

**The Communications Group**  
&  
**Arkansas Department of Human Services:**  
**Division of Child Care**  
**and Early Childhood Education**



**Ariel Strategic Communications**

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## **Project Background and Study Objectives**

The Communications Group recommended this research effort for its client, the Arkansas Department of Human Services: Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, to continue research that will inform communications strategies that will build awareness and positive attitudes toward the state's Better Beginnings program for child care and early childhood education providers in Arkansas. Ariel Strategic Communications worked with The Communications Group and ADHS to hold groups statewide with participants grouped by location and their current relationship with the Better Beginnings program (participants and nonparticipants). Groups were convened in central Arkansas (Conway), southwestern Arkansas (Arkadelphia) and northwestern Arkansas (Rogers) in mid- to late February.

This study was designed to:

- Identify emotional and rational motivators for child care providers to participate in the rating system.
- Develop research-based recommendations for how to best communicate to child care providers about the system's opportunities.
- Identify barriers for adaptation of a statewide child care provider ratings system.

## Methodology and Timeline

The Communications Group and its client the Arkansas Department of Human Services: Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education agreed after the focus group study completed by Ariel Strategic Communications in December 2010 with mothers with children in child care that more inquiry was needed with child care providers. ADHS stipulated what regions of the state in which it desired to seat the groups, and Ariel Strategic recommended that participants be divided by their current relationship with the Better Beginnings program. The following groups were convened:

- One group of nonparticipating child care leaders, one group of participating child care leaders in Conway, Thursday, February 17, on the campus of the University of Central Arkansas
- One group of nonparticipating child care leaders, one group of participating child care leaders near Arkadelphia, Wednesday, February 23, at Iron Mountain Lodge
- One group of nonparticipating child care leaders, one group of participating child care leaders in Rogers, Thursday, February 24, at the University of Arkansas's Global Campus

The client provided Ariel Strategic Communications with a list of possible participants from its Website listing of child care providers and early childhood educators in designated counties for each region, and Ariel Strategic Communications recruited participants for each group from this pool. Each participant was qualified by a telephone interview, and all participants who took part were paid \$75 in cash at the conclusion of the meeting.

Each group was guided through structured activities as well as discussion to elicit the desired information objectives. The group members also conducted a Q-Sort, as the parent groups had previously, in which participants prioritized statements about attributes that were true of quality child care providers. The statements were based on statements collected by Ms. Jones when she recruited the first three groups (two Conway groups and one Arkadelphia group). According to Qmethod.org,

Q Methodology is a research method used to study people's "subjectivity" – that is, their viewpoint. Q Methodology was originally developed by William Stephenson (1902-1989), an Englishman trained in physics (Ph.D., 1926), psychology (Ph.D., 1929) and psychometrics under the tutelage of Charles Spearman and Sir Cyril Burt. It has been used both in clinical settings for assessing patients, as well as in research settings to examine how people think about a topic.

The complete findings of the Q-sort analyst, Michelle LaVicka, Ph.D., can be found in Appendix B. The statements subjects sorted can be found in Appendix E.

The Communications Group and its clients approved the participant screener and the facilitation guide.

All convened groups included these lines of discussion:

- Likes/dislikes of their jobs/daily routines as well as their hopes and aspirations for the children in their care

- Attributes of quality in their specific organization or child care/education organizations in general
- Communications about and demonstrations of quality to parents/prospects as well as communication gaps
- The contributions their organizations make to the lives of the children and families they serve
- How they like their professional services to be referred to

Groups were also asked questions specific to their relationship with the Better Beginnings program.

- Nonparticipants were asked how likely they are to enroll, what they knew of or heard about the program, benefits of Better Beginnings and benefits of nonparticipation.
- Participants were asked what motivated them to enroll, benefits of the program, how they would encourage others to enroll and what they don't like about the program.

All convened groups also included the following activities:

- Creating an advertisement for Better Beginnings
- Q-sort

All groups were filmed for simultaneous viewing by the client and recorded for future reference.

## Findings by Session

### **Session I: Central Arkansas Nonparticipants**

On Thursday, February 17, at 11 a.m., five participants were seated for the first focus group of the study at the Brewer-Hageman Conference Center on the University of Central Arkansas campus. The women were from Conway, Mayflower and Morrilton, and were recruited from Conway and Faulkner counties. The chart below indicates the organizations represented by those in this group:

	<b>No. of Children Served</b>	<b>Ages of children served</b>	<b>Religious</b>	<b>Home-based</b>	<b>Individually Owned</b>	<b>Affiliated with another organization</b>
1	16	9 mos.-12 yrs.	X	X	X	
2	15-20	Newborn-16 yrs.		X	X	
3	96	18 mos.-3 yrs.	X			X
4	55	6 wks.-12 yrs.			X	
5	16-20	1 yr.-10 yrs.	X	X	X	

After they introduced themselves, participants answered the question, “What do you like most about your job?” Several responded that they enjoy playing with the children and seeing them grow and develop during their time. Another mentioned interaction with the children and families, and said she likes giving all the children “big hugs every day...” and ended by saying she likes all the roles she gets to play in the lives of the kids, “doctor, nurse, ... cook.” Another participant who had moved up to a director role said that she enjoys being recognized by children who have grown and gone to school, and seeing that those children miss her and the experiences they had at her school. The last participant said she likes working in a Christian environment. Finally, women who had already answered also mentioned that they value how they are contributing to the community and to families by providing a safe learning environment for children.

Members of the group were then asked what they like least about their jobs. The first to answer said, “The thing I like the most is interaction, and the thing I like least is interaction.” She said the difficulties in communicating with parents and families frustrates and concerns her. “That’s hard,” she concluded, “especially when you care about the people and the children.” Another said she likes managing other teachers least, and another said she dislikes the ongoing problem of finding and keeping good staff members for her organization. Another woman agreed with both of these answers.

Asked to imagine what they would change about their organization if there were no restrictions or resource restraints, the first to respond said she would hire more staff so she could serve more children. Another said she would have more space so she could divide the children more by age and give each group more appropriate play areas and another woman agreed. One woman said she would have “the perfect facility,” with which the final person to answer this question also agreed.

Next the participants were asked to identify their hopes are for the children in their care each day. Here are some of their verbatim responses:

- “I hope that they have a good day and go home happy.”
- “You want them to be happy.”
- “I want them to feel secure because that’s part of their happiness... I want to see progress. ... I want to see the children moving ahead in their lives and gaining not just knowledge, but confidence and learning how to cooperate with other people.”
- “I want the children to have a rewarding experience, socially, academically... .”

This group was also asked to identify indications of quality for their organizations.<sup>1</sup> The first person to answer said that she sees the best demonstration of quality is that the child is clean during the day and when he or she returns home to his parents. “There’s a basic standard that the child is not just told to go change [his or her] clothes, but that [he or she is] helped and encouraged to understand that we want to stay clean.” She also said that a child’s happiness and willingness to stay in child care or resistance to go home indicates quality care. Another woman said the student-to-teacher ratio is an indicator of quality, with which another participant later agreed. One woman said that her organization’s use of a specific curriculum demonstrates that they provide quality care with educational opportunities. Then the members of the group were also asked how *any* child care organization indicates quality. The first woman to respond reiterated all the points the group members had made about indications of quality in their own organizations. One facility owner said that quality is indicated by staff members who have the expertise to be flexible with the schedule and the children they serve. The women then began to speak about how a child care license does not equal quality care. One woman said, “Do they treat the children with respect? Do you treat the parents, and grandparents, family and staff with respect?” And then the group continued the discussion of when the “set of rules” for quality ratings contradict providing quality care to children on an individual basis.

Those who own their child care organizations were asked what they hoped for when they started their facilities. The first to answer said she didn’t start hers; she bought it, and she did so because she wanted to make some changes. “The lady I bought it from was very tense and snappy, and she was not a happy lady. ... I wanted to change that atmosphere to be something that was happy and loving and not condemning.” And she said she feels she’s accomplished that. Another said she also bought the facility from someone, but she had small things to “tweak” as a leader, which she has done, as well. A third owner said she wants the children to be happy, which she also feels she accomplishes each day.

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<sup>1</sup> Not all groups were asked all questions in the guide due to time restraints or the ongoing focusing of the inquiry. The first group is often asked the most questions, which are then edited and refined as the study continues.

Those who work for others in their organizations were asked how they chose where to work. Both women who answered found themselves in their roles through a series of positions or their past roles with the organization.

The group's members were then asked how their organization *communicates* that it provides quality child care. The first to answer got all-around agreement when she said, "Mine is word-of-mouth." Another said her location puts her right in front of parents driving their children to school each day. Ms. Jones followed up by asking if they thought their organizational behavior was responsible for their positive reputations in their communities, and several participants agreed and a final woman stipulated, "And your standards."

The women were asked if they think the public has an accurate view of their organizations. The first woman to respond said, "I don't because they just look at me like [I'm] just the babysitter... Like the parent's job is so much more important." Another followed this response by saying of the parents, "They don't know that you're hands on and that you're actually influencing in the things [the parents] do." Ms. Jones then asked the participants what they would like the families to understand about their services that they don't think parents currently "get." Here are some verbatim responses:

- "The professionalism. We are professionals, and we're not just babysitters."
- "We're not just someone who collects a paycheck from the parents. We have caring hearts."
- "I wish they'd understand that we are people, we have lives too because most of the time they just want us to keep the kids all day."

At this point, the facilitator moved the group into discussing the Better Beginnings program specifically by asking them what they had heard about the program. The first person to respond said, "What I heard about it is that it's a lot that you have to go through in order to get quality. ... But overall they say it's a good thing." This woman then said that having "state folks in and out of" her business was not why she had become a small-business woman, and the idea of this conflicted with her desires for her independent professional life. Asked the outcome of following the rules, this participant said that your organization is approved and has tax benefits along with the ability to charge more for child care. Another woman said your organization can receive grants that those that are not Better Beginnings facilities cannot receive.

Next the group members were asked to speak candidly about how likely it is that their organization will enroll in Better Beginnings while it is still voluntary. The first person said, "Zero." Another woman agreed, saying that the rules and guidelines would decrease the quality of the services they provided. One daycare owner said that the idea that she could charge more is not really attractive to her, as she can charge whatever she likes. She did say that the reality for income would be that the state would pay her more for voucher children, so she would stop losing money on those families.

The participants next identified the benefits of *not* participating. "We have more freedom within our own curriculum and within our own walls," said one woman, and others agreed. Asked what else keeps them from participating, this same woman said that the time involved in Better Beginnings is something that discourages her from voluntarily enrolling. Another woman said it is one thing, as the business

owner, to earn continuing education hours, but to require staff to go and to pay them as well, can be onerous. “Even if you say that you’ll pay them, they still don’t want to go to [the] classes. They don’t want to take the time,” agreed one woman.

The group’s members were then asked to identify what gave them the most pride in their work each day. Below are some of their verbatim responses:

- “The kids. The hugs that they give.”
- “It feels good to know that [the children] love you... .”
- “The hugs and the kids hanging off both legs, and jumping all over you.”

The group members were then asked to name their organization’s most important contribution to the families they serve. The first response, which was greeted with laughter and much agreement, was “potty training.” Another said that because children are often better behaved in their facilities, the parents get to see what the child is capable of, which often differs from their perceptions. “I like bringing structure,” said one participant. One woman used the term “safe haven,” and another agreed, saying, “It really is, and the children come in knowing that for those eight or ten hours, everything is going to be good.” Finally, one woman said that standing up to parents who are mistreating a child is the greatest contribution.

Before the activities were begun, the group members were asked how they liked to be referred to professionally. Some women agreed that the term “child care provider” was “accurate.” Another said, “It’s better than being called a babysitter.” Another said she prefers to be called a “child care professional” if pressed, but that she really doesn’t have much interest in a title. Another woman said she prefers the term “teacher” and another said she refers to herself as a “daycare worker.” A participant who manages others said she refers to employees as “staff” or “our teachers.” All participants seemed to agree “child care facility” sounded “cold.” Later in the session, Ms. Jones followed up on this question by asking how the parents refer to their organizations. The first person to respond said that she hears, “school,” “daycare” and even her “house.”

Next, participants were instructed to create advertisements for Better Beginnings and to work on their Q-sort concourses as well in the same independent work time. The Q-sort is addressed later in this report. This group’s ads included:

- “Better Beginnings
  - Fun, safe, love
  - Laugh, Better Future
  - Better started”
- Better Beginnings (with a drawing of a sun and a school)
  - Forming a solid foundation for your child’s future
    - Social development
    - Emotional growth
    - Educational progress
    - Physical development, etc.
  - All under one roof
- Beginnings
  - Brighter start, Better tomorrow

- Better Beginnings (with a rainbow)
  - For a Better start in your child's future
- Better Beginnings
  - Better bigger opportunities for your children.

After a few final remarks, regarding how the report would be used, the participants were thanked, paid and dismissed.

**Session II: Central Arkansas Better Beginnings Participants**

Session II was held at 12:45 p.m. on Thursday, February 17, with eight participants for the second central Arkansas group. The women were from Vilonia, Center Ridge, Conway and Morrilton, and were recruited from Faulkner and Conway counties. The chart below indicates the organizations represented by those in this group:

	<b>No. of Children Served</b>	<b>Ages of children served</b>	<b>Religious</b>	<b>Home-based</b>	<b>Individually Owned</b>	<b>Affiliated with another organization</b>
1	69	3 yrs.-5 yrs.				X
2	175	6 wks.-12 yrs.			X	
3	180	4 yrs.				
4	80+	K-12 yrs.				X
5	30	12 mos.-5 yrs.				X
6	200	6 wks.-10 yrs.	X		X	
7	174	Newborn- 5 yrs.				X
8	32	3 yrs.-5 yrs.				X

After introducing themselves, the participants were asked what they like best about their jobs. They mentioned seeing the children grow and transition through developmental stages after they left their care (but still in their larger organization), the positive impact they have on the families overall and working with parents. Asked what they like least, paperwork, working with parents when tension arises, staffing issues that grow from not being able to pay well and recruit dedicated workers and collecting balances from parents were mentioned.

The group members were then asked what they imagine for their organizations if anything were possible. The first person to respond said she would like to take all children who apply. “It’s very hard to have to turn people away from service that they want,” she said, and others agreed. Other changes the participants would make without their current limitations include creating ample space for the children, paying teaching assistants more, paying all staff more, and retaining staff longer after they are trained. One woman said she would like to give the children more opportunities, “Like the things that the parents don’t have the opportunity to do with their kids like music, gymnastics, tumbling... .”

The women were then asked what they want for the children every day when they come to work. Here is a sample of verbatim statements:

- “I want little ones to enjoy learning.”

- “If you can take and erase everything else and just make it equal across the board. I’m dreaming a little.”
- “You need the parents to trust you to share what’s happened the night before.”
- “I want them to come through the door knowing that we are where we want to be, and how that they want to be there.”

