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ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION: BECOMING AN EDUCATED CONSUMER PART II: PROGRAM EVALUATION

This document is intended to provide a brief overview, selected references, and examples of key information on program evaluation. A basic understanding of these issues and where to go for further information and expertise will assist policy makers as they participate in State discussions with partners about school readiness, program evaluation, and accountability to ensure the quality of early care and education and promote the school success of all young children. This resource will help you become an "educated consumer" on this topic. There are two additional documents in this series— Part I addresses child assessment, and Part III addresses accountability systems.

Note: The term assessment can be used for a variety of purposes, such as needs assessment, assessment of property taxes, etc. In the field of early care and education, assessment most commonly refers to identification of child outcomes, and evaluation is most often associated with identification of outcomes at the program level, though it may include teacher and/or child outcome assessment.

What Is Program Evaluation?

Program evaluation is a systematic process of clearly articulating the services and desired outcomes of an intervention or program. Data tied to the program goals documents the quality and effectiveness of the program over time. Program evaluation can incorporate many methods of data collection, such as child assessment, observations of practice, measures of the environment, and surveys or interviews of teachers or parents.

Key Points:
1. Effective program evaluation depends on clear identification of (1) the goals and intended outcomes of the program, (2) the services/intervention expected to achieve the outcomes, (3) the amount or level of intervention expected to cause effects, and (4) the relevant data and its collection and analysis.

2. A commonly used approach, the *Logic Model*, takes you through this process step by step.

3. It is critically important to be sure the program has been implemented well and the logic model—or how you intend to directly influence the expected outcomes—has been clearly defined before measuring the impacts.

4. When measuring the impact on children, it is important that the goals and outcomes have a logical relationship to children's development and that children have received the services for a sufficient length of time to allow for a significant impact—given the myriad of factors that affect how children develop.

5. Choose measures that clearly match the purpose of the evaluation. Data gathered on individual children, when aggregated, can be used to make determinations about the efficacy of the program to help children achieve goals, assuming there is an appropriate link between the program goals and the assessment tool.

6. Sampling is an effective method to determine child outcomes while reducing the staff burden and costs of individually assessing many children.

7. Program evaluation results have many important uses for improving the quality of services to children and families, garnering public support, developing policy, and justifying public funding.

Definitions of Terms Associated With Program Evaluation:

What does *Aggregate* mean? To *aggregate* data is to take all the individual scores and combine them.

What is *Formative Evaluation*? *Formative evaluation* is the ongoing documentation of the program and its impacts, which is used to make adjustments and revisions to services or the intermediate goals of the program during the initial phases of program implementation.

What is a *Logic Model*? A *logic model* is a clear and logical explanation of how the goals of the program link to the services provided and produce the expected results.

What is *Sampling*? *Sampling* is a process of selecting a subgroup of a population that will be used to represent the entire population.

What does *Statistically Significant* mean? A result that is reported as *statistically significant* is one that has a very high probability of not occurring by chance.

What is *Summative Evaluation*? *Summative evaluation* is the final summary of the program and its impact at the end of a particular length of time, and it typically measures the long-term goals or impact of the program.

Resources:
For a discussion of the reasons to conduct evaluation, key questions answered in evaluations, and the logic model approach, see the following:

- *Evaluating Early Childhood Programs: Improving Quality and Informing Policy* (July 2003), Vol. 23, No.6, by Walter Gilliam and Valerie Leiter, produced by ZERO TO THREE. This resource is available at www.med.yale.edu/chldstdy/faculty/pdf/GilliamLeite_r03.pdf.

For detailed information about how to develop logic models for programs, with many examples and checklists, see the following:

- *Logic Model Development Guide: Using Logic Models to Bring Together Planning, Evaluation, and Action* (January 2004), produced by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. This resource is available at www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub3669.pdf.

For information about how to hire an outside evaluator, questions for interviewing evaluators, and how to design and manage an evaluation contract, see the following:

- *When and How to Use External Evaluators* (November 2002), by Tracy Rutnik and Marty Campbell, produced by the Annie E. Casey Foundation through the Funders Evaluation Initiative. This resource is available at www.aecf.org/upload/Publication files/When%20and%20How%20External%20Evaluators.pdf.

For a discussion of current challenges in early childhood evaluation, see the following:

- "Evaluating Early Childhood Services: What's Really Behind the Curtain" (Summer 2004), in *The Evaluation Exchange*, Volume X, No. 2, by Jack Shonkoff. This resource is available at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue26/index.html.

