



# What Does Quality Mean to Families?

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# Purpose of this Presentation

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- To provide an overview of recent studies on families' perceptions of quality in early care and education
- To consider how families' perspectives are taken into account in early childhood program and policy initiatives regarding quality
- To present a conceptualization of family engagement as a reciprocal relationship between families and ECE program staff that more closely matches the recent research



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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**There are aspects of quality that pertain to families' needs as well as to children's needs.**

Li-Grining and Coley (2006):

- Study of low income children and families in three cities: Boston, Chicago and San Antonio.
- Average income at the federal poverty level.
- Four year old children with a regular child care arrangement of 10 hours or more per week



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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- *Developmental quality* assessed via direct observation in main child care arrangement
- *Duration of care*: Months in current major arrangement
- *Mother's general satisfaction* with care provided to child: whether care setting was a safe, warm and healthy environment with a caring, involved and informed provider
- *Accessibility*: whether mother felt she had choices and options that met her standards, whether she had transportation problems, access to reliable child care and a care provider who shares values
- *Flexibility*: how flexible the care provider was regarding hours of care and mothers' work schedules
- *Mother-provider communication*: level of communication and emotional support that occurred between the mother and care provider
- *Preference* for child care in terms of type mother would choose if she had complete freedom



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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## *Types of care:*

- 43% of sample attended centers (including Head Start),
- 6% licensed family child care homes and
- 50% unlicensed home-based settings

## *Developmental quality:*

- Observed quality higher for Head Start than all other types, followed by other centers, which in turn had higher observed quality than all types of homes.

## *Continuity of care*

- Greater in care provided in home by a relative than in center-based care.



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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## *Overall satisfaction:*

- Did not differ by care type.

## *Accessibility*

- Mothers perceived Head Start and other centers as less accessible than relative care in child's home

## *Flexibility*

- Mothers perceived Head Start and other centers as less flexible than all types of home-based care

## *Communication*

- Mothers reported lower communication in Head Start, centers and licensed home-based care than those in unlicensed relative care.

## *Preferences*

- 38% of mothers used type of care they preferred



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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“There appears to be a clear dichotomy, with formal center care providing the most developmentally supportive care for children, and unregulated home settings providing care that best meets mothers’ needs.” p. 139



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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**Parents of children attending publicly sponsored pre-kindergarten programs prioritize traditional aspects of program quality, but they also see further aspects of the program as important**

Barbarin, McCandies, Early, Clifford, Bryant, Burchinal, Howes & Pianta (2006)

In-home interviews with 439 families in five states whose 4 year old children attended publicly sponsored pre-kindergarten programs. Families varied in SES, with approximately half low income



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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- Parents were asked:
  - *What in your opinion makes a high quality program? What distinguishes a good preschool from mediocre or poor preschool programs?*
  - *Now we would like to know more about what was important to you in choosing to send your child to this preschool program. What specifically were you looking for in a preschool program?*
- *Content analysis of open ended responses*



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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- Most of the responses fit into categories traditionally used to reflect structural and process features of quality.
  - Structural: teachers are qualified; enough staff to work with children
  - Safe, clean physical environment
  - Adequate instructional resources
  - Sound instruction
  - Teacher attributes: motivated, friendly, caring, approachable
  - Effective discipline
  - Positive emotional climate



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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But three dimensions in parents' responses went beyond what is usually included in structural and process features of quality:

- **Comprehensive service provision:** including needs of families as well as children, including nutritious food, flexible hours, staff who can speak Spanish, opportunity to learn English
- **Convenient location:** Program accessible from home or work and in safe area
- **Home-school partnership:** relationship between parents and staff involving minimal tension, trust, regular communication and cooperative interactions.