Participants were then asked to identify their own organizations’ quality indicators. The first to respond said that kindergarten teachers who taught her Pre-K students were able to skip two months of instruction because the students were so well prepared by her program. Another said there are many, complex indicators that are interlinked, “environmental aspects, the staff, the health and safety, interacting with the parents. ... It’s sort of a monster,” she said of quality regulations and measurements. (Several others agreed with her.) Ms. Jones then asked the question differently to refocus the discussion, and asked the participants to think about a time they felt pride in their organization and what had happened to cause that sense of pride. Several participants said getting their quality rating scores engendered pride in them. Another said she loves seeing the children going from not being able to write anything to being able to write their own names. “And you’re thinking, ‘Golly! They couldn’t do that when they walked in the first day.’” Another said she feels pride in her team who make that kind of progress possible.

There were no participants in this group who owned their facilities, so the participants discussed why they wanted to work where they do. One woman who works in a lab school at UCA said she enjoys the double layer of teaching both the children and the teachers. Another said she enjoys a lot of support from her school district. Another said she wanted a better opportunity for herself after working with Head Start. Most seemed to feel they had realized their hopes when taking these positions, but one woman expressed vague frustration with what she is able to accomplish with children.

Participants were then asked to identify how their organization communicates that it provides child care families can trust. One said their school earned a national accreditation beyond Better Beginnings to demonstrate quality. Another said friendliness to parents when they walk in and, “When they call on the phone, giving them the time that they need to not just cut them off short with little short answers even though you’re in a hurry to do something else.” Another agreed that being genuine matters and communicates quality and another said that when children don’t want to go home, parents know they are receiving quality care.

Ms. Jones asked the group members if they felt that the public’s view of their organization is accurate. The first to answer said that she can see understanding on parents’ faces when they come inside the school and see first-hand what is going on. “And they’re amazed at what it takes to [serve] the number of children we have.” The participants were then asked what they would like families to know about them that they don’t currently “get” or understand. The first responded, “Our quality,” and she elaborated that parents want to see “tracing sheets” as work that is produced, but she said she believes those are not indicators of children learning. Another elaborated, “They actually do learn through play.” Several participants then spoke about how much more parents need to do at home in order to ensure their children’s development. “You have to train the parents,” summarized one woman.

The discussion was then directed toward Better Beginnings explicitly, and participants were asked what their primary motivation was in becoming part of the Better Beginnings program. Below are sample verbatim statements:

- “I thought it was required.”

- “We initially did it for the money.”
- “I think from a parent’s point of view, if they see quality, or Better Beginnings ... then they’re like, ‘Oh, I want my child there.’”
- “Ours was a matter of pride. ... I always take home the feeling that we’re going to be the best at what we do.”

Asked what they would miss about Better Beginnings if it went away (though Ms. Jones emphasized that this is *not* planned), participants identified such attributes as the motivation to show their organizational pride, the structure of Better Beginnings quality guidelines, the oversight of the program that assures leaders that their centers are doing their best and the level of confidence they have that they are running their centers the correct/best way.

The participants were next asked what they would say to someone to convince them to enroll in Better Beginnings, and the first response was “Come over one afternoon and see what’s going on,” meaning she would let the results of participation speak for themselves. Another said, “It is a lot of work, but it’s worth the effort. ... Because it makes you a better program, and it’s for the kids.” Another said it distinguishes her program from “the one down the street.” The group members discussed briefly the many steps that are taking in enrollment in Better Beginnings and how they would explain the incremental nature of the process, and one said that nonparticipants get “discouraged because there’s so much to do.”

The women were then asked what they don’t like about Better Beginnings, and several women said they don’t like the paperwork and all the necessary documentation. Another said that the resources she needs to go through the process are hard to secure in her private facility. At this point in the discussion one woman energetically spoke at length about how she was reviewed eight months ago but had not yet received her scores from Better Beginnings, even though she had “begged and begged.” Others said this had happened with their organizations, while others said they had received feedback in a timely manner. The participants talked about the problems this delay presented them such as not letting them know what to correct and change. They expressed a sense of powerlessness that frustrated them after what they identified as many hours of extra work to prepare for the reviews. “Tracking down the scores ... we shouldn’t have to do that. We should get those scores and we should know exactly what we scored on each of those subsections and everything because we can’t improve if we don’t know what we’ve messed up,” summarized one, to general agreement of the group.

Asked if they would tell others who aren’t enrolled in Better Beginnings about these complaints, many said they would not because they “would not want to discourage them.” Again, the difficulty with receiving feedback was mentioned with the implication that this participant *would* tell nonparticipants about this aspect of the program because she found it so frustrating. After this conversation, Ms. Jones asked for any other negative attributes, and one participant said that she did not like that her rapid ascension in Better Beginnings quality ratings meant that her organization received less funding from the program, and she felt that was an inappropriate penalty. “We got the least amount of money,” she said. Another woman said she doesn’t like the Better Beginnings book because it reads that it take “two or three hours” to pull the required materials together, but it takes much longer (the group as a whole agreed with this as well). They also wanted the information to be required in just one place in the process, not repeatedly.

Shifting the focus from Better Beginnings, the facilitator asked what gives the participants the most pride in their work. Here are sample verbatim responses:

- “The children.”
- “The smiles and hugs.”
- “To hear them read those little books.”
- “To look at those eyes this big that say, ‘I can read.’”
- “Of course 90 percent of our kids probably wouldn’t be served if we didn’t have them.”
- “It’s good to see [the parents] walking with their children because ... when you watch them, they’re *talking* to them as they’re walking up.”

The group members were then asked to identify the biggest contribution that they and their organizations make to the families they serve. One woman said that they help children grow and develop in ways that they would not be able to do at home. Another said giving the parents security in leaving their children somewhere safe and productive each day. Another agreed, saying, “I had a parent tell me, ‘I know she’s safe here.’”

Next, they were asked to discuss how they communicate their quality with parents and families. They listed annual family celebrations and survey administration.

This brought the group to the discussion of how their professions were classified or named. Ms. Jones asked them what they thought of the term “child care provider.” This group was not positive, saying, “Makes us sound like babysitters.” One woman responded that she prefers the term “educator” to general agreement and another stipulated “early education.” Asked what they prefer to be called, one woman said her title is “site coordinator,” and she’s comfortable with that. Others said, “educator,” or “early childhood educator” or “teacher.” Another said, “early childhood education director.”

Next participants were asked to create advertisements for Better Beginnings. Their ads are described below with text quoted and illustrations indicated in parentheses.

- Better Beginnings
- Better Beginnings (with attributes listed in stars around these words)
  - Family
  - Early Learning
  - Teachers
- Give your child the best start possible ... choose a Better Beginnings Program (with B, B and P in stars)
- Better Beginnings 4 (drawing of a child’s face)
  - Call Eagle’s Landing with phone number
  - A.S. & B.S. & Summer
- Better Beginnings (on a yellow-brick road that turns into a rainbow with a mother and daughter setting off on the road)
- Better Beginnings: Come Check Out Our Program (Child care picture of boys, girls, race, etc.)
- Better Beginnings is the Best (with a picture of stairs leading up)
- Better Beginnings (over a rainbow)

Participants then worked on their Q concourses, the results of which are discussed fully below. After a brief concluding conversation, participants were thanked, paid and dismissed.

**Session III: Southwestern Arkansas Nonparticipants**

Session III was convened at 11 a.m. on Wednesday, February 23, with eight participants in the first southwestern Arkansas group. The participants, which included one man and seven women, were from Malvern, Arkadelphia, Hot Springs and Hope, and were recruited from Hot Spring, Clark, Garland and Hempstead counties. The chart below indicates the organizations represented by those in this group:

	<b>No. of Children Served</b>	<b>Ages of children served</b>	<b>Religious</b>	<b>Home-based</b>	<b>Individually Owned</b>	<b>Affiliated with another organization</b>
1	30	6 wks.-12 yrs.			X	
2	33	3 yrs.-6 yrs.	X			X
3	50	Newborn- 5 yrs.	X		X	
4	50	2 1/2 yrs.-9 yrs.			X	
5	177	6 wks.-5 yrs.				X
6	50	6 wks.-10 yrs.			X	
7	45	3 yrs.-15 yrs.				X
8	31	8 wks.-Pre-K	X			X

After introductions, participants listed what they most like about their jobs, saying they like the children, seeing children accomplish new things, being role models for parents and their success rate with their students transitioning to kindergarten. They like least the paperwork involved in their jobs, the processes that take their time away from the children, letting employees go, finding money and resources for what they need and want to accomplish, trying to keep the parents happy and the shortcomings with their building.

Asked what they imagine they would do without resource restraints and limitations, participants said they would like to pay teachers more (“They deserve it.”), improve their playground, hire more teachers to improve their student-to-teacher ratio, hire better teachers, paint and improve the carpet in the facility, give meals to children instead of charging them and improving classrooms.

The group members were then asked what they hope most for the children in their care each day. They said they want them to feel safe and secure, to be motivated and to have a good day.

Asked how their organizations demonstrate that they provide quality care, participants listed the following attributes and actions:

- “I try to hire good teachers that are well educated.”
- “The teachers have a lot of experience.”
- “All my teachers are certified. ... I provide a lot and I think the parents see that if there’s ever a problem.”
- “It’s personalized. You know everyone’s name.”

Those who own their own facilities were asked what they hoped to accomplish when they began them. “I wanted the children to learn, even the infants and toddlers. I wanted to teach them before they got ready for Kindergarten making sure that they grow up to know how to behave and how to do what needs to be done for life,” said one participant. Another said she started her business because she had children of her own she didn’t want to put in child care, and then she said in general she wants the children to have fun and to enjoy their day. Another said she started her business because she identified a need for more child care in her market and had a home that could accommodate child care facilities. Participants who work for others were asked how they chose their organizations over others. Several found themselves in positions where child care was the best option open to them for personal or professional reasons.

Asked how their organizations communicate that they provide quality child care, participants said “word of mouth,” demonstrating success for children and quality ratings and accreditations.

The participants were then asked if the public’s view of their organization is accurate. The first person to respond said “yes,” but another said that many people don’t understand the broad range of services that are offered and provided to families. One woman said that while many parents think that child care centers are just “babysitters,” and “sometimes you have to let them know that ... we’re actually learning and teaching the children not just letting them do whatever.”

The participants were asked how they communicate their quality. One said they have a Facebook page as well as Google ads. Another said they have an annual citywide event in which they represent their organization. Another said, “I’m probably not doing a good job of it,” and went on to say that she relies on word of mouth, which has worked positively for her. Another said along with word-of-mouth, she uses Facebook and newsletters to communicate.

The facilitator then directed the participants toward discussing Better Beginnings specifically, asking what they had heard about the program. One said she had been through the trainings “several times.” Another said she understood Better Beginnings to be an “improved quality of education to give the children that little extra jumpstart.” Another said it has “three levels” but that she hasn’t “gotten deep into it.”

The group members were then asked to speak candidly about how likely they were to participate in the Better Beginnings program. Here is a sample of their verbatim responses:

- “We will. ... It’s pretty much going to be a requirement if you want to be able to get grants from the state. I’m pretty sure it’s going to hit everybody.”
- “Very likely.”

- “It’s a possibility, but at this point I don’t see adding an extra pressure with somebody else coming in to check us out.”
- “I won’t do it until its mandatory. ... There’s some of it that’s really good, and then there’s other things that ... some of the regulations make me think how did I ever grow up...?”
- “I probably will do it. ... A lot of my centers are ready.”
- “I was thinking ‘somewhat likely.’”
- “As quick as possible. I go through a lot anyway, so I’m ready to advance. I want to advance and do everything I can.”

Asked about the greatest benefits of enrollment in Better Beginnings, participants identified the funds available (“They have changed it where you pretty much cannot get any assistance without it.”), being rated (incentives to keep improving).

The participants were then asked what they feel are the biggest benefits to *not* participating in Better Beginnings. The first response was, “Less paperwork.” But the next participant to answer said that those who don’t participate will be left behind in the quality race. The next woman said she resisted participation as an independent businesswoman. “It’s just more of [the state’s] control of my center. I don’t like some of it. If I don’t agree with it, I don’t want it in my center, and I feel like it should be my choice,” she said. The next participant said that during his career in education, he has seen many “cycles” of initiatives, minimizing the impact; however, he did say that he likes the structure of it. Finally one woman said she couldn’t think of any good aspects to not participating.

The facilitator continued to probe for issues that keep other participants from enrolling in Better Beginnings. One participant said, “I feel like my plate’s really full, and I feel like my time can be better spent communicating with the teachers about expectations or with the parents,” but she did say that the requirements she has seen would be good to implement in her program. Another woman said that some of the requirements don’t flow well in her center.

The group members were then asked what they take the most pride in every day at work. They identified knowing they’ve helped someone, seeing children with their parents when they’ve had a good day at their center (“the child has felt secure and loved”), helping low-income students fulfill their daily needs and “being the voice of reason for children and families in the school district.”

Participants were next asked to state what they feel is their most important contribution to the families that they serve. They listed the following:

- “Just providing good care when they can’t be there.”
- “Protecting them and making them feel comfortable while they’re gone.”
- “Just not giving up on a particular issue. ... We’re going to keep working, we’re going to try this, we’re going to try that.”
- “A lot of what parents don’t appreciate is time. [When you correct parents], they hate you now, but like you later.”

The group was asked about professional terminology next and how they wanted their jobs to be referred to by others. They identified early childhood education and quality care along with preschool, but rejected babysitting. Others said they offer therapeutic care and weekday preschool or said they work in a learning center.

At this point in the discussion, participants were directed to create advertisements for Better Beginnings. Below are the descriptions of their ads with the text quoted and pictures indicated parenthetically.

- Better Beginnings: A better way to begin ... .com phone ... (picture of woman with child sitting in chair)
- Coming soon to a Preschool near you: Better Beginnings (picture of sun shining)
  - Level 1, 2, 3 Quality Rated
  - 20% Tax Break
  - Better schools for your children
- Your day is better when it begins with us.
  - Better Beginnings (three stars) program
- Sarah's Precious Child Care & Pre-School are now taking application for Better Beginnings, which is now more Quality Based for your precious ones to advance daily. Come join the fun. For more information call... (picture of two children)
- Education deserves Better Beginnings
- (Picture of a pyramid) Pre-K – Elem.
  - Infants/Toddlers
  - (Birth) Better Beginnings
- Better Beginnings (pictures of a little, red schoolhouse and a child)
  - Our goal: Happy Healthy Children
- Better Beginnings...
  - Better Training
  - Better Education

The participants were then directed to complete the Q concourses, which will be addressed below in context of the entire study.

