCDBG Reauthorization of 2014.

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