

Department of Health and Human Services

**OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL**

**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
FOR
QUALITY CHILD CARE:**

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES



**JUNE GIBBS BROWN
Inspector General**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

To determine the perceptions of community child care leaders regarding technical assistance provided under contract with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Child Care Bureau.

BACKGROUND

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 repealed a number of child care programs and created a single, integrated Child Care and Development Block Grant for low-income families. Program goals are to ensure accessibility and affordability of quality child care for working families by promoting parental choice, encouraging States to provide consumer education to parents, and helping States implement health, safety, licensing, and registration standards. The program is currently funded for a total of \$20.9 billion for Fiscal Years 1996-2002.

The ACF contracts with outside entities to provide technical assistance funded through this Grant. This technical assistance includes the coordination and support of regional and national conferences, national workgroups, leadership forums, audio conference calls, and creation of the National Child Care Information Center. In 1997, ACF further expanded its technical assistance capabilities by creating the Child Care Technical Assistance Network.

While ACF provides technical assistance only to States, Territories, and Tribes, child care at the community level is ultimately affected. To determine perceptions at this level, we surveyed 100 community child care leaders regarding their sense of the technical assistance provided and the extent to which it meets their needs. We asked them about the format and content of technical assistance, and to identify critical issues facing the child care community.

FINDINGS

Overall, community child care leaders are satisfied with the technical assistance

Over 90 of the 100 participants surveyed are satisfied that the technical assistance they received addressed their concerns and was provided when they needed it. They also view the technical assistance events as valuable opportunities to network, collaborate, and learn what other States are doing. Their suggestions for improving technical assistance include updating invitation mailing lists and providing invitees with more advance notice of upcoming events.

They prefer regional meetings and conferences

Seventy-five participants express a preference for regional meetings and conferences because they are more narrowly focused and provide local or regional information which is often the key to improving the quality of child care. Other technical assistance formats they find beneficial are the Internet, large national conferences, mailings, targeted technical assistance, audio conference calls, focus group events, and national workgroup meetings and forums.

The National Child Care Information Center is a valuable technical assistance tool

Almost two-thirds (63) of the participants are familiar with the National Child Care Information Center and 59 are aware of the ***Child Care Bulletin*** published by the Center. They report that information provided by the Center is helpful and promptly provided upon request. Nearly one-fourth (24) have also accessed the Center’s homepage on the World Wide Web and find it beneficial.

Participants identify subsidy payments, infant/toddler care, school-age child care, welfare reform, Head Start/child care collaboration, and inclusion of children with disabilities as the most critical issues facing child care

Forty-four participants identify subsidy payment rates and/or sliding fee scales as a critical child care issue. It is followed by infant/toddler care, school-age care, welfare reform, Head Start/child care collaboration, and inclusion of children with disabilities as other critical issues.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Clearly, community child care leaders think highly of the technical assistance they are receiving. However, based on our analysis of their responses, we identified a few areas where improvements could make this program better. We therefore suggest that ACF work with technical assistance contractors and regional office staff to

- *Improve advance notice and information about upcoming events.*
- *Focus technical assistance on issues community child care leaders consider critical.*
- *Continue to support the National Child Care Information Center, but enhance the technical assistance provided through its website.*

AGENCY COMMENTS

The ACF concurs with our suggested opportunities for improvement and describes recent changes in their technical assistance initiatives. Their comments are included in Appendix A.

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

To determine the perceptions of community child care leaders regarding technical assistance provided under contract with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Child Care Bureau.

BACKGROUND

Legislation

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 repealed the Title IV-A child care programs (Aid to Families with Dependent Children/Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Child Care, Transitional Child Care, and At-Risk Care) and created a single, integrated Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), also called the Child Care Development Fund, for low-income families. Legislation requires the ACF to provide States, Territories, and Tribes with technical assistance focused on the achievement of Child Care and Development Block Grant program goals. Program goals are to ensure accessibility and affordability of quality child care for working families by promoting parental choice, encouraging States to provide consumer education to parents, and helping States implement health, safety, licensing, and registration standards.