Finally, the facilitator followed up with the group members at the client's direction to elicit more explicit responses to what they do not like about Better Beginnings. Many discussed the requirements that seem to regulate minutia in their centers, such as number of toys, water access, etc. Another mentioned how requirements for hot water changed over time, but they built their facility based on the earlier requirements and now cannot easily change them. Below are some other verbatim comments:

- "I won't make any more money if I enroll in Better Beginnings. I don't know that we'll get any more children out of it because we have a good reputation; we've been there 3 years." She continued by saying that she wished the program would send someone in to gather all the information for her. "I don't have time to do this paperwork."

- “[Their requirements] just didn’t work for me.”
- “It’s unreasonable. It doesn’t work ... it makes my teachers work harder and makes me work harder and there’s no need in doing things like that.”
- “Some of the things they require are expensive. I just don’t have the money for it.”
- “My big thing is, why are they trying to make everybody the same? ... The whole point of being in preschool is everybody is unique. [The government thinks] everything fits in this little model.”
- “I don’t think any of those people (alluding to government workers) ever worked in this setting.”

After a brief concluding conversation these participants were thanked, paid and dismissed.

**Session IV: Southwestern Arkansas Better Beginnings Participants**

Session IV was convened at 12:45 p.m. on Wednesday, February 23, with nine participants, one man and eight women. The group members were from Hope, Hot Springs, Malvern and Gurdon, and were recruited from Hempstead, Garland, Hot Spring and Clark counties. The chart below indicates the organizations represented in this group:

	<b>No. of Children Served</b>	<b>Ages of children served</b>	<b>Religious</b>	<b>Home-based</b>	<b>Individually Owned</b>	<b>Affiliated with another organization</b>
1	46	Newborn-12 yrs.				X
2	108	6 wks.-4 yrs.	X			X
3	85	12 wks.-12 yrs.	X			X
4	22	1 yr.-12 yrs.		X	X	
5	65	Newborn-12 yrs.			X	
6	800	Newborn-5 yrs.				
7	800	Newborn-5 yrs.				
8	30	4 yrs.				
9	85	4 yrs.				X

Participants introduced themselves and then discussed their favorite aspects of their jobs. One said, “I never have the same day twice; it’s never boring.” Another said she likes being able to help groups of children all day long (instead of focusing her efforts on one person, as she had done in a previous career role). “I like the people, the families, the children, the staff, the people,” listed one person. Others spoke about valuing being able to make a difference in children’s lives. When asked what they do not like, again, paperwork was mentioned very quickly, along with budgeting and bureaucracy. One woman said she doesn’t like “all the different expectations from the different groups,” referring to regulatory, quality and oversight groups. Her frustration rises from trying to meet all requirements and succeed in those arenas. Another supported this by saying that finding time to work on the requirements was unpleasant because requirements conflict, so it feels impossible to succeed at times. Another said she doesn’t like the “constant change in requirements,” with which another woman agreed.

Asked what they wish their organizations could do differently, the participants made comments about how they wish their expert teachers had more latitude to fulfill the children’s needs, lack of funding to pay more credentialed teachers or pay them to earn more credentials, having to focus so much on

paperwork and processes rather than the children's immediate needs and more flexibility in scheduling to meet day-to-day children's needs as well as make the most of teachable-moment opportunities (to much agreement).

Asked what they want most for the children in their care each day, participants identified the following (included here as a sampling of verbatim statements):

- "I hope they take home a new experience that they never had before."
- "That their needs are met."
- "We just hope they go home happy."
- "I just want [the children] to enjoy being there and the parents not fretting about leaving them."
- "I hope that it's the best part of their day."

The participants then addressed how their organization demonstrates its quality. The first person to answer cited accreditation they have earned at her program: "That would be a sign of quality in what we're doing for our kids," she said. Others agreed throughout this discussion. Another agreed, saying quality ratings indicate their level of care and teaching. Another said that children being ready to advance shows that they are fulfilling their promises to families. Another agreed, saying, "I think they really get it when their child leaves your center and goes to public school and they're ready." Another said, "I think the parents' feelings and your parents' attitudes about your program says more than just the paperwork that you've got... ." There was a brief discussion about the need to educate parents about learning through play, as sometimes parents expect a different kind of work to show learning.

Ms. Jones then asked the group members how they communicate about their quality programs. The first person to answer went back to the idea of *demonstrating* quality rather than *communicating* quality by discussing results. The facilitator then asked, "What do you *say* about your program," and again someone said, "Actions speak faster." Another said her organization's quality ratings are in the handbook, but they don't "publicize" it. One person said their quality ratings are by the sign-in sheet for parents so they see it every day and another said her certificates are framed and hung in the hallways. One participant said she works to be visible in her community and involved. The next person to speak said that parents and families put "a lot less emphasis on what you say."

The group members were next asked if they feel the public's (and parents') view of what they provide is accurate. Below are some sample verbatim comments:

- "I don't think they know what goes on during the day and most of them don't care."
- "I think they understand that we work with children. ... I think that's pretty well known in the community, and I think we have a pretty good reputation."

The facilitator followed this question with an inquiry about what the participants would like for families to know about them that they feel is currently misunderstood. Members of the group identified various attributes, such as that families don't know they don't have merely minimal licensing but have worked hard for extra credentials, that pre-K is important, that their services aren't "just daycare ... not just babysitting," and that they conduct developmentally appropriate activities with each age group.

Another said, “we’re providing the foundations for life,” and another said, “[parents] can multiply the results if they will help out.” This statement generated a great deal of conversation about the extent to which parents do not participate in their children’s education.

This group was then asked to identify the primary motivations members felt to enroll in Better Beginnings. One woman said it was not optional given her ABC status. Another said she wanted the quality rating for her center. This person was also asked why the star system of Better Beginnings appealed to them. The first person to answer said that it was something “visual that the parents can see just like anything you do these days... [with] the star rating.” Another said that Better Beginnings holds her accountable and that she is concerned if they can’t pass something because her center shouldn’t perform at that level only for ratings, but all the time.

Asked what they would miss if Better Beginnings were to fade away, “accountability” was the first attribute mentioned. She also said, “to be recognized for what you are and for what you do.” The ratings system’s value to parents was also mentioned. At this point some people spoke about what they don’t like. One said she wouldn’t miss “the hand-washing.” Another participant said she thinks it is more difficult for private centers to get the resources to meet all the quality requirements and to fulfill the processes of enrollment.

Ms. Jones then asked them to speak more about what they don’t like about Better Beginnings. The first person referred to the difficulties previously mentioned of gathering the resources to meet requirements. Another person who deals with special needs children said that she finds it frustrating that Better Beginnings may not allow for specific educational plans for those children. Other participants agreed with this and related their own encounters with this problem. “The needs of your children may be different for each and every one of them because you’re focusing on your children’s needs,” she said. And another participant agreed that requirements not only don’t always help children, but various program requirements often conflict, frustrating administrators and owners. They also spoke about the requirements for educational training that take teachers away from students, and the other group members discussed this for awhile.

Asked what they would say to convince someone to enroll in Better Beginnings, participants made the following verbatim statements:

- “I guess for someone who’s absolutely [not] participating, you might be able to say, ‘Well, maybe you should do this for more money.’”
- “The money is nice. ... But also there’s a lot of support, not just financially, but I think there’s a lot of support in the system...”
- “If I understand it correctly, the original point of Better Beginnings was to get those that were here and try to at least bring them up a little bit and have the funding there available for them to be somewhat accountable and yet have some recognition.”
- “I think it’d be a great asset to someone that’s in child care that’s for the children.”

- “Better Beginnings is there to deal with the whole center. ... [We’re] crossing a bridge that will supposedly link all child care programs in Arkansas to becoming better providers for the children.”

The discussion was then moved to what gives participants the most pride in their work every day. Participants said they value making a difference, establishing a foundation for children’s educational lives and helping children with developmental disabilities solve problems and advance to fulfill potential.

When asked how they like their profession or field to be described, participants said, pre-K, preschool, early learning center, learning center, quality after-school care, quality pre-K, professional child care provider, child development center.

The group members were then given time and directions to create an advertisement for Better Beginnings and to prioritize the value statements regarding quality child care and early childhood education.

Their advertisements included the following with text directly quoted and pictures indicated in parentheses:

- Better Beginnings
  - Be a Better Provider
    - Begin Providing Better Services for Success
    - Better Service 4 Success!
- The words “BETTER BEGINNINGS” vertically down the page with horizontal attributes filled in around the letters, such as Technical Assistance, Quality Teachers, ECERS, Readiness, Iters, Success
- Better Beginnings
  - Your child only gets one beginning!
- Better Beginnings: A great place to start your program
  - Technical Assistance
  - Funding for materials and professional development
  - Program Administration Scale
  - Star Rating System
  - Community-aware of your program
- [Three large stars]
  - Provides quality early childhood education
  - Highly qualified teachers/staff
  - Safe, orderly environments
  - Great parent-school relations
- Invest Early
  - “Better Beginnings”
  - Your child’s wave to the future
  - A child’s mind can’t wait!

- Reach 4 the Stars
  - Begin Better Beginnings
  - Better Service 4 Success
- Going Beyond the Stars
  - Better Beginnings
  - Your child's opportunity to reach for galaxies
- Better Beginnings is:
  - Quality
  - Child focus
  - Parent involvement
  - Qualified teachers
  - Looking at the future
  - Investing in the community
- Better Beginnings
  - Because your child's learning & development Begins at birth.

After these were completed, there was a discussion about the rising number of children with behavioral issues and what those children need from educational systems. After this discussion, the participants were thanked, paid and dismissed.

**Session V: Northwest Arkansas Nonparticipants**

Session V was convened at 11 a.m. on Thursday, February 24, with seven participants.<sup>2</sup> The group members were from Fayetteville, Bentonville, Rogers and Springdale and were recruited from Washington and Benton counties. The chart below indicates the organizations represented in this group.

	<b>No. of Children Served</b>	<b>Ages of children served</b>	<b>Religious</b>	<b>Home-based</b>	<b>Individually Owned</b>	<b>Affiliated with another organization</b>
1	16	Newborn-5 yrs.		X	X	
2	54	6 wks.-5 yrs.			X	
3	45	3 yrs.-4 yrs.	X			X
4	60	6 wks.-5 yrs.			X	
5	410	5 yrs.-12 yrs.			X	
6	22	3 yrs.-5 yrs.	X			X

This group introduced themselves and then discussed what they like most about their jobs. The first woman to speak said she likes helping “latchkey” children and “knowing that these kids have a place to go where they’re safe and have activities.” Another said she started her business to create a place that would provide “good quality for the kids... , that the parents would know that [the children] were safe and healthy.” Another said she likes to see the children grow and learn. “It is just awesome to see them make the milestone steps,” she said, which others supported with their comments. Another said she liked when parents see how well their students test when entering school and “the results,” said another. One participant said she likes interacting with the parents.

Next participants were asked what they like least about their jobs, and their answers included staff turnover that leads to inconsistency for children and their parents (others discussed this as well), paperwork and the voucher program (“it’s a farce,” she said).

The participants were asked what they want for the children they serve each day. “My hope is that they feel secure and that they’re comfortable in their environment,” said the first person to respond. Others said they wanted consistency for their students/charges. Another participant said that safety is a high priority, and finally one woman said is to provide an atmosphere where children are accepted and nurtured.

<sup>2</sup> One participant brought her mother, who was also an owner of the child care organization she represented. The “guest” participated in the conversation and was qualified to attend, but she did not create an advertisement or a Q concourse.

The participants were then asked what were the indicators of quality for their organizations. They listed the staff members, a real understanding of the children's needs, a low student-to-teacher ratio, the curriculum, quality meals and snacks, level of family involvement, staff-parent relationships (with which several agreed and on which they elaborated) and convenience for working families who rely on a center for child care. Asked how they *communicate* that they provide quality, the first participant said that daily interaction between the teacher and the families conveys quality. Ms. Jones asked them what messages they send to communicate about their quality facilities. One participant said she has a brochure that explains quality programs and what her facility provides. She also said that organizations must always let "parents know they are welcome." Another said she struggles with getting parents to understand that her home-based organization is a school, and she said it is important to "refer to yourself as what you are. ... If you're a preschool refer to yourself as that." She also said she posts notices about the training she and her staff members attend for parents to see.

This was a good segue into the topic of how the public views their organizations and several participants expressed that they do not feel they are accurately perceived outside of their schools/centers. One said she finds parents struggle to understand that her program is a school because "we teach through play instead of ... [sending] home worksheets ... and flash cards." One woman said that the parents of her students are "upset" because her facility isn't a Better Beginnings facility, but she said she teaches children how to get ready for kindergarten, rather than "play" all day. "Our licensing agent is trying to talk us into doing the Better Beginnings, but we're steering away from it because if we don't do some papers with them, parents get upset." Another said she is in a school setting, which helped outsiders understand what she and her colleagues provide. One participant said using parent testimonials can mitigate some of the misunderstandings. Another woman said that potential staffers think they know what she and her staff are doing all day if they've "ever babysat at child." Asked what they want the families to understand, the first response was, "That we close at 6," and another elaborated on that saying that voucher parents believe they don't have to pay late fines, which moved some members into a brief discussion of how parents fall short in their responsibilities to their children. One woman said, "We're not only preparing the kids for Kindergarten, but we're also preparing the parents for Kindergarten as well."

The group members were then asked what they have heard about the Better Beginnings program. The first person to respond said, "Very little." The next person said, "I was discouraged about it." She said her licensing agent told her they already do many of the qualifying activities, but they wouldn't be able to have children do "papers" anymore. Another person asked this participant if she had done "Quality," and this participant said she had not, as her program had no problem "keeping up with schools." Another participant corrected this person's perception of Better Beginnings, saying she seemed to be talking about Quality instead. "To me, Better Beginnings ... is more on the business end." Another said it helps centers become and demonstrate that they are professional businesses. Another said Better Beginnings is a kind of "umbrella" that was over administrative, Quality and classrooms all under that umbrella. One person said she was not familiar with Better Beginnings, and a participant who has begun the enrollment process summarized her process for this woman. "At this point, my biggest struggle is getting my staff all of the trainings that they have to have because they have to be at a certain level of

training.” Another participant said she was somewhat “grandfathered” due to previous credentials and ratings and then she and others explained that though her program was enrolled, it would not automatically stay rated without demonstrating worthiness of the rating. One woman explained to another who serves 60 children, “You probably still have a lot of what they’re requiring. The thing is, you’re probably already doing it, but they want that documented.” Another said she had stopped her plan to enroll due to personal problems that drained her time, but she also didn’t think it would help her center.

The women were then asked how likely they are to enroll in Better Beginnings while it is still voluntary.

- “I won’t.”
- “Probably not. Our staff is certified teachers.”
- “Who has the money right now to be spending it to be forced to be doing something?”
- [We’re doing it all already], we just don’t have their stamp of approval.”

