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better beginnings

EVERY CHILD DESERVES OUR BEST

UAMS

CHILD CARE PROVIDER SURVEY REPORT

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PART 1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sample Recruitment

All child care providers in the state of Arkansas were invited to participate in an online survey about their experiences or expectations about Better Beginnings. We used website, U.S. mail, and email to invite providers throughout the state to participate in the online survey. The invitation was posted on the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) website. DCCECE also provided contact information for 3,047 licensed child care providers. Providers with valid email addresses were emailed an invitation and a reminder of the survey deadline. Providers without valid email addresses (n=1, 472) were mailed a postcard. Of those, 36 postcards were undeliverable. One hundred fifty-seven sites were registered for multiple licenses. These sites were also mailed an additional follow-up letter explaining how to fill out a single survey for multiple licenses. All communications included information about the monetary incentive to participate: a drawing for two \$200 prizes and four \$100 prizes.

Sample Characteristics

Better Beginnings Participating Providers. With 262 respondents, an overall 38% response rate was achieved for participating providers. The majority of respondents were mostly at the highest level of quality (Level 3, n=216, 82%) and were providers of center-based child care (n=213).

Better Beginnings Non-Participants. There were 254 non-participating respondents to the survey (an 11% overall response rate). Characteristics of the providers suggest that respondents were likely to be of

higher than average quality. For preschoolers, approximately 60% of all of the respondents reported having ratios that were better than required by the state, and most of the respondents (n=176, 69%) reported using at least one curriculum.

Concerns about Participating

We asked only non-participating providers about concerns that could keep them from participating in Better Beginnings. Areas where providers have concerns were 1) training time for program staff, 2) costs associated with meeting requirements, 3) time for administrative tasks, and 4) time to complete application process. Open-ended responses about difficulties were related to Better Beginnings not working for part-time centers, quality not representing real quality for children, and associated costs.

Concerns about Better Beginnings Components

We asked participating providers about their difficulties with attaining and documenting Better Beginnings components. For both sets of questions, the administrative sections of Better Beginnings—the Program Administration Scale (PAS)/Business Administration Scale (BAS) and Strengthening Families—were the areas where respondents reported the greatest concern. We asked respondents to explain their concerns for each of the items, and the majority of stated concerns about the PAS/BAS were related the time burdens of documenting standards. For the Strengthening Families component, most of the concerns were related to an inability to access and/or understand the training and materials.

Similarly, when we asked non-participating providers about their difficulties with attaining Better Beginnings components, respondents believed that the administration section would be difficult for them to attain. Like participating respondents, the majority of concerns for PAS/BAS were related to time constraints; many comments were specific to documentation requirements. For Strengthening Families, time constraints were listed as a main concern, as well as uncertainty of requirements. Additional concerns focused on difficulty interacting with families and technology concerns. Unlike the participating respondents, non-participants also expressed concerns about the environmental rating where general and staff-related anxiety and costs for materials/equipment were the primary concerns.

Costs of Participation

We asked both participating and non-participating providers about costs of participating in Better Beginnings and for which components the costs were associated. The majority of respondents in both groups reported costs associated with 1) the environmental assessment – the majority of associated costs were materials/equipment for the classroom/school and 2) professional development requirements for staff – costs include paying for training and related travel, covering substitutes in the classroom when teachers are out, and increasing salary costs.

Differences between the groups were seen as participating providers also reflected on costs related to the PAS/BAS assessment. Comments included expenses related to buying supplies/equipment to do documentation (software for budgeting, for example) and personnel costs related to documentation (such reallocating staff, paying overtime, etc.). Another difference between the groups was evidenced as non-participating providers commented on concerns related to passing on costs to parents and increasing the cost of their care.

Better Beginnings' Levels and Planning

Better Beginnings Levels 1 and 2. There were a total of 30 programs at lower levels of Better Beginnings (Level 1=19, Level 2=11). We asked them if they planned to apply for a higher level and 97% reported that they would. Eighty-six percent reported they would apply before they were required to renew. We asked if they need additional supports to meet a higher level; the majority reported that they would need additional funding, technical assistance, greater training availability, and support specific to PAS/BAS assessment.

Better Beginnings Level 3. Eighty-three percent of Level 3 providers reported they would apply for a higher level. We asked about specific supports needed to maintain Level 3; the majority reported needing support with documentation in general and specific to PAS/BAS. Like Levels 1 and 2, additional supports requested were greater training availability, technical assistance, and funding. Level 3 providers also suggested additional TAPP support and/or improvements to the TAPP registry, and support related to Strengthening Families.

Non-Participating Providers. We asked providers if there were any supports that were needed to apply to Better Beginnings. Like those providers who are already participating, the non-participants requested greater number of trainings available and in more areas in the state, technical assistance (help with the application process, curricula, portfolios, and additional trainings with unfamiliar elements such as with portfolios and medical care plans), funding for equipment/materials, hiring/paying more qualified staff, and time for documentation. Finally, there were multiple requests for simplification with comments suggesting that the demand was too high to participate.

Changes as a Result of Better Beginnings

We asked participating providers if they had observed changes as a result of participating in Better Beginnings. Seventy-six percent of respondents reported that staff members have a better understanding of the components of a quality program. Only 33% reported that parents have a better understanding of the components of a quality program, and only 8% agreed that the level was important to parents in choosing their child's care. Fifty-eight percent of respondents had used their rating to promote their center.

Suggestions for Improvement

We asked both participating and non-participating providers to share with us what changes they would make to the Better Beginnings system. Both groups of providers suggested the need to **simplify** (*"The amount of preparation for the PAS evaluation seems outrageously detailed..."*). Areas of overlap between the two groups included:

- Simplify (*"...Would rather not participate because of ... paperwork..."*)
- Greater training availability including amount and variability in timing and location
- More funding (*"The program needs to provide better financial incentives... The professional development money is not really useful when all of your employees have degrees."*)
- TAPP improvements (*"...Accept out of state and Head Start trainings"*)
- Change Better Beginnings components (*"...Although PAS is important in running a successful business and having systems in place for a quality center, I don't feel that it determines a quality learning environment..."*)

- Provide adjustments/allowances by program type, for instance for part-time programs, family childcare providers, and centers serving children with developmental delays
- Greater clarity and support in applying (*“More hands on support [visits/examples/suggestions/to-do lists/etc.] from a higher level mentor!”*)
- Improve systems alignment (*“To make it more compatible with the ABC regs...”; “Head Start...have federal reviews”*)

Participating providers also requested increased and/or timely communication with Better Beginnings, and non-participating providers expressed some uncertainty in the benefit of applying.

Recommendations

Training

Given recent communication with DCCECE, some of the difficulties and suggestions for improvement that providers have reported around training have already been addressed. For example, professional development grants in Better Beginnings can now be used to help cover the costs associated with trainings for the entire staff and not just those attaining CDA or other college-level courses. While this is a welcome change on the part of providers, it’s important to balance provider need with what we know about effective professional development: college preparation is the ultimate goal and most likely related to optimal outcomes for children.

Another repeated comment is that there are multiple barriers that limit providers’ access to information and opportunities to meet the training hour requirements of Better Beginnings. The state is moving toward providing more training online, which will address some of the issues inherent in state-wide distribution of information and will allow more flexibility in the timing of training. Again, while these changes are likely to improve the accessibility of trainings across the state, the existing literature suggests that trainings that are longer term and customized to the recipient are more successful. Therefore, it may be necessary to add in some additional technical assistance support around trainings that do not meet the criteria established in the research literature.

Administrative Functioning

There were multiple concerns from both participating and non-participating providers about administrative elements of Better Beginnings. The majority of provider concerns were related to the amount of time required to document administrative practices for the PAS/BAS assessment. There were also concerns about the Strengthening Families component of the administrative process review, in this case mostly related to uncertainty in the requirements.

Program and Business Administration Scales. The PAS and the BAS are reliable, valid instruments useful in highlighting strengths and weaknesses of business functions. The items most related to child outcomes have been removed from Better Beginnings scoring because they are too far beyond the norm of common practice in Arkansas. However, providers still report PAS/BAS to be overly burdensome, and business practices have not been related to child outcomes in the literature. Therefore, we recommend investigating the replacement of full PAS/BAS assessments with assessment of fewer key elements of

business practices, as has been the choice of other QRIS states. We encourage continued use of PAS/BAS as a training and technical assistance tool.