Funding

Consolidation of all child care programs into the CCDBG dramatically increased the amount of technical assistance funds available, from \$2.3 million in FY'95 and \$2.6 million in FY'96 to \$6.6 million in FY'97 and over \$7 million in FY'98. With the President's new child care initiative announced in January 1998, the ACF estimates that funding available for technical assistance could increase even more. The entire CCDBG program is currently funded for a total of \$20.9 billion for Fiscal Years 1996-2002.

Technical Assistance Contracts

The ACF initially awarded a contract for technical assistance to J&E Associates for Fiscal Years 1993 and 1994. The technical assistance provided through this contract focused on certificate payment programs mandated by newly enacted legislation. This legislation required that States have a system capable of operating a certificate payment program in place by October 1, 1992 to allow parental choice in the selection of child care providers. Under this contract, States and tribes were surveyed regarding their certificate program capabilities and technical assistance needs. In addition, regional meetings and national child care conferences were conducted.

Upon expiration of the contract with J&E Associates, a new 3-year contract was awarded to Trans-Management Systems Corporation (T-MSc) in cooperation with Collins Management

Consulting. With reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant in 1996, this

contract was extended for an additional year. Technical assistance provided under contracts with these companies included convening, supporting, and/or administering

- State, territorial, and tribal work groups,
- Annual conferences, such as National State Child Care Administrators Conferences, National American Indian and Alaska Native Child Care Conferences, and national leadership forums focused on specific issues related to child care,
- regional child care conferences, and
- the National Child Care Information Center.

Contractor responsibilities also encompass a multitude of logistical support activities associated with convening and coordinating workgroups and conferences, such as securing adequate meeting facilities, hotel accommodations and presenters, compiling invitation and participant lists, designing agendas, and providing advance notice of upcoming events. They also provide travel arrangements and reimbursement for conference presenters, and in some instances (i.e., National State Child Care Administrators' Conference) for some conference attendees.

The National Child Care Information Center complements, enhances, and promotes child care linkages and serves as a mechanism for supporting quality, comprehensive services for children and families. To carry out their work, it provides question and answer services, an Internet and digital library, information resources collection and dissemination, and linkages to other websites and information sources. Questions and requests for information received by the Center come from a variety of sources via telephone (1-800-616-2242), fax, e-mail, and contacts at meetings and conferences. The Center also publishes a website located at <http://nccic.org>. This website serves as a starting point for child care information about State and tribal program activities, funding resources, organizations, child care research, welfare reform, health and safety, promising practices, leadership forums, conference calendars, and other child care resources. The Information Center activities include

- dissemination of child care information in response to requests from States, Territories and Tribes, policymakers, parents, programs, organizations, child care providers, and the public.
- maintenance of the website.
- serving as the adjunct for the Educational Resources Information Center clearinghouse for child care via the National Child Care Information Center website.
- publication of the *Child Care Bulletin* newsletter.

In 1997, the ACF redesigned their technical assistance approach to address emerging child care issues and technical assistance needs. Through this redesign the ACF created a Child Care Technical Assistance Network which was in the early stages of development at the time we

conducted this study and not evaluated. This new Network is comprised of seven independent projects, each awarded to an individual contractor. These projects and contract awardees are the

- National Child Care Information Center (Collins Management Consulting, Inc.),
- Child Care Bureau Logistical Support Project (Trans-Management Systems Corporation),
- Healthy Child Care America Campaign (Inter-agency agreement between the ACF, Child Care Bureau, and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, implemented through the American Academy of Pediatrics),
- Tribal Child Care Technical Assistance Center (Native American Management Services, Inc.),
- Child Care Partnerships Project (The Finance Project),
- Child Care Inclusion for Children with Disabilities (University of Connecticut Health Center), and
- Child Care Information Systems Technical Assistance Project (SRA International, Inc.).

These projects will allow continuation of the National Child Care Information Center, the website, and the Child Care Bulletin. They will also play a major role in continuing to address ongoing and emerging child care issues and technical assistance needs at both the national and State levels through national and regional conferences, forums, and audio conference calls.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

While ACF provides technical assistance only to States, Territories, and Tribes, child care at the community level is ultimately affected. As such, this inspection focuses on the perceptions of child care community leaders and individuals associated with improving and ensuring the quality of child care regarding contracted technical assistance provided by the ACF, Child Care Bureau, with block grant funds.