One participant said she would not “because of the horrible situation that we got into with Quality” in which she perceived that after all her investment in qualifying, she was denied for a “silly thing” such as a teacher not washing her hands after wiping a child’s nose, when the teacher said she did wash her hands.

The facilitator then asked the participants to act as their own “devil’s advocate” and identify *benefits* of enrollment in Better Beginnings. Below is a sample of their responses:

- “Finances. They give you good money for being in the program.”
- “You get funding.”
- “We got quite a bit of money and have been able to implement things.”
- “I was going to say, like, marketing and status to have that, to say we are quality Better Beginnings, but there again the parents are going to have to be educated in this to understand what it means.” (There was extended discussion about the lack of awareness among parents and families of the purported value of Better Beginnings.)
- “I think the idea is good because I think parents are accustomed to the stars while looking for motels ... I think they’re on the right track with that.”

One participant said at this point, “If it comes to mandated, I’ll take their one diamond, or whatever they’ve decided they’re putting which means you’ve met the state’s requirements for DHS and I’ll stop there. I won’t mess with the rest.” Another said, “You don’t have to be quality approved to provide quality care.” Another implied that Better Beginnings is “hurting small businesses” by sending “mixed signals.” Finally, one person said about Better Beginnings, “I think that’s part of the whole system is that people are afraid that they can’t be who they are.”

The group members were then asked how they want others to refer to their profession and their positions within their careers. They mentioned “early learning center,” “child care center,” “child care provider,” “principal,” “quality child care provider of school-aged children” and “early childhood educator.”

Next, participants created advertisements for the Better Beginnings program. Below are descriptions of the advertisements that were created:

- ABC: Better Beginnings
  - Quality Service
  - Quality Care
  - Quality Early Education
- Better Beginnings: A better future for your child
  - Quality centers that prepare your child for the future.
  - Check for your center ratings.
  - Call --- ----- to inquire about your center, or visit our Website.
- Better Beginnings
  - Certified Teacher
  - Quality static [sic]
  - Business established
- Better Beginnings (picture of three diamonds)
  - “Every child deserves our best”
  - Join AR Quality to give your children a better beginning!
- (Drawing of five diamonds) Better Beginnings
  - Who
  - What
  - Where
  - Why
  - When
- Better Beginnings (with drawing of shining diamond)
  - Find out what a diamond is worth

The participants then worked on their Q concourses.

Ms. Jones returned to discussing topics with the group, asking its members what gives them the most pride at work each day. The first respondent said she values when a parent will come to her and say, “I don’t know what I’d do without you.” Another elaborated saying she likes it when parents ask, “Why can’t I take you with me?” One woman said that she loves it when the children run to her without fear. “That’s a really good feeling for me,” she said, and another said she values positive staff feedback. Finally one woman said, “I have one family that I had all five of their children ... they trust me and have confidence in what I do.”<sup>3</sup>

After a brief concluding conversation, participants were thanked, paid and dismissed.

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<sup>3</sup> At the end of each conversation, participants are asked if there is anything they were waiting to be asked that they were not asked. In this group, one woman asked at this point, “Is the state doing this so that, I know that some of us have a small business, is this to run us out of business and for it to be state controlled on everything. It feels that way, that the state is pushing to control everything.”

**Session VI: Northwestern Arkansas Better Beginnings Participants**

Session VI was convened at 12:45 p.m. on Thursday, February 24, with nine participants. The participants were from Bentonville, Fayetteville and Rogers and were recruited from Benton and Washington counties. The chart below indicates the organizations represented in this group.

	<b>No. of Children Served</b>	<b>Ages of children served</b>	<b>Religious</b>	<b>Home-based</b>	<b>Individually Owned</b>	<b>Affiliated with another organization</b>
1	100	6 wks.-K			X	
2	150+	6 wks.-7th grade	X			X
3	75	3 yrs.-5yrs.	X			X
4	600	3 yrs.-5 yrs.				X
5	340	3 yrs.-4 yrs.				X
6	240	6 wks.-5 yrs.				X
7	136	Newborn-5 yrs.			X	
8	28	3 yrs.-5 yrs.				
9	52	10 wks.-5 yrs.				X

After participants introduced themselves, the members of the group were asked to identify what they like best about their jobs. Below are some verbatim comments from participants:

- “I love to hear the children’s stories. I like to see how they grow, and I like to see them develop.”
- “You reach all these students that are going to go out and be teachers some place else, too.”
- “Being able to assist families.”
- “We all know as we don’t see a lot of the benefits for decades, and then all of a sudden we get a letter in the mail from a doctor or a lawyer or another successful business person. ... I have some of those letters ... .”
- “They love their first teacher.”

They were also asked to identify what they like least about their jobs. Again, paperwork was mentioned first. They also cited putting together documentation for assessments and regulatory bodies, negative interaction with parents (“anything that involves conflict”), fulfilling what they designate to be “unnecessary requirements” for oversight organizations, not being able to serve all the children who need early education services and not being able to receive funds as private organizations to fulfill all quality requirements.

When asked what they hope for the children in their care every day, the first person to answer said “I just want them to have that loving and nurturing experience through play and peers because those 11 hours a day may be all that they have.” Other participants agreed. Another said she wants children to have a desire to learn each day, so that when they transition, she’s confident in their abilities.

The participants were then asked how their organizations demonstrate their quality. The first attribute identified was “staffing” and spoke about the credentials of the teachers. “I think that’s probably the most important first step,” she said. Another participant agreed, and added the curriculum is another strong indication of quality. Other attributes listed include learning centers, quality meals and snacks and rich and productive relationships with parents and families. The group members were then asked to discuss how they communicate about the quality they offer. They mentioned several channels (handbooks, Websites, parent-teacher conferences, events and bulletin boards). Asked what messages they communicate through these channels, accreditation, health and safety, curriculum, staff and administration, anecdotes about the children’s progress and home visits were mentioned.

With this in mind, the facilitator asked the participants if they feel the public has an accurate view of their organizations. One group member said she is frustrated when her own husband refers to her school as “daycare,” which she doesn’t feel reflects how hard she and her staff work and what they accomplish each day with the children. But another participant said the perception is changing in her community, as the kindergarten teachers are communicating the value of early childhood education to their networks as they have seen the positive impact of good programs. Other participants agreed that people outside their organizations see them as offering education and school programs. But another woman countered and said private centers are still more often regarded as daycares and babysitting services, with which several participants agreed. The facilitator asked if the public school umbrella wasn’t helping private centers as well. One participant from a school district then spoke at length about programs and processes in the schools to assess children’s skills and progress.

The focus of the discussion was now moved to what the participants’ primary motivations were in becoming involved in Better Beginnings. Several participants were “grandfathered” in due to previous quality statuses. One woman said, “But I think we want to maintain that high quality,” implying that she would pursue any quality credentials that are appropriate. Another reiterated the quality aspiration saying, “I wanted to be better than we were. ... I just wanted to give my kiddos the very best.” One woman said the previous owners of her facility were not able to pass another credentialing process due to limited resources, and her goal was to change that. “I want the best of everything, and I want to be the best of everything, so it’s always been my goal.” (One woman digressed at this point to complain about all the regulations involved in various quality measures.)

Members of the group were then asked to talk about what they don’t like about Better Beginnings in general. The first person to respond said that she doesn’t like the fact that families aren’t educated about Better Beginnings, so her enrollment and rating have not “helped our center in any way.” She said she feels that she is having to “do the state’s job and explain” the program to the parents in order to convince them to stay or to enroll. Another participant agreed, saying there needs to be a bigger “media push.” She said that their part is fulfilled, but that the state’s roll in publicizing the meaning of her

quality rating is not being fulfilled. “I find that disappointing for my teachers,” she said. She also said she is frustrated by the time constraints in applying for the next level. She feels ready and she does not like being made to wait. Others agreed. One participant talked at length about how she was not able to use funding from Better Beginnings for substitute professional development, which she found frustrating as that was where she perceived a need, and Better Beginnings would not allow that. She explained that as a director, she was not given latitude to administer the resources according to her real needs. Another said she had had similar issues with fund allocation.

The facilitator then asked the group what gives them the most pride in their work each day. The first participant said, “When one of my staff comes into my office and they are beaming.” She explained that seeing her teachers learn and understand how to help children learn and grow is very meaningful. Another said she loves getting cards and notes from parents, overhearing people speak well of her facility or seeing conversations on Facebook or e-mails that praise her center for how it has helped children. Another said she displays all her staff’s credentials, and she feels a lot of pride when people see how qualified her personnel are and react positively to that. Another said she feels proud when friends of her students enroll because of recommendations her center has gotten through word-of-mouth.

The participants were next asked how they like their professions to be described or titled. They listed the following:

- Early childhood professional
- Early childhood education specialist
- Early childhood educator
- Teacher
- Educator

The participants were next directed to work on their advertisements for Better Beginnings and then to complete the prioritization exercise. The advertisements produced used the following language (and pictures):

- (drawing of a kite in the clouds) Soaring Above the Average
- (drawing of a school) Better Beginnings
  - Build a better tomorrow today
- (drawing of a sun shining over a rainbow with a flower) Better Beginnings: Make all that is childhood happy!
- (drawing of grass at the bottom) It’s a new day! For Early Childhood Education
  - Better Programs
  - Better Staff
  - Better Facilities
  - Better Beginnings
- Better Beginnings
  - A New Day in Early Childhood Education

- Is your child attending a Quality Learning Center?
- Check out our Website [www.arbetterbeginnings.com](http://www.arbetterbeginnings.com).
- (drawing of a ladder reaching from grass to stars) Better Beginnings
  - Helps you reach for the STARS!

The session then concluded after brief round-up statements and the participants were thanked and paid.

### **Note on Observable Population Differences**

This study was conducted by separating those who are already enrolled in Better Beginnings from those who have not yet enrolled. During this study several notable trends in behavioral differences were noticed along with differences in expressed values.

- Nonparticipants were more difficult to recruit and less likely to appear for the session once they were recruited and *agreed* to participate.
- Participants were more reliable and more comfortable with accountability.
- Participants were more confident in the focus group physical milieu.
- Nonparticipants were generally more suspicious of government motives in oversight and regulation.

As this study was not a statistical sample of demographic categories among providers, the above observed trends are not statistically valid; however, this researcher suggests that it would not be imprudent for those dealing with nonparticipants on the topic of Better Beginnings to accommodate some level of resistance to further accountability by the state.

## Summary of Q -Sort Findings

The complete report, including statistical analysis and methodology, of the Q-sort exercise performed by the study participants can be found in Appendix B. This section summarizes the results most cogent to the study's objectives.

The population Q-concourses were evaluated in two sets: Better Beginnings participants (BB) and the entire population, including nonparticipants in the program. This was due to the need for 17 valid Q-sorts per group for statistical validity. The nonparticipants were a smaller set and had too many invalid participants to evaluate independently.

The factors for the entire population (including nonparticipants) are:

- child safety and care
- positive experiences free of outside influences, and
- child focused.

The factors for the BB participants are:

- low prioritization of education,
- child-focused/record-adverse,
- data and detail focused,
- learning activity apathy, and
- instructional independence.

Discussion regarding the eight factors and their identification follows. It is worthwhile to note that none of the factors in the BB group significantly correlated with any other factor. These weak correlations between all factors suggest there is little to no relationship between people who load on any factors and indicate most (but not all) participants only identify with one factor.

Analysis revealed ten factors when the total population was studied without BB participants separated out. This indicates that there was a wider range of values. (The statistics indicate that the priorities were broader, but more pronounced.) For this reason, only those factors with an eigenvalue greater than 2.0 were selected for study in order to prioritize the statistically most significant factors.

### *Total Population Factor Discussions*

#### Factor 1: Child Safety and Care

Among the opinions of owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers, the middle reflected variance, 17%, was for the influence of factor 1, Child safety and care. Below are the positive characterizing statements for those participants who loaded on factor 1. These statements reflect the focus owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers who loaded on factor 1 have on taking care of children in clean, child-friendly facilities while eschewing a focus on student-to-teacher ratio and searching for or calling on outside resource support.

Distinguishing positive statements for Factor 1:

- Take attentive care of the children for whom they are
- Have clean, child-friendly facilities
- Employ qualified, energetic staff members that ensure the children's days go well

- Immediately respond to a crying child to assess what's wrong
- Offers children safe, educational, fun toys and activities
- Are staffed with workers who look and act professionally
- Makes sure to meet the needs of the children each and every day
- Is recommended highly by other parents and families in the community

### Factor 2: Positive Experiences, Free of Outside Influences

Among the opinions of owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers, the highest level of variance, 18%, came from the influence of factor 2, the need for positive experiences free of outside influences. Statements (8 and 15) highlighted the importance of the student receiving learning opportunities while receiving child care and ensuring parents felt welcome to come see their children or discuss their progress. Other positively-ranked statements also highlighted the participating child care providers who loaded on factor 2 perceived happiness and positive relationships were important to success. The participants who loaded on factor 2 did not seem as concerned with employee happiness or ability to express lovingness and firmness; however, the participants did highlight the need for employees to be energetic (supporting the positive focus of the factor) as well as prepared for the day's activities.

Positive distinguishing statements (abbreviated) for Factor 2:

- Offer engaging activities to children throughout the day
- Have open-door policies so that parents feel welcome to ...
- Involve the parents in the curriculum so that the whole ...
- Keep the student-to-teacher ratio low
- Creates an emotional environment that supports children ...
- Have positive, one-on-one relationships with the student ...
- Employ teachers who are well prepared for each day with ...
- Employ qualified, energetic staff members that ensure ...
- Take attentive care of the children for whom they are responsible

These statement selections suggest participants who load on factor 2 want to be sure their child care service engages the children and their parents while remaining independent of outside guidelines and structure. Those participants who load on factor 2 do not, however recognize the importance of safety or see a need in classroom organization.

### Factor 3: Child Focused

Among the opinions of owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers, 15% of the variance was for the influence of factor 3, focus on the child. Factor 3 had 18 distinguishing statements associated with it at a confidence level of 95% ( $p < .05$ ). Respondents seemed least concerned with making parents feel welcome. Participants who felt strongly about the need to be child focused also focused on employing teachers who added to the child's positive experiences while at the child care center.

Positive distinguishing statements for Factor 3 include:

- Creates an emotional environment that supports children
- Take attentive care of the children for whom they are res
- Makes sure to meet the needs of the children each and every

- Employs teachers who are happy to be there and share the
- Is experienced enough to be able to identify when a child
- Maintains consistent personnel so that staff turnover is
- Organizes its classrooms and facilities in happy and safe
- Employs teachers who are loving and firm

These three significant statements reflect the owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers perceives the need to emotionally support children is the most critical purpose of their business. These distinguishing statement selections also suggest participants who load on factor 3 are least concerned with making parents feel welcome. It appears, based on the sorts, the focus of the owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers is on the child.

