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Utilizing a Statewide Training System to Improve Child Day Care Quality

Richard Fiene

This article describes Pennsylvania's comprehensive child day care and early childhood development training system, with particular attention to ECELS—the Early Childhood Education Linkage System of the Pennsylvania chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics—and its immunization initiative. The initiative was established with the state Bureau of Child Day Care Services to improve the overall immunization status of all children in child day care in Pennsylvania. An early childhood education/child day care quality improvement model is briefly discussed to demonstrate how licensing/monitoring data can be tied to a training and technical assistance program.

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With the advent of the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) in 1991, states have implemented initiatives to promote program quality that range from loans to child day care programs to large-scale training systems.* Allowable projects are in five major areas: resource and referral activities, training, licensing improvement, staff salaries, and child day care loans. Many states have used this funding to establish and implement training systems [Morgan et al. 1993].

This article describes Pennsylvania's development of a comprehensive child care and early childhood development training system and the system's initial results, followed by a discussion of the Early Childhood Education Linkage System (ECELS) of the Pennsylvania chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The Pennsylvania chapter has established an innovative system for monitoring and improving childhood immunization status that can serve as a model of how states can link licensing/monitoring data to technical assistance/training system interventions [Fiene 1992].

In 1992, the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) instituted several collaborative projects to increase training opportunities for child care providers in the Commonwealth. These initiatives were begun for several reasons: (1) DPW wanted to assure that high-quality training would continue to be offered; (2) periodic, ongoing training (six hours per calendar year) was mandated by DPW for all child care workers; and (3) DPW was able to subsidize the training to make it affordable for more child care providers. Pennsylvania used federal and state funds¹ during state fiscal year 1991–1992 to support the statewide training system. Only Texas spent more CCDBG funds on training [Morgan et al. 1993] than Pennsylvania.

*In 1991, CCDBG set aside 6.25% of \$731,915,000 of federal funds for program quality initiatives.

During 1992–1993, Pennsylvania's training system was expanded and renamed the Child Care and Early Childhood Development (CCECD) training system. Approximately 50,000 training encounters were provided during that period, garnering immediate national attention for Pennsylvania for its training initiatives. ECELS, the Keystone University Research Corporation Home-Based Project, and the Southeast Regional School-Age Training Project were all recognized nationally for their innovation and leadership in the early childhood development and child day care training field [Morgan et al. 1993]. It is these initiatives that are described in this article.

During 1993–1994, the major training initiatives continued, with much fine tuning and expansion in areas such as mentoring projects with local programs, additional articulation agreements with local colleges and universities, experimentation with video training, increased input from the Child Care and Early Childhood Development Training Advisory Committee, shared resources and information with the Alliance of Early Childhood Professional Preparation (the state higher education advisory committee) and the Family-Focused Early Intervention System, and expansion of technical assistance opportunities. In all, approximately 40,000 training encounters were provided by eight training contractors during 1993–1994.

Some training programs were arranged or delivered by Marywood College, Keystone Junior College, and Pennsylvania State University. A school-based program was housed within the Central Intermediate Unit in the state college area. Other training programs were housed with nonprofit or corporate entities, such as Community Services for Children, Keystone University Research Corporation, Pittsburgh YMCA, Montgomery Child Care Association, and the Pennsylvania chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Funding and contracts were awarded on a competitive basis.

Other major initiatives were developed as a result of the Pennsylvania Child Care and Early Childhood Development

(CCECD) training system. An early childhood development curriculum continues to be refined and expanded as courses are offered to graduate level teachers and directors. The Child Development Associate (CDA) scholarship program continues to grow. A new early childhood education loan forgiveness program has been instituted and should attract additional highly qualified staff members to teach in child care programs.

At present, training contractors offer classes and courses to child day care staff members across Pennsylvania in the following seven categories: developmentally appropriate practices; emergent literacy; child development; discipline, growth-producing relationships, and interpersonal skill development; health and safety; program administration; and collaboration with community resources and parents.

A description of each of the initiatives and projects follows, with types of services, targeted populations, and service areas noted. The Early Childhood Education Linkage System (ECELS) is highlighted because its major immunization initiative is of special interest to state agencies.

The CCECD Training System

Child Day Care Centers

Licensed child day care centers employ the greatest number of child day care staff. Two providers of training are responsible for assuring that high-quality training sessions on child development and child care operations are available and accessible to child care center staff members (teachers, aides, directors, etc.). Louise Child Care (the Training Connection) serves the western and central regions of Pennsylvania (47 of its 67 counties); Marywood College serves eastern Pennsylvania (the remaining 20 counties).

From July 1993 to June 1994, these two training contracts served over 25,000 child day care employees. Trainees could choose from several options: general workshops, agency-specific

workshops, subsidized early childhood college courses, on-site mentoring sessions, and subsidized conference attendance.

To provide the many training programs needed for licensed child care teaching staff members and to maintain cost-effectiveness, Marywood College and the Training Connection forged partnerships with other organizations and subcontractors. Using regionalized subcontractors enabled them to hold training sessions simultaneously at several sites. Both Marywood College and the Training Connection provided training outlines to subcontractors and reviewed course materials to ensure the quality and consistency of training. All curriculum content was approved by the State Training Director. As of January 1995, over 400 trainers were in the CCECD training system.