In determining our sample of child care community leaders, we selected 100 individuals to participate in our study who had taken part in a technical assistance event sponsored with Child Care and Development Block Grant funds between May 1995 and December 1997. The participants were selected at random from 38 lists of event participants provided to us by Trans-Management Systems Corporation, the contractor responsible for convening, supporting and administering technical assistance during this time. Before selecting our sample, we excluded State child care administrators from the universe because we had surveyed them regarding their perceptions of technical assistance in a previous study. As such, our sample provided us with

participants from 35 State agencies (i.e., State Departments of Human Services, Social Services, Education, Labor, etc.), and various other agencies and organizations which include Head Start agencies (13), non-profit agencies (11), local community organizations (5), local government agencies (5), universities (5), child care providers (5), child care resource and referral agencies (5), welfare affiliated organizations (3), other technical assistance providers (2), and other entities associated with an interest in quality child care.

We conducted telephone surveys with sample participants to solicit information on each one's satisfaction with various aspects of the technical assistance contracts. This included the event they attended, critical issues facing the child care community, their familiarity with the National Child Care Information Center, and the Child Care Bulletin.

This is one of three inspections to focus on various entities' perceptions of technical assistance provided by the ACF, Child Care Bureau. In a previous report, "Technical Assistance for Quality Child Care: State Administrators' Perspectives," we address the perceptions of State child care administrators. A future report will address the perceptions of ACF regional office staff.

We conducted our review in accordance with the *Quality Standards for Inspections* issued by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency.

FINDINGS

Overall, community child care leaders are satisfied with the technical assistance

We asked community child care leaders who participated in the survey to rate their overall satisfaction with the technical assistance event attended, and whether or not the information provided at those events addresses their concerns and was received when they needed it. In response, over 90 of the 100 participants (91 and 92 respectively) are satisfied that the information addresses their concerns and is provided when needed. Many child care leaders indicate that the technical assistance events also provide them with valuable opportunities to network, collaborate, brainstorm and learn about what other States are doing.

Some of their suggestions for improving technical assistance include updating invitation mailing lists, getting the “right” people included in technical assistance events, and providing invitees with more advance notice of upcoming events. They also suggest that more advance information about the focus of upcoming events would allow them to better prepare and participate in event discussions.

They prefer regional meetings and conferences

When asked to identify the formats they find most beneficial, 75 participants indicate they find regional meetings one of the most beneficial technical assistance formats. Of those, 60 indicate they prefer small regional meetings and 47 prefer large regional conferences. Thirty-two indicate a preference for regional events in general, both large and small. They comment that smaller meetings are better focused and, while learning about national perspectives and trends is important, local or regional information is often the key to improving the quality of child care. Other formats in order of preference are information provided via the Internet (33), large national conferences (27), mailings (26), targeted technical assistance provided upon request (23), audio conference calls (18), focus group events (18), national workgroup meetings (13), and national forums (9).

The National Child Care Information Center is a valuable technical assistance tool

The Information Center

Sixty-three of the participants surveyed are familiar with the National Child Care Information Center. Of those, 33 indicate they have contacted the Center for information and 30 indicate that the Center is able to provide requested information, and that information is provided in a timely manner and is helpful.

Most participants became aware of the Center through information provided at technical assistance events and conferences. They indicate most of their requests to the Center are for information about what other States are doing (7) and various statistical information (5), which is consistent with the types of requests the Center receives overall.

The Website

Most participants (80) have access to the Internet, and 24 indicate they have accessed the Center's homepage on the World Wide Web. The Center reports over 358,000 individuals visited the website between February 1998 and January 1999, a 62 percent increase over the previous year, and that each accessed an average of 6 internal pages with each visit.

Survey participants indicate the website information they find most useful relates to what other States are doing and statistical data, the same types of information they most frequently request from the Center itself. Participants also note that the Center's website is a good link to other sites, and that they refer others to the website. The 24 community child care leaders that have accessed the website report the frequency of their website access as weekly (1), monthly (7), occasional (12), seldom (3), and no response (1). Their suggestions for improving the website are to include more news on program policy and operation from HHS and university extension information.