### *Better Beginnings Factor Discussions*

#### Factor 1: Low Prioritization of Education

Among perceptions of the owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers, the largest reflected variance, 25%, was for the influence of factor 1, Low prioritization of education. Factor 1's only positive agreed-with statement was statement 10, "Involve the parents in the daily progress and experience of their children through strong communication"; however, the statement's rank was low which indicated it was not a priority although it was a consideration. The characterizing statement most disagreed with for factor 1 was statement 9 "Involve the parents in the curriculum so that the whole family is included in the child's progress and education." The second most disagreed with statement characterizing factor 1 was statement 33 "Follows established guidelines for curriculum and development for the children they serve." The weakly disagreed with statement was 36, "Maintains consistent personnel so that staff turnover is low."

Positive distinguishing statements for Factor 1 include:

- Involve the parents in the daily progress and experience of their children

Negative distinguishing statements for Factor 1 include:

- Maintains consistent personnel so that staff turnover is low
- Follows established guidelines for curriculum and development for the children
- Keeps the student-to-teacher ratio at 7-to-1 or 6-to-1

Owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers who loaded on factor 1 do not feel complying with educational guidelines, including suggested student-to-teacher ratios, is a critical component of providing successful child care.

#### Factor 2: Child-Focused/Record Averse

Among opinions of owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers, 14% of the variance was for the influence of factor 2, child-care focused/record-averse. Respondents seemed least concerned with maintaining records and seeking grants or other outside resources to improve their child care program.

Positive distinguishing statements for Factor 2 include:

- Create special learning opportunities for the children in their care on a regular

- Ensures the safety and the security of all the children in their care
- Employs teachers who are loving and firm

These statements reflect a focus on child care, in terms of learning and discipline, are more important to the owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers than their child care center's reputation or recordkeeping. These statement selections suggest participants who load on factor 2 want to be sure they provide the children in their child care program with individualized learning opportunities and the participants are less concerned with the technical elements of child care including paperwork and grant receipts. The statement ranking also suggests participants do not highly prioritize maintaining or enhancing their child care's reputation within the community.

### Factor 3: Data and Detail Focused

Among opinions of owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers about ideal child care programs, 9% of the variance was for the influence of factor 3, the focus on data and details. Respondents seemed least concerned with their child care center's layout and general environment. Participants who felt strongly about the need for data and record keeping comfort were neutral regarding safety and security of the children under their care.

Positive distinguishing statements for Factor 3 include:

- Keep the student-to-teacher ratio low
- Keep good records so that a child's progress and needs are well documented
- Are attentive to every detail that has to do with the child's progress
- Keeps the student-to-teacher ratio at 7-to-1 or 6-to-1

These distinguishing statement selections suggest participants who load on factor 3 want to be sure their child care service provides learning records that are well-maintained and they are less concerned with their child care center's physical environment in terms of both safety and layout.

### Factor 4: Learning Activity Apathy

Among opinions held by owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers, 9% of the variance was for the influence of factor 4, learning activity apathy.

The only distinguishing statement for this factor was negative:

- Offer engaging activities to children throughout the day

This negative ranking suggests participants who loaded on factor 4 are not concerned with providing learning opportunities to the children under their care.

### Factor 5: Instructional Independence

Among owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers opinions' about their child care center, 9% of the variance was for the influence of factor 5, instructional independence. Participants who felt strongly about providing safe and happy environments in the classroom were uninterested in seeking parental support for the academic instruction of the children in their care.

Positive distinguishing statements for Factor 5.

- Organizes its classrooms and facilities in happy and safe ways
- Have strong leadership to work with the teachers as a team

These statements reflect that owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers perceive the child care center's atmosphere is a critical component whereas parental participation in the student's learning was not considered as important. These selections suggest participants who load on factor 5 want to be sure the children under their care are happy and safe and they are less concerned with involving the parents or outside agencies in the child care process.

## Themes and Implications

*Providers and educators want the same things for their charges/students as parents want for their children while they are in others' care.*

Throughout all the groups, it was very apparent that providers want the same things for the children in their care that parents want for their children while they are in care. They hope for their joy in learning, safety, emotional security, progress, happiness and desire to be where they are. While the Q analysis differentiated many prioritized values for the whole population tested as well as for the Better Beginnings participants separately, all participants expressed such hopes for the children in their care, and most advertisements directly or indirectly related Better Beginnings to the best possible care/educational experience.

*Communications Implications: Overt appeals to providers' hopes for the children in their care are likely to resonate strongly with owners, directors, teachers and leaders of child care and early childhood educational organizations statewide. Demonstrating how Better Beginnings will positively impact children on a day-to-day basis will appeal to the fundamental motivation that all participants espoused in the groups. While some providers may have stronger emotions for other priorities (self, independence, etc.), they will not be able to explicitly deny concern for a child's wellbeing.*

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*Nonparticipants' most positive emotional motivator is identified by this study as entrepreneurship*

The observable behavioral differences between *most* of the nonparticipants and *most* of the participants in Better Beginnings indicates a pattern, and the most positive of those differences was nonparticipants' entrepreneurial, independent small-business spirit. It is important to note that some positive emotional resistance arises from genuine concern for individual children's needs that are not perceived as accommodated by Better Beginnings. Neutral emotional motivators include not wanting to engage in the bureaucratic processes and resource allocation necessary to enroll. Negative emotional motivators include suspicion of government and oversight that will lead to criticism of how teaching is done and how care is provided. Several nonparticipants stated they opened their own centers in order to make the decisions, set the tone and steer the course of their working lives as well as to create a beneficial environment for children, and their faith in their own judgment coupled with their resistance to supervisory oversight will keep them from enrolling in Better Beginnings *unless* their independent business spirit is engaged by the program, and that spirit overrides their concerns and resistance to supervisory oversight.

*Communications Implications: Communications must appeal to owners' and leaders' sense of sound business and organizational practices and to the independent spirit of such leaders. Implied (but not overt) messaging may be employed to mitigate fears about "Big Brother" and to demonstrate real potential for growth and prestige for small businesses that would come with a Better Beginnings rating designation. Underscoring support for entrepreneurs and underplaying oversight is more likely to engage these late adopters.*

*Early adopters of Better Beginnings are most motivated by accomplishment/achievement.*

Throughout this study, participants who elected to enroll in Better Beginnings without being “grandfathered in” to the program or mandated to by a supervisor or affiliated organization did so because “that is just the kind of person I am. I want the best of everything for everything I do. I want to be the best.” While advertisements for the program expressed the benefit for children overtly, some advertisements implied that Better Beginnings programs were higher quality, more accomplished programs, and the comments made about motivation throughout the study support this as the primary emotional motivator for participants who freely and voluntarily adopted it.

*Communications Implications: To engage more participants who are similarly motivated to early adopters, communications about Better Beginnings must highlight the achievement and accomplishment aspect of enrolling in the program. For those for whom “nothing but the best is good enough,” Better Beginnings can be held up as the gold standard. This will engage more leaders who are like those who have already enrolled.*

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*Desire for outsiders to understand their contribution to the vital importance of quality early childhood care and education*

Throughout the study, among both nonparticipants and participants, child care and early childhood education leaders strongly indicated that they feel misunderstood by the public about both the actual services they provide and the value of those services. Comments about how parents perceive providers’ jobs caring for their children as less important than the parents’ jobs, and the lack of understanding of the credentials and knowledge required to teach small children and proactively manage children’s days indicate that providers feel undervalued and as less than professional. Their main complaint about public perception is that outsiders don’t get the significance of their contribution not only to children, but also to families and to communities.

*Communications Implications: Communications for parents about Better Beginnings that demonstrate the value of early childhood education will resonate with providers and may indirectly motivate nonparticipants to inquire or enroll.*

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*Resentment of lack of public education about the value of Better Beginnings*

While this is a minor theme, it is important to address, because it regularly surfaced among participant groups. Participants who were motivated by whatever factors (ambition, mandate, previous accomplishment) were nonetheless frustrated with parents’ lack of understanding of and subsequent lack of value for the credential of the rating. Several said they spent a great deal of financial and time resources to earn their rating but felt the return on the investment was not realized because the state was not fulfilling its public education role.

*Communications Implications: Educating parents about the value of Better Beginnings programs will resonate with early adopters, supporting them when they encourage other organizations to join the program. It will encourage others to participate inasmuch as it creates a “pull” for Better Beginnings in the market.*

## **Appendix A: General Facilitation Guide**

### **Introduction**

*These comments welcome the group, instruct the participants and establish the moderator as the leader.*

My name is Stacey Jones, and I will be your facilitator today. First, I want to thank you for taking your time today to meet here for this discussion.

I want you to know that I am a professional moderator and facilitator, and I do not work for the Arkansas Department of Human Services. You probably know that your comments today are not confidential or anonymous. I am audio taping them (and as you can see the group itself is being video taped). This is because your comments are very important to me for this research, and so I want to capture everything you say for further evaluation. As you will find throughout this group, we will not get any more personal than you are comfortable, and I think that you will find the questions and activities interesting – I hope you do.

We will be here today for 90 minutes or less. I know you are busy! During that time, I have a few favors to ask of you:

- Please turn off your cell phones and pagers or put them on silent so they will not disturb the group.
- Please try not to engage in side conversations with your neighbor; our transcriptionist will not know what to type when she has several speakers at the same time!
- If I ask you to finish or wrap up the point you are trying to make, it is not because I am not keenly interested in what you are saying, but it IS because part of my job is to manage all the group's time wisely, and I will just want to keep our discussion moving along.

Before we move on, do you have any questions?

### **Participant Introductions/Warm-Up**

*This question helps accustom each participant to speaking in front of the group by asking about a pleasant experience or happy memory or an enjoyable topic.*

1. First of all, I know you have name cards in front of you, but I'd like all of you to introduce yourselves and tell me a little bit about the child care organization where you work. [This will provide the observing clients with the information that the participants will provide in a short questionnaire they will fill out before the groups.]

### **Directional Topic Questions**

*These questions serve most importantly to move the participants' frames of reference toward their aspirations for their organizations, so that their comments throughout the group are based on these emotions, associations and priorities.*

2. Thank you. You were chosen for this group because you are a leader in your child care organization. What do you like best about your job?

3. What would you say that you like least about your job?
4. What do you wish your organization could do differently? Think about it from a standpoint of ANYTHING is possible, no restraints, just what you want to have happen.
5. What do you want for the children in your care every day when you come to work? [Clarify if necessary: When you come to work every morning, what is it you hope most for the children in your care?]

### **Focus Questions**

*These questions get to the essential point of the study.*

6. What do you feel are indications of quality about YOUR organization? How do you know your organization offers quality child care to families?
7. What do you think are the best indications of quality child care and education among other providers?
8. Now, for those who own their own organization, what did you hope to accomplish when you started your facility? [Probe: Have you accomplished it?]
9. For those who work for someone else, how did you choose to work there and not somewhere else? [Have you realized those hopes/dreams?]
10. How does your organization communicate that it provides child care that families can really trust?
11. Do you think the public's view of your organization is accurate? By "public" I mean to include your families as well as those not involved with you.
12. What would you like your families to know/understand about you that you think they don't currently "get"?
13. RATING SYSTEM QUESTIONS for Better Beginnings Participants:
  - a. What was your primary motivation in becoming part of the Better Beginnings rating system? [Probe for clarity]
  - b. What would you feel you would miss if the Better Beginnings program ended now or eventually? [Clarify if necessary that the program is not going away; this question is just a way to find out what is valued.]
  - c. What would you say to convince someone whose program isn't involved in Better Beginnings that they should be in it?
  - d. What don't you like about Better Beginnings? Is this something you would tell others about if they asked you about the program?
14. RATING SYSTEM QUESTIONS for those not involved in Better Beginnings:
  - a. Let's talk about the state's rating system, Better Beginnings: What have you heard about it? [For those who don't know or know little, ask another group member to explain the program.]
  - b. Let's be frank: How likely do you think it is that your organization will eventually participate? [Probe deeply: help me understand your feelings...]
  - c. What do you think are the greatest benefits of participating in the program?

- d. What are the benefits of NOT participating? [Probe: What are the risks of becoming involved?]
- e. What keeps you from participating at this point?

### **Emotional “Code” Questions**

*These questions establish the sacred or most meaningful aspects of this service for this public.*

- 15. How do you explain to children why they have to come to your facility?
- 16. What gives you the most pride in your work each day?
- 17. What would be the best way for you to demonstrate to others the excellence of your organization?
- 18. What do you feel is you and your organization’s biggest contribution to the families you serve?
- 19. You may have noticed that I have been saying “child care provider.” I was wondering what you think of this term?
  - a. What do you prefer to be called?
  - b. Probe for what do you think of...
    - i. Daycare
    - ii. Child care
    - iii. Provider facility
    - iv. Early education program

### **Activity**

*This activity forces participants to go beyond words and mitigates the “impression management” that occurs during group discussions by reducing their expressions to visual elements.*

- 20. Before we move on, I would like to have you use the paper, pens and materials here [have white paper, markers, crayons, pens] to create an advertisement for Better Beginnings.
- 21. Tell me about your ad and how you decided to do it that way. [Round-robin. Probe.]

### **Q-Sort Activity**

Now, I have another activity for you that will ask you to participate in before we wrap up. It’s really a prioritization exercise using statements you made to me when you were recruited for this study.

*[Directions will be given based on how many distinct statements are gathered during recruitment. Participants will be given a set period of time to prioritize the features of the ideal child care provider on a worksheet according to most agree, least agree. The facilitator will then step out briefly to confer with the clients about any remaining round-up, follow up questions they would like asked.]*

Now that you are finished, please pass your worksheets up to me. Thank you!

### **Concluding/Summary Questions**

*These questions wind up the discussion for the participants to help them feel “closure” after some emotional discussions and provide one last chance to gather necessary information.*

22. If you had one minute to talk to the families you provide care for, what would you say to them, if you could say ANYTHING at all – that you would most want them to know?
23. Before I let you go, is there anything we need to talk about today that we haven't yet addressed? Or is there any question you kept expecting me to ask that I didn't?

Thank you so much for your time! You've been very helpful today! Please leave all your work and notes on the table and I will collect them. I will pay you your incentive fee as you step out.

## Appendix B: Complete Q-Sort Findings

### PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Michelle LaVicka, Ph.D.

#### Demographic information

A total of 32 individuals' completed valid sorts for participation in this study. Twenty of the participants are currently enrolled in Better Beginnings (designated as "BB") and 12 participants are nonparticipants in Better Beginnings ("non-BB"). For this study, a minimum of 17 participants were required to ensure the data were statistically sound. Based on the participant group sizes, the data are presented in two parts: BB and combined. There were not enough nonBB participants to ensure a valid statistical analysis; however, the combined results could provide insight into additional factors influencing participants within the entire group and were, therefore, maintained. Data are presented in two parts within each subheading: BB Group Participants and Non-BB Group Participants.

