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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



“Reaching for the Stars”

Family Child Care Home Validation Study

Reaching for the Stars

“Reaching for the Stars” is an initiative of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Division of Child Care (OKDHS). Its intent is to improve the quality of child care in Oklahoma, especially care available to children receiving child care subsidy. The study reported here is part of a program of research funded by the Division of Child Care to evaluate “Reaching for the Stars.”

Under “Reaching for the Stars” family child care homes may earn one of four Star ratings: One-Star, One-Star Plus, Two-Star, and Three-Star. These Star ratings correspond to differential reimbursement rates providers receive for the care of children funded by OKDHS subsidy. Key criteria differentiating the Star categories are outlined in the Table below. The enhanced quality criteria for the Two-Star family child care homes focus on provider education, parent involvement, and program evaluation. Details on the Two-Star criteria are available on the OKDHS website at www.OKDHS.org/childcare.

The Study

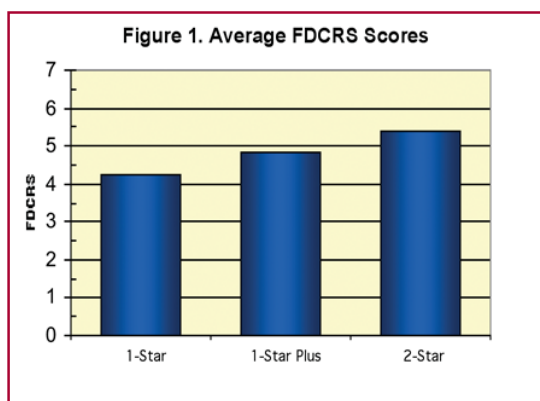
The purpose of this study was to examine quality differences among family child care homes of each Star rating. A statewide stratified random sample of One-Star, One-Star Plus, and Two-Star homes were randomly selected from OKDHS licensing lists. All existing Three-Star level homes were invited to participate. The sample included 189 family child care homes: 61 One-Star, 63 One-Star Plus, 62 Two-Star and 3 Three-Star homes. Only homes licensed for a maximum of 7 children were sampled; large family child care homes serving 8 or more children were not eligible. Because there were so few available, Three-Star homes were not included in the analyses reported here.

Data collection included a 3-hour observation of the environmental quality of the family child care home using the following measures.

- Global quality: *Family Day Care Rating Scale* (FDCRS; Harms & Clifford, 1989)
- Sensitivity of provider-child interactions: *Caregiver Interaction Scale* (Arnett, 1989)

Questionnaires supplied additional data on parent involvement, provider education and professional development, and enrollment.

Star Category	Criteria
One-Star	Meet basic licensing
One-Star Plus	Meet some Two-Star criteria 1st yr, all Two-Star criteria in 2 years or revert to One-Star
Two-Star	Meet enhanced criteria or national accreditation
Three-Star	Meet Two-Star enhanced criteria and national accreditation

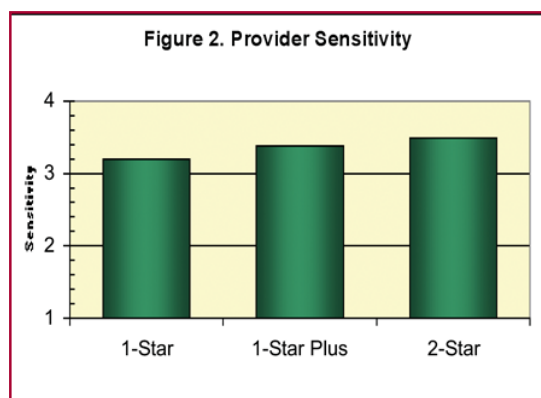


Environmental Quality Differences

As intended by the “Reaching for the Stars” initiative environmental quality was higher in homes of higher Star status. Differences across Star categories were found for average global quality scores on the FDCRS and for the sensitivity of provider-child interactions.

- Two-Star homes had significantly higher FDCRS scores than either One-Star or One-Star Plus homes.
- One-Star Plus homes had significantly higher FDCRS scores than One-Star homes.
- Two-Star providers were more sensitive in their interactions with children than providers in One-Star homes.
- The sensitivity of provider-child interaction was high across all Star categories.

The enhanced quality criteria for Two-Star status requires family child care home providers to implement a variety of parent involvement strategies. No differences were seen in parent involvement practices across Star status. All providers used about four parent involvement strategies; welcoming parents at all times was the most frequently utilized.



Education and Professional Development

The educational levels of the family child care home providers were similar across Star categories. The majority (45%) reported they had completed some college, 37% had completed high school or vocational school, and 18% had completed an Associate’s Degree or higher. Professional development and specialized education in early childhood education (ECE) varied by the Star status of the home and reflected Two-Star criteria.¹



- Providers in Two-Star and One-Star Plus homes had completed significantly more hours of professional development in the 12 months prior to data collection than had providers in One-Star homes.
- Providers in One-Star Plus homes were four times more likely than those in One-Star homes to have completed a Child Development Associate Credential (CDA).

