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BRIEF REPORT

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“Reaching for the Stars” and Child Care Quality

Brief Report of Findings From a Statewide Study of Child Care Centers

What is “Reaching for the Stars”?

“Reaching for the Stars” is a quality improvement initiative of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Division of Child Care. Child care programs that meet enhanced quality criteria receive a higher Star rating and higher rates of reimbursement for the provision of child care services. The Star ratings are 1-Star, 1-Star Plus, 2-Star and 3-Star.

Study of Oklahoma Child Care Centers

The findings presented here are from a study of 336 randomly selected Oklahoma child care centers. Participating programs included 98 1-Star, 85 1-Star Plus, 97 2-Star and 56 3-Star or nationally accredited centers. Information was obtained from directors and teachers. Infant/toddler, preschool, and school-age classrooms were observed.

What is the Landscape of Center-Based Care in Oklahoma?

Higher Quality Since “Reaching For the Stars”

Child care quality is better today than it was in 1999 soon after implementing “Reaching for the Stars.” Using a 7-point scale, typical quality scores for preschool classrooms in 1999 were 5.19 and 5.75 in 2002.

Program Auspice and Star Category

Most programs participating in the study were for-profit centers. The highest concentration of for-profit programs was in the 1-Star Plus and 2-Star categories. Few 1-Star Plus centers were non-profit. Publicly sponsored programs were most likely to be 3-Star centers.

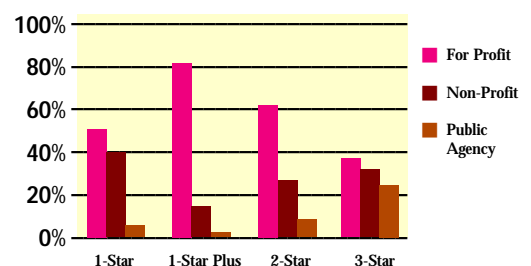
Ratio and Group Size

- Teacher-child ratios are similar in all Star categories.
- Three-Star/Accredited centers have larger group sizes in preschool and school-age classrooms than centers in other Star categories. Most also have two adults working in each classroom.
- In 3-Star/Accredited centers group sizes and teacher-child ratios are associated with center auspice. Group sizes are larger and there are more children per teacher in for-profit than non-profit 3-Star/Accredited centers.

3-Star/Accredited For-Profit vs. Non-Profit

- Infant/toddler classrooms: group sizes are 38% larger, ratios are 30% higher.
- Preschool classrooms: group sizes are 43% larger, ratios are 43% higher.
- School-age classrooms: group sizes are 42% larger, ratios are 52% higher.

Center Auspice By Star Category





Subsidy Enrollment Patterns

- More children receiving subsidies are enrolled in child care than ever before.
- Centers of all Star levels enroll children who are subsidized by DHS.
- The percentage of DHS subsidized children enrolled in 1-Star Plus (55%) and 2-Star centers (49%) is higher than in 1-Star centers (38%).
- Striking differences in subsidized enrollment are associated with both center auspice and Star category.
 - For-profit 3-Star/Accredited centers enroll 74% more children with subsidy than non-profit 3-Star/Accredited centers.
 - In contrast, for-profit 1-Star centers enroll only 19% more children with subsidy than non-profit 1-Star centers.

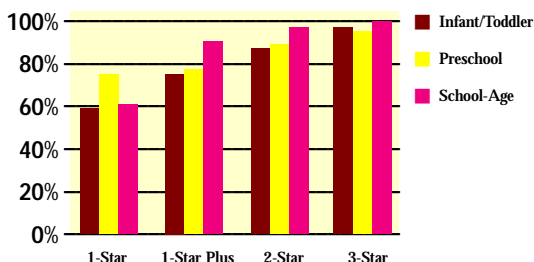
Does Tiered Reimbursement Translate into Different Levels of Child Care Quality in Oklahoma?

Quality of the Environment

The quality of the classroom environment was assessed through sensitivity of teacher-child interactions and global quality of the classroom. The global quality of infant/toddler, preschool and school-age classrooms was assessed with a 1 to 7 scale. Scores of 5 or above represent "good" quality.

- Caregivers in all Star categories engage in sensitive interactions with children of all ages.
- Global quality ratings for infant/toddler, preschool and school-age classrooms in 2-Star and 3-Star/Accredited centers are higher than in 1-Star and 1-Star Plus centers.

"Good" Global Quality: Scores of 5 or Above



Quality of Staff

- Teachers in 3-Star/Accredited centers are paid higher salaries than teachers in centers of other Star levels.
- Directors and teachers in 3-Star/Accredited centers have more formal education and more education focused on early childhood/child development than their counterparts in the other Star levels.
- Staff in 2-Star and 3-Star/Accredited centers participate in more DHS-sponsored quality improvement initiatives than staff in 1-Star and 1-Star Plus centers.

What Requirements of the Stars Program are Most Important for Center Quality?

A statistical model was created to examine the relationship between "Reaching for the Stars" criteria and global center quality. After accounting for subsidy density and licensing regulations, the Stars criteria below were the best predictors of center quality.

- Strong parent involvement: Written communication, parent conferences, parent resource area, participation in program and policy development
- Better master teacher-child ratio: Master teachers have education or certification in child development or early childhood education.
- Clearly defined learning centers in each classroom: Blocks, dramatic play, art, books, and manipulatives



For details on the "Reaching for the Stars" criteria see: www.okdhs.org/childcare

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For additional information on this study see the ECCO website: www.ou.edu/ecco