#### Correlation Matrix

##### **BB Group Participants**

Using PQmethod2.11 software (Schmolck, 2002), correlations among viewpoints of owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers were calculated using the correlation statistic  $r$ . A 20 x 20 matrix (Appendix A) was created where the number of individuals is 20 ( $n = 20$ ). The table shows the number of ways each individual's sort of 36 statements about his or her child care business relates to every other individual's sort of the same set of statements. Correlations of  $r = +1.00$  represent perfect positive relationships, correlations of  $r = -1.00$  represent perfect negative relationships, and a correlation of  $r = 0.00$  represents no relationship.

Determining the correlation significance involved calculating the standard error (SE) and dividing 1 by the square root of the 36 questions. The equation is represented by  $1/\sqrt{36} = 0.1666$ . A 95% confidence level ( $p < .05$ ) is the standard deviation multiplied by the SE, or  $1.96 \times 0.1666 = 0.3266$ . To achieve a 99% level of confidence ( $p < .01$ ), multiply 2.58 by  $0.1666 = 0.430$ . Although a significantly correlated number is roughly 2 to 2.5 times the SE (Brown, 1993), which equates to  $2 \times 0.1666 = 0.333$  and  $2.5 \times 0.1666 = 0.4166$ , for this study (both BB and Non-BB), the 0.430 value was used in order to maintain a high level of confidence and a narrow focus on the specific elements for each factor.

The Q-sorting procedure requires a forced, quasi-normal distribution that always results in a mean of 0. The standard deviation for this study (both BB and Non-BB) was 2.138. The nature of Q-methodology, with an emphasis on understanding individuals' perceptions, makes the correlation matrix of less interest than the emergent factors (Brown, 1993); however, the correlation matrix calculations play an important role in helping identify values flagged for use during factor rotation.

##### **Non-BB Group Participants**

A subsequent correlation statistic  $r$  was also calculated among combined (BB and Non-BB) viewpoints of owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers about his or her child care center. A 32 x 32 matrix (Appendix B) was created where the number of individuals is 32 ( $n = 32$ ). Regardless of

the *n* value, calculating the standard error (SE) did not change. The mean also remained 0. The standard deviation for this calculation remained 2.138.

### Factor Loadings

#### **BB Group Participants**

Factor analysis in Q-methodology is used to identify factors that contain highly correlated Q-sorts (Brown, 1993). The empirical values for the factors emerge during the PQCENT process (Schmolck, 2002). The unrotated factor loading matrix (Appendix C) revealed seven factors. The maximum number of factors allowed by the PQMethod2.11 software is eight. Of the seven factors, five factors had eigenvalues greater than 1. Researchers (McKeown & Thomas, 1988) suggest any eigenvalue lower than 1 is not significant. The summed variance of these five unrotated factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 accounted for 67% of the total variance of the sorts.

Factors were rotated using orthogonal rotation, Table 1, a method offered by the PQVARIMAX feature of PQMethod2.11 (Schmolck, 2002). This rotation process helped maximize the possible number of significantly correlated Q-sort variates on any one of the five extracted factors within significance levels of  $p < .01$ . Values greater than or equal to 0.43 are considered significant although not necessarily pre-flagged by PQMethod2.11. These significant but possibly omitted factors were flagged manually for inclusion among the sorts.

Table 1  
*Rotated Factor Loading with an X Indicating Defining Sorts*

QSORT	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
1 ABB2	0.3967	0.5147X	-0.1072	0.3531	0.1022
2 ABB3	0.0689	0.0876	0.0553	0.7454X	0.0210
3 ABB4	0.7503X	-0.0727	0.1993	-0.3109	0.0062
4 ABB5	0.5437X	0.0363	0.1472	0.3303	-0.2475
5 ABB6	0.0185	0.2621	-0.0027	-0.1024	0.7064X
6 ABB7	0.1124	-0.0496	-0.7873X	-0.0356	0.3948
7 ABB8	0.6728X	0.2822	0.1240	0.1786	0.3071
8 ABB9	0.6778X	0.0276	-0.0685	0.0375	0.4014
9 CBB1	-0.0545	0.2573	-0.0408	0.5071X	0.6774X
10 CBB2	-0.0835	0.5805X	-0.1758	0.3968	0.3334
11 CBB3	0.7670X	-0.0194	0.0049	0.1911	-0.1607
12 CBB5	0.6013X	-0.1329	0.4302X	0.4339X	-0.0643
13 CBB6	0.1058	0.8423X	0.3618	-0.0912	0.0241
14 RBB1	0.5598X	0.4183	-0.0296	0.0678	0.4058
15 RBB2	0.7385X	0.1377	0.1059	-0.2413	-0.0647
16 RBB3	0.7024X	0.4602X	-0.0350	0.1522	0.0969
17 RBB4	0.5010X	0.1017	0.3773	0.2471	0.3400
18 RBB6	0.2826	-0.1055	0.7239X	-0.0015	0.2550
19 RBB7	0.5997X	0.4737X	-0.3279	0.1593	0.1217
20 RBB8	0.0833	0.7311X	-0.1974	0.0440	0.3270
% Expl. Var	25	14	9	9	10

Although the PQMethod2.11 software (Schmolck, 2002) originally detected seven factors, five had eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The eigenvalue for factor 1 was 6.3481, factor 2 was 3.0477, factor 3 was 1.6014, factor 4 was 1.2976, and factor 5 was 1.1266 accounting for 25, 14, 9, 9, and 10 percent of the explained variation, respectively, or 67 percent of the variation explained by all five factors.

Factor rotation does not affect underlying relationships found in the correlation matrix since some Q-sorts can load to the same factors and thus indicate a similarity of opinion. Sorts CBB1 loaded on factors 4 and 5, CBB5 loaded on factors 1, 3, and 4, and both RBB3 and RBB7 loaded on factors 1 and 2. Every BB sort loaded on at least one factor.

A >0.5 correlation between factors indicates a strong relationship between factors. As depicted in Table 2, there are no strong correlations (positive or negative) between any of the factors. There is a positive, although not significant relationship between factors 1 and 2 and factors 2 and 5; however, the remaining relationships are weak. These weak correlations between all factors suggest there is little to no relationship between people who load on any factors and indicate most (but not all) participants only identify with one factor.

Table 2  
*Correlations Between Factor Scores*

Factors	1	2	3	4	5
1	1.0000	0.4655	0.2339	0.3318	0.1586
2	0.4655	1.0000	0.0133	0.2980	0.4288
3	0.2339	0.0133	1.0000	0.2050	-0.1185
4	0.3318	0.2980	0.2050	1.0000	0.3891
5	0.1586	0.4288	-0.1185	0.3891	1.0000

Using the PQMethod2.11 software (Schmolck, 2002), the composite reliability is calculated against the estimated factor reliability of 0.800 to determine the reliability of whether the factor scores are different between factors, as illustrated in Table 3. The 0.800 base is the researchers use to assume participants will rank-order the same statements the same way at least 80% of the time (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). The data indicate a strong composite reliability almost exceeding 90% for each factor.

Table 3  
*Factor Characteristics*

Factors	1	2	3	4	5
No. of Defining Variables	11	6	3	3	2
Average Reliability Coefficient	0.800	0.800	0.800	0.800	0.800
Composite Reliability	0.978	0.960	0.923	0.923	0.889
SE of Factor Scores	0.149	0.200	0.277	0.277	0.333

In order to add additional reliability to the findings, the PQMethod2.11 software (Schmolck, 2002) was used to calculate the values for standard errors for differences between the normalized factor scores. Table 4 is an illustration of the standard errors for differences which indicate there is a significant difference between factors since the values are between -0.5 and 0.5.

Table 4  
*Standard Errors for Differences in Normalized Factor Scores*

Factors	1	2	3	4	5
1	0.211	0.249	0.315	0.315	0.365
2	0.249	0.283	0.342	0.342	0.389
3	0.315	0.342	0.392	0.392	0.434
4	0.315	0.342	0.392	0.392	0.434
5	0.365	0.389	0.434	0.434	0.471

*Note:* Diagonal entries are standard errors within factors

Factor analysis detected five factors describing the perceptions of child care center owners/directors/teachers/leaders. The five factors are **low prioritization of education, child-focused/record-adverse, data and detail focused, learning activity apathy, and instructional independence**. Discussion regarding the five factors and their identification follows in the factor analysis section.

***Total Population (Including Non-BB Group Participants)***

The initial unrotated factor loading matrix (Appendix D) revealed ten factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. This large quantity of high eigenvalues suggests a lot of variance within the participant population. Although researchers (McKeown & Thomas, 1988) suggest any eigenvalue lower than 1 is not significant, for the purpose of this portion of the study, only eigenvalues greater than 2 were considered. There were three unrotated factors with eigenvalues greater than 2 and those three unrotated factors accounted for 50% of the total variance of the sorts.

As with the BB sorts, factors were rotated using orthogonal rotation to help maximize the possible number of significantly correlated Q-sort variates on any one of the three extracted factors within significance levels of  $p < .01$ . Values greater than or equal to 0.43, as with the BB sorts, were considered significant although not necessarily pre-flagged by PQMethod2.11. These significant but possibly omitted factors were flagged manually for inclusion among the sorts, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5  
*Rotated Factor Loading with an X Indicating Defining Sorts*

QSORT	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1 ABB2	0.3838	0.2285	0.5529X
2 ABB3	-0.0141	0.1508	0.3472
3 ABB4	0.2503	0.7080X	-0.2009
4 ABB5	0.1079	0.5878X	0.0574
5 ABB6	0.3956	-0.0878	0.3749
6 ABB7	0.5880X	-0.3942	0.0074
7 ABB8	0.4432X	0.6071X	0.3742
8 ABB9	0.5865X	0.4185	0.1347
9 CBB1	0.1759	-0.1151	0.7602X
10 CBB2	0.1794	-0.1689	0.7415X
11 CBB3	0.2849	0.6877X	-0.0394
12 CBB5	-0.1682	0.7739X	0.2190
13 CBB6	0.0809	0.1796	0.5475X
14 RBB1	0.5583X	0.3560	0.4122
15 RBB2	0.3696	0.6301X	-0.0862
16 RBB3	0.5538X	0.5227X	0.3293
17 RBB4	0.1110	0.5579X	0.4389X
18 RBB6	-0.1949	0.5300X	0.0995
19 RBB7	0.6882X	0.2726	0.3154
20 RBB8	0.4889X	-0.1364	0.5541X
21 CN1	0.3646	0.4954X	0.5205X
22 CN2	0.0524	0.4873X	0.2922
23 CN3	0.7223X	0.0805	-0.3424
24 AN2	0.7018X	-0.0503	0.2398
25 AN5	0.7928X	0.1284	0.2497
26 AN4	0.0657	0.5043X	0.0707
27 AN5	-0.0411	0.4647X	-0.0095
28 AN6	0.4204	0.2724	0.5666X
29 RN1	0.3582	0.6150X	0.2441
30 RN3	0.4050	0.2834	0.2270
31 RN5	0.0245	0.1613	0.7031X
32 RN6	0.4446X	0.2745	0.3729
% Expl. Var	17	18	15

Although the PQMethod2.11 software (Schmolck, 2002) originally detected ten factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, three had eigenvalues greater than 2.0. The eigenvalue for factor 1 was 9.9886, for factor 2 was 3.6647, and for factor 3 was 2.433 accounting for 17, 18, and 15 percent of the explained variation, respectively, or 50% of the variation explained by all ten factors.

Factor rotation does not affect underlying relationships found in the correlation matrix since some Q-sorts can load to the same factors and thus indicate a similarity of opinion. Sorts ABB8 and RBB3

loaded on factors 1 and 2, RBB8 loaded on factors 1 and 3, and RBB4 and CN1 loaded on factors 2 and 3. ABB3, ABB6, and RN3 did not load on any factor.

A >0.5 correlation between factors indicates a strong relationship between factors. As depicted in Table 6, there is a positive, strong relationship between factors 1 and 2 and between factors 1 and 3. There is a positive, although not significant, relationship between factors 2 and 3. These positive correlations between all factors suggest there is a relationship between people who load on any of the three factors and indicate there is a possibility some participants will identify with more than one factor.

Table 6  
*Correlations Between Factor Scores*

Factors	1	2	3
1	1.0000	0.5089	0.5794
2	0.5089	1.0000	0.4067
3	0.5794	0.4067	1.0000

Using the PQMethod2.11 software (Schmolck, 2002), the composite reliability is calculated against the estimated factor reliability of 0.800 to determine the reliability of whether the factor scores are different between factors, as illustrated in Table 7. As with the BB factor characteristic analysis, the 0.800 base was used as a comparison value (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). The data indicate a strong composite reliability that exceeds 97% for each factor. Compared to the BB factors, these factors are far more likely to be similarly sorted.

Table 7  
*Factor Characteristics*

Factors	1	2	3
No. of Defining Variables	11	14	9
Average Reliability Coefficient	0.800	0.800	0.800
Composite Reliability	0.978	0.982	0.973
SE of Factor Scores	0.149	0.132	0.164

In order to add additional reliability to the findings, the PQMethod2.11 software (Schmolck, 2002) was used to calculate the values for standard errors for differences between the normalized factor scores. Table 8 is an illustration of the standard errors for differences which indicate there is a significant difference between factors since the values are between -0.5 and 0.5.

Table 8  
*Standard Errors for Differences in Normalized Factor Scores*

Factors	1	2	3
1	0.211	0.199	0.222
2	0.199	0.187	0.211
3	0.222	0.211	0.232

Note: Diagonal entries are standard errors within factors

Factor analysis detected three factors influencing the perceptions of child care center owners/directors/teachers/leaders. The three factors are **child safety and care, positive experiences free of outside influences, and child focused**. Discussion regarding the three factors and their identification follows.

### Factor Analysis

Calculation of the factor scores and difference scores using PQMethod2.11 is the last step in the Q methodological analysis preceding interpretation of the factors. Factor analysis requires calculating z-scores (the normalized weighted value) for each statement for every respondent who defined a factor. Analysis of the factor scores, the composite Q sorts, and the distinguishing statements is what allows for the interpretation of the factors (van Exel & de Graf, 2005).

The characterizing statements at the extreme positions (-4, -3, +3, +4) of the composite sort for each factor provided the first descriptive pieces of evidence about the factors. Analysis of the less extreme (-2, -1, 1, 2) and neutral (0) scores help further develop the factor identification. The analysis of the differences and similarities in the distinguishing and consensus statement groups further support factor interpretation and add to the overall understanding of the emergent factors.

### BB Group Participants

#### Factor 1: Low Prioritization of Education

Among perceptions of the owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers, the largest reflected variance, 25%, was for the influence of factor 1, Low prioritization of education. Eleven participants loaded on this factor at a level of significance greater than 0.43 ( $p < .01$ ). Of those eleven, eight only loaded on this factor and the other three also loaded on factors 2 and 3. All eleven of those who loaded on this factor were *positively* associated with only this factor.