For a detailed discussion, including frequently asked questions and developmental charts on how to effectively assess young children when curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation and accountability are interrelated, see the following:

- *Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children Birth through Age 8* (November 2003), a revised Joint Position Statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE). This resource is available at www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/CAPEexpand.pdf.

For recommendations on evaluating programs that include young children with disabilities see:

- *Promoting Positive Outcomes for Children with Disabilities: Recommendations for Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation* (March 2007), developed by the Division of Early Childhood, Council of Exceptional Children, and endorsed by NAEYC. This resource is available at: www.dec-sped.org/pdf/positionpapers/Prmtg_Pos_Outcomes_Companion_Paper.pdf.

For specific recommendations about evaluating programs in a way that is appropriate for young English language learners, see the following:

- *Screening and Assessment of Young English-Language Learners* (July 2005), published by NAEYC, was developed by a workgroup of experts in the field in collaboration with NAEYC staff as a supplement to NAEYC's position statement—

Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children Birth through Age 8. This resource is available at www.naeyc.org/about/positions/ELL.asp.

How Are States Using Program Evaluation?

In an era of increasing emphasis on accountability, States are often required to evaluate programs funded with public and/or private dollars. States often use program evaluation results to advocate for increased funding and to show efficacy to the public, including parents, community leaders, and business partners. States use evaluation data to improve or realign services and target scarce resources. Some States are building internal capacity to conduct evaluations, and many are partnering with key stakeholders, as well as universities or private organizations, to conduct evaluations.

Key Points:
1. Summative program evaluation should not be undertaken before a formative evaluation reveals that the program has been implemented well and of a sufficient intensity to reasonably expect effects on child, family, or caregiver practice.

2. A commitment to invest in professional development and training for all staff that have responsibilities to participate in the evaluation is necessary.

3. The initial budget should include a sufficient amount of resources to conduct the evaluation for an appropriate length of time.

4. The data collecting, entering, and analysis functions should be identified and be adequate to ensure accurate data reporting.

5. A plan for how, when, and to whom data will be reported is also critical.

Examples of Program Evaluations:

Kansas
The Kansas Infant/Toddler Child Care Quality Study had three components: a baseline assessment of providers and quality of infant-toddler care settings, documentation of implementation of infant-toddler project services, and a followup assessment to document impact on quality after 1 year of participation. A stratified random sample was used to identify providers in all care settings and in diverse communities across the State. Information is available at www.kaccrra.org/resource_files/100/100_resource_file1.pdf.

North Carolina
A study of 110 publicly funded preschool child care programs that participated in the Smart Start program from 1994 to 2001 measured the quality of classroom practice; participation levels in technical assistance activities; and a sample of children's abilities in language, literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills. Results revealed that the quality of the centers that participated in the program steadily increased. Participation in technical assistance was significantly related to quality of the center, and children in higher quality centers scored higher on readiness measures. Information is available at www.fpg.unc.edu/smartstart/.

The BUILD Initiative

The BUILD Initiative is a nine-State, multiyear initiative supported by a number of the foundations that participate in the Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative. The evaluation of the Build Initiative began with four States—Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Ohio—in May 2002. In 2003, BUILD added a fifth State, Pennsylvania, as part of the national evaluation, and four learning partner States—Hawaii, Michigan, Oklahoma, and Washington. A BUILD Initiative national evaluation consultant works with the State evaluation partner. A framework for system evaluation has recently been released. Information is available at http://buildinitiative.org/.

Resources:

For a free subscription and information about current issues facing program evaluators, including innovative methods, emerging trends, and approaches to evaluation, see the following:

- *The Evaluation Exchange*, published by the Harvard Family Research Project. This resource is available at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval.html.

For information on a framework for assessing program quality and children's learning, including key questions and infrastructure issues at the local and State levels, see the following:

- "Taking Stock: Assessing and Improving Early Childhood Learning and Program Quality" (2007), The Report of the National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force. This resource, and other related resources, is available at: www.pewtrusts.org/our_work.aspx?category=102

For information about evaluations of school readiness programs, including discussion of the methodologies used, effects on child development, and specific program features linked to effectiveness, see the following:

- *Evaluations of School Readiness Initiatives: What Are We Learning?* (March 2003), by Elizabeth Brown and Catherine Scott-Little, produced by the Southeastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE). This resource is available at www.serve.org/_downloads/REL/ELO/SchoolReadiness.pdf.

