Early childhood education

Why is high-quality early childhood education important, and what is known about access to high-quality programs?

Experiences in high-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs can set the context for success in elementary school and beyond. Early childhood programs for children through age 8, including prekindergarten or preschool programs as well as child care and infant and toddler programs, can be a vital support for young learners. Research points to the positive cognitive, physical, and social-emotional outcomes of ECE for all children. Research also suggests that ECE programs can have especially strong impacts for low-income children and children for whom English is not a first language. In some instances, ECE can even help to narrow the gaps in learning achievement between low-income and higher income children.

Early childhood experiences set the context for success in elementary education and beyond.

However, only about two in five eligible 4-year-olds are enrolled in a state-funded preschool program or Head Start.

Even for those children who do participate, programs may not be of sufficient quality to improve student readiness for school success.

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REL Midwest supports high-quality ECE through the work of the ECE Research Alliance, a researcher–practitioner partnership. The goal of the alliance is to use research to define, measure, implement, and evaluate the elements of quality in the context of today’s ECE systems. Our current research and technical assistance projects include the study of quality rating and improvement systems (QRISs), professional development and quality improvement supports, and data system integration to link data on young children. In addition, the alliance guides the development of REL Midwest ECE knowledge-sharing activities. Through these activities, REL Midwest helps connect regional stakeholders to emerging ECE practices and research. Ultimately, we hope that the lessons learned from regional projects inform evidence-based policy and practice in the Midwest. For more information about alliance projects, please contact Ann-Marie Faria (afaria@air.org).

**ECE quality improvement supports**

Research on ECE has produced numerous evidence-based recommendations that practitioners can draw upon.

REL Midwest hosted an interactive Web-based workshop designed to educate practitioners on how to develop and administer quality surveys.7

REL Midwest hosted a full-day, in-person event in Minnesota on the effects of early childhood academic content, particularly mathematics and reading content, on later student achievement.8

REL Midwest hosted a public television broadcast in Ohio. The broadcast provided practical recommendations on how to improve early childhood literacy skills across early childhood care and education contexts and at home.9

**QRISs**

A QRIS is a “method to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education settings.”5 All states in the Midwest region have a QRIS for ECE programs.

REL Midwest examined how recent changes in Michigan’s QRIS rating calculations are related to changes in the distribution of QRIS program ratings in the state.6

REL Midwest is conducting a regional scan of QRISs to better understand the features, success, and challenges associated with developing and implementing a statewide QRIS.

REL Midwest is helping Iowa investigate how professional development is related to improved quality of ECE programming by developing a survey instrument that will measure the types of quality improvement activities undertaken by participating programs in each Midwestern state’s QRIS.

**Early childhood data systems**

Statewide early childhood data systems, especially those systems that link data held across various state agencies such as education, social services, and health into a single system, can provide valuable information for policymakers and practitioners, as well as families and caregivers.

REL Midwest is helping the Illinois Early Learning Council understand how states facilitate interagency collaboration to support the development of an integrated early childhood data system in Illinois.

REL Midwest hosted an interactive webinar on the development of early childhood data systems in states across the country. The webinar provides practical recommendations for developing these types of systems.10
Endnotes


7 Link: http://www.relmidwest.org/research-alliances/early-childhood-education-research-alliance

8 Link: http://www.relmidwest.org/events/bridging-link-between-early-childhood-and-kindergarten-readiness

9 Link: http://www.relmidwest.org/events/developing-early-literacy-skills

10 Link: http://www.relmidwest.org/events/building-early-childhood-data-systems

Additional information

For more information about this infographic, contact REL Midwest by e-mail (relmidwest@air.org) or by phone (866-730-6735).