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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Endorsed by 20% of families or more as an indicator of quality:

- Sound instruction
- Teacher attributes
- *Home-school partnerships*

Endorsed by 20% of families or more in making decision about whether or not to enroll child in a program:

- Sound instruction
- Teacher attributes
- Positive emotional climate
- *Comprehensive services*
- *Convenient location, and*
- *Home-school partnerships*



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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“Three dimensions used in parents’ conception of quality rarely surface in the research or professional literature. These three dimensions were comprehensive service provision, convenient location, and home-school partnership. These three dimensions met some of the practical needs and concerns of parents who were entrusting the care and education of their children to others. ” p. 639



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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**Child-centered and family-centered aspects of quality are linked: “Children may only reap the benefits of the child-centered aspects of high-quality programming” if families also perceive care to be family-sensitive.**

Bromer, Paulsell, Porter, Henly, Ramsburg, Weber & Families and Quality Workgroup Members (forthcoming):

Reviewed the research to identify the key components of family-sensitive caregiving



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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- Work group formed at meeting on *Development the Next Wave of Quality Measures for Early Childhood and School-Age Settings* sponsored by OPRE, DHHS and federal partners in January 2008.
- Started discussions at the meeting and continued to work together to carry out review and prepare chapter for book *Measuring Quality in Early Childhood Settings*.
- Book will also have chapters reviewing what would in depth measures of quality need to include when focusing on:
  - social and emotional supports in early care and education,
  - respect for culture,
  - development of dual language learners,
  - children with special needs
  - Supports for early mathematical skills



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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Work group concluded that there are three core components of family sensitive caregiving:

- (1) *Positive attitudes towards families*, including “openness, respect and acceptance of diverse family cultures, traditions and practices... appreciation for diverse family circumstances and situations.”
- (2) *Knowledge and understanding of individual families* including knowledge about family’s economic and employment circumstances; family practices, including cultural practices, family structure, child-rearing and routines; and parents’ individual strengths and needs
- (3) *Practices with families* including frequent and positive communication, flexible scheduling and fees, and resources and referrals for families



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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Based on literature, workgroup hypothesized that family-sensitive caregiving would result in outcomes for families as well as children.

Potential benefits for families:

- Longer duration of participation in ECE settings and easing of transitions when they did occur
- Stronger partnerships of parents and providers/educators
- Reduced stress on work-family issues
- Greater sense of social support



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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## Potential benefits for children

- Continuity in relationships with caregivers
- If care is also high quality on child-focused dimensions, larger dosages of such care
- Referencing: children observe family-provider relationships and respond. May affect quality of relationship with caregiver to see positive family-caregiver relationship
- Less self-care
- Positive effects on parenting if work-family stress is reduced and parents feel more respected and supported

Important to note that not only positive practices are involved in family sensitive caregiving, but also less tangible attitudes and knowledge. As will see in a later section, much easier to articulate and measure practices.



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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Family involvement in early care and education contributes to young children's development. Some aspects of family involvement are particularly important.

Fantuzzo, McWayne and Perry (2004)

- In earlier work, Fantuzzo and colleagues had developed Family Involvement Questionnaire. Based on Epstein's typology for older age ranges, identified different dimensions of family involvement in ECE to describe nature and extent of family involvement in young children's early education.
- In this study looked at whether these were related to a range of children's developmental outcomes among four year olds participating in Head Start



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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Three parent-involvement dimensions:

- School-based involvement: activities and behaviors that parents engage in at school to benefit their children
- Home-based involvement: active promotion of a learning environment at home for children (e.g., creating space for learning activities at home, learning opportunities for child in the community)
- Home-school conferencing: communication behaviors between parents and school personnel about a child's educational experiences and progress



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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Although all three dimensions showed relationships with the child outcomes, "Home-Based Involvement activities, such as reading to a child at home, providing a place for educational activities, and asking a child about school, evidenced the strongest relationships to later preschool classroom competencies" (p. 476)

- motivation
- attention/persistence,
- receptive vocabulary
- fewer behavior problems



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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These findings are in accord with meta-analysis by Jeynes (2005) focusing on research on parental involvement during elementary school and children's achievement

- Focused on findings of studies linking parent involvement both as it occurred spontaneously and as encouraged by parent involvement programs
- Found overall effects on achievement. Parental expectations about achievement had stronger effects than more demonstrative aspects of involvement like attendance and participation in school events
- Programs to increase involvement did show effects