Strengthening Families. We would expect use of the Strengthening Families model to heighten awareness and to improve relational helpgiving skills if all staff members, not just administrators, receive more intensive training than currently designated. Most of the provider concern was related to a lack of understanding about what the component entails. Therefore, more education for this component may waylay concerns. However, if providers continue to refuse participation because of the Strengthening Families requirements, it is an area to further consider revision. As currently implemented, Strengthening Families is less likely to lead to major benefits for children. Reducing the burden to providers while retaining the assessments of the elements of care that most strongly benefit children (such as the ERS) is recommended.

Adaptations by Program Type

There were multiple comments related to making adjustments for certain types of programs. Comments ranged from difficulties of part-time and family care programs in meeting requirements, to better alignment of state systems (such as with Arkansas Better Chance programs), and to reciprocity for some programs that have federal reviews (such as Head Start). UAMS is currently conducting interviews with providers across the state to better understand the needs of programs of different types and will report to DCCECE by the summer of 2011. We also know that the state is currently realigning the regulations of ABC to better match Better Beginnings, which will alleviate some provider concern for duplicity of documentation. While we do not see immediate reciprocity to Head Start programs being granted, the review of performance standards conducted as part of the first-year evaluation of Better Beginnings highlighted vast areas of overlap where additional documentation for rating could be waived given the current Better Beginnings system.

Head Start Programs. As a whole, Head Start programs are required by federal regulations to meet many of the standards in Better Beginnings. Documenting that programs are in good standing as a result of federal review, verifying that CLASS scores meet the cut off as shown to positively relate to child outcomes (a minimum score of 3.25), and limiting the additional assessments required for Better Beginnings would be an appropriate cost-saving measure for the state and has the potential to increase participation among Head Start programs.

Summary

The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education is devoted to creating a voluntary Quality Improvement initiative that will benefit Arkansas children and their families. DCCECE has already made changes to the implementation of its professional development grants to make them more useful to providers. Future changes to Better Beginnings should thoughtfully balance the needs of providers willing to make program improvements with elements of care linked to children's health and development in research.



PART 2

NON-PARTICIPANT RESULTS

All child care providers in the state of Arkansas were invited to participate in an online survey about their experiences or expectations about Better Beginnings. Two surveys were developed; one for participating providers (BB providers) and one for non-participating providers (non-BB providers).

We used website, U.S. mail, and email to invite providers throughout the state to participate in the online survey. The invitation was posted on the DCCECE website. DCCECE also provided contact information for 3,047 child care licenses. Providers with valid email addresses were emailed twice. Providers without valid email addresses (n=1, 472) were mailed a postcard. Of those, 36 postcards were undeliverable. 157 sites were registered for multiple licenses. These sites were also mailed an additional follow-up letter explaining how to fill out a single survey for multiple licenses.

All communications included information about the monetary incentive to participate: a drawing for two \$200 prizes and four \$100 prizes.

Sample Description

There were a total of 298 participants who provided responses to the non-BB providers' survey. However using information provided by DCCECE, we determined that 44 respondents were Better Beginnings rated providers (one at Level 1 and 43 at Level 3), and their data was removed and added into the participating provider responses. This results in 254 respondents to the non-participating provider survey.

Of the 254 participants, there were 53 providers without license numbers or with numbers that did not match the records that we have from DCCECE. These participants were included in the overall analyses reported but will not be included in the subgroup analyses provided in the report.

Table 1. Non-Participating Respondents by Program Type and Ages Served

		What Type of Program		Total
		Center Based	Home Based	
Ages Served	Preschool	23	0	23
	Infant/Toddler and Preschool	66	0	66
	School Age	8	0	8
	All	52	45	97
	Preschool and School Age	6	0	6
	Infant/Toddler and School Age	1	0	1
Total		156	45	201

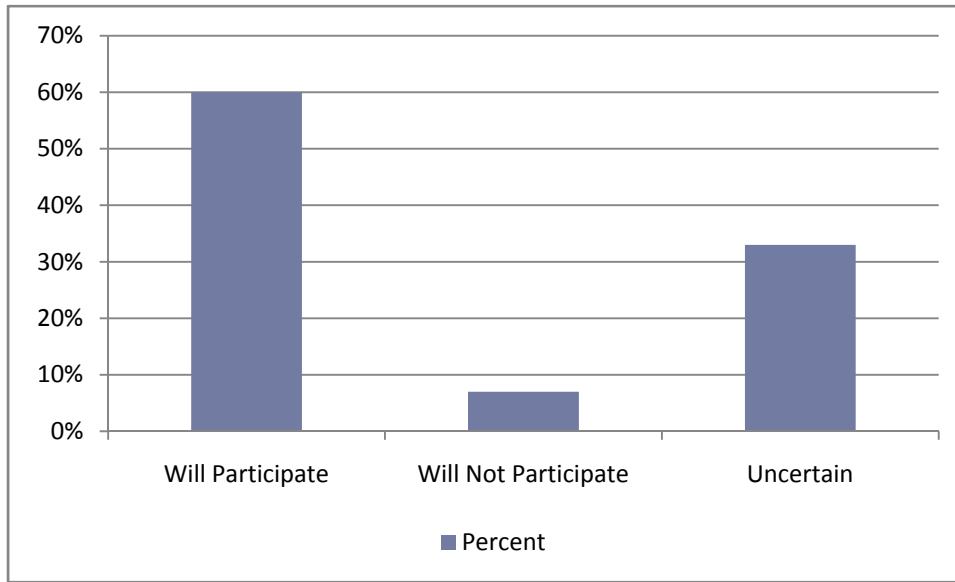
Subgroup analyses were conducted for 201 respondents, the vast majority of whom were center-based programs (n=156) serving infants/toddlers and preschool-aged children (n=66) and children of all ages (n=52). All 45 family childcare homes provided services to children from infancy through school age (see Table 1 for a synopsis).

According to the information provided used to contact participants, there were 2,350 providers in the state not participating in Better Beginnings. Information attained in May 2011, reported 1,998 non-participating providers in the state. Given 254 respondents and the information available for the 3,047 child care providers, that represents an 11% overall response rate to the survey for those providers participating in Better Beginnings. Using the more recent information, a response rate of 13% was determined.

Detailed information about the programs was only available from data attained in May 2011. According to that data, there are 1,354 licensed child care centers and 644 licensed and/or registered family child care homes not participating in Better Beginnings. Therefore, a response rate for child care centers was computed to be 12% where the rate for family child care homes was less at 8%.

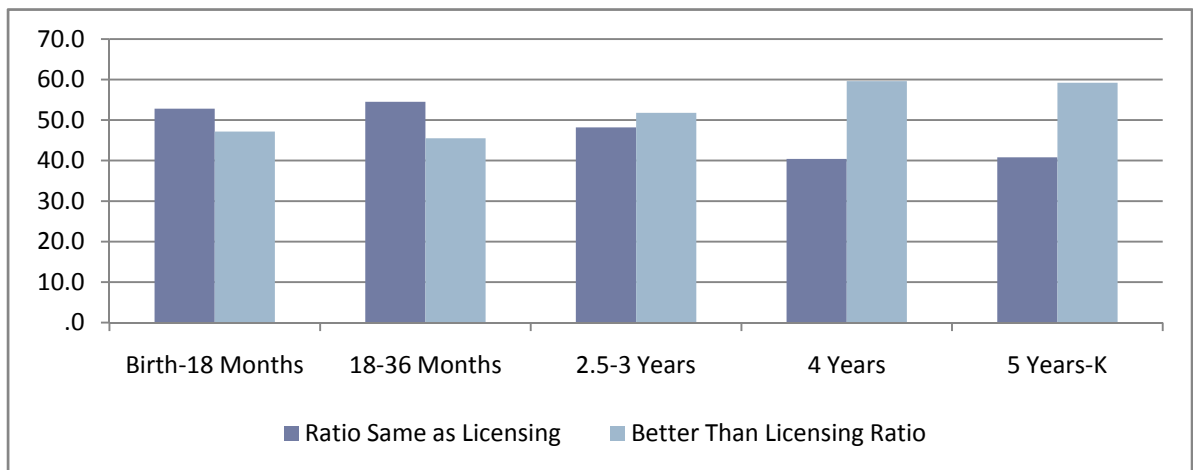
Using data from all of the respondents not identified as currently part of the Better Beginnings quality system (n=254), 153 (60%) indicated that they plan to apply to the quality system in the future. Eighteen respondents (7%) reported that they had no plans to participate, while 83 (33%) were uncertain (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Respondents' Plans to Participate in Better Beginnings



Characteristics of the providers suggest that respondents were likely to be of higher than average quality. For example, 68% of the respondents reported fewer than 10% of their children receive child care vouchers. For preschoolers, approximately 60% of all of the respondents reported having ratios that were better than required by the state (see Figure 2). Most of the respondents (n=176, 69%) also reported using at least one curriculum (30% of the programs used just one curriculum). For example, 39% reporting use of Creative Curriculum, 30% using Adventures in Learning, and 34% using theme based. Finally, some respondents (n=28, 11%) reported being accredited by one or more national accrediting bodies.

