

## Evaluation of Massachusetts' Change in Child Care Subsidy Authorization Policy

### Project Team:

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### Project Description.

In response to the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014 regulations, MA Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) is implementing a 12-month authorization period for all subsidy recipient families, with minimal mid-authorization reporting requirements for temporary changes in families' work/education/training activities or income, as long as families' incomes do not exceed 85% of the state's median income. These changes went into effect on March 1, 2019.

The mixed methods study is designed to: 1) document the design of the new subsidy authorization policies and the implementation of the new regulations and administrative practices across service delivery systems; 2) examine the impact of policy changes on the stability of subsidy receipt and care arrangements among families and the enrollment stability of subsidized children among providers; and 3) identify and test improvements to the policies through ongoing lessons learned during this evaluation.

### Research Questions.

- *Policy implementation pre-post changes:* What are the subsidy authorization policies and administrative procedures before policy changes? How are the new regulations implemented across different agencies (TANF, child welfare, CCR&Rs and providers)? Are there gaps between the initial design logic of policy changes and short-run implementation? How are these gaps addressed over time?
- *Policy impacts pre-post changes:* What are the impacts of policy changes on the subsidy and

care stability? What are the impacts of policy changes on providers' subsidized enrollment stability? How does implementation variation help to explain results?

- *Policy implementation improvements post-change:* Are there any identified bottlenecks or areas of improvement after the initial policy implementation? Can a low-cost policy intervention, informed by the implementation study results, positively impact family subsidy stability?
- *Impact variation and equity analysis:* Are there variations in the impacts of policy changes on the subsidy and care stability by selected sub-groups, e.g., eligibility group, child age, immigration status, service regions? Are there variations in the impacts of policy changes on provider enrollment stability by selected provider characteristics, e.g., centers vs. family day care, provider capacity?

### Data/Sample.

- *Children's administrative records:* Two cohorts of children are used to compare outcomes before and after policy changes. Cohort 1 includes all children who began receiving subsidies before the changes and Cohort 2 includes all children who began receiving subsidies after the changes. The sample to test service system improvements will be determined based on the timing and details of the intervention.
- *Provider licensing data:* All licensed child care providers are categorized into two groups. Group 1 includes providers that were in business anytime three years before policy changes.

Group 2 includes providers that were in business anytime three years after policy changes.

- *Policy documents*: All information relating to new regulations is reviewed: EEC presentations, public comments, questions raised at trainings, state budgets and policy guidance.
- *Key informant interviews*: Interviews and feedback surveys are conducted with EEC staff, representatives from all agencies involved in service delivery and community organizations working with subsidy families. EEC trainings and meetings of ad-hoc advisory group are attended.
- *Site visits and interviews*: On-site visits and interviews are conducted with subsidy administrators at CCR&R, TANF and child welfare offices, and parents in two service regions.

**Methods.** This mixed methods study utilizes quantitative and qualitative techniques:

- *Impact Analysis*: The team employs a two-cohort approach, before and after policy changes, to compare differences in outcomes. The analysis uses pooled time series cross-sectional data, pooling each of three years of data pre- and post-policy change, to estimate the extent that policy changes affect outcomes. An analytic method for the policy intervention will be decided after the selection of the intervention
- *Implementation Analysis*: To document the implementation of policy changes and its effectiveness, the team conducts 1) document review, 2) key informant interviews, 3) direct observation (through site visits and attendance at trainings on the policy changes and other related EEC meetings), 4) online feedback through surveys of subsidy administrators involved with implementation (CCR&Rs and contracted child care providers), and 5) interviews with parents.

### **Progress Update.**

- *Impact study*: Data for pre-policy changes were transferred to the evaluation team, and the team is currently in the process of data cleaning, management and generating descriptive results for the pre-policy change period.
- *Implementation study*: The team completed the documentation of baseline implementation of existing subsidy authorization processes across

CCR&R, TANF and child welfare agencies, and gathered multiple stakeholders' perspective about policy components that may increase subsidy stability and potential implementation issues that may result in service bottlenecks.

### **Implications for policy/practice**

This study will contribute much needed rigorous evidence about the implementation and impacts of a key CCDBG regulation change. Results of the study will 1) help to inform states on potential effectiveness of new regulations (through our impact research and findings) and 2) help states identify ways to improve their service delivery systems under the new regulations (through our implementation research and findings).

### **Implications for research**

The study's mixed methods design will 1) empirically test the impact and pathways of effects of the policy change and 2) produce rich contextual information from multiple stakeholders about the implementation of policy changes. The study will also highlight the importance of studying implementation variation and differential impacts for different sub-groups. The study will contribute to a growing body of research using low-cost scalable experiments to test the effects of continuous quality improvement in administrative processes.

### **For more information:**

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