



## OVERALL QUALITY AMONG LICENSED AND LICENSE-EXEMPT EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS

*Findings from the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium indicate a notable difference between licensed and license-exempt early childhood centers in several areas: teacher education and professional development, compensation, and program quality.*

### 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. Across the four states, a random selection of 2,022 child care providers participated in the study representing licensed infant, toddler, and pre-school centers including Head Start and Early Head Start programs, license-exempt centers, and licensed and unlicensed family child care homes. In Missouri, 319 center-based providers participated in telephone interviews. Of those, 77 providers were randomly selected to have a researcher visit her program to conduct an on-site assessment of child care quality.

This brief will discuss several important aspects of early childhood centers. The findings presented are those that show statistically significant differences between licensed and license-exempt centers. Each program was observed for two- to three-hours using the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS) and either the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale or the Infant-Toddler Environmental Rating Scale depending on the age of the children.

### Teacher Education and Professional Development

The findings from this study indicate that early childhood teachers who work in licensed child care centers have more education and participate in more professional development opportunities when compared to teachers who work in license-exempt centers.

**Education:** Teachers in licensed centers more frequently reported that they had completed the process to earn a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and they reported having more formal child development-related education than teachers in license-exempt centers.

**Professional Development:** Teachers in licensed centers more frequently participate in professional development activities than those in license-exempt centers. Teachers in licensed centers were more likely to:

- Belong to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- Attend a training in specific curricula designed for early childhood programs (e.g., Project Construct, High Scope)
- Pursue on-going training opportunities that further their knowledge of child development and their career as an early childhood educator

policy brief

## **Teacher Compensation**

Although compensation is frequently limited to salary, the MCCRC study also examined this from the perspective of benefits. The findings indicate that teachers who work in licensed child care centers received more benefits than teachers who work in license-exempt centers.

**Retirement:** Teachers in licensed child care centers more frequently reported that they participate in a retirement program through their place of employment than teachers in license-exempt centers.

**Health Insurance:** Teachers in licensed child care centers are more likely to receive personal health insurance and health insurance for family members than teachers in license-exempt centers (the cost and scope of the health insurance plans were not examined in this study).

## **Program Quality in Licensed and License-Exempt Centers**

Important differences were identified between licensed and license-exempt centers in two critical areas related to the learning experiences of young children. These include:

**Overall Program Quality:** Licensed centers in urban and rural areas scored higher on overall program quality than license-exempt centers. Further, license-exempt centers in rural communities scored lower than license-exempt centers in urban areas. Licensed centers also scored higher than license-exempt centers on the CIS positive interaction subscale and lower on the detached behavior subscale. This means caregivers had more positive interactions and exhibited less detached behavior as they interacted with the children. Licensed centers participate in the USDA food program more frequently than license-exempt centers.

**Reading to Children:** Teachers in licensed programs were more likely to agree to the following statement than teachers in license-exempt centers, “Every day, every child in your care is read to or receives picture book experiences.”

## **Policy Recommendations**

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

- Ensure all small business owners, including owners of child care facilities, have the opportunity to purchase affordable health insurance for their employees.
- Require training hours in general child development and health and safety practices for persons who work in license-exempt centers.
- Provide on-site training and continued professional development consultations for early childhood educators working in early childhood programs and target rural communities.

(Thornburg, K., Scott, J., Mayfield, W., 2002)

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