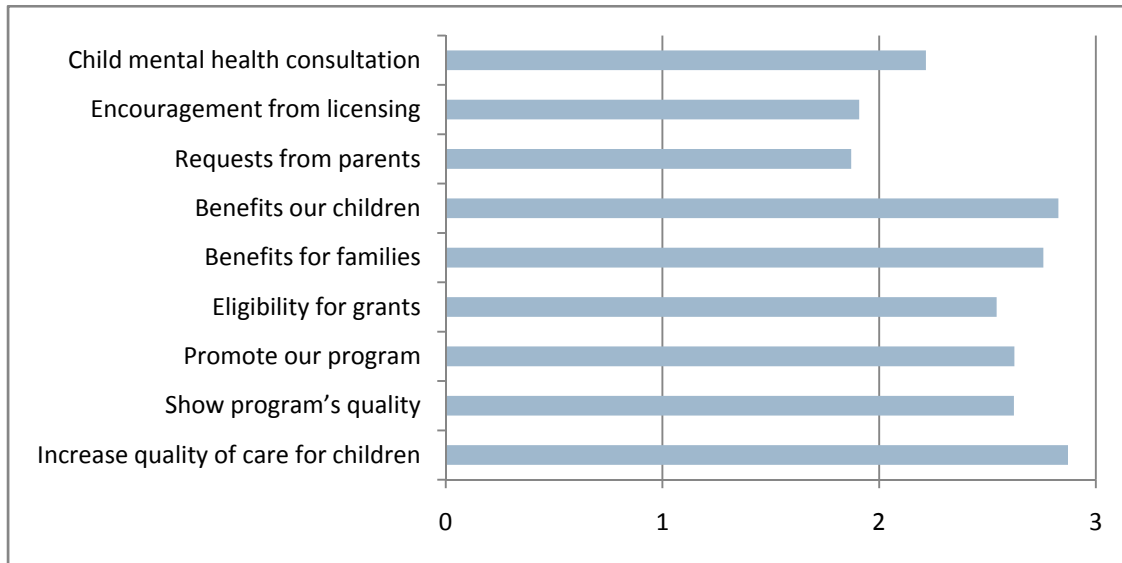
Figure 2. Respondents' Self-Reported Child-Staff Ratios



Reasons for Participating

We asked providers: If you decide to participate in Better Beginnings, please rate the importance of the following reasons from 0= 'no importance' to 3= 'great importance'. Most respondents rated each of the reasons they were given to participate as at least of some importance (see Figure 3), with a desire to increase the quality of the care that they provide having almost complete support (scores for this question were the highest and nearly 3, indicating that most participants endorsed quality being of great importance). There were two items with less agreement: 1) requests from parents and 2) encouragement from licensing. Additional open-ended responses included being able to compete with other pre-kindergarten programs, desire to increase staff quality, and the perception that the state will require participation. Comparisons across programs that could be identified as center providers and family childcare indicated no differences between beliefs between the two types of providers.

Figure 3. Non-Participating Providers' Reasons to Participate in Better Beginnings



Concerns about Participating

We then asked non-BB providers about concerns that could keep them from participating in the QRIS (Question: "Do you have any concerns about participating in Better Beginnings? Please rate the level of concern of the following reasons from 0= 'no concern' to 3= 'great concern'). Items with mean scores that are higher reflect areas where providers have concerns with the highest rated items. These areas are 1) training time for program staff, 2) costs associated with meeting requirements, 3) time for administrative tasks, and 4) time to complete application process (see Table 2 for all of the items). Open-ended responses related to difficulties were related to Better Beginnings **not working for part-time centers** (30%), **quality not representing real quality for children**, and **costs** (see Appendix A for all responses).

Table 2. Non-Participating Providers' Concerns about Participating in Better Beginnings

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Costs associated with meeting requirements	228	2.1667	.91408	.00	3.00
Training time for program staff	229	2.2271	.96015	.00	3.00
Training time for administrative tasks	228	2.1360	.97272	.00	3.00
Time to complete application process	225	2.0489	.97391	.00	3.00
Lack of support from program leadership	224	.9643	1.04969	.00	3.00
Lack of support from program staff	226	1.1903	1.03025	.00	3.00
Lack of availability of required trainings	223	1.6592	1.08657	.00	3.00
Staff turnover	231	1.3463	1.10787	.00	3.00
Increasing costs for parents	217	1.8157	1.10266	.00	3.00
The level will not matter	198	1.3687	1.01283	.00	3.00
Parents may not choose if not the highest level	225	1.3111	1.11848	.00	3.00
Would not provide a fair representation of program	218	1.4862	1.18060	.00	3.00

Ease or Difficulty of Attaining and Documenting Better Beginnings Standards

Comparisons between types of care demonstrated only one marginal difference between the groups; family childcare homes are significantly less concerned about staff turnover than center-based programs (see Figure 3). Family childcare reported less concern than center programs except in the area of the meaning of the level (although mean differences between the responses were not significantly different).

Ease or Difficulty of Attaining and Documenting Better Beginnings Standards

Most providers reported that they had reviewed the application process (n=167; 74%) and the components of Better Beginnings (n=178; 80%). We asked, "How difficult do you think it would be to attain each of the following components for your current rating, where 0=very easy, 1=somewhat easy, 2=neither easy nor difficult, 3=somewhat difficult, and 4=very difficult?" Therefore, items with mean scores above 2 represent general perceptions of difficulty. There were three areas where providers reported beliefs that areas would be difficult for them to attain – the Administration Scales (marginal), Strengthening Families, and the Environmental Rating Scales components (see Figure 4).

Comparisons of responses from family childcare and center providers revealed one significant difference in beliefs about attaining each of the criteria; that criterion was Strengthening Families. Center-based programs reported significantly greater concern (average=2.32) than family childcare providers (average=1.76) in their ability to meet the requirements for Strengthening Families.

Figure 3. Non-Participating Providers' Concerns about Participating in Better Beginnings: Center and Family Care

