



TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS

Supplementary Information Provided for Consideration of Florida's Universal Pre-Kindergarten Implementation

The implementation of Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) in Florida is a critical issue with critically tangible meaning for the lives of children and families. Research in this area and similar initiatives in other states can inform discussion as policymakers, key stakeholders, and community members prepare to make decisions on the logistics of UPK. What follows are general concepts and findings related to quality care and specifically the issue of teacher qualifications.

INTRODUCTION

Quality care, no matter how it is defined, is logically correlated with the provision of care and specifically, the teacher. There are many characteristics that are universal to high quality teachers. Quality teachers, for example, are responsive to children's needs, understand the significance of building and enhancing early learning experiences, individualize their approach to children's learning, provide choices and not limitations, and willingly share the direction of learning by engaging with children and following children's natural interests (McGraw-Hill Education, 2003; National Research Council, 2000; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2000). The criteria for recruitment and retention of teachers who have knowledge and expertise in child development (typical and atypical), cultural sensitivity, literacy, numeracy, cognitive processes, appropriate learning environments, observation, and family involvement is complicated and a finite formula cannot be extracted from current research and practice. What can be discerned is an awareness of the need for sensitivity related to this issue and knowledge that criteria must be carefully leveled so as to not disregard quality sources of teachers.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Relative to early care and education, professional development is a broad term that refers to the amount of time teachers spend on becoming educated in theory and practice. Professional development activities may include formal education, in-service training

hours, training that is not mandated or for credit, or a combination of these. Frequent debate surrounds the significance of each on teacher quality. Research in this area enlightens discussion, but does not provide finite solutions. The National Research Council released *Who Cares for America's Children?* in which researchers concluded that overall education and training specific to child development are related to positive outcomes for children, with training as the more important factor (1990). Specific to Florida, authors of The Florida Child Care Improvement Study reported that an increase in required professional preparation and an increase in training hours for teachers resulted in improved overall quality, as well as teacher responsiveness (Howes, Galinsky, Shinn, Sibley, Abbott-Shim, & McCarthy, 1998). Overall, researchers have concluded that years of educational experience, formal or otherwise, have a positive correlation with teacher quality. Therefore, in studies related to this issue, researchers conclude that generally teachers with bachelor degrees provide higher quality care and interactions.

POLICY CONSTRAINTS

While it can be concluded from the literature that a correlation exists between level of education attained and quality of care provided, consideration must be given to the existing teacher shortage in Florida and the reality of implementing a system requiring a four-year college degree. A paper was developed for the State Board of Education in Florida by the Deputy Commissioner for Planning, Budgeting, and Management in the Office of Strategy Planning addressing the various areas of critical teacher shortage. Among them were Reading and Exceptional Student Education Program teaching staff (2001). The impact of teacher qualification standards implemented for UPK must be further investigated to ensure current education programs not be hampered and quality early childhood staff without a four-year degree not be overlooked. Early childhood educator expertise and knowledge about child development is critical to

children's learning and care. Another consideration is the reality that it is difficult to hire and retain quality staff in early care and education, and it is important to recognize that one model may not serve the professional needs of the field. Forethought of early childhood educator expertise is therefore significant on many levels. For this reason, workforce development is a fundamental issue related to the implementation of UPK.

STATE PRE-KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVES OR COMMONLY/ CURRENTLY ACCEPTED CRITERIA

There is not a uniform approach related to teacher qualifications in states offering pre-kindergarten services. There are however, commonalities in requirements. The majority of states with pre-kindergarten initiatives seemingly recognize the importance of educational preparation and set some minimum requirements for training or related experience for teachers in pre-kindergarten programs (Blank & Mitchell, 2001). Additionally, most states offering pre-kindergarten services require teachers to receive ongoing training (Barnett, 2003; Blank & Mitchell, 2001). However, there is a large variance in expectations for training and education among states.

From this information, it can be discerned that teacher qualifications are an important structural component for implementation of universal pre-kindergarten, but that a model for educational requirements has not been established in practice or research. As a basis for consideration in determining teacher qualifications, requirements for the Office of School Readiness in Georgia are provided below.

The Georgia model of pre-kindergarten services requires that lead teachers:

- be certified in early childhood, elementary education, early childhood/interrelated special education
- have a four-year college degree in a related field (early childhood, education, family consumer sciences)
- have a four-year college degree in psychology or social work *plus* additional early childhood education (Child Development Associate, associate degree in early childhood education, Montessori diploma, valid nationally recognized Child Care Professional credential)
- have a technical institute diploma/degree, associate degree, or Montessori diploma

The Georgia model of pre-kindergarten services requires that teaching assistants:

- be at least 21 years of age
- possess a high school diploma or its equivalent
- have experience working with children younger than five years of age
- possess proficient communication skills

Additionally, all levels of service related to pre-kindergarten have mandatory training annually. The amount of time is unspecified, but the training content is determined by the Office of School Readiness and certificates of completion are kept on file for each teacher.

BENCHMARKS OF PROGRESS IN FLORIDA

What follows below are the current benchmarks of progress in Florida relative to training and education in birth to five services.

State Mandated Coursework

Minimum Training Requirements: All child care facility personnel, except volunteers who work less than 40 hours per month, must complete and pass a competency exam for the department's approved 40-hour Introductory Training. Child care facility personnel must begin this training within 90 days from the date of employment and complete both Part I and Part II within one year from the date the training began.