Additionally, the two training providers developed articulation agreements (contractual arrangements with local colleges and universities) with several colleges to offer child day care staff members college credits for attending a specified series of training workshops. Thus, child care staff members could advance on the career ladder while implementing quality programs and practices. Helping staff members obtain training necessary for promotion within the child day care and early childhood education field may reduce staff turnover.

School-Age Child Day Care

School-age child care (SACC) programs were developed to provide children from five to 15 years of age with a safe and developmentally appropriate alternative to nonsupervised care. Child day care for school-age children is provided through a diverse network of organizations that includes churches, synagogues, Boys and Girls Clubs, YM/YWCAs, traditional child day care centers, family child care homes, municipal recreation departments, schools, community organizations, and neighborhood centers.

The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare funds four organizations to implement, administer, and assure the quality of

services for latchkey children: Community Services for Children (Northeast Region Training Contractor), Day Care Association of Montgomery County (Southeast Region Training Contractor), YMCA of Pittsburgh (Western Region Training Contractor), and Central Intermediate Unit (Central Region Training Contractor). All offer training and technical assistance for quality improvement of existing SACC programs. The four organizations have conducted 300 training programs, educating 4,466 staff members.

Family Child Care Homes

A significant number of children in Pennsylvania receive child day care services in the homes of family child care providers rather than in child day care centers and nursery schools. These providers run small programs that serve from four to as many as 12 children. Home-based providers may receive training through workshops, a training refund program, or a Child Development Associate (CDA) scholarship assistance program [Fiene 1993].

Keystone University Research Corporation (KURC) has served family child care providers with refund/voucher and CDA scholarship programs for over seven years. The refund/voucher program allows providers to attend preapproved training programs of their choice and submit bills for reasonable costs to KURC for reimbursement. Acceptable training options include conferences, seminars, college courses (reimbursed at \$250 per course), workshops, and on-site training. To receive reimbursement, providers must submit evidence of their family child care home registration (family child care homes) or license (group child day care homes), the training must be "appropriate," and the training must last at least six hours. Appropriate training topics include health matters such as first aid and CPR, child development, business management, working with parents, and developmentally appropriate practices and curriculum. A total of 896 reimbursements were approved in 1993–1994.

For child care providers and staff members with low incomes, KURC offers scholarships and scholarship assistance to

help them obtain a CDA credential. The CDA credential indicates that the provider has completed a prescribed course or series of training sessions related to child day care and early childhood education. During 1993–1994, 176 child care staff members and providers received scholarships or financial assistance.

In addition to these ongoing services, KURC offered 300 direct training workshops. With the addition of more direct trainers, the program was able to serve a total of 4,865 child care employees in 1993–1994. KURC also distributes a newsletter and operates a toll-free telephone hotline to make information accessible to child day care providers. The use of both services continued to increase during 1993–1994.

Many families purchase child day care services from unregulated and/or minimally certified providers. It is difficult to assess, improve, or maintain quality at these sites because they rarely come to the attention of officials. In fact, it is virtually impossible to determine the number of providers who operate this way. During the 1992–1993 fiscal year, the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare became partners with the Penn State Cooperative Extension to implement the Better Kid Care program in response to the needs of these parents and providers.

The Better Kid Care program offers educational materials—a kit with information on health and safety, child development, and age-appropriate activities for children, along with six learn-at-home programs called "Caring for Kids." Child care workers or parents can obtain the materials by writing or calling, via toll-free hotline, the Penn State Extension offices, which are located in all 67 counties in Pennsylvania. Parents are encouraged to share information with child care providers who might be reluctant to draw attention to themselves by requesting information. More than 5,000 people were enrolled in the project during 1993–1994.

In addition, the 67 Penn State Cooperative Extension county offices conducted workshops for child care providers. Training in various topics in early childhood development and education was provided to more than 2,400 people.

Third-Party Evaluation

A third-party evaluation [Johnson 1994] is being completed at this writing on the overall CCECD system. It has been apparent that the six hours of inservice training per year are not adequate to produce significant program improvements in the classroom by teachers. Regulatory recommendations from the evaluation call for an increase in the six hours of inservice training to the 24 hours per year recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children or—preferably—to the 40 hours per year recommended by the Child Welfare League of America.

The evaluation does indicate improvement in classroom implementation of developmentally appropriate practices on the part of staff members who had 20 or more hours of classes and/or workshops on these subjects. Staff members who had fewer than 20 hours of this kind of training did not demonstrate the same level of change in their classroom implementation skills—a key finding.

The evaluation has also uncovered a need to tie training to ongoing monitoring and licensing. This interface of data and technical assistance, which few states use, can serve as a critical link in improving the quality of all child care programs. ECELS—the Early Childhood Education Linkage System—a national demonstration project, has been successful in providing many of these linkages.

