



TEACHER EDUCATION AND BENEFITS IN SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

Findings from the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium indicate notable differences in teacher training, compensation, and perceptions of employment depending on the type of community (rural or urban) and whether or not the early childhood program receives child care subsidies.

policy brief

Background

In 2001, university researchers and state program partners in four states (Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska) initiated the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium (MCCRC). The focus of the Consortium's work is to conduct a large longitudinal study on a range of issues associated with child care quality and conditions. Across the four states, a random selection of 2,022 child care providers participated in the study representing licensed infant, toddler, and preschool centers including Head Start and Early Head Start programs, licensed family child care homes, and license-exempt centers. In Missouri, 517 providers participated in telephone interviews.

This brief will discuss several aspects of child care quality directly related to the teaching staff. The findings presented are those that show statistically significant differences related to subsidy status and type of community.

The Child Care Subsidy

The federal government provides funds to the state of Missouri to assist low-income families in paying child care expenses, through Child Care Development Block Grants or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. This supports a parent's effort to obtain child care while seeking employment and/or education.

Since child care plays a pivotal role in parental employment/education as well as a child's healthy growth and development, it is critical to look at the child care subsidy program from multiple perspectives including: parent eligibility requirements for the subsidy, the role of child care providers and access to care, and the quality of subsidized child care.

Overall, findings from the MCCRC study indicate subsidized programs tend to be less likely to offer teacher benefits in the area of health insurance, paid sick leave, and retirement benefits. However, they are more likely to offer a reduction in tuition, for the children of staff. Additionally, teachers in subsidized programs tend to have less formal education. Findings were somewhat different for programs in urban and rural communities.

Subsidized Care in Urban Communities

Findings from the MCCRC study indicate that programs that accept subsidies in urban communities have teachers with less education and fewer benefits than non-subsidized programs. Specifically, in subsidized programs:

- Teachers tend to have less formal education than their counterparts in non-subsidized programs.
- Teachers are less likely to have paid sick leave.

In addition, the teachers are less likely to see their profession as a career in early childhood education and more likely to see it as a way of helping others by watching children. This distinction is important because it provides insight into how the teacher approaches working with the children.

Subsidized Care in Rural Communities

Among rural communities, programs that accept subsidies tend to score lower in three areas related to teacher education and benefits than the subsidized care in urban communities. Specifically, among subsidized programs in rural communities:

- Teachers tend to have less education than teachers in non-subsidized programs.
- Teachers are less likely to have paid sick leave, health insurance, and retirement benefits.
- Teachers tend to participate in fewer training programs.

Teachers in subsidized programs score higher in the area of viewing their job and the mission/purpose of their program as important. This is notable since the teacher's perception of her work, and the importance of it, influences how she approaches her work as an early childhood educator.

Policy Recommendations

When formulating policy regarding the well-being of children, policies should function to enhance both the care and education of children. Therefore:

- Establish standards of teacher education, reflective of good practice in the area of early childhood education, for programs accepting child care subsidies.
- Modify the eligibility requirements for Medicaid so teachers in early childhood programs, and their family members, qualify for health insurance.
- Target the needs of rural child care providers in the area of on-site training and small business consultations.
- Provide incentives, such as tuition assistance and increases in salary, to encourage teachers working in subsidized programs to seek further education.
- Provide on-site training and continued professional development consultations for early childhood educators working in subsidized programs.

(Compiled by Kathy Thornburg, Jacqueline L. Scott, and Wayne Mayfield, 2002)

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