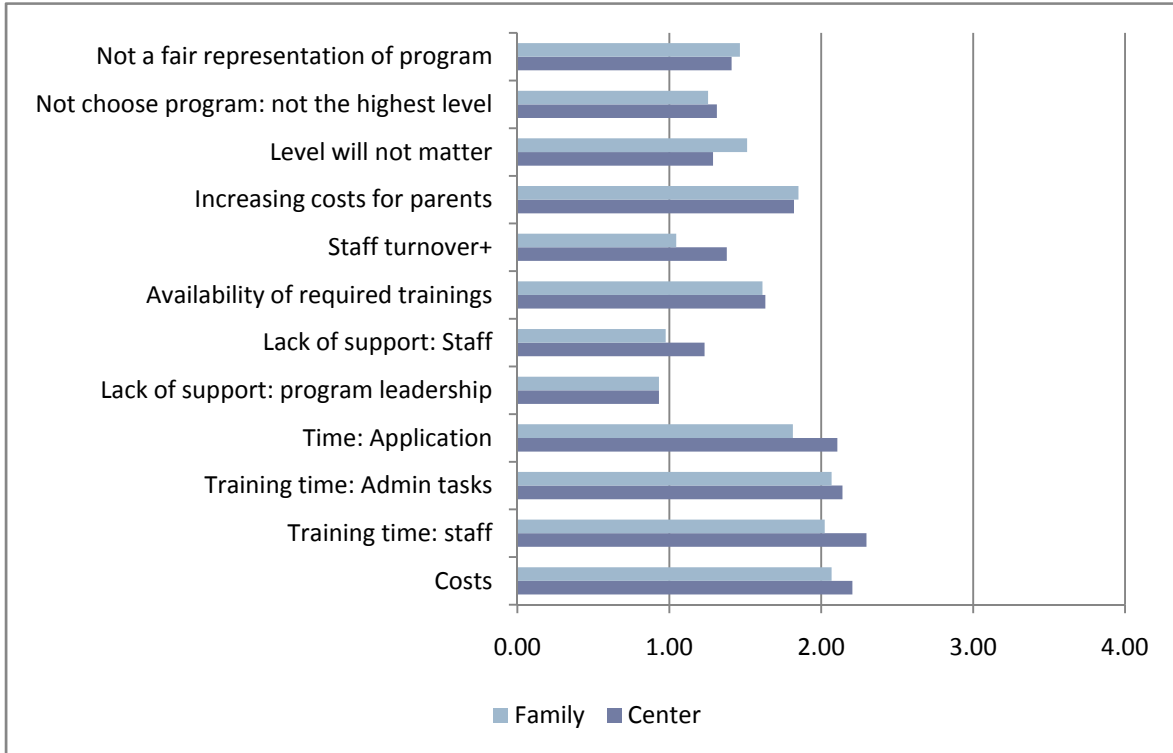
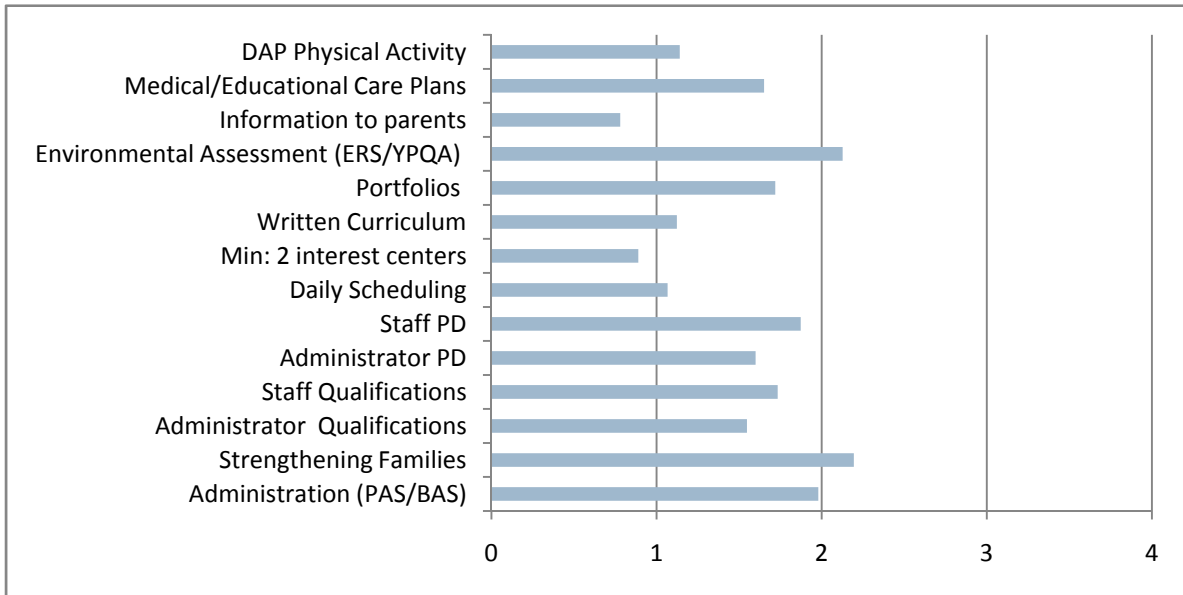


Figure 4. Non-Participating Providers' Perceptions of Difficulty with Meeting Better Beginnings Components



We asked participants to note the reason for the difficulty or ease of attaining each of the requirements. We examined and summarized the open-ended responses to the three areas of concern (see Appendix B).

Examining responses regarding the **PAS/BAS**, 54 participants provided open-ended responses; 42 were related to concerns about the criterion. The vast majority of concerns were related to **time constraints** (n=28, 68%). Many of the time-related constraints were specific to **documentation** requirements for PAS/BAS, such as *“making the time to create the documentation”* and time required to attend **training** *“having coverage of onsite administrators and the travel for the trainings are a problem.”* There were also general concerns related to staffing and the complexity of the assessment, such as *“the PAS component seems unnecessarily complicated and overly detailed. This is the biggest hang-up we have in getting our program in Better Beginnings.”*

For **Strengthening Families**, there were 35 participants who provided responses; 29 were concerns about the criterion. Again, **time** constraints were listed as a main concern (35%), as well as **uncertainty** of requirements (25%). For example, one participant stated: *“Time element again. Also, I have accessed the Strengthening Families website multiple times in an attempt to find out more about participating in the webinar.”* Other concerns focused on difficulty **interacting with families** (25% such as, “I have several parents who just want to sign their child in/out and get out of the building...they say it's a struggle to do anything childcare related once they get home.”) and **technology** concerns (n=10% such as “Webinars are very difficult because we lack the technology.”)

For **Environmental Rating Scales**, there were 29 participants who provided responses; 22 were with concerns about the criterion. For this construct general and staff-related **anxiety** was listed as a main concern (36%). Comments included, *“This one is basically for me an issue of fear of the “unknown”...nervousness of the possibility of failing,”* and, *“We've always done well with this, but the staff gets very anxious about this.”* Other concerns were related to **costs for materials/equipment** (23%) with statements such as, *“The amount of toys and learning materials needed get costly.”* The next highest frequency statement was that the requirement means **time away from children** (9%, such as, “Again, time being spent on the book and meeting “black and white standards” instead of spending time with the children. I feel that my teachers have more important tasks”). Finally, there were responses related to having **unqualified staff** (9%) and **assessor issues** (9% such as, “I have seen the observers say things are ok on one visit and say something completely different on another. They often contradict themselves”).

We also asked if programs would have to make budgetary changes to meet each of the components of Better Beginnings. Most (n=114; 82%) of the 139 respondents to this question would need to redirect or increase funds. Budget changes were associated with:

- **Training** (39%) – includes expenses to cover travel and pay as well as substitute teachers in the classroom

“...You have to pay subs to work in the classroom, pay for gas for the teachers to drive to the classes and pay the teachers.”

- **Materials** (21%) – such as additional materials for classrooms (including curricula) and/or cost for documentation supplies

“Yes, would need assistance to purchase curriculum for infants, cover cost of training stipend for staff, and pay”

- **Personnel and Payroll** (18%) – for example, higher teacher pay for better qualified teachers or more teachers to cover classrooms

“We would need additional staff to manage the paperwork and implementation” and “Provide subs for training of our employees, have more in salaries for appropriately educated teachers...”

- **Building or Equipment Upgrades (8%)** – such as buildings, playgrounds, and/or furniture

“The center needs to improve on the inside such as painting and purchasing the items to meet the requirements that is needed in order to make a good score for the learning centers as well as outdoor equipment”

- **Increase Rates for Care (8%)** – comments centered around passing costs to parents

“Most likely, our rates would have to go up due to the need for more materials needed to fit the requirements”

DCCECE Support

We also asked providers about their awareness of the supports available to them through DCCECE. The following table shows the percentages of respondents’ choices regarding supports that will be used. Many respondents were not aware of technical assistance support related to the PAS/BAS (25%), ERS assessments (37%), and regarding curricula (32%). Over 40% of respondents were not aware of the Strengthening Families website or any of the support available through Better Beginnings staff. The supports that most will use are training to meet requirements and the Better Beginnings website.

Table 4. Non-Participating Providers’ Perceptions of Use of State Supports in Percentages

<i>Support:</i>	Not Aware	Aware, Will Not Use	Aware, Might Use	Aware, Will Use
a. Technical Assistance for Program Administration (PAS/BAS)	25%	4%	31%	40%
b. Technical Assistance for Environmental Ratings (ERS/YPQA)	37%	5%	27%	41%
c. Technical Assistance for program curriculum development	32%	12%	26%	30%
d. Training required for Better Beginnings (TAPP)	16%	4%	21%	60%
e. Better Beginnings Toolkit	28%	4%	21%	47%
f. Better Beginnings Website	15%	4%	23%	58%
g. Strengthening Families Website	43%	3%	18%	35%
h. Better Beginnings Helpline	42%	4%	27%	27%
i. Better Beginnings Grant Staff	48%	4%	20%	28%
j. Better Beginnings Administrative Staff (DHS)	38%	3%	26%	33%

We asked providers if there were any additional supports that were needed to apply to Better Beginnings (Question: “Please note any specific supports you need or internal changes you must make to apply for Better Beginnings”). There were 77 respondents to this question; 52 responses related to needing support from the Division. Directors expressed need in the following areas (see Appendix D for complete list of responses):

- **Trainings (21%)** – statements included needs for greater number of trainings available and in more areas in the state.