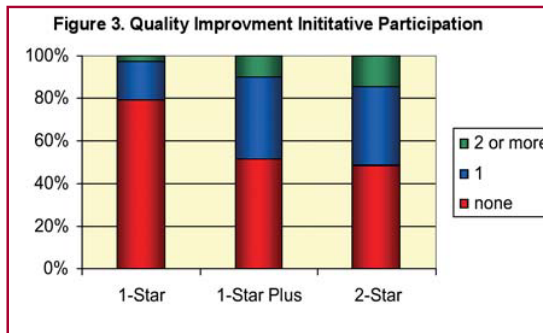
Star Category	Mean Hours Professional Development	Two-Star Specialized Education
One-Star	19.19	26%
One-Star Plus	51.30	21%
Two-Star	40.32	48%

Quality Improvement Initiatives

The Division of Child Care has invested heavily in a wide variety of strategies (i.e., grants, accreditation support, model observation sites) to improve the quality of child care in Oklahoma. Providers participating in this study were asked to identify, from a list of 7, the quality improvement initiatives in which they had participated. Fifty-eight percent of the providers in the total sample have not participated in any of the initiatives while 32% have participated in only one. However, the number of initiatives accessed varied by Star status.

- Providers in Two-Star homes were more likely to have participated in 2 or more initiatives than providers in other Star categories.
- One-Star home providers were more likely to report they had not participated in any of these initiatives than were providers in the other Star categories.

¹ Two-Star Specialized Educ. Criteria: CDA credential, or AA degree or higher in ECE, or AA degree or higher in other fields with 12 hours in ECE. At the time of data collection there was a training alternative to the specialized education criteria.



Participation in Professional Development Opportunities

Providers reported using a variety of OKDHS sponsored professional development opportunities. From a list of 11 professional development opportunities the most popular in all Star categories was conference vouchers. The utilization of professional development opportunities varied by Star status.

- Two-Star and One-Star Plus providers had participated in more professional development initiatives than those in One-Star homes.
- One-Star Plus and Two-Star providers were more likely than One-Star providers to utilize Satellite training, scholarships, and Child Care Careers training.



Prof. Dev. Opportunity	One-Star	One-Star Plus	Two-Star
Mean No. Accessed	1.84	3.66	4.17
Satellite	37%	70%	71%
CECPD Schlrshp	12%	44%	42%
TEACH Schlrshp	13%	33%	45%
Child Care Careers	29%	61%	57%

Enrollment Patterns

Because the Stars program aims to improve the quality of care received by children in poverty, information on both total enrollment and the enrollment of children funded by OKDHS subsidy was obtained.

- Total enrollment figures were higher in Two-Star homes than in One-Star Plus homes.
- Providers of Two-Star and One-Star Plus homes were more likely than One-Star providers to accept children receiving subsidy – about 3 children per home.
- One quarter of the providers did not accept children funded by subsidy.
- Providers in One-Star Plus and Two-Star homes were more likely to enroll children of racial/ethnic diversity.

Enrollment	One-Star	One-Star Plus	Two-Star
Total Enrollment	6.62	6.27	7.67
Have Waiting List	32%	39%	56%
Children with Subsidy Currently Enrolled	52%	94%	80%
Subsidy Enrollment	35%	55%	40%
Ethnic Minority	26%	58%	63%





Enhancing Quality Through Policy

The data gathered for this study provide an opportunity to explore characteristics of family child care that might be improved through policy initiatives. Therefore, subsidy density (percent subsidized enrollment), licensing regulations, and Stars criteria were examined together to reveal predictors of family child care quality. A hierarchical regression equation was used to predict FDCRS quality using these factors.

Unlike child care centers in Oklahoma, neither subsidy density nor licensing variables (group size, ratio) had a significant impact on quality in family child care homes. However, after controlling for subsidy density and licensing, “Reaching for the Stars” criteria predicted quality. Together provider specialized education, hours of professional development and parent involvement accounted for a statistically significant 14% of the variance.

Only the education variables were significant predictors though. That is, providers with more specialized education and professional development offered homes of higher quality.

Appreciation is expressed to the family child care providers who made this study possible.

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Because this regression model predicted only 14% of the variance in quality, we can assume that other factors, not yet identified, play an important role in the quality of care available in Oklahoma family child care homes.



Implications for Policy and Practice

This study validates the merit of the “Reaching for the Stars” initiative. As intended Family Child Care Home quality varies by Star category with higher levels of quality seen in homes with higher Star ratings. The factors of specialized education and professional development are most closely linked to differences in quality. This is consistent with a substantial body of literature, including other studies of Oklahoma facilities.

Policy initiatives that encourage providers to obtain formal specialized education and professional development are the logical course of action. Expansion of current scholarship programs, as well as strategies to make higher education accessible to child care providers should be pursued.

Regarding professional development, ideal programs are rigorous, lengthy, in-depth, and are coupled with guided opportunities to implement learning in real-life situations.



Additional information on “Reaching for the Stars” research available from the following websites:

www.okdhs.org/childcare
www.ou.edu/ecco