Introductory Training Part I (30 hours)

Introduction to Child Care (20 hrs)

- State and Local Rules and Regulations
- Health, Safety and Nutrition
- Identifying and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect
- Child Growth & Development

Behavioral Observation & Screening (10 hrs)

Introductory Training Specialized Modules

Part II (10 hours)

- Infant and Toddler Appropriate Practices
- Preschool Appropriate Practices
- Special Needs Appropriate Practices
- School-Age Appropriate Practices
- Owner-Operator

Child Development Associate Equivalency (CDA Equivalency)

The CDA Equivalency is a DCF approved training program that provides a similar level of training as the CDA and meets licensing requirements.

Child Development Associate (CDA)

A Child Development Associate is a national credential, recognized throughout the United States, which is issued by the Council for Professional Recognition in Washington, DC. www.cdacouncil.org

Director Credential

The Director Credential is a comprehensive credentialing program consisting of educational and experiential requirements at two levels, foundational and advanced. www.flchild.com

Associate of Science Degree (A.S. Degree)

An Associate of Science program provides students with the knowledge necessary to perform and excel in a particular profession. Some of the credits earned in an A.S. degree program can be transferred to a four-year college or university. The A.S. curriculum is not considered equal to the first two years of a bachelor's degree. www.dcc.firn.edu

Associate of Arts Degree (A.A. Degree)

An Associate of Arts program is a 60-hour course of study that covers the core materials needed to complete the first two years of a four-year bachelor's degree.

Bachelor's Degree

A Bachelor's Degree is awarded after 120 hours of education at a four year College or University.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES/INITIATIVES

With the implementation of UPK, provisions for professional development are necessary in order to ensure quality programming. If Florida is to systematically increase demands for education and training, a configuration supporting the continuation of education must be developed. Outlined below are professional development strategies or initiatives currently in place that support the attainment of higher education and increased skills for early care and education professionals.

Large-Scale Teacher Training

Recently the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation released a report on a three-year research study, *A Systemwide Approach to Improving Early Childhood Program Quality in the Detroit Metropolitan Area*. Evaluators of the project reported the results of a successful large-scale initiative designed to increase the number of skilled teachers through training. The training project was designed to expand the knowledge and skills of teachers, certify trainers to mentor and support classrooms, and certify teachers at exemplary centers to provide models for other early childhood agencies in the surrounding area (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2003). Researchers found this approach to training results in positive quality enhancements to the programs and increased knowledge and skills for teachers. A broad-based training plan would provide flexibility and leadership opportunities from a state-level perspective, while ensuring mandated training for UPK staff is designed and geared toward increased competencies in the classroom.

T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Scholarship Program

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program offers scholarships to child care professionals who want to earn credentials or degrees in early childhood education. The T.E.A.C.H. Program links training, compensation and commitment to improving the quality of early childhood care and education experiences for young children and their families. It provides scholarships for early childhood caregivers and center directors to work toward earning an A.S. degree in Child Development and Education, a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, a CDA equivalency or a Director Credential. T.E.A.C.H. involves a partnership for the sharing of expenses by the caregiver receiving the scholarship, the sponsoring child care center or family child care home, and the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship program. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship program provides the majority of the cost of tuition and books, per semester travel stipend for most participants, a bonus for caregivers and directors who complete their contract, and counseling and administrative support for the program. With additional funding, this program could expand to support continued education toward a four-year college degree in the area of early childhood education or a related field.

Child Care WAGES® Florida Project

The Child Care WAGES® Florida Project is designed to improve quality by reducing turnover and encouraging the continued education of early care and education teachers (including center staff and family child care providers). This program provides education-based salary supplements to low-paid teachers (centers and family child care homes) providing services birth to five.

Designed to provide stable relationships for preschool children and their families with better-skilled and consistent teachers, this program rewards teacher education and continuity of care. Salary supplements are tied to the education level of the recipient and the position the recipient holds in the program. For example, a teacher or family child care provider is eligible for a \$450 annual supplement for having attained a national CDA, and can earn \$1500 per year with an A.S. or A.A. in Early Childhood Education. Supplements are also dependent on an individual's stability within a program. Accordingly, participants in the Child Care WAGES® FLORIDA Project receive supplements each time they maintain their employment within the same workplace for a period of six months. With additional funding, this program could expand to support continued education toward a four-year college degree in the area of early childhood education or a related field, as well as incorporate a retention incentive for UPK staff.

CONCLUSION

Our priorities must be set in alignment with what we know related to staff development and quality care and education: training on a statewide level, promotion and scholarship for continued education, and support to UPK staff. It is imperative that we set our standards in accordance with what was long ago acknowledged by Plato, "The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future life." UPK will be successful if children's needs take precedence with systemic consideration given to families, professionalism, funding, and programming.

SELECTED RESOURCES

- Barnett, S. (2003). *Better teachers, better preschools: Student achievement linked to teacher qualifications*. National Institute for Early Education Research.
- Blank, H. & Mitchell, A. (2001). *The status of preschool policy in the states*. Children's Defense Fund. December 2001.
- Critical Teacher Shortage Areas 2002-2003. (2001). Report from the Deputy Commissioner for Planning, Budgeting, and Management for the Board of Education in Florida.
- High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, (2003). *A systemwide approach to improving early childhood program quality in the Detroit metropolitan area*. McGregor Fund. January 2003.
- Howes, C., Galinsky, E., Shinn, M., Sibley, A., Abbott-Shim, M., & McCarthy, J. (1998). *The Florida Child Care Quality Improvement Study: 1996 Report*.
- Guidelines for Pre-kindergarten Learning and Teaching. (2003). *Executive Summary*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- National Research Council. (2000). *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers*.
- National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2000). *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*.
- Who Cares for America's Children?* (1990). Hayes, C., Palmer, J., & Zaslow, M. Editors; Panel on Child Care Policy, National Research Council.