How Are States Evaluating Quality?

Many States have been determining whether their use of the quality set-asides from the Child Care and Development Fund has been effective. States have also used a number of other strategies to improve the quality of child care, such as tiered reimbursement or rated licenses, and are increasingly engaged in evaluating the effects of these strategies. A growing body of research is supporting States' efforts to define and measure quality, although challenges remain due to the diversity of the field and the nature of assessing young children in dynamic environments.

Key Points:

1. Researchers define quality in two ways: structural and process. *Structural* quality refers primarily to aspects of care that can be regulated, such as licensing, adult-child ratios, credentials, and education requirements. *Process* quality refers to environmental influences on quality, such as adult-child interaction, learning activities, and other characteristics of caregivers' styles of relating to children.

   - The most common observational measure used in early care and education program evaluations is the *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS)*—including versions for infant-toddler, the *Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS)*—and for school-age care, the *School Age Classroom Environmental Rating Scale (SACER)*. *ECERS* requires classroom observations by trained observers who have achieved a specific level of reliability.

2. New tools are emerging, such as the *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool (ELLCO)*, which measures the degree to which a classroom and the teachers there support young children's literacy development; the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (CLASS), which measures indicators of teacher-child interaction and classroom environment; and the *Child Care Assessment Tool for Relatives*, which is an observational measure of quality in family, friend, and neighbor care.

Resources:

For a brief guide to evaluation and a set of 14 user-friendly sample instruments that can be used for both formative and summative evaluations of child care quality improvement initiatives, see the following:

   - *A Toolkit for Evaluating Initiatives to Improve Child Care Quality* (2003), by Toni Porter, et al, produced by Bank Street College of Education, Institute for a Child Care Continuum. This resource is available at www.bankstreet.edu/iccc/toolkit.html.

For a guide to evaluation, addressing the why, what, and how of evaluation for program managers, see the following:

   - *The Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation* (December 2003), produced by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. This resource is available at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/other_resrch/pm_guide_eval/index.html

For information on measures of the overall quality, and specific indicators of quality, of early care and education settings, including information on psychometric properties and the population and setting for which they are intended, see the following:

   - "Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings: A Compendium of Measures" (November 2007), prepared by Child Trends for ACF's Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. This resource is available at www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2007_12_10_FR_CompleteCompendium.pdf.

For a discussion of the issues and challenges in measuring quality in family, friend, and neighbor care, see the following:

- *Measuring Quality in Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care: Conceptual and Practical Issues*, Research-to-Policy Connections, No. 6 (April 2007), E. Maher, produced by Research Connections. This resource is available at www.childcareresearch.org/SendPdf?resourceId=12033.

For information on how States and Territories can use system and program evaluation to determine the effective use of funds for children under age 3, see the following:

- *At-A-Glance: Evaluation and Infant-Toddler Care*, developed by the National Infant-Toddler Child Care Initiative, funded by the Child Care Bureau, ACF, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). This resource is available at http://www.nccic.org/ITCC/PDFdocs/B2Three_AAGEvaluation.pdf

For information on approaches States are using to evaluate out-of-school time initiatives, see the following:

- *State After School Profiles: Measuring Results, Research and Program Evaluation, produced by the Afterschool Investments Project,* funded by the Child Care Bureau, ACF, DHHS. This resource is available at http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov.

For information about specific measures used by States and researchers, see the following Web sites:

- **Child Care and Early Education Research Connections**. The 50-State Data Tool allows users to create their own tables of State data, and an Instruments and Measures Section allows users to review measures that have been used in previous research, as well as search for specific measures by key words or phrases. Available at http://childcareresearch.org/discover/index.jsp.

- **National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)**. The Assessment Database is a resource for finding information about a variety of assessments and for identifying assessments appropriate for specific uses. Users can define specific terms to build their own "custom" databases or review "pre-built" databases by NIEER. A variety of related links are also identified. Available at http://nieer.org/assessment/.

CD-ROM
The following information and technical assistance tools, produced by the Child Care Bureau, contain video clips, documents, and links to online resources related to assessment and program evaluation:

- *Leading the Way to Quality Early Care and Education* (2005). This resource is available free and may be ordered on the Web at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/ta/pubs/cd/ltw_cd.htm.

- *Child Care Works*: *Research to Practice* (2006). This resource is available free and may be ordered on the Web at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/ta/pubs/cd/ccw.htm.