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CONTACT

Molly O'Connor, Thrive by Five Washington
206.621.5562; molly@thrivebyfivewa.org

Amy Blondin, WA State Dept. of Early Learning
360.725.4919; amy.blondin@del.wa.gov

Groundbreaking Study Finds Professional Coaching Boosts Child Care Quality Coaching key component of quality rating and improvement system being developed by state

SEATTLE – When child care providers get one-on-one coaching and a modest amount of money to make changes to their program, the quality of the care they give children starts to go up – and pretty quickly, according to a recent study done on the state’s proposed system to boost the quality of licensed child care in Washington state.

The findings come from an independent evaluation of Seeds to Success, a voluntary child care quality rating and improvement system being field tested in five Washington communities by the Washington State Department of Early Learning (DEL) and Thrive by Five Washington. In 2007, the state Legislature directed DEL to develop a system to rate all licensed child care programs statewide, release those results publicly and offer resources and support for those child care providers who want to improve the quality of their care. Princeton-based Mathematica Policy Research, an independent research company, conducted the study. [Read the brief.](#) (Full report and more information is [online.](#))

According to the National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center, 22 states have developed rating systems that provide information to parents and providers about the quality of child care programs. But our state’s system is one of the first to be evaluated by a randomized controlled trial – considered the gold standard of research design – so that we can better pinpoint which strategies are most effective in improving child care quality.

In 2009, during the first year of the Seeds to Success field test, Mathematica examined the impact the field test was having in two of the five participating communities: East Yakima and White Center. In these two communities, professional development opportunities were offered to 66 child care businesses –14 child care centers and 52 family child care providers. Mathematica randomly selected half of the businesses to receive several hours of intensive coaching each month and quality improvement grants, which could be spent on scholarships for staff, curriculum and classroom materials, or parent engagement materials.

“I don’t get to say this very often as an evaluator, but I can confidently say that the Seeds coaching and funding improved child care quality,” said Kim Boller, Mathematica’s lead researcher for the study. “Quality scores were much higher for the group with access to Seeds coaching and quality improvement funds than for the control group that did not have access to these resources.”

Experts agree that high-quality early learning experiences give young children the start they need to enter school ready for success.

“We are very excited by the findings from this study and grateful to all of the providers who participated,” said Nina Auerbach, president and CEO of Thrive by Five Washington, the state’s public-private partnership for early learning. “We knew from previous research and similar systems in other states that one-on-one coaching for providers makes a difference in improving the quality of child care, but we wanted to know how much of a difference it makes. This study clearly shows that coaching is critical and needs to be part of any system we have here in Washington.”

Seeds to Success is about raising the quality of care for all children and giving families the information they need about local child care to make the best choices possible.

“All Washington children and families deserve access to high-quality child care,” said Dr. Bette Hyde, director of the Washington State Department of Early Learning. “Seeds to Success will help families learn why high-quality care is so important to their child’s school readiness, and how to look for high-quality care. And we’re going to support providers as they make both minor and major changes to their programs, so that the kids in their care are ready to be successful when they start school.”

Child Care Resources in King County is helping with the field test in White Center and sees a need being met for both parents and providers – and ultimately children – through Seeds to Success. “Many of the 12,000 parents we talk to every year want us to recommend the best childcare program or provide a rating system. And the licensed child care providers we work with say they’re committed to providing quality care, but there aren’t enough resources to make the improvements needed,” said CEO Deeann Puffert “Our community wants children to have quality child care – they know it’s important – and Seeds to Success can help make it happen.”

With the Mathematica study now complete, the results and recommendations have helped inform year two of the Seeds to Success field test. During year two of the field test, more than 100 child care businesses and 300 child care providers in White Center, East Yakima and Spokane, Clark and Kitsap counties are expected to help test the system. The state Department of Early Learning, Thrive by Five Washington and various key partners are already working with the National Governors’ Association on a plan to take Seeds to Success statewide.

Child care providers participating in the field test are excited about the potential of the Seeds to Success system.

“Seeds to Success has been an incredible opportunity to further develop our craft and focus on the practice and profession of Early Learning,” said Sarah Airhart, founder and director of The Community School of West Seattle. “The relationships built with the coaches have provided inspiration, support and a deeper understanding of our role in the lives of young children.”

“This brings a lot of joy and happiness to me to see that my day care center is becoming more quality than it used to be,” said Lettie’s Day Care director Leticia Rubio-Lopez through a translator. The East Yakima child care provider said she likes the quality rating and improvement system being developed “because there is a true interest for the children. Through the evaluation that took place, I was able to find out the areas I need to improve and work more diligently.”

To date, funds from both the public (state and federal) and private sectors have supported the Seeds to Success field test. Seeds to Success is a priority under the state’s new 10-year Early Learning Plan.

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Thrive by Five Washington is the state’s nonprofit public-partnership for early learning focused on mobilizing a long-term statewide commitment to early learning, so that all children can thrive in school and life. Thrive builds awareness and deepens knowledge around the importance of early learning, identifies best practices and proven models and creates ongoing momentum to ensure that children and families throughout the state have access to high-quality early learning support and opportunities.

www.thrivebyfivewa.org

Washington State Department of Early Learning was created in 2006 to help all Washington children reach their full potential. DEL oversees the state-funded comprehensive preschool program, child care licensing, child care subsidies, and other initiatives and programs to support parents as children’s first and most important teachers. For more information, visit www.del.wa.gov.

Mathematica Policy Research, a nonpartisan research firm, provides a full range of research and data collection services, including program evaluation and policy research, survey design and data collection, research assessment and interpretation, and program performance/data management, to improve public well-being. Its clients include federal and state governments, foundations, and private-sector and international organizations. The employee-owned company has conducted some of the most important studies of education, health care, international, disability, family support, employment, nutrition, and early childhood policies and programs.

<http://mathematica-mpr.com> and <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/earlychildhood/>