



Investigating the Impact of a State-Wide Unified Professional Development Framework On Quality Environments and Child Outcomes

Abstract

Research indicates that the educational level of early care and education professionals is an essential determinant of the quality of services that young children receive. Early care and education professionals who complete more years of formal training or who receive an early childhood degree at the college level provide higher quality care and education for young children. In fact, the most critical indicators of the quality of an early care and education program and subsequent positive outcomes for the children are the education, compensation, and consistency of the early care and education professionals working in the program (AFT, 2002; Kagan & Newman, 1996; Learning to Care, 1998; North Carolina Partnership, 1998; Whitebrook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989). Low pay and lack of benefits that early care and education professionals receive is a barrier to gaining formal or specialized training. In addition, research documents that low rates of retention of staff has a significant impact on program quality (AFT, 2002; SREB, 2001).

In 2000, the Kentucky General Assembly passed historic early childhood legislation (KIDS NOW) of which a component included the development of a seamless professional development system. The professional development system includes Core Content, articulation, credentials, scholarships and a training framework. This comprehensive professional development system, along with other initiative components in assuring maternal and child health, supporting families, enhancing early care and education, and establishing a support structure, have moved the field of early childhood forward in the state and improved child outcomes. This innovative, comprehensive initiative positions Kentucky well for extending the research for addressing the *Child Care Bureau's priority* related to Professional Development and Training.

The University of Kentucky Interdisciplinary Human Development Institute and Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling and the University of Louisville, in collaboration with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, the Division of Child Care, and the Kentucky Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Development, propose to build on the current statewide evaluation of the state KIDS NOW Initiative by conducting research investigating the degree to which a statewide unified professional development system impacts the educational level of early care and education providers and subsequent classroom quality. Moreover, the influence of these indicators will be examined to determine their impact on child outcomes. The research design will include a multi-site, mixed-methods design with 79 centers and 330 classrooms and teachers that represent three types of classroom settings (child care, Head Start, and state preschool). Child level outcome data will be collected on 395 children across these settings. Data collection will be coordinated with members of the KIDS NOW Evaluation team so that resources are maximized.