Factor 1 had four distinguishing statements associated with it at a confidence level of 95% ( $p < .05$ ). Three of the four statements were significant to the 99% confidence level ( $p < .01$ ). Of the four statements, three of them were negatively ranked, and two of those negatively ranked statements were ranked at -4. For those two strongly-ranked, negative statements (33 and 9), participants were least concerned with providing a small student-to-teacher ratio at their child care site and were also least concerned with establishing instructional guidelines for education. Participants who loaded on factor 1 were neutral regarding the importance of providing progress reports to parents regarding child development and did not value the ability to maintain a low staff turnover rate. Table 9 is a list of all of the distinguishing statements for factor 1, each significant at  $p < .05$ . The three significant at  $p < .01$  are noted with an \*.

Table 9  
*All Distinguishing Statements for Factor 1*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
10	Involve the parents in the daily progress and experience of their children	1	0.62
36	Maintains consistent personnel so that staff turnover is low	-2	-1.02*
33	Follows established guidelines for curriculum and development for the children	-4	-1.60*
9	Keeps the student-to-teacher ratio at 7-to-1 or 6-to-1	-4	-2.25*

Note.  $P < .05$ ; asterisk (\*) indicates significance at  $p < .01$ . Both the factor Q-Sort value and the normalized score are shown.

Factor 1's only positive agreed-with statement was statement 10, "Involve the parents in the daily progress and experience of their children through strong communication"; however, the statement's rank was low which indicated it was not a priority although it was a consideration. The characterizing statement most disagreed with for factor 1 was statement 9 "Involve the parents in the curriculum so that the whole family is included in the child's progress and education." The second most disagreed with statement characterizing factor 1 was statement 33 "Follows established guidelines for curriculum and development for the children they serve." The weakly disagreed with statement was 36, "Maintains consistent personnel so that staff turnover is low."

Table 10 contains the two most significant characterizing statements for those participants who loaded on factor 1. Both of the most significant characterizing statements had a 99 percent confidence level. These two statements reflect the fact that owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers who loaded on factor 1 do not feel complying with educational guidelines, including suggested student-to-teacher ratios, is a critical component of providing successful child care.

Table 10

*Characterizing Statements for Factor 1*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
33	Follows established guidelines for curriculum and development for the children	-4	-1.60*
9	Keeps the student-to-teacher ratio at 7-to-1 or 6-to-1	-4	-2.25*

**BB Group Participants**

**Factor 2: Child-focused/Record-averse**

Among opinions of owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers, 14% of the variance was for the influence of factor 2, child-care focused/record-averse. Five participants loaded on this factor at a level of significance greater than 0.43 ( $p < .01$ ). Of those five, two of the participants also loaded on factor 1.

Factor 2 had seven distinguishing statements associated with it at a confidence level of 95% ( $p < .05$ ). All of the statements were also significant to the 99% confidence level ( $p < .01$ ). Of those seven, one statement was ranked at +3. This statement highlighted the importance of providing the student with tailored learning opportunities during child care.

Of the seven statements significant to 99% confidence level, two statements were ranked at -4 and one statement was ranked at -3. For those two statements (16 and 32), respondents seemed least concerned with maintaining records and seeking grants or other outside resources to improve their child care program. Table 11 is a list of all of the distinguishing statements for factor 2, each significant at  $p < .05$ . The 18 significant at  $p < .01$  are noted with an \*.

Table 11

*All Distinguishing Statements for Factor 2*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
6	Create special learning opportunities for the children in their care on a regular	3	1.31*
23	Ensures the safety and the security of all the children in their care	2	0.85*

26	Employs teachers who are loving and firm	1	0.39*
3	Offer age-appropriate curriculum and programs for their students	-1	-0.31*
21	Is recommended highly by other parents and families in the community	-3	-1.64*
16	Keep good records so that a child's progress and needs are well documented	-4	-1.73*
32	Have the expertise they need to access all possible resources for their students	-4	-2.32*

Note.  $P < .05$ ; asterisk (\*) indicates significance at  $p < .01$ . Both the factor Q-Sort value and the normalized score are shown.

Factor 2's most positive agreed-with statement was statement 6, "Create special learning opportunities for the children in their care on a regular basis." The next most agreed with statement was 23, "Ensures the safety and the security of all the children in their care." The distinguishing statements most disagreed with for factor 2 were statement 16, "Keep good records so that a child's progress and needs are well documented" and statement 32 "Have the expertise they need to access all possible resources for their students (such as grants, etc.)." The second most disagreed with statement characterizing factor 2 was statement 21, "Is recommended highly by other parents and families in the community."

Table 12 contains the four most significant characterizing statements for those participants who loaded on factor 2. All of the four characterizing statements had a 99 percent confidence level. These four statements reflect a focus on child care, in terms of learning and discipline, are more important to the owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers than their child care center's reputation or recordkeeping. These statement selections suggest participants who load on factor 2 want to be sure they provide the children in their child care program with individualized learning opportunities and the participants are less concerned with the technical elements of child care including paperwork and grant receipts. The statement ranking also suggests participants do not highly prioritize maintaining or enhancing their child care's reputation within the community.

Table 12  
*Characterizing Statements for Factor 2*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
6	Create special learning opportunities for the children in their care on a regular	3	1.31*
21	Is recommended highly by other parents and families in the community	-3	-1.64*
16	Keep good records so that a child's progress and needs are well documented	-4	-1.73*
32	Have the expertise they need to access all possible resources for their students	-4	-2.32*

Note.  $P < .05$ ; asterisk (\*) indicates significance at  $p < .01$ . Both the factor Q-Sort value and the normalized score are shown.

### **BB Group Participants**

#### **Factor 3: Data and detail focused**

Among opinions of owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers about ideal child care programs, 9% of the variance was for the influence of factor 3, the focus on data and details. Three participants loaded on this factor at a level of significance greater than 0.43 ( $p < .05$ ). Of those three, one also loaded on factors 1 and 4.

Factor 3 had seven distinguishing statements associated with it at a confidence level of 95% ( $p < .05$ ). Five of the seven statements were significant to the 99% confidence level ( $p < .01$ ). Of those five

significant statements, one was ranked at +4. Of the five statements significant to 99% confidence level, one statement was ranked at -4 and one statement was ranked at -3. For those two statements (1 and 20), respondents seemed least concerned with their child care center’s layout and general environment. Participants who felt strongly about the need for data and record keeping comfort were neutral regarding safety and security of the children under their care (23). Table 13 is a list of all of the distinguishing statements for factor 3, each significant at  $p < .05$ . The five significant at  $p < .01$  are noted with an \*.

Table 13  
*All Distinguishing Statements for Factor 3*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
7	Keep the student-to-teacher ratio low	4	1.81
16	Keep good records so that a child’s progress and needs are well documented	4	1.44*
5	Are attentive to every detail that has to do with the child’s progress	3	1.06
29	Keeps the student-to-teacher ratio at 7-to-1 or 6-to-1	2	0.99*
23	Ensures the safety and the security of all the children in their care	0	-0.21*
1	Take attentive care of the children for whom they are responsible	-3	-1.44*
20	Offers children safe, educational, fun toys and activities in an attractive	-4	-2.12*

*Note.*  $P < .05$ ; asterisk (\*) indicates significance at  $p < .01$ . Both the factor Q-Sort value and the normalized score are shown.

Factor 3’s most positive agreed-with statement was statement 7, “Keep the student-to-teacher ratio low.” The next most agreed with statement was 16, “Keep good records so that a child’s progress and needs are well documented.” The characterizing statement most disagreed with for factor 3 was statement 20, “Offers children safe, educational, fun toys and activities in an attractive environment.” The second most disagreed with statements characterizing factor 3 was statement 1, “Take attentive care of the children for whom they are responsible.”

Table 14 contains the five most characterizing statements for those participants who loaded on factor 3. Three of the five most characterizing statements had a 99 percent confidence level. These three significant statements reflect the child care center’s record keeping is a critical component whereas the physical environment and safety of the children was not as important. These distinguishing statement selections suggest participants who load on factor 3 want to be sure their child care service provides learning records that are well-maintained and they are less concerned with their child care center’s physical environment in terms of both safety and layout.

Table 14

*Characterizing Statements for Factor 3*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
7	Keep the student-to-teacher ratio low	4	1.81
16	Keep good records so that a child's progress and needs are well documented	4	1.44*
5	Are attentive to every detail that has to do with the child's progress	3	1.06
1	Take attentive care of the children for whom they are responsible	-3	-1.44*
20	Offers children safe, educational, fun toys and activities in an attractive	-4	-2.12*

*Note.*  $P < .05$ ; asterisk (\*) indicates significance at  $p < .01$ . Both the factor Q-Sort value and the normalized score are shown.

**BB Group Participants****Factor 4: Learning Activity Apathy**

Among opinions held by owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers, 9% of the variance was for the influence of factor 4, learning activity apathy. Three participants loaded on this factor at a level of significance greater than 0.43 ( $p < .05$ ). Of those three, one also loaded on factors 1 and 3 and another also loaded on factor 5.

Factor 4 had only one distinguishing statement. This factor was significant to the 99% confidence level ( $p < .01$ ). Participants who felt strongly about learning activity apathy rated the need to offer engaging activities as -3. Table 15 includes the only distinguishing statements for factor 4 and because it is significant at  $p < .01$  it is noted with an \*.

Table 15

*All Distinguishing Statements for Factor 4*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
8	Offer engaging activities to children throughout the day	-3	-0.86*

*Note.*  $P < .05$ ; asterisk (\*) indicates significance at  $p < .01$ . Both the factor Q-Sort value and the normalized score are shown.

Participants who loaded on factor 4 ranked its only distinguishing statement, "Offer engaging activities to children throughout the day to keep them learning and growing," as strongly negative. This negative ranking suggests participants who loaded on factor 4 are not concerned with providing learning opportunities to the children under their care.

**BB Group Participants****Factor 5: Instructional Independence**

Among owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers opinions' about their child care center, 9% of the variance was for the influence of factor 5, instructional independence. Two participants loaded on this factor at a level of significance greater than 0.43 ( $p < .05$ ). Of those two, one also loaded on factor 4.

Factor 5 had five distinguishing statements associated with it at a confidence level of 95% ( $p < .05$ ). Three of the five statements were significant to the 99% confidence level ( $p < .01$ ). Of those three significant statements, one was ranked at +3. Of the three statements significant to 99% confidence level, one statement was ranked at -4 and one statement was ranked at -3. For those two negatively-ranked statements (13 and 9), respondents seemed least concerned with interacting with the parents. Participants who felt strongly about providing safe and happy environments in the classroom were uninterested in seeking parental support for the academic instruction of the children in their care. Table 16 is a list of all of the distinguishing statements for factor 5, each significant at  $p < .05$ . The three significant at  $p < .01$  are noted with an \*.

Table 16  
*All Distinguishing Statements for Factor 5*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
27	Organizes its classrooms and facilities in happy and safe ways	3	1.64*
19	Have strong leadership to work with the teachers as a team	2	0.89
13	Have positive, one-on-one relationships with the students' parents	-3	-1.41*
34	Is able to call on whatever additional resources are needed	-4	-1.44
9	Involve the parents in the curriculum so that the whole family is included	-4	-1.64*

*Note.*  $P < .05$ ; asterisk (\*) indicates significance at  $p < .01$ . Both the factor Q-Sort value and the normalized score are shown.

Factor 5's most positive agreed-with statement was statement 27, "Organizes its classrooms and facilities in happy and safe ways." The characterizing statement most disagreed with for factor 3 was statement 9, "Involve the parents in the curriculum so that the whole family is included in the child's progress and education." The second most disagreed with statements characterizing factor 5 were statement 34, "Is able to call on whatever additional resources are needed so that any single child served can realize his or her fullest potential" and statement 13 "Have positive, one-on-one relationships with the students' parents characterized by honest, open communication about the child's needs."

Table 17 contains the four most characterizing statements for those participants who loaded on factor 5. Three of the four most characterizing statements had a 99 percent confidence level. These three significant statements reflect that owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers perceive the child care center's atmosphere is a critical component whereas parental participation in the student's learning was not considered as important. These distinguishing statement selections suggest participants who load on factor 5 want to be sure the children under their care are happy and safe and they are less concerned with involving the parents or outside agencies in the child care process.

Table 17

*Characterizing Statements for Factor 5*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
27	Organizes its classrooms and facilities in happy and safe ways	3	1.64*
13	Have positive, one-on-one relationships with the students' parents	-3	-1.41*
34	Is able to call on whatever additional resources are needed	-4	-1.44
9	Involve the parents in the curriculum so that the whole family is included	-4	-1.64*

Note.  $P < .05$ ; asterisk (\*) indicates significance at  $p < .01$ . Both the factor Q-Sort value and the normalized score are shown.

**BB Group Participants**

**Consensus Statements**

Statements indistinguishable between any of the identified factors are consensus statements among participants (van Exel & de Graf, 2005). Of the similar ranking of the single statement listed in Table 18 among owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers, none was significant. The consensus statement did suggest those who loaded on factors 1, 2, 3, 4, and/or 5 did not value, albeit not significantly, providing children under their care with “a curriculum that includes not only academics but also personal growth opportunities.” This lack of concern regarding curriculum suggests educational instruction is not a priority as perceived by child care providers.

Table 18

*Consensus Statements*

No.	Statement	Factor									
		1		2		3		4		5	
		Rnk	Score	Rnk	Score	Rnk	Score	Rnk	Score	Rnk	Score
28	Offers a curriculum	0	-0.43	-2	-0.91	-2	-0.98	-2	-0.80	-1	-0.66

Note. All listed statements are non-significant at  $p > .01$ , and those flagged with an asterisk (\*) are also non-significant at  $p > .05$ .

**Total Population Including Non-BB Group Participants**

**Factor 1: Child Safety and Care**

Among the opinions of owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers, the middle reflected variance, 17%, was for the influence of factor 1, Child safety and care. Eleven participants loaded on this factor at a level of significance greater than 0.43 ( $p < .01$ ). Of those eleven, eight only loaded on this factor. Two participants also loaded on factor 2 and one participant also loaded on factor 3. All eleven of those who loaded on this factor were *positively* associated with only this factor.

Factor 1 had 17 distinguishing statements associated with it at a confidence level of 95% ( $p < .05$ ). Ten of the 17 statements were significant to the 99% confidence level ( $p < .01$ ). Of the ten statements, three of them were negatively ranked and of those three, two of them were negatively ranked at -3. For those two strongly-ranked, negative statements (7 and 34), participants were least

concerned with providing a small student-to-teacher ratio and looking for outside sources of financing or support. Participants who loaded on factor 1 were neutral regarding the importance of happiness, either of students or employees, and were most focused on having clean, child-friendly facilities where they could provide care to the students who came to them. Table 19 is a list of all of the distinguishing statements for factor 1, each significant at  $p < .05$ . The ten significant at  $p < .01$  are noted with an \*.