“We would use more of the trainings if they were in South Arkansas or Southeast Arkansas. It is very hard for our staff to go and stay a week for trainings like Frameworks”

“I am having a hard time trying to get into a PAS basic training to get started. Every time I look to getting in a class that is in my location they are already filled up and the session is closed.”

- **Technical assistance (23%)** – requests for existing TA help with the application process, curricula, portfolios, but additional trainings such as with portfolios and medical care plans.

“A person to answer questions and guide us through the process”

“As a family home, I would like trainings on portfolios and medical care plans and how to write them”

“I need Technical Assistance with FCCERS, BAS, and Better Beginnings program. Help with curriculum to make sure what I have it meeting standards”.

- **Increased or improved staff (10%)** – comments focus on need to hire more or more qualified staff.

“I am having problems finding workers with a CDA or those willing to get their CDA”

“I need qualified staff, so my staff would have to be trained on a higher level...”

- **Equipment and/or Materials (12%)** – these needs are related to costs for materials or building repairs/costs.

“We must upgrade our playground greatly as well as purchase a multitude of curriculum tools”

“Getting funds to provide adequate materials for the rooms that would at least get us to a level 1”

- **Time (15%)** – general time comments related to pulling together documentation

“More time! I'm already working over the hours I'm actually paid...”

- **Funding (4%)** – general grant support requested

“Grant money to help the business survive this process of change with childcare.”

- **Simplification (10%)** – respondents made comments suggesting that the demand was too high to participate

“I am certified, but my hands are tied--we will not be applying for Better Beginnings certification”

“Biggest problem is the PAS portfolio materials and the time it takes to prepare it”

“Approved training for staff seems unattainable”

Suggestions for Improvement

Finally, the last open-ended question was, “Do you have suggestions for improving the Better Beginnings System?” We received 57 responses, 40 of which were suggestions for improvement (all responses and coding provided in Appendix E).

Simplifying was the most frequent suggestion (28%). Comments included concerns about paperwork and documentation as well as making it easier to implement.

“The amount of preparation for the PAS evaluation seems outrageously detailed. Also, we have noticed that evaluators seem much more concerned with insignificant items that are easy to quantify [you only washed your hands for 9 seconds instead of 10!] rather...”

“PAS is very difficult!!!”

Directors also requested **financial support** (20%), either increased support for their program type, grants for applicants, or wages for staff as they make gains in their professional development

“Provide a paid person to get it going. There are not enough hours in my day. I spend half of my day on documentation of employee's absences, complaints and such. Parents take the other half along with payroll, taxes, and administrative duties.”

“Give some of the grant monies on the front end—like if you are getting ready for BB—there are some monies available to help with the cost of training and materials...”

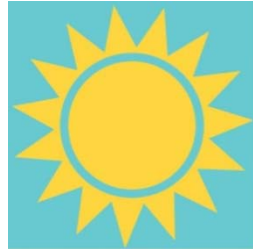
“Financial support for teacher salaries”

Another request was to **adjust standards for program types** (18%), for instance for part-time programs, family childcare providers, and centers serving children with developmental delays.

“I would like to see adjustments made for just afterschool programs. It is very difficult for us to meet curriculum requirements and training hours because most of us go to college or have a day job since our jobs don't start 'til 3 in the afternoon”

“It seems that it does not work for part time programs such as ours. Many of the standards just are not feasible for a program like ours where the children are only at school for 2 1/2 hours”

Other suggestions included **increasing the availability of trainings** (18% such as “Hold trainings on Saturdays for the Daycare Family Homes. Do online classes when possible”); to provide **more clarification and support for the application process** (13%, such as “I don't understand how or where to get started, I guess I need a computer mentor to figure out how to keep up in this paperless world. We are getting very few classes here to sign up for in Mtn. Home and I usually get my info from other workers and directors”); **improving TAPP**, either to accept more training types and/or to speed up TAPP processes (8%, such as “send a list of trainings for each center to complete each level. [example: “you” have completed...in order to reach level one please complete...these are when those trainings are offered...”]); and **to clarify the benefit of participation** (3%, “I don't understand why to get involved. It looks like it is just more paperwork for the administration and the teachers and I don't see how it will help our children. The basic ECERS program is the complete opposite of what the public schools are wanting”).



PART 2

PARTICIPANT RESULTS

All child care providers in the state of Arkansas were invited to participate in an online survey about their experiences or expectations about Better Beginnings. Two surveys were developed; one for participating providers (BB providers) and one for non-participating providers (non-BB providers).

We used website, U.S. mail, and email to invite providers throughout the state to participate in the online survey. The invitation was posted on the DCCECE website. DCCECE also provided contact information for 3,047 child care licenses. Providers with valid email addresses were emailed twice. Providers without valid email addresses (n=1, 472) were mailed a postcard. Of those, 36 postcards were undeliverable. One hundred fifty-seven sites were registered for multiple licenses. These sites were also mailed an additional follow-up letter explaining how to fill out a single survey for multiple licenses.

All communications included information about the monetary incentive to participate: a drawing for two \$200 prizes and four \$100 prizes.

Sample Description

There were a total of 262 (218 unduplicated) providers currently part of the Better Beginnings quality system, 214 of which (82%) had been rated. There were 12 providers without license numbers and eight providers who were listed in a DCCECE list as not being Better Beginnings programs but whose open-ended responses indicated otherwise. Most of the participating providers were at the highest level of quality using the new Better Beginnings levels (Level 3, n=216, 82%). There were 229 respondents for whom we identify the type of program provided. The vast majority were center-based programs (n=213) serving preschool-aged children (n=123). Only 16 participating programs serve children in family childcare (FCC) homes, the majority of which provided services to children from infancy through school age (see

Table 1 for a synopsis). Unfortunately, the sample of FCC providers is too small to warrant subgroup analysis.

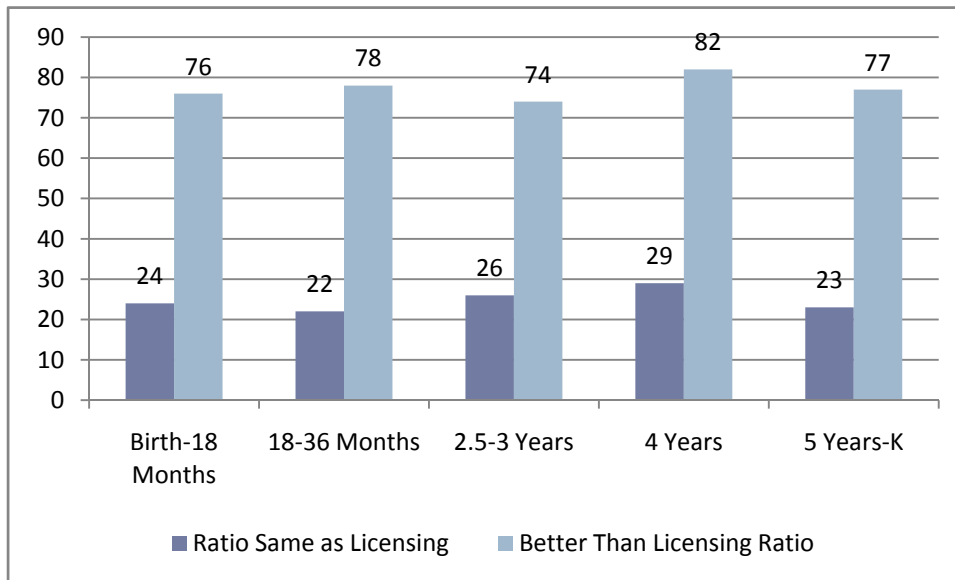
According to the information provided to contact participants, there were 695 providers in the state participating in Better Beginnings; 15 providers at Level 1, 16 providers at Level 2, and 664 providers at Level 3. Information attained in May 2011 reported 737 participating providers in the state. Given 262 respondents and the information available from the 3,047 providers that were surveyed, that represents a 38% overall response rate to the survey for those providers participating in Better Beginnings. Using information available from May 2011, yields a response rate of 36%.