# Recent Research on Families' Perspectives on Quality

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In sum, recent research is pointing to the importance of:

- Thinking about quality in terms of *both* family and child needs, and viewing these as linked.
- Active practices that engage families as components of quality from a family perspective, but also positive attitudes and knowledge
- Home component of family involvement as well as school component and home-school linkages as related to children's development, but particular importance of home component to child outcomes



## Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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Turn now to question of whether and how family perspectives are reflected in approaches to improving quality in ECE. Two broad conclusions:

- Family perspectives ARE incorporated in policy and program initiatives focusing on improving quality in early care and education (ECE),
- However, program and policy initiatives capture only some aspects of quality from a family perspective



# Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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Will provide examples from three ECE  
quality improvement approaches:

- Quality Rating Systems (QRS)
- Use of quality measures to guide program improvement
- Accreditation



## Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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### Quality Rating Systems (QRS)

- One of the purposes of QRS is to provide information about program quality to parents so they can make informed decisions about early care and education
- QRS also promote continuous improvement efforts for the child care field



## Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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### Quality Rating Systems, cont.

- 27 states (and District of Columbia) are operating, piloting, or launching a QRS
- Virtually all of the QRS include quality standards for positive family involvement



# Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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## Quality Rating Systems, cont.

- Standards for family involvement in QRS include:
  - bulletin boards for communication to parents
  - written communication to parents (daily, weekly, monthly)
  - parent-teacher conferences (at least 1 annually)
  - family involvement activities (at least 1 annually)
  - community resources available to parents
  - parent participation in program development
  - program maintains a Parent Advisory Board



# Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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## Quality Measures

- Quality measures used as guides for ECE program improvement
  - ECERS-R* Parent Involvement item focuses on 'provisions for parents' such as:
    - whether parents are given written program information and information about their child
    - whether parents share in program evaluation and decision-making
  - Parent Caregiver Relationship Scale* focuses on
    - quality of parent-caregiver relationship.



# Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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## Quality Measures, cont.

*Program Administration Scale*-items on the Scale include:

- whether program has family supports such as sick child care, extended hours, flexible programming
- whether program has multiple modes of communication with families
- whether families are involved in evaluating the program



# Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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## Accreditation

- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation standards address:
  - whether programs use multiple methods to communicate with families
  - whether programs/teachers gather information about families' race, religion, language, family structure, socioeconomic background, childrearing practices
  - whether curriculum is responsive to family values and experiences
  - whether information about resources and services is available to families
  - whether program is responsive to parents' work-family schedules



# Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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## Accreditation, cont.

- National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) accreditation standards address:
  - whether provider respects diverse family styles and strengths
  - whether provider exchanges information with families
  - whether provider gives families information about tax credits and subsidies



# Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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## Strengths and Limitations

- Key components of quality from a family perspective do appear in approaches to measuring quality for program and policy purposes BUT there are limitations:
  - QRS and quality measures focus primarily on program-based activities and practices and do not address family engagement within the home.
  - It is important to differentiate between provider efforts to support family involvement and how much involvement actually occurs
  - This distinction is important in high-stakes contexts (QRS, tiered reimbursements) so that providers who serve parents less likely to get involved (single parents, parents working multiple jobs, etc.) are not penalized for serving these populations



# Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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## Strengths and Limitations

- Heterogeneous nature of child care settings means that certain family engagement practices will not be appropriate in all settings
  - e.g., parent-teacher conferences may not make sense in a setting where the provider and parent interact every day or have a close relationships



# Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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## Strengths and Limitations

- RAND evaluation of Qualistar (Colorado's QRS) found that it is hard to accurately measure parent involvement.
- The Parent Involvement item on the ECERS-R is completed only by providers. There is potential for self-presentation bias.
- The Parent-Caregiver Relationship Scale seems to address the extent to which parents like staff on a personal level
- When using the NAEYC Parent Form (18 yes/no items), > 90% of responses were positive for each item



# Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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## Efforts to Address Limitations