Table 19  
*All Distinguishing Statements for Factor 1*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
1	Take attentive care of the children for whom they are responsible	4	2.10
4	Have clean, child-friendly facilities	3	1.29*
14	Employ qualified, energetic staff members that ensure the children's days go well	2	1.18
12	Immediately respond to a crying child to assess what's wrong	2	1.01*
20	Offers children safe, educational, fun toys and activities	2	0.62*
2	Are staffed with workers who look and act professionally	1	0.46*
31	Makes sure to meet the needs of the children each and every day	1	0.41
21	Is recommended highly by other parents and families in the community	1	0.40*
25	Employs teachers who are happy to be there and share their energy	0	0.21*
27	Organizes its classrooms and facilities in happy and safe ways	0	0.00
24	Creates an emotional environment that supports children	0	-0.01*
26	Employs teachers who are loving and firm	-1	-0.28
15	Have open-door policies so that parents feel welcome to	-1	-0.48*
35	Is experienced enough to be able to identify when a child may need additional	-1	-0.65
33	Follows established guidelines for curriculum and development	-2	-1.12
7	Keep the student-to-teacher ratio low	-3	-1.20*
34	Is able to call on whatever additional resources are needed	-3	-1.32*

*Note.*  $P < .05$ ; asterisk (\*) indicates significance at  $p < .01$ . Both the factor Q-Sort value and the normalized score are shown.

Factor 1's highest ranked characterizing statement was also its most positive agreed-with statement: statement 1, "Take attentive care of the children for whom they are responsible." The next highest ranked statement was statement 4, "Have clean, child-friendly facilities" although statements 7 "Keep the student-to-teacher ratio low" and 34 "Is able to call on whatever additional resources are needed" were equally significant, albeit negatively ranked.

Table 20 contains the four most significant characterizing statements for those participants who loaded on factor 1. Three of the four most significant characterizing statements had a 99 percent confidence level. These three statements reflect the focus owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers who loaded on factor 1 have on taking care of children in clean, child-friendly facilities while eschewing a focus on student-to-teacher ratio and searching for or calling on outside resource support.

Table 20

*Characterizing Statements for Factor 1*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
1	Take attentive care of the children for whom they are responsible	4	2.10
4	Have clean, child-friendly facilities	3	1.29*
7	Keep the student-to-teacher ratio low	-3	-1.20*
34	Is able to call on whatever additional resources are needed	-3	-1.32*

**Total Population Including Non-BB Group Participants****Factor 2: Positive experiences, free of outside influences**

Among the opinions of owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers, the highest level of variance, 18%, came from the influence of factor 2, the need for positive experiences free of outside influences. Fourteen participants loaded on this factor at a level of significance greater than 0.43 ( $p < .01$ ). Of those 14, two of the participants loaded on factor 1 and two participants loaded on factor 3.

Factor 2 had 20 distinguishing statements associated with it at a confidence level of 95% ( $p < .05$ ). Thirteen of the statements were significant to the 99% confidence level ( $p < .01$ ). Of those 13, two statements were ranked at +3. These statements (8 and 15) highlighted the importance of the student receiving learning opportunities while receiving child care and ensuring parents felt welcome to come see their children or discuss their progress. Other positively-ranked statements, although not as highly ranked as those already discussed, also highlighted the participating child care providers who loaded on factor 2 perceived happiness and positive relationships were important to success. These statements included 24, 13, 14, 12, and 31.

The participants who loaded on factor 2 did not seem as concerned with employee happiness or ability to express lovingness and firmness; however, the participants did highlight the need for employees to be energetic (supporting the positive focus of the factor) as well as prepared for the day's activities.

Of the 13 statements significant to 99% confidence level, two statements were ranked at -3. For those two statements (27 and 32), respondents seemed least concerned with providing happy and safe environments and seeking grants and outside resource assistance. Table 21 is a list of all of the distinguishing statements for factor 2, each significant at  $p < .05$ . The 18 significant at  $p < .01$  are noted with an \*.

Table 21

*All Distinguishing Statements for Factor 2*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
8	Offer engaging activities to children throughout the day	3	1.30*
15	Have open-door policies so that parents feel welcome to	3	1.29*
9	Involve the parents in the curriculum so that the whole f	2	0.99*
7	Keep the student-to-teacher ratio low	2	0.88*
24	Creates an emotional environment that supports children	2	0.80*
13	Have positive, one-on-one relationships with the student	2	0.78*
18	Employ teachers who are well prepared for each day with	1	0.76
14	Employ qualified, energetic staff members that ensure th	1	0.73
1	Take attentive care of the children for whom they are responsible	1	0.42*
12	Immediately respond to a crying child to assess what's	0	0.40
6	Create special learning opportunities for the children in	0	0.23
31	Makes sure to meet the needs of the children each and every	0	0.01
16	Keep good records so that a child's progress and needs a	0	-0.05*
35	Is experienced enough to be able to identify when a child	0	-0.15
25	Employs teachers who are happy to be there and share the	-1	-0.57*
26	Employs teachers who are loving and firm	-2	-1.24*
20	Offers children safe, educational, fun toys and activities	-2	-1.34*
27	Organizes its classrooms and facilities in happy and safe	-3	-1.36*
32	Have the expertise they need to access all possible resources	-3	-1.38*
33	Follows established guidelines for curriculum and development	-4	-1.56

*Note.*  $P < .05$ ; asterisk (\*) indicates significance at  $p < .01$ . Both the factor Q-Sort value and the normalized score are shown.

Factor 2's most positive agreed-with statement was statement 8, "Offer engaging activities to children throughout the day." The next most agreed with statement was 15, "Have open-door policies so that parents feel welcome." The characterizing statements most disagreed with for factor 2 were statement 33, "Follows established guidelines for curriculum and development," statement 32 "Have the expertise they need to access all possible resources for their students (such as grants, etc.)," and statement 27 "Organizes its classrooms and facilities in happy and safe"

Table 22 contains the five most significant characterizing statements for those participants who loaded on factor 2. Four of the five characterizing statements had a 99 percent confidence level, the only statement receiving a ranking of 4 (+ or -) was not significant to the 99 percent confidence level. These five statements reflect a focus on openness and positive relationships while maintaining independence of guidelines or outside influence. These statement selections suggest participants who load on factor 2 want to be sure their child care service engages the children and their parents while remaining independent of outside guidelines and structure. Those participants who load on factor 2 do not, however recognize the importance of safety or see a need in classroom organization.

Table 22

*Characterizing Statements for Factor 2*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
8	Offer engaging activities to children throughout the day	3	1.30*
15	Have open-door policies so that parents feel welcome to	3	1.29*
27	Organizes its classrooms and facilities in happy and safe	-3	-1.36*
32	Have the expertise they need to access all possible resources	-3	-1.38*
33	Follows established guidelines for curriculum and development	-4	-1.56

*Note.*  $P < .05$ ; asterisk (\*) indicates significance at  $p < .01$ . Both the factor Q-Sort value and the normalized score are shown.

**Total Population Including Non-BB Group Participants****Factor 3: Child focused**

Among the opinions of owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers, 15% of the variance was for the influence of factor 3, focus on the child. Nine participants loaded on this factor at a level of significance greater than 0.43 ( $p < .05$ ). Of those nine, one also loaded on factor 1 and two loaded on factor 2.

Factor 3 had 18 distinguishing statements associated with it at a confidence level of 95% ( $p < .05$ ). Eleven of the 18 statements were significant to the 99% confidence level ( $p < .01$ ). Of those 11 significant statements, one was ranked at +4 and one was ranked at +3. Of those two statements, the focus was on the child's emotional needs (statements 24 and 31). Of the 11 statements significant to 99% confidence level, one statement was ranked at -3. For that statement (15), respondents seemed least concerned with making parents feel welcome. Participants who felt strongly about the need to be child focused also focused on employing teachers who added to the child's positive experiences (25, 35, 36, 27, 26, 7, 14, 20, and 12) while at the child care center. Table 23 is a list of all of the distinguishing statements for factor 3, each significant at  $p < .05$ . The 11 significant at  $p < .01$  are noted with an \*.

Table 23

*All Distinguishing Statements for Factor 3*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
24	Creates an emotional environment that supports children	4	2.04*
1	Take attentive care of the children for whom they are res	3	1.64
31	Makes sure to meet the needs of the children each and every	3	1.33*
25	Employs teachers who are happy to be there and share the	2	1.29*
35	Is experienced enough to be able to identify when a child	2	0.99*
36	Maintains consistent personnel so that staff turnover is	2	0.67*
27	Organizes its classrooms and facilities in happy and safe	2	0.45
26	Employs teachers who are loving and firm	1	0.27
7	Keep the student-to-teacher ratio low	0	0.19*
14	Employ qualified, energetic staff members that ensure the	0	-0.04*

3	Offer age-appropriate curriculum and programs for their s	0	-0.04*
20	Offers children safe, educational, fun toys and activities	0	-0.10*
12	Immediately respond to a crying child to assess what's	0	-0.11
22	Works with the parents to create appropriate disciplinary	-1	-0.56
33	Follows established guidelines for curriculum and development	-1	-0.62
5	Are attentive to every detail that has to do with the chi	-2	-0.73
19	Have strong leadership to work with the teachers	-2	-0.83*
15	Have open-door policies so that parents feel welcome to	-3	-1.34*

Note.  $P < .05$ ; asterisk (\*) indicates significance at  $p < .01$ . Both the factor Q-Sort value and the normalized score are shown.

Factor 3's most positive agreed-with statement was statement 24, "Creates an emotional environment that supports children." The next most agreed with statements were 1, "Take attentive care of the children for whom they are responsible" and 31 "Makes sure to meet the needs of the children each and every day." The characterizing statement most disagreed with for factor 3 was statement 15, "Have open-door policies so that parents feel welcome."

Table 24 contains the four most characterizing statements for those participants who loaded on factor 3. Three of the four most characterizing statements had a 99 percent confidence level. These three significant statements reflect the owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers perceives the need to emotionally support children is the most critical purpose of their business. These distinguishing statement selections also suggest participants who load on factor 3 are least concerned with making parents feel welcome. It appears, based on the sorts, the focus of the owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers is on the child.

Table 24  
*Characterizing Statements for Factor 3*

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Rank	Score
24	Creates an emotional environment that supports children	4	2.04*
1	Take attentive care of the children for whom they are res	3	1.64
31	Makes sure to meet the needs of the children each and every	3	1.33*
15	Have open-door policies so that parents feel welcome to	-3	-1.34*

Note.  $P < .05$ ; asterisk (\*) indicates significance at  $p < .01$ . Both the factor Q-Sort value and the normalized score are shown.

**Total Population Including Non-BB Group Participants**

**Consensus Statements**

Statements indistinguishable between any of the identified factors are consensus statements among participants (van Exel & de Graf, 2005). Of the similar ranking of the single statement listed in Table 25 among opinions of owners/directors/teachers/leaders of child care centers, four were significant. The consensus statement did suggest those who loaded on factors 1, 2, and 3 recognized the value of safety, ranking it 4, 3, and 4 for factors 1, 2, and 3, respectively. The participants also highlighted the value they placed on talking and loving each child every day. The participants were not focused on involving parents on a daily basis, nor on offering a varied curriculum. They were most strongly aligned in not valuing a low student-to-teacher ratio.

Table 25  
*Consensus Statements*

No. Statement	Factor					
	1		2		3	
	Rnk	Score	Rnk	Score	Rnk	Score
10* Involve the parents in the daily progress and experience	1	0.30	1	0.66	1	0.27
11* Take time to talk to and love each child as they need t	3	1.27	4	1.69	3	1.61
23* Ensures the safety and the security of all the children	4	1.96	3	1.53	4	1.78
28* Offers a curriculum that includes not only academics bu	-1	-0.35	-1	-0.51	0	0.00
29 Keeps the student-to-teacher ratio at 7-to-1 or 6-to-1	-4	-1.73	-4	-1.84	-4	-1.79

*Note.* All listed statements are non-significant at  $p > .01$ , and those flagged with an asterisk (\*) are also non-significant at  $p > .05$ .

APPENDIX A: CORRELATION MATRIX BETWEEN SORTS – BB

SORTS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1 ABB2	100	29	19	23	28	16	50	33	37	30	30	30	41	35	21	58	31	2	55	41
2 ABB3	29	100	-8	15	4	-5	22	12	28	28	17	23	3	10	3	24	13	14	13	17
3 ABB4	19	-8	100	31	3	-3	54	46	-21	-16	42	43	15	33	61	39	27	29	19	-8
4 ABB5	23	15	31	100	-6	-22	22	43	3	-5	38	53	12	28	23	36	24	18	39	3
5 ABB6	28	4	3	-6	100	17	24	19	41	18	-7	-12	21	41	-4	27	17	6	22	35
6 ABB7	16	-5	-3	-22	17	100	5	28	20	29	-1	-21	-20	17	-3	11	-11	-32	28	26
7 ABB8	50	22	54	22	24	5	100	49	39	37	54	44	35	57	53	65	46	26	49	21
8 ABB9	33	12	46	43	19	28	49	100	24	10	32	29	13	43	46	47	47	28	47	36
9 CBB1	37	28	-21	3	41	20	39	24	100	57	-3	6	17	39	-14	16	28	6	29	39
10 CBB2	30	28	-16	-5	18	29	37	10	57	100	-8	1	43	36	-1	22	24	-20	28	51
11 CBB3	30	17	42	38	-7	-1	54	32	-3	-8	100	50	8	49	50	53	39	15	40	-6
12 CBB5	30	23	43	53	-12	-21	44	29	6	1	50	100	8	26	32	41	58	44	19	-9
13 CBB6	41	3	15	12	21	-20	35	13	17	43	8	8	100	37	21	38	28	19	27	48
14 RBB1	35	10	33	28	41	17	57	43	39	36	49	26	37	100	31	66	44	18	62	46
15 RBB2	21	3	61	23	-4	-3	53	46	-14	-1	50	32	21	31	100	44	39	26	41	15
16 RBB3	58	24	39	36	27	11	65	47	16	22	53	41	38	66	44	100	42	20	69	42
17 RBB4	31	13	27	24	17	-11	46	47	28	24	39	58	28	44	39	42	100	33	32	16
18 RBB6	2	14	29	18	6	-32	26	28	6	-20	15	44	19	18	26	20	33	100	1	-1
19 RBB7	55	13	19	39	22	28	49	47	29	28	40	19	27	62	41	69	32	1	100	52
20 RBB8	41	17	-8	3	35	26	21	36	39	51	-6	-9	48	46	15	42	16	-1	52	100