Detailed information about the programs was only available from data attained in May 2011. According to that data, there are 703 licensed child care centers and 34 licensed family child care homes participating in Better Beginnings. Therefore, a response rate for child care centers was computed to be 30%, while the rate for family child care homes was more at 47%.

Table 1. Participating Respondents by Program Type and Ages Served

		What Type of Program		Total
		Center Based	Home Based	
Ages Served	Preschool	123	1	124
	Infant/Toddler and Preschool	49	0	49
	School Age	13	0	13
	All	23	15	38
	Preschool and School Age	5	0	5
Total		213	16	229

Figure 1. Respondents' Self-Reported Child-Staff Ratios



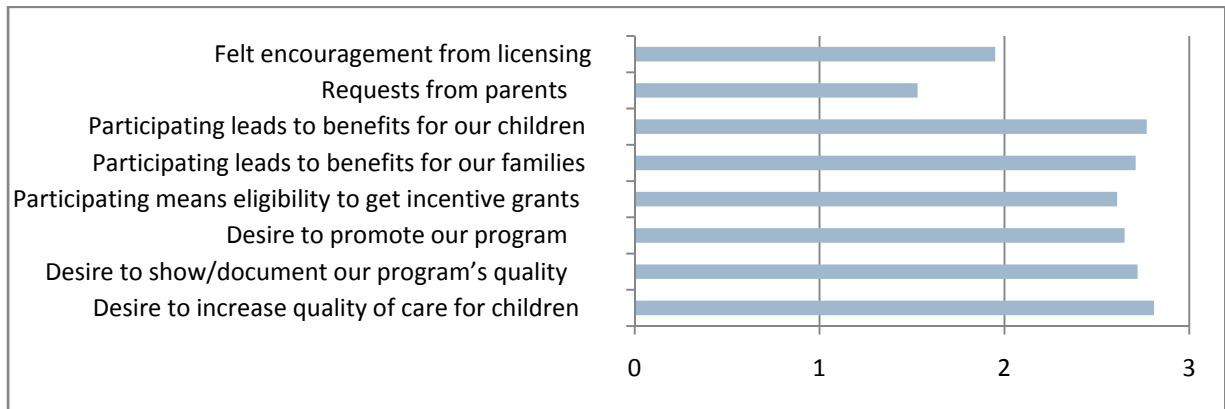
Characteristics of the programs support that survey respondents are of higher than average quality. For example, 88% of the respondents reported fewer than 10% of their children receive child care vouchers. For preschoolers, over 82% of all of the respondents reported having ratios that were better than

required by the state (see Figure 1). Most of the respondents (84%) also reported using at least one curriculum (34% of the programs used just one curriculum and most reported using at least two). Finally, some respondents (16%) reported being accredited by one or more national accrediting bodies.

Reasons for Participating

We asked providers: If you decide to participate in Better Beginnings, please rate the importance of the following reasons from 0= ‘no importance’ to 3= ‘great importance’. Most respondents rated each of the reasons they were given to participate as at least of some importance (see Figure 2), with a desire to increase the quality of the care that they provide having almost complete support (scores for this question were the highest and nearly 3, indicating that most participants endorsed quality being of great importance). Providers also highly endorsed benefits for the children and documentation of quality as important reasons. There was one item with less agreement and that was getting requests from parents. Additional open-ended responses included requirements of ABC funding and availability of incentive grants. There were no differences between Level 3 and other programs on these items.

Figure 2. Participating Providers’ Reasons to Participate in Better Beginnings



Ease or Difficulty of Attaining and Documenting Better Beginnings Standards

We then asked Better Beginnings providers how difficult or easy it has been for them to attain the criteria for each of the components of the system. (“How difficult has it been to attain each of the following components for your current level? Please note the reason for the difficulty or ease?”) Responses were coded 0=very easy, 1=somewhat easy, 2=neither easy nor difficult, 3=somewhat difficult, and 4=very difficult. Therefore, items with scores higher than 2 represent general perceptions of difficulty. There were two areas where providers reported beliefs that areas would be difficult for them to attain:the PAS/BAS assessment and the Strengthening Families, both in the administrative sections (see Figure 3).

Comparisons of Level 3 to other programs showed several differences in their perceptions of the difficulty to attain components. Significant differences were seen on three components: PAS/BAS , [t(228) = -1.93, p = .05; M Level 3 = 2.43 , M Level Other = 1.93]; administrator qualifications [t(239) = -3.34, p = .002; M Level 3 = 1.56, M Level Other = .81]; and staff qualifications [t(238) = -2.82, p = .007; M Level 3 = 1.44 , M Level Other = .84]. Marginally significant differences were observed in two additional areas: staff professional development [t(237) = -1.67, p = .097; M Level 3 = 1.53 , M Level Other = 1.10] and child

health and development [$t(192) = -1.82, p = .07; M \text{ Level } 3 = 1.04, M \text{ Level Other} = .65$]. Level 3 centers perceived more difficulty than other centers in all of these areas.

Figure 3. Participating Providers' Perceptions of Difficulty with Meeting Better Beginnings' Components



We asked participants to "...note the reason for the difficulty or ease of attaining each of the requirements." Given the two areas of the administration section of concern, we looked more closely at the open-ended responses to the PAS/BAS and Strengthening Families (see Appendix A).

There were 80 responses about PAS/BAS; 13% were positive and 9% of comments were related to not having yet completed the assessment. The remaining comments expressed concern.

- The majority of statements with concern about the PAS/BAS were related to time burdens related to documenting standards (45%):

"Amount of time required-takes time away from other items of importance in operating a child care facility which are important."

"Added paperwork to a business that is already consumed in paperwork which requires more employees or longer hours."

- 9% reported they are still unclear about the intent or requirements; 5% reported that training did not clarify the process well enough.

"We are worried that the PAS assessor will not agree that we have proof of all these things, though we see it as proof"

"In spite of training, it is still hard to understand what things will prove things well enough"

- 8% expressed difficulty because of training availability.

"We had to drive from Ft. Smith to Hope AR to find a class. 300 miles Had to spent the night in hotel"

"Availability of courses/requirements/time/location"

- 6% reported difficulty attaining the required information.
“Since we are a Head Start program ran by a larger agency we do not have access to a lot of the requests nor have a lot of input into policies.”
“Due to being a corporation- hard to get information”
- 5% reported discomfort with documentation
“Do not like having to fill out income or other information”
“Making sure everything we do is documented Needing the last 3 years”

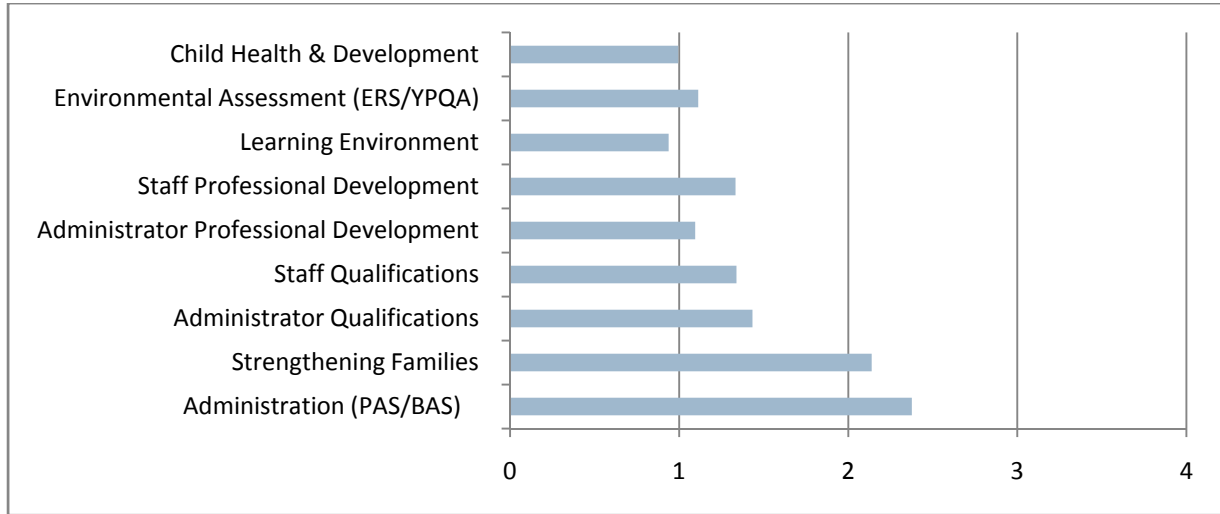
There were 60 respondents related to Strengthening Families requirements; 10% of respondents reported ease with attaining the criteria, 7% reported not having yet completed the process, and another 7% reported positively on the training. The largest percentage of responses related to confusion about the criterion.