- RAND evaluators developed their own tool-Family-Provider Partnership (FPP) measure
- The FPP reflects many of the themes from the research such as knowledge of the child and family, accessibility, flexibility, comprehensive services



# Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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- 3 items ask parents about involvement opportunities in child care program including planning, decision-making, and social activities for families
- 2 items ask about frequency of discussions initiated by caregivers about child's interests and behavior in child care and at home and parents are asked to assess the degree to which the program works to support child's development
- 4 items asks parents to assess the competence and caring of the provider
- 3 items ask about changes made since child has been in program
- the Family Form is completed by parents
- the Documentation checklist is completed by providers



# Inclusion of Family Perspective in ECE Quality Improvement Approaches

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In sum:

- It is positive that all of these policies and program approaches include family involvement
- Most approaches focus on engaging parents within the program context.
- Some notable exceptions, such as NAEYC accreditation emphasis on attempts to understand family life, flexibility, communication
- Recent efforts to extend measurement of family involvement in policy initiatives important
- Further work needed to develop measures of quality from family perspective



# Re-conceptualizing Family Involvement

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Need for a conceptualization of family involvement that more fully captures family perspective.



# Re-conceptualizing Family Involvement

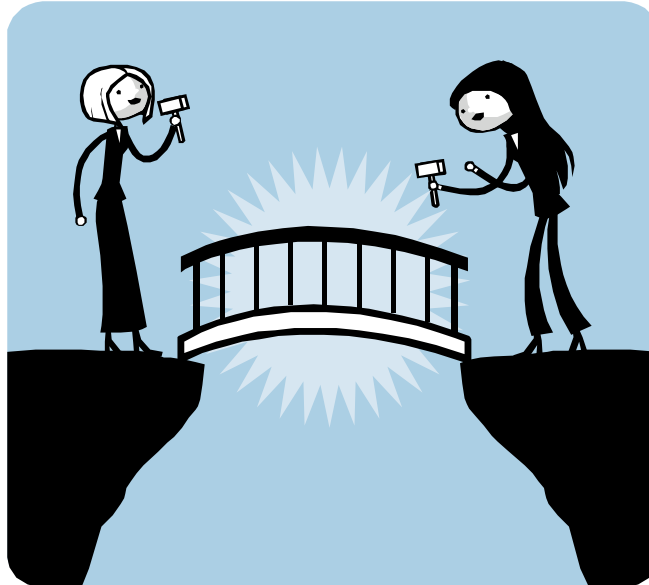
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## *Family Engagement, Diverse Families, and Early Childhood Education Programs: An Integrated Review of the Literature (Pre-K Now and NAEYC)*

- Reviewed literature on family engagement
- Concluded that family engagement should be conceptualized as an on-going, reciprocal, strengths-based partnership between families and early childhood programs
- Recommends paradigm shift from *parent involvement* to *family engagement*
- Traditional paradigm focuses on whether or not parents are engaged in school-based activities such as volunteering in classrooms, attending school events, parent-teacher conferences

# Re-conceptualizing Family Involvement

- Conceptualization of family engagement is that of building a bridge between early care and education programs and families





# Re-conceptualizing Family Involvement

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- Conceptualization of family involvement as a partnership between programs and families that is co-constructed and characterized by:
  - Trust
  - Shared values
  - Consistent communication
  - Mutual respect



# Re-conceptualizing Family Involvement

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- Focus groups carried out as part of “Engaged Families” project also found that families do not always understand terminology used and purposes of policy and program approaches to quality and family engagement
- Pre-K Now Focus Groups
  - Parents did not fully understand purposes of home visiting
  - Parents did not fully understand purpose of “homework”



# Questions for Discussion

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- Does your PIRC currently utilize any of the components of reciprocal family engagement that we've described? Is this a direction you're interested in going in?
- How does your program respond to both family and child needs?
- How does the information presented here align with your ideas about the work of the PIRCs? Do these ideas align with, extend OR overstretch the mission of the PIRCs as you see it?
- What kind of feedback do you get from families about the kinds of support they need or want?



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