The Early Childhood Education Linkage System

The Early Childhood Education Linkage System (ECELS), funded in part by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare and the Pennsylvania Department of Health, collaborates with public and private agencies to improve the well-being of children in the state's early childhood programs. ECELS services include a registry of professional health consultants for technical assistance and local linkage with child care providers; a toll-free information hotline; a free lending library; a quarterly newsletter;

and an arrangement of linkages among community-based trainers and child day care providers.

The early childhood program quality improvement model (PQIM) drawn from ECELS is a conceptual model for interfacing the child care licensing system with the training and technical assistance system [Fiene 1992]. The licensing system literally drives the training and technical assistance system by the use of information derived from licensing data. Appropriate technical assistance and training modalities can be targeted to major areas of noncompliance with regulations. Interventions can be determined by type of provider (center-based or home-based), by geographic area (urban or rural), by size of program, and so on.

Training opportunities include information on evaluating data from immunization and preventive health service records, preventing traffic injuries, and promoting general health and safety. The American Red Cross Child Care Course and self-learning modules on health and safety for family child care providers are also offered. Child day care providers participated in 7,772 units of ECELS training during 1993–1994.

Other noteworthy accomplishments of ECELS in 1993–94 included responding to over 4,000 requests for health information; conference presentations on infection control, health policies, and illness prevention; publication of the quarterly HEALTH LINK newsletter (circulation 15,000+); and recruitment of health professional consultants to assist child day care programs with specific health-related issues and problems.

The Immunization Initiative

The immunization initiative is the product of a unique relationship between ECELS and Pennsylvania. The Bureau of Child Day Care Services licensing staff regularly collects licensing information from providers of child day care services, including sampling records to check the immunization status of children. Over the past several years, the state licensing office determined, both from a sample of programs studied by ECELS and from the

ongoing efforts of the licensing staff, that children in child day care settings lacked up-to-date immunizations, contrary to the state's child day care regulations. Regulatory compliance was only 80% to 85% statewide, in contrast to a national goal of 95% for group child day care settings. Based upon these results, a partnership was forged between the Pennsylvania Bureau of Child Day Care Services and ECELS to increase compliance regarding immunizations in child day care programs.

On a quarterly basis, data gathered by the licensing staff are aggregated by the research division of the bureau and shared with ECELS for follow-up. ECELS follows up with those programs that have the greatest noncompliance with immunization regulations and provides technical assistance and linkage to pediatric services in the community. The director of ECELS is a past president of the Pennsylvania chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Her success in following up with her peers is much greater than what licensing staff members might achieve with the same pediatricians.

This monitoring system has great potential, especially when the federal government's CCDBG efforts to increase the monitoring of the immunization status of children in federally supported child day care are considered. It is an example of how licensing data can be used to drive the focus of a state's training and technical assistance efforts, a subject that has been reviewed extensively [Fiene & Nixon 1985; Fiene 1988, 1992; Aronson 1994] in the early childhood program quality research literature.

The early childhood program quality improvement model has other components that can be used to improve programs that are not a formal part of the training and technical assistance system. Self-assessment as used in accreditation of early childhood programs provides one example of such an approach; site inspection findings from licensing observations or through Head Start performance reviews is another. This program quality improvement model offers a multidimensional approach to the quality enhancement of early childhood programs. A critical

component of the model is the linking of data from monitoring systems to training and technical assistance systems so that interventions can be customized to the needs of individual programs.

Conclusion

The Pennsylvania Child Care and Early Childhood Development training system has offered all early childhood personnel numerous training opportunities to achieve quality practice. Focus groups have been established to obtain feedback from trainees, providers, agencies, and trainers on improving the existing system. Moving toward a seamless early child care and education professional development system is the goal. Expansion of articulation agreements with local colleges and universities is occurring throughout the state. Additional linkages between the licensing and technical assistance/training systems will be explored.

As is true with any statewide training system, constant improvements are always being considered. The Pennsylvania CCECD training system is no exception. For fiscal year 1995–1996, the training system has been locally based by using the Penn State University Cooperative Extension offices as resource training centers in each county. This administrative change moves Pennsylvania's CCECD training system one step closer to a seamless early child care and education professional development system by establishing one statewide training contractor where previously there were eight.

Finally, ECELS's successful tying of licensing/monitoring data to a technical assistance/training system demonstrates that this approach is both cost efficient and effective for program quality improvement in child day care and early childhood programs. The new National Health and Safety Performance Standards for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs [American Public Health Association/American Academy of Pediatrics 1992] are being given priority by the National Center for the Education in

Maternal and Child Health. With selected high-priority standards, it will be possible to target technical assistance and training to key risk areas. ♦

Note

1. Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds (\$2,105,178) as well as state funds (\$617,607) and other federal funding (Child Development Associate (CDA) Scholarship funds = \$100,000 and federal Dependent Care Block Grant funds = \$366,000) were used to fund the Pennsylvania Child Care/Early Childhood Development (CCECD) training system. The CCDBG block grant is a major child care and early childhood development federal funding stream that provides direct child day care service funds and program quality funds to states. The CDA program offers scholarships to low-income and needy students who are pursuing their CDA credential. The Dependent Care Block Grant is a federal funding stream earmarked for programs for school-age children.

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