- 42% reported inability or confusion related to accessing training and materials.
“The webinar was not available before my PAS evaluation. I had to figure out something on my own by reading it online.”
“Confusion, not sure some say just look at site and other paperwork says participate in webinar.”
“Our site does not have the equipment necessary to participate in the webinars. We have to make other arrangements.”
- 17% had concerns related to time.
- 10% expressed concern with the content.
“I feel I am not certified to help families with their problems. I have my own problems to deal with and now they are asking me help other people with theirs.”
“This is difficult in a large site with multiple centers and does not align with what occurs in school settings.”

As a follow-up to programs’ perceptions with attaining the criteria for the Better Beginnings components, we asked about documentation of each component with the following question: “How difficult has it been to document each of the following components for your current level? Please note the reason for the difficulty or ease of documenting each of the requirements.” Responses were coded 0=very easy, 1=somewhat easy, 2=neither easy nor difficult, 3=somewhat difficult, and 4=very difficult. Therefore, items with scores higher than 2 represent general perceptions of difficulty. Again, the area of greatest concern is the administration section (the PAS/BAS assessment and Strengthening Families; see Figure 4).

Differences between Level 3 centers and other centers were also seen in this area. Six significant differences were observed: PAS/BAS [$t(174) = -2.27, p = .02; M$ Level 3 = 2.47, M Level Other = 1.74]; administrator qualifications [$t(178) = -3.27, p = .002; M$ Level 3 = 1.51, M Level Other = .82]; staff qualifications [$t(176) = -2.80, p = .008; M$ Level 3 = 1.40, M Level Other = .82]; administrator professional development [$t(175) = -2.28, p = .03; M$ Level 3 = 1.14, M Level Other = .68]; staff professional development [$t(179) = -3.07, p = .004; M$ Level 3 = 1.42, M Level Other = .77]; and environmental assessment [$t(173) = 2.46, p = .02; M$ Level 3 = 1.02, M Level Other = 1.67]. Level 3 centers perceived more difficulty in each of these components except documenting environmental assessments.

Figure 4. Participating Providers' Perceptions of Difficulty with Documenting Components



Again, because of the concern with the administration section of the Better Beginnings, we examined open-ended responses related to the PAS/BAS and Strengthening Families components (see Appendix B).

For the PAS/BAS portion of the administrative requirements, there were 56 respondents; 14% of which were related to having the documentation in place or having other supports that made this documentation easy for the provider (*"Our program qualified for CARF certification first which enabled us to earn level 3 Better Beginnings certification"*). Another 7% reported not having yet gone through the process.

- 41% expressed concerns over the amount of time required.

"hardest part was finding the time"

"Very comprehensive and time consuming to come up with new policies and documentation. Also having to get approval from Board of Directors."
- 16% expressed concern over finding and preparing documentation.

"The requirements for documentation such as "show evidence of a system" requires creating many new documents when we already have things that should have been good enough."

"Didn't have all the necessary documents. Had to make some changes to fit into the guidelines."
- 13% commented that the requirements were unclear.

"Instructions unclear"

"WE used TA but still unsure if we knew what was needed."
- 5% commented on redundancy.

"Too redundant; monumental documentation"
- 4% reported content concerns.

'Needed too much personal information.'

For documenting the Strengthening Families portion of the administrative requirements, there were 45 respondents; 9% reported already having family supports in place (such as “Head Start requires”), 4% reported ease of use, 14% reported not having completed that documentation as of yet, and 13% reported positive training experiences. The majority of the concerns (24%) were about access to training and materials.

- 24% stated concerns about access to Strengthening Families training and materials
- 7% reported concerns with the content.

“Some of the suggestions were not realistic”
- 13% expressed concerns over the time involved.

“I am having to take so much time away from my teaching and personal time just for the information they are wanting from us.”
- 4% commented they did not understand requirements.

“How many actions are needed. How in depth should we be and how to document the actions.”

DCCECE Support

Table 5. Participating Providers’ Perceptions of Use of State Supports in Percentages

<i>Support:</i>	Not Aware	Aware, Did Not Use	Used, Not Helpful	Used, Somewhat Helpful	Used, Very Helpful
k. Technical Assistance for Program Administration (PAS/BAS)	16	40	3	23	18
l. Technical Assistance for Environmental Ratings (ERS/YPQA)	11	37	4	17	32
m. Technical Assistance for program curriculum development	32	51	0	7	11
n. Training required for Better Beginnings (TAPP)	4	13	3	31	49
o. Better Beginnings Toolkit	9	7	2	37	45
p. Better Beginnings Website	2	12	3	44	39
q. Strengthening Families Website	21	15	19	30	15
r. Better Beginnings Helpline	41	42	2	11	5
s. Better Beginnings Grant Staff	30	22	2	15	32
t. Better Beginnings Administrative Staff (DHS)	34	20	1	16	29

We also asked providers about their use of the supports available to them through DCCECE. The following table shows the percentages of respondents’ choices regarding supports and their helpfulness. Many respondents were not aware of support available related to help with curricula, nor any of the support available through Better Beginnings staff. The supports considered most useful were TAPP

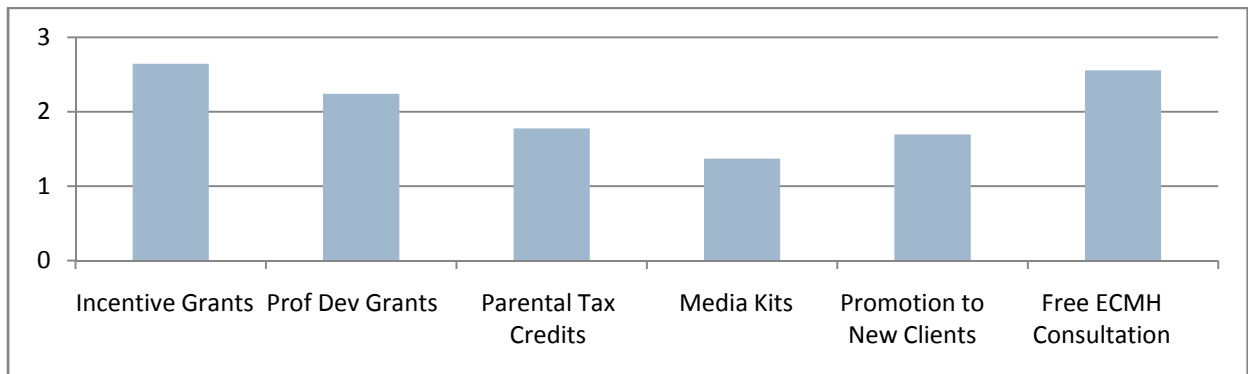
trainings, the Better Beginnings toolkit, and the website. There was one resource – the Strengthening Families website – that participants found not particularly helpful, which is an area where more guidance from DCCECE could be provided (see Figure 5).

Differences in the perceptions of the usefulness of supports between Level 3 centers and other centers were seen in two areas: Better Beginnings grant staff [$t(202) = -2.16, p = .03; M \text{ Level } 3 = 2.09, M \text{ Level Other} = 1.41$] and Better Beginnings Program specialists [$t(201) = -1.93, p = .05; M \text{ Level } 3 = 2.00, M \text{ Level Other} = 1.24$]. Level 3 centers found these supports more helpful.

To follow up with supports that programs have available, we asked programs about the importance of Better Beginnings incentives to their participation. Items were rated from 0=no importance to 3=great importance; therefore, the higher the average score, the more valued each incentive is to the participating providers. The highest incentives are the general incentive grants, the availability of free ECMH consultation, and professional development grants (see Figure 6).

Level 3 centers were significantly different from other centers on two of these incentive items: Better Beginnings tax credits [$t(118) = 2.32, p = .01; M \text{ Level } 3 = 1.64, M \text{ Level Other} = 2.29$] and promotion of program for new clients [$t(128) = 2.23, p = .03; M \text{ Level } 3 = 1.59, M \text{ Level Other} = 2.18$]. Level 3 centers saw these as less of an incentive than other centers.