The Child Care Bulletin

Fifty-nine of the participants are familiar with the *Child Care Bulletin*, a newsletter published by the National Child Care Information Center. Through the Center, the ACF uses this bulletin as a tool to disseminate information resources to approximately 3,000 subscribers. It includes information on Federal requirements and program changes, innovative approaches to quality child care, and examples of model programs.

Fifty-one of the participants surveyed receive copies of the bulletin on a regular basis, 39 of which indicate they are on the mailing list. Other participants receive copies of the bulletin from other sources (9) or via the Internet (3). All 51 comment they find the issues addressed in the bulletin to be timely and of interest to them in meeting their needs. They indicate the bulletin is a good general reference for child care issues (7), is a valuable tool for presenting national perspectives and trends (6), and a good format for providing legislative activity information.

Participants identify subsidy payments, infant/toddler care, school-age child care, welfare reform, Head Start/child care collaboration, and inclusion of children with disabilities as the most critical issues facing child care

We presented survey participants with a list of technical assistance issue areas and asked them to identify the three most critical. From that list 44 participants identified subsidy payments/sliding fee scales as a critical child care issue. It is followed by infant/toddler care (36), school-age child care (31), welfare reform (28), Head Start/child care collaboration (27), and inclusion of children with disabilities (26) as other child care issues they consider critical.

We also asked them to further refine their selection by naming one of the three selected issues as "most critical." Again, subsidy payments/sliding fee scales was selected as the most critical issue (16). It is followed by welfare reform (11), infant/toddler care (9), and Head Start/child care collaboration (8). Survey participants comment that adequate subsidy payments are important to attract good child care providers, which in turn will affect the quality of child care being provided.

They also note that quality child care must be available for welfare reform to be successful. Other issues participants identified as critical, but not included in our list, are staffing and wages, child care during non-traditional hours, transportation, child care in rural areas, and blending child care funding streams. A list of critical issues most noted by child care community leaders is outlined below.

Critical Child Care Issues

**Number of Survey Participants
Who Selected Issue As:**

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Critical</u>	<u>Most Critical</u>
Subsidy Payments and Sliding Fee Scales	44	16
Infant/Toddler Child Care	36	9
School-Age Child Care	31	7
Welfare Reform	28	11
Head Start/Child Care Collaboration	27	8
Inclusion of Children with Disabilities	26	7
Provider Training Programs	17	5
Collaboration/Coordination with Other Agencies	13	4
Provider Accreditation	9	0
Health and Safety	7	2
Child Care Resource and Referral	7	3
Family Centered Child Care	6	2
Sharing Information with Other States	5	0

Number of Respondents = 100

In addition, we asked participants to identify issues that may become critical in the future. In response they indicate certain broad issues such as salaries, welfare reform, provider accreditation, child care for “working poor” families, infant/toddler child care, and school-age child care as projected critical issues for the future.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Clearly, community child care leaders think highly of the technical assistance they are receiving. However, based on our analysis of their responses, we identified a few areas where improvements could make this program better. We therefore suggest that ACF work with technical assistance contractors and regional office staff in the following three areas.

Improve advance notice and information about upcoming events

- ! Periodically update invitation lists.
- ! Furnish those invited with adequate advance notice of upcoming events.
- ! Provide invitees with specific information about the focus of upcoming events.

Focus technical assistance events on issues community child care leaders consider critical

- ! Subsidy payment rates and sliding fee scales
- ! School-age child care
- ! Welfare reform
- ! Head Start/child care collaboration
- ! Inclusion of children with disabilities
- ! Infant/Toddler child care

Continue to support the National Child Care Information Center, but enhance the technical assistance provided through its website

- ! Provide technical assistance participants with more information about the website and its use.
- ! Make available more information about State practices and policies, successful program models, and upcoming technical assistance events through the website.

AGENCY COMMENTS

The ACF concurs with our suggested opportunities for improvement and describes recent changes in their technical assistance initiatives. Their comments are included in Appendix A.

APPENDIX A



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Office of the Assistant Secretary, Suite 600
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Washington, D.C. 20447

June 7, 1999

TO: June Gibbs Brown
Inspector General

FROM: Olivia A. Golden
Assistant Secretary
for Children and Families

SUBJECT: Response to the OIG Draft Report: "Technical Assistance for Quality Child Care: Community Perspectives" (OEI-07-97-00421)

The Administration for Children and Families is pleased to have the opportunity to provide official comments on the Office of Inspector General's draft report entitled, "Technical Assistance for Quality Child Care: Community Perspectives" (OEI-07-97-00421). The report presents findings from a survey of child care community leaders conducted by the Office of Inspector General, as well as recommendations for improving the Child Care Bureau's technical assistance. We have responded to each of the three recommendations.

The passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 had an enormous impact on the growing need to provide quality child care for the nation's children and families. In recognition of the need, the Child Care Bureau established a Child Care Technical Assistance Network (CCTAN). The network provides States, Territories and Tribes with technical assistance that focuses on specific areas of need identified by the State and Tribal administrators, Regional offices, the child care community, and the Child Care Bureau.

The CCTAN includes the following projects and contract awardees:

- National Child Care Information Center (Collins Management Consulting, Inc.);
- Child Care Bureau Logistical Support Project (Trans-Management Systems Corporation);
- Healthy Child Care America Campaign (American Academy of Pediatrics);
- Tribal Child Care Technical Assistance Center (Native American Management Services, Inc.);
- Child Care Public/Private Partnerships Project (The Finance Project);
- Map to Inclusive Child Care (University of Connecticut); and
- Child Care Information Systems Technical Assistance Project (SRA International, Inc.).

With the intent of understanding the technical assistance needs of community child care leaders, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted a survey of the community's perspectives on the technical assistance provided by the Child Care Bureau prior to PRWORA. The findings of the Office of Inspector General's Study of the technical assistance offered by the Child Care Bureau through 1997, are basically consistent with the Bureau's own assessment of the technical assistance that was available for the community child care leaders prior to 1997.

The Child Care Bureau believes the CCTAN, which began developing in October 1997, is already addressing many of the recommendations that the Inspector General identifies in the report. The CCTAN contracts were newly awarded at the time that the survey of community leaders was conducted. Although several of the contractors had previously provided technical assistance for the Child Care Bureau, all of the contracts awarded as part of CCTAN have new and different tasks.

General Comments

The specific OIG recommendations are stated below and followed by the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) responses.

OIG Recommendation: Improve advance notice and information about upcoming events.

- Periodically update invitation lists.
- Furnish those invited with adequate advance notice of upcoming events.
- Provide invitees with specific information about the focus of upcoming events.

ACF Response:

The Child Care Bureau concurs that some improvement is needed in providing advance notice of upcoming events to the many national and regional child care events. Logistical support is provided by the Child Care Bureau Logistical Support Project (CCBLSP) under a contract with Trans-Management Systems Corporation (T-MS). T-MS has hired additional staff both for child care conferences and for logistical arrangements. In order to furnish adequate notice of upcoming events, the CCBLSP has been sending "Save the Date" postcards well in advance of the event. As part of registration materials distributed prior to an event, the Bureau generally provides a draft agenda, including specific information about the focus of the event.

Child Care Bureau events, as well as other national child care conferences, are posted on the National Child Care Information Center's website.

The ACF regional office staff generally decides the list of invitees in concert with the State Child Care Administrators. The CCBLSP will continue to work with the regions to ensure that event invitation and participation lists are complete and accurate. The Child Care Bureau has recently received a significant amount of positive feedback from the child care community regarding the improvements in the logistical support provided by the CCBLSP.

OIG Recommendation: Focus technical assistance events on issues community child care leaders consider critical.

- Subsidy payment rates and sliding fee scales
- School-age child care
- Welfare reform
- Head Start/Child Care collaboration
- Inclusion of children with disabilities
- Infant/Toddler child care

ACF Response:

The ACF appreciates the identification of certain topics of interest to community child care leaders. Several of these topics will be addressed at the National State Child Care Administrators Conference on August 9-11, 1999.

