Child Care Access in Alabama:
Recent Research and Future Directions

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Overview

Framing

Research Findings

Implications and Future Directions
Child Care

- Supports children’s learning and development
- Helps families participate in the workforce
- Furthers our state’s economic growth
All programs for young children provide both care and education.
There is a gap between what it costs to provide high-quality child care and what families can pay.

How do we fill that gap?
Top Priorities Related to Child Care

- Build supply and increase access to high-quality care
- Decrease cost to families
- Grow a stable and qualified early education workforce through increased compensation

Child Care Aware, 2023; Alliance for Early Success, 2020; Urban Institute, 2018
Multi-Dimensional Framework of Access to Child Care and Early Education

Reasonable Effort

Supports child’s development

Affordability

Meets parents’ needs

Paschall & Maxwell, 2022
Exploring Child Care Access in Alabama: Three Studies

1. Measuring and Mapping Child Care Access in Alabama
2. Identifying and Addressing Barriers to Early Care and Education Access in Rural Alabama Using Rapid-Cycle Evaluation
3. Alabama Family Child Care Providers’ Decision-Making Related to Serving Children During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic
Study 1: Measuring and Mapping Child Care Access in Alabama

- Create maps to visualize child care licensing and subsidy data
- Understand current subsidized child care access in Alabama
- Inform data-informed decisions to increase supply of affordable ECE options

https://tinyurl.com/almapping
Study 1: Measuring and Mapping Child Care Access in Alabama

- Developed five sets of maps, each measuring subsidized access differently.
- Data stories provide example of how to combine maps to inform geographically-targeted solutions.

Subsidy Slot Map

Child Population Map
Study 1: Measuring and Mapping Child Care Access in Alabama

Data story example: a zip code where there doesn’t seem to be enough subsidized care, and programs participate in subsidy at a low rate

- **Blue quadrant**: low program participation, high utilization of slots by subsidized children
- **Orange dots**: not enough subsidized slots in zip code
Study 1 Highlights

- Significant **local variation** in access
- Zip codes around the state with **no regulated capacity**
- Many children receiving subsidies attend care **outside their zip code**
- **Clusters of zip codes** with high enrollment ratios and large differences between the subsidy rate and eligibility rate, indicating potentially insufficient subsidized child care supply
Recommendations for Policy and Practice

• Explore **targeted intervention** where maps suggest there is inadequate subsidized care

• Implement strategies for **recruiting and supporting home-based child care providers**

• Help child care programs **begin participating in the subsidy system**, and identify and address barriers they may face

• Support and encourage **faith-based license-exempt programs** to become licensed
Limitations of Mapping Access

- Often rely on census estimates
- Don’t capture variation in access based on children’s ages
- Families don’t always want child care where they live
- May over-estimate demand
Recommendations for Research and Data

• Supplement findings with **direct data collection** from families and educators

• Examine access specifically for **infants and toddlers** and **non-standard hours care**

• Use **waiting list data** as another method to measure demand

• Because data are from prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, consider **recreating** these maps
Study 2: ECE Access in Rural Communities

• Case studies of two rural communities
  • Phase 1:
    • Interviews with 31 stakeholders about ECE access and quality
    • Identify a need
  • Phase 2:
    • Develop an intervention plan to meet that need
    • Pilot the intervention and measure its effectiveness
• Case studies of promising practices to address access and quality
Study 2: Phase 1 Results

• Barriers
  • Insufficient capacity
  • Hours of operation
  • Cost
  • Transportation

• Differences by role
  • Community leaders: insufficient infant/toddler care
  • Parents: satisfied with infant and toddler care options

• Access dimensions
  • Reasonable effort discussed most often
  • Access dimensions sometimes conflict (e.g., improving teacher-child ratio)
Study 2: Phase 2

• Community A:
  • LENA Start groups with Alabama Talks and United Way of West Alabama
  • Goal: engage parents and relative caregivers in parent education about the importance of talking with children

• Community B:
  • Business practices learning community for current and aspiring center-based child care administrators
  • Goal: build administrative capacity and provide social support
Study 2: Implications

• Understanding and addressing ECE access needs in rural communities is complex
• Include multiple stakeholder perspectives when possible
• Consider access dimensions in combination with each other
Study 3: Alabama Family Child Care Providers’ Decision-Making Related to Serving Children During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Study of FCC educators during COVID-19
  - Administrative data
  - Educator interviews
- Lower closure risk for FCC educators who
  - Participate in subsidy, especially in lower-opportunity communities
  - Are nationally accredited
- FCC educators prioritized families’ needs when making operating decisions
- System flexibility and financial incentives helped them stay open
Overall Implications

- Need for **statewide and local solutions**
- Importance of **collaboration**
  - Across agencies that support young children and families
  - Research-practice partnerships
  - Employer, philanthropic, government, advocacy, non-profit collaborations
- Integrating **multiple data sources**
- Including early childhood educator and family **voice**
- Attending to **implementation**
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