State of Oklahoma
Pilot Early Childhood Program
Phase II Evaluation
2008-2009

Executive Summary

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August 2009 / Revised October 2009

Prepared for:
State Pilot Program 2009 Evaluation Results

Program Description
In 2006 the Oklahoma State Legislature directed the State Board of Education to establish a pilot infant and toddler program (hereafter called “Pilot Program”) funded through private donations and state funds to serve at-risk children and their families in at least one rural and one urban area of the state. The Request for Proposals (RFP) developed by the Oklahoma State Department of Education (2006) specified varying levels of educational preparation for classroom personnel, family support services with specified caseloads, and continual professional development. Community Action Project of Tulsa County (CAPTC) was awarded the grant contract and during fiscal year 2007 (July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007) they collaborated with 5 other early childhood agencies to implement high quality infant and toddler services in 13 sites across Oklahoma.

The Pilot Program reached 90 classrooms in June 2007, and grew to 139 in June 2008, and 138 in June 2009. Currently, these classrooms are administered by 13 agencies operating in a variety of communities across Oklahoma. These providers offer services to 138 classrooms and 1,438 children through age 3 from families whose incomes are 185% or less of the federal poverty level. Nine of the participating providers are non-profit organizations (six of whom operate Early Head Start and/or Head Start programs), two providers are private/for-profits, one is a Tribal government, and one is public school district.

Program Evaluation
CAPTC, as the lead grantee for the Pilot Program, had dual goals for program evaluation: To inform continuous program improvement and to document child and family outcomes. To achieve these goals, CAPTC collaborated with the Early Childhood Education Institute at the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa to design and implement a three-phase evaluation.

For Phase I evaluation, which is ongoing, all Pilot Program sites report on grant requirements such as teacher qualifications, teacher-child ratios, and hours of operation. These reports are submitted monthly to CAPTC who stores and monitors the information.

The focus of Phase II evaluation, implemented with Pilot Program sites in their second year of operation, is to assess program quality and to use this data to inform action plans for continuous program improvements. The major evaluation question is: What is the quality of Pilot Program-funded classrooms?

To answer this Phase II evaluation question concerning program quality, Early Childhood Education Institute evaluators randomly selected Pilot Program classrooms and administered tools commonly used to assess quality in infant and toddler classrooms. A specially trained
observer spent at least 3 hours of observation time per classroom while administering these measures.

**Evaluation Results for 2008-09: Overall Classroom Quality**

During the Winter of 2009, 22 State Pilot Program classrooms (59% of the total of 37 classrooms) in their second year of participation in the Statewide Pilot Program were observed for 3 hours and assessed using the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised Edition or ITERS-R (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2003). The ITERS-R has 35 items divided into seven subscales (Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Listening and Talking, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure, and Parents and Staff) that assess overall quality of programs for children from birth to 30 months of age. The anchor ratings associated with the ITERS-R scores are: 1=Inadequate, 3=Minimal, 5=Good, 7=Excellent.

Overall, as displayed on the table above, the total average ITERS-R score was 4.30 across the 22 observed State Pilot Program classrooms. This rating is similar to the average of 4.43 found by Goelman et al. (2006) and slightly lower than the average of 5.0 found in the Early Head Start National Study (Administration for Children and Families, 2006).
Average scores of 5 ("good") or greater were evident on 3 of the 7 subscales (Listening and Talking, Interaction, and Parents and Staff). Specifically, the following percentages of classrooms attained scores of 5, "good", or higher on these three subscales:

- 54.5% (n=12) on Listening and Talking
- 68.2% (n=15) on Interaction
- 86.4% (n=19) on Parents and Staff

The Listening and Talking and Interaction subscales measure important features of early childhood settings. Specifically, these subscales assess staff-child interactions, guidance strategies, and staff efforts to support children in using and understanding language. The Parents and Staff subscale looks at programs’ provisions for welcoming parents and the personal and professional needs of staff as well as staff supervision, continuity, and opportunities for personal growth.

Because an ITERS score of 5 is considered "good", the number of classrooms scoring below 5 is of interest when targeting quality improvement efforts. Of the 22 classrooms observed, the following percentages of classrooms scored below 5 or "good":

- 78.4% (n=17) on Space and Furnishings
- 100% (n=22) on Personal Care Routines
- 45.5% (n=10) on Listening and Talking
- 90.9% (n=20) on Activities
- 32% (n=7) on Interaction
- 86.4% (n=19) on Program Structure
- 13.6% (n=3) on Parents and Staff

Thus, while the total average ITERS-R score of 4.3 fell between the ratings of "minimal" and "good", the percentages of classrooms receiving subscale scores less than 5 indicate the need for additional program development and strengthening. Notable areas for improvement include Personal Care Routines (health and safety practices), Activities (purposeful learning activities for children), Program Structure (scheduling blocks of time for free play indoors and outdoors), and Space and Furnishings (appropriate furnishings, room arrangements, and displays for young children). These results have been shared with program administrators and were used to drive professional development programming.

Evaluation Results for 2008-09: Teacher Sensitivity

During the Winter of 2009, the 22 State Pilot Program classrooms (59% of the total of 37 classrooms) in their second year of participation with the Statewide Pilot Program were also assessed using the Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale or Arnett (Arnett, 1989). The Arnett is a
A 26-item scale that assesses the quality and content of the interactions between teacher and child. The items measure the emotional tone, discipline style, and responsiveness of the caregiver in the classroom. When using the Arnett, the observer rates the extent to which the caregiver exhibits the behavior described in the item on the following 4-point scale: 4=Very much, 3=Quite a bit, 2=Somewhat, 1=Not at all.

Overall, as displayed on the previous table, the staff were rated as "sensitive" with a rating of 3.15 on the 4-point scale. Staff were rated “not at all” harsh or detached, with mean scores of 1.14 and 1.16 respectively. Similar to our findings, Goelman et al (2006) reports means of 3.28 for sensitivity, 1.14 for harshness and 1.41 for detachment. The mean rating of 3.15 on sensitivity is also consistent with the means of 3.4 to 3.5 found in the Early Head Start classrooms that participated in the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project (Administration for Children and Families, 2006).

Scores of 4 (very much) and 3 (quite a bit) on the Harshness and Detachment subscales and scores of 2 (somewhat) and 1 (not at all) on the Sensitive subscale were targeted for quality improvement efforts. Again, these results were shared with program administrators to inform future State Pilot Program professional development programming.
Evaluation Results for 2008-09: Conclusions
Taken together, these two measures administered by independent evaluators suggest adequate to good program quality in the State Pilot Program sites during 2008-09. To reiterate, the ITERS-R average Total Score of 4.3 fell between “minimal” and “good” overall quality; and the Arnett results documented “sensitive” staff. However, given both measures were slightly lower than the findings of the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project (Administration for Children and Families, 2004), the State Pilot Program sites should continue to strive for improvements.

These results did drive Pilot Program professional development. In conjunction with the Pilot Program professional development experts, a plan was implemented to use the ITERS-R and Arnett results to inform and focus individual mentoring and large group trainings. The professional development experts delivered feedback to the observed sites that was based on their unique ITERS-R and Arnett results.

Next Steps
- Examine trends from 2007-08 and 2008-09 Phase II classroom quality measures to more fully inform future State Pilot Program design. For example, examine common areas requiring improvement and design targeted intervention.
- Examine Phase III child outcome preliminary results to contextualize classroom quality and relationship to child outcomes.
REFERENCES


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