6-2018

Paths to QUALITY Evaluation Brief #2: Child Care Providers and Quality Improvement

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Elicker, James, "Paths to QUALITY Evaluation Brief #2: Child Care Providers and Quality Improvement" (2018). Center for Families Publications. Paper 68.
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What is Paths to QUALITY™?

Indiana’s Paths to QUALITY™ child care quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) was launched statewide in 2008 to help parents identify and select quality child care. Paths to QUALITY also recognizes providers who strive to achieve higher quality care, beyond basic state licensing requirements. Paths to QUALITY is a voluntary system for licensed child care centers, licensed family child care homes, and unlicensed registered child care ministry programs. Purdue University was contracted by the state of Indiana to objectively evaluate whether Paths to QUALITY (PTQ) is effectively meeting its goals.

The main goals of Paths to QUALITY are to:

- Improve child care quality for Indiana children and families.
- Recognize providers for their quality achievements.
- Provide a tool for parents to use to select high quality child care.
- Support optimal development and school readiness for children birth to five years.

Primary Evaluation Question about Child Care Provider Quality Improvement:

What are the factors that predict child care providers’ advancement in quality in PTQ?

Research Focus of the Provider Study:

- Track providers’ quality improvement over two years within the PTQ rating system.
- Provider characteristics and attitudes about PTQ and working for program change.
- Provider-coach relationships.
- Types of coaching assistance provided.

Research Methods:

We conducted five interviews over a two-year period with 179 randomly selected child care providers. These providers started the study at PTQ Levels 1, 2, or 3. We also conducted three interviews with each provider’s PTQ coach during the two-year study. Over the full two-years, 150 child care providers (84%) remained in the study.

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Key Findings:

- Voluntary participation in PTQ and providers’ rated quality steadily increased over the past seven years. The number of providers rated at Level 3 and 4 increased and currently outnumber the providers rated Levels 1 and 2. (See Figure for licensed child care centers’ ratings changes.)
  - In 2017, 91% of all licensed child care centers, 71% of all licensed family child care homes, and 23% of all unlicensed registered child care ministry programs were participating in PTQ.

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Conclusions and Policy Recommendations:

- Most PTQ child care providers are motivated to advance to higher rated quality levels, and they say they are confident they will advance. However, only about one-third of the providers actually advanced during two years.
- Level 3 child care providers are least likely to advance. We question whether there are enough incentives to motivate providers to advance from Level 3 to Level 4.
- Important predictors of quality advancement are provider education level, confidence, motivation, years of experience, and professional engagement.
- Many providers, especially licensed family child care homes have “stalled” at Level 1. It is important to understand the motivations and needs of this subgroup when planning system assistance to providers.
- Public recognition is a key non-monetary reward factor for many providers. Therefore, it is important to continue efforts to promote the rewards and benefits of participating and advancing in PTQ.
- We identified four distinct subgroups of providers with who have diverse characteristics, including attitudes about quality improvement, education levels, and coaching needs. Coaching assistance will be most effective if tailored to these individual differences.

Increase in Rated Quality: Distribution of Rated Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010 (n=474)</th>
<th>2017 (n=601)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- During the two-year study, one-third of the providers increased one or more PTQ quality levels. Others stayed at the same level or went down.
- Level 1 and 2 providers were most likely to advance. Level 3 providers were least likely to advance.

- Child care providers most likely to advance were significantly more likely to have the following:
  - Providers with higher levels of education, more years of child care experience, and more engaged professionally (professional organization membership, conference attendance, etc.).
  - Providers that reported being more motivated, intentional, and confident about PTQ advancement.
  - Providers who reported their PTQ coach was more helpful.
  - Providers who were seen by their PTQ coach as “likely to advance.”

The Phase 2 evaluation for Paths to QUALITY was conducted between 2014 and 2018. James Elicker, Professor in Human Development and Family Studies at Purdue University—West Lafayette, Indiana directed the evaluation and led the research team.

This research brief was written by Project Manager Sara Lane and James Elicker. We are grateful for the evaluation project support by the Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning (OECOSL) in the Indiana Family Social Services Administration (FSSA). The results and conclusions in this brief are solely those of the authors and do not imply endorsement by the FSSA or OECOSL. The full final evaluation report is available on the website of the Indiana Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning.