



Program Focus Team Action Plan: Quality Early Childhood Experiences in Kansas

2012-2013

Strategic Opportunities Addressed:

- Prepare People in Kansas to Thrive in a Global Society and All Aspects of Life
- Create Opportunities and Support People in Kansas to Improve Their Physical, Mental, and Emotional Health and Well-Being

Situation:

"The developmental effects of child care depends on its safety, the opportunities it provides for nurturing and stable relationships and its provision of linguistically and cognitively rich environments. Yet the child care that is available in the United States today is highly fragmented and characterized by marked variations in quality, ranging from rich, growth promoting experiences to unstimulating, highly unstable and sometimes dangerous settings. The burden of poor quality and limited choices rests most heavily on low-income, working families whose financial resources are too high to qualify for subsidies yet too low to afford quality care. -- National Academy of Sciences, 2000

Research has shown that the first three years of life are critical in children's brain development and that quality child care and education in the preschool years can greatly enhance a child's lifetime potential. Quality early childhood experiences have been linked to positive social skill development and pre-school readiness (Burchinal & Cryer, 2003; Lester et. al, 2010). In addition, an individual's growth and development into a healthy, successful adult is greatly influenced by the quality of his or her early childhood experiences, between 0-6 years of age.

In Kansas, there are 202,606 children under the age of 4 and 97,821 or 48% of children under the age of 6 have both parents in the labor force (2012 Child Care in the State of: Kansas, Child Care Aware of America, June 2012).

Child care providers have an enormous impact on children's development and research shows that better trained providers lead to higher quality care and more positive outcomes for children. A provider's skill level helps determine whether children in care are safe and have the early learning experiences they need to succeed in school. Children in the care of inadequately prepared providers spend more of their day in aimless activity and show delays in language and social development. Yet most child care providers lack the training and education needed to provide a quality environment.

Child Care Aware of America recommends that center directors have a bachelor's degree or higher in early childhood education or a related field. The agency also recommends increasing the education requirements for lead teachers to a CDA credential or an associates degree in early childhood education. The agency further recommends that the annual training requirements for teachers should be 24 hours including CPR and first-aid renewal.

In Kansas, center directors do not meet Child Care Aware of America recommendations and the lead teachers in centers are only required to have a high school diploma or GED before working with children. However, Kansas changed their Statutes and Regulations, effective February 3, 2012. The new regulations require each program director, staff member, and volunteer to complete initial orientation and training within seven days of employment. Furthermore, the program director, staff, and volunteers must complete health and safety training, pediatric first aid and CPR.

Kansas currently has 983 child care centers and of those, 12% are accredited. Of the 5,458 family child care homes, 1% are accredited. There are 5,160 child care workers in Kansas child care centers and Child Care Aware of Kansas provided 787 training sessions with an average of 23 providers attending the training sessions. (2012 Child Care in the State of: Kansas, Child Care Aware of America, June 2012).

There is a direct relationship between professionals' level of training and quality of work with children, especially in terms of the effects on children's language development, social skills, and learning (Whitebook, 1989).

Public Value:

When you support the Quality Early Childhood Experiences in Kansas program, early childhood education and care providers will receive more training in working with young children, which leads to a higher quality of care and more positive outcomes for children, which will benefit other community members because fewer criminals will be in our justice system, fewer adults on public assistance, fewer teens will be pregnant and we will have a stronger workforce.

Outcomes:

Short-Term:

Early care and education professionals, providers and parents will:

- understand physical, cognitive, social/emotional, and communication development of children
- understand the role of learning environment that meet children's needs, capabilities, and interests to maximize their learning potential
- understand that observing and assessing what children know and can do, will help them develop activities that meets the children's developmental and learning needs
- understand how to establish and maintain an environment that ensures children's health, safety and development
- understand how important it is to establish supportive relationships with the children in their care, and to guide them as individuals, and as part of a group

Evaluation Questions:

(Short-term - single session)

1. What understanding did participants gain about the development of children?
2. What have participants learned about the role of the learning environment in early childhood education and how to establish and maintain it?
3. What did participants learn about the role of observation and assessment in early childhood education?
4. What did participants learn about the role of supportive relationships in early childhood education?

Medium-Term:

Early care and education professionals, providers and parents will:

- integrate information on physical, cognitive, social/emotional, and communication development of children, and learning patterns of individuals and groups, and apply it in their work with children in their care
- plan, implement and evaluate learning environments and curriculum to meet children's needs, capabilities, and interests and maximize learning potential
- use observations and assessments to develop curriculum and activities to meet the children's developmental and learning needs
- establish and maintain a healthy, nourishing and safe environments
- establish supportive relationships with children in their care, and guide them as individuals, and as part of a group

Evaluation Questions:

(Follow-up from single session)

1. Have participants applied what they've learned about child development and learning styles in their work with the children in their care?
2. Have participants implemented and evaluated the learning environments and curriculum in their early childhood setting to ensure that they meet the children's needs, capabilities and interests?
3. Have participants used observation and assessment to develop curriculum and activities to meet the children's needs?
4. Have participants provided a healthy, safe and nourishing environment?

Long-Term:

More child care centers and family child care homes will meet the quality requirements for accreditation and become accredited.

More Kansas early childhood education providers will receive advanced training/education in early childhood education.

Parents of 0-6 year olds will identify and utilize quality early childhood programs.

Evaluation Questions:

1. How many child care centers and family child care homes are accredited?

2. How many hours of training have early childhood education providers attended?

Outputs:

Potential Participants

- center directors
- lead teachers in centers
- assistant teachers in centers
- family child care home providers
- parents

Potential Activities

- trainings and workshops
- newsletters
- cooperate with coalitions and networks

Existing Programs and Potential Products

- **I am Moving, I am Learning:** national Head Start curriculum to promote structured environments for movement and healthy eating. (DoD/USDA CYTTAP provides training at scheduled times during the year.)
- **Rock Solid Foundations:** Univ. of Nebraska social emotional curriculum derived from Vanderbilt University's CSEFEL program. (DoD/USDA CYTTAP provides training at scheduled times during the year.)
- **The Best Care:** Univ. of Arkansas multi-module curriculum covering topics from allergies, fruits & vegetables to child behavior and early money literacy. (Curriculum modules are available on the KSRE "Families!" website.)
- **Better Kid Care:** Penn State Univ., online modules and face-to-face training provided by Extension agents and local childcare networks.
- **Understanding Challenging Behavior and Building Positive Relationships:** KSRE curriculum prepared by Rebecca McFarland (includes teaching guide, Powerpoint presentation and additional resources).
- **Managing Challenging Behavior by Creating Supportive Environments:** KSRE curriculum prepared by Rebecca McFarland (includes teaching guide, Powerpoint presentation).
- **Employee ServSafe:** KSRE program delivers consistent food safety training suitable to providers involved with the preparation and serving of food.

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