



STATUS OF INFANT AND TODDLER PROGRAMS IN MISSOURI

Background

Early childhood is a critical period for cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional development.¹ Research finds that brain development in the early stages of life occurs at rapid rates² (85 % of a child's brain structure is formed by the age of three³), and that cognitively stimulating environments can positively guide brain development and formation during this time.² In fact, research finds that children who attend high quality infant and toddler programs are better prepared to succeed in school and in the workforce than those who did not attend.^{1,4}

Thus, the quality of infant and toddler programs has great implications for children's development. Infant and toddler exposure to cognitively stimulating and nurturing environments can launch children on trajectories of academic success. A useful and widely used tool in assessing the quality of these programs is the Infant/Toddler Environmental Scale (ITERS).⁵ Past research reveals two indicators of high quality infant and toddler programs: (1) teacher's formal education level,⁶ and (2) teacher's salary level.⁷

In 2001-02, researchers and state program partners in four states (i.e., Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska) initiated the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium (MCCRC). One of its tasks was to examine infant and toddler workforce issues and program quality. Across the four states, 2,022 randomly selected child care providers participated in completing extensive surveys. Then, a randomly selected subset of programs was observed. The findings reported below describe the current conditions of *Missouri's* infant and toddler programs (surveys $n = 156$; observations $n = 33$).

Infant and Toddler Teachers

- Average income for infant and toddler teachers is a little under \$15,000/year (less than \$7.20/hour). This is important to note because a teacher's income is the best predictor of program quality in Missouri, as measured by the ITERS.
- Infant and toddler teachers have less education and less training in child development than preschool teachers. They are less likely to report child development or early childhood as their formal education emphasis and are less likely to participate in professional training.
- Less than half of infant and toddler teachers have training in an early childhood curriculum.
- *Only* 12.2% of teachers have a Bachelor's degree (or higher).
- Over 1/4 of infant and toddler teachers would choose other work if given the opportunity.
- Each teacher cares for approximately 4 infants or toddlers at one time.

policy brief

Infant and Toddler Program Quality

- 61% of infant and toddler programs in Missouri scored lower than 5.0, which is the benchmark for “good” quality, according to the ITERS (1-7 scale; 1 = inadequate; 3 = minimal; 5 = good; 7 = excellent).
- Cognitive- and language-related activities emerged as two deficient areas in Missouri’s infant and toddler programs, according to the ITERS (Learning Activities subscale mean = 3.74; Talking/Listening subscale mean = 4.47).

Policy Recommendations

State investment is needed in the education of its youngest citizens by:

- Supporting infant and toddler teachers in obtaining college courses in child development.
- Making infant and toddler curricula accessible and affordable to all infant and toddler teachers.
- Providing a wage supplement based on formal education to teachers so they can afford to stay in the profession.
- Increasing infant toddler teacher training in cognitive and language development.

¹ Burchinal, M.R., & Cryer, D. (2003). Diversity, child care quality, and developmental outcomes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 18, 401-426.

² National Research Council Institute of Medicine. (2000). The developing brain. In J. P. Shonkoff & D. A. Phillips (Eds.), *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development* (pp. 182-223). Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press

³ Voices for America’s Children and the Child and Family Policy Center (2004). *Early learning left out: An examination of public investments in education and development by child age*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

⁴ The Carolina Abecedarian Project. (2003, July). *Early learning, later success: The Abecedarian study (Executive summary)*. Retrieved June 8, 2003, from http://www.fpg.unc.edu/%7Eabc/executive_summary.htm

⁵ Harms, T., Clifford, R. M., & Cryer, D. (1990). *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale*. New York: Teachers College Press

⁶ Thornburg, K.R., Scott, J., & Mayfield, W. (2002). *Teacher education and high quality early education*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri-Columbia Center for Family Policy and Research.

⁷ Thornburg, K.R., & Fuger, K.L. (2003). *House Bill 1519 early childhood project: Final evaluation report*. Columbia and Kansas City, MO: University of Missouri-Columbia Center for Family Policy and Research and University of Missouri-Kansas City Institute for Human Development.

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