Over the past year, the Child Care Bureau has sponsored several national Leadership Forums addressing issues identified in the Inspector General's survey. For these Leadership Forums, the Child Care Bureau invites State Child Care Administrators, ACF Regional child care staff, and leaders in the child care community.

In February 1998, the Child Care and Head Start Bureaus jointly hosted a national forum on the financing of collaborative early childhood programs, including Head Start/child care collaborative efforts. In September, the two Bureaus sponsored a National Leadership Forum on Quality Care for Infants and Toddlers to discuss collaboration and capacity building. Last November, the Child Care Bureau hosted a Licensing and Finance Forum that highlighted successful models of blended funding for early childhood programs, including Head Start/child care collaborations.

In November 1999, ACF and the U.S. Department of Education will jointly sponsor a conference for child care, Head Start, and pre-kindergarten providers and state and local education agencies. The purpose of the conference will be to share information on existing models of collaboration between the programs at the community level, and to identify strategies to support the expansion of these partnerships to respond to the child care needs of working families.

The Child Care and Head Start Bureaus recently launched a new training and technical assistance initiative "Quality in Linking Together: Early Education Partnerships" or "the QUILT". The QUILT project will work with ACF Regional Offices to engage States and Tribes in developing a strategic approach that supports and fosters early education partnerships at the local level. In addition, the QUILT will disseminate information on partnerships and collaborative strategies, and provide on-site technical assistance for child care, Head Start, pre-K, and other early education providers.

On May 21-22, 1999, the Child Care Bureau, in partnership with the Maternal and Child Health Bureau and the American Academy of Pediatrics, conducted its annual Healthy Child Care America Conference. The theme for this year was "Healthy Child Care America: Quality Child Care in the New Millennium." The conference focused on community integration and health systems development to support children in child care settings in the areas of quality assurance, infrastructure and outreach. One of the plenary sessions focused on the "Impact of Welfare Reform on the Health of Children in Child Care."

The Child Care Bureau recently selected ten States to receive technical assistance through the Map to Inclusive Child Care Project, which promotes the inclusion of children with disabilities. As part of these efforts, the Annual National Institute for the Map Project will be held in Washington, D.C. on August 12-13, 1999. States from Year 1 and 2 of the Project will be invited to participate in sharing experiences and techniques on improving the opportunities to serve children with disabilities in their States.

OIG Recommendation: Continue to support the National Child Care Information Center, but enhance the technical assistance provided through its website.

- Provide technical assistance participants with more information about the website and its use.
- Make available more information about State practices and policies, successful program models, and upcoming technical assistance events through the website.

ACF Response:

The ACF concurs with the OIG recommendation to support the National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC). In February 1998, the Child Care Bureau awarded a new contract to implement and expand the NCCIC. By the end of the first year of this contract, the Child Care Bureau estimates over 450,000 people have accessed the NCCIC Home Page for information about the Child Care Bureau, State demographics, publications and other child care resources. Each of these visitors accesses, on average, six internal pages of the NCCIC website.

The NCCIC website was recently revised to be more user-friendly. The website is now organized by topic and by interest areas, and provides links to other child care websites. A calendar of national and regional events can be accessed through the website. At the August 1999 State Administrators' Conference, there will be opportunities for the child care community to learn how to access the NCCIC website.

The NCCIC has expanded the NCCIC Library database and includes over 10,000 materials in a variety of media. These materials include State and tribal specific holdings, general materials relating to all aspects of child care and videos, newsletters and journals of use to the child care field.

Since February 1998, over 90,000 documents have been distributed to the child care field including pamphlets, brochures, fact sheets, flyers, newsletters, publications, monographs, and videos. Many materials that NCCIC has developed, including information responses, are now available in Spanish.

The NCCIC is in the process of developing a searchable database on-line. The database will link various information from different child care sources. Once completed, the child care community will be able to compare State child care practices and policies.

If you have questions or need further information, please contact Frank Fuentes, Deputy Associate Commissioner of the Child Care Bureau, at 401-7256.