Figure 6. Participating Providers’ Perceptions of Importance of Incentives

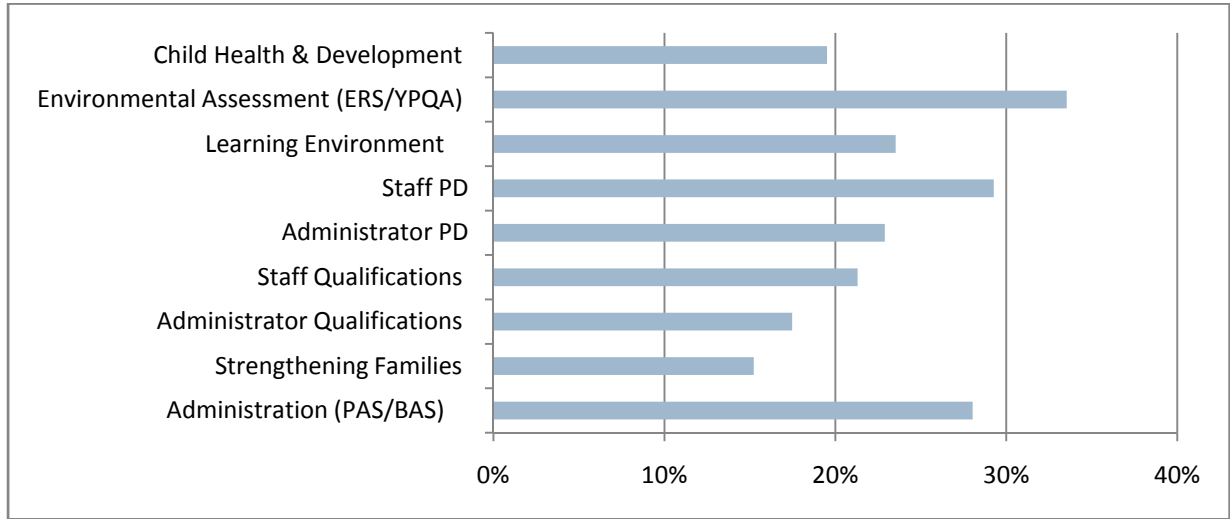


Costs Associated with Participation

We asked about changes in finances that were made to meet each of the Better Beginnings components. (“Did you make any changes in budgeting/fiscal priorities to meet the Better Beginnings requirements listed below? Briefly describe costs associated with each requirement.”) Items were scaled 0=no, 1=yes, so the number in the table reflects the percentage of providers who agreed that they needed to make budgetary changes for each component. Those with the highest cost by provider report are the Environmental Rating Scales assessment, staff professional development, and the PAS/BAS assessment. Some of the responses that describe the cost for each area are provided below (Figure 7).

Level 3 centers were different than other centers in two areas of budget change: learning environment [$t(168) = 2.11, p = .04; M \text{ Level } 3 = .20, M \text{ Level Other} = .42$] and administration qualifications [$t(163) = 2.64, p = .01; M \text{ Level } 3 = .13, M \text{ Level Other} = .42$]. Level 3 centers less frequently reported making changes in these areas.

Figure 7. Percent of Participating Providers' Costs for Better Beginnings



There were 22 respondents to budget changes required for the Environmental Rating Scales, but 18% of those respondents reported no changes would be required (see Appendix C for all responses). Of the remaining comments, most were related to costs associated with materials (27%).

- 27% reported increased spending on classroom materials.
“Just making sure we have plenty of the same type of toys for the entire class, etc.”
“Trying to meet the requirements of having the right block, books etc... costs are heavy in this area”
- 23% reported a general increase.
- 9% reported increased staff costs.
- 9% reported increase in equipment, such as playground equipment.
- 9% reported they are in the budgeting process.

There were 38 respondents to budget changes required for Staff Professional Development; 18% of those respondents reported no changes would be required. The remaining comments were related to increased costs as follows:

- 32% reported increases in training costs.
“Paid for classes”
“Additional cost due to registrations and additional salary to cover staff training”
- 18% reported increased pay for staff.
“Expensive to get hours for employee”
- 16% reported increased costs for travel reimbursements.
“Cost of hotel and food and transportation to conferences”
“Travel to trainings because none are in this area”
- 11% reported increased costs for subs.
“Not sure how to cover class rooms with subs so teachers can be gone....expensive”
“Spent additional money on subs/overtime.”

Administrative Assessment (PAS/BAS) included 33 respondents, 12% reported no changes were required. The remaining comments were related to concerns about re-budgeting requirements:

- 18% reported not having control or info about budgets.
“Our owner handles this.”
” Program administered through the DMEC”
- 18% reported increased costs for training.
“Training cost money to leave town plus cost of extra staff to cover center while teacher is at training”
- 15% reported increases in supplies/equipment.
“Need to purchase software to do reports”
“Filing system”
- 12% had to hire or reallocate staff to assist.
“Part-time office help in order to collect and organize required data”
“Hired a accountant”
- 6% reported needing more insurance.
“Do not have disability ins.; will consider”
- 6% reported having to pay overtime.
“Took multiple hours to complete which lead into overtime!”
- 6% reported a general increase in costs without specification as to the reason.

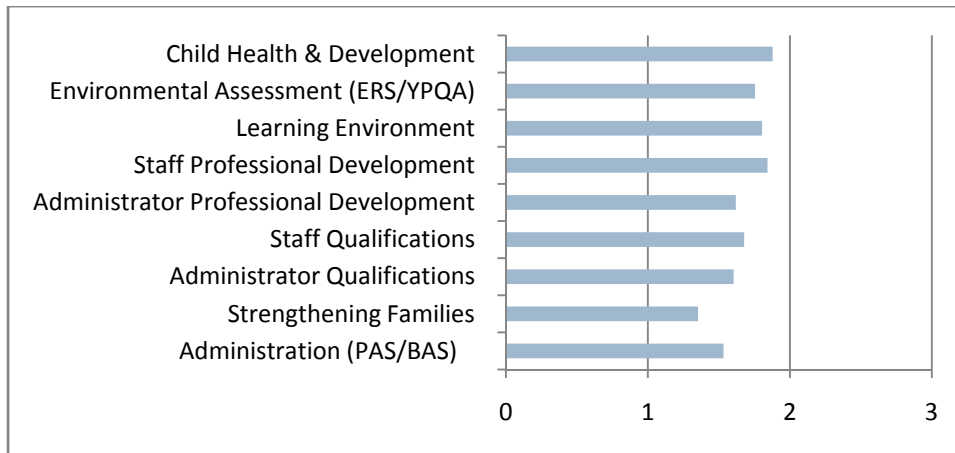
Quality of Child Care

We asked the question, “has participating in Better Beginnings improved the quality of child care in your center?” Items were rated with 0=not improved and 3=greatly improved. Therefore, items with higher averages are areas where participants felt the most improvements were made. Those areas with the greatest improvement are in Child Health and Development, Staff Professional Development, the Learning Environment, and Environmental Assessments. These are the areas with the greatest support in the scientific literature as related to more optimal child development, so these being the more salient areas of improvement is positive (see Figure 8).

One items showed differences between Level 3 and other centers: Child Health and Development [$t(170) = 1.80, p = .07; M$ Level 3 = 1.82, M Level Other = 2.17]. Level 3 centers perceived less improvement in this area.

We also asked, “how likely is it that Better Beginnings requirements will lead to continued improvement for your center?” Fifty-eight percent reported “very likely”, 29% reported “likely”, 6% stated “somewhat likely”, and 7% reported “unlikely” or “very unlikely”.

Figure 8. Participating Providers' Perceptions of Change in Quality



Better Beginnings Levels and Planning

As stated in the sample description, most (84%) of respondents were self-reported Level 3 programs. We asked separate questions about the plans for programs dependent on their level. There were a total of 30 programs at lower levels of Better Beginnings (Level 1=19, Level 2=11). We asked them if they planned to apply for a higher level, and 97% reported that they would. We also asked if they would apply before they were required to renew, and 86% answered affirmatively.

We asked if they need additional supports to meet a higher level. There were 16 respondents who reported some additional support would be needed (see Appendix D for all responses). The areas were as follows:

- 38% expressed the needs for funding.
 - “More grant money.”*
 - “My town is too small and the parents do not make enough money for me to do and keep raising their rates so that I can keep up with what this program wants us to do. This is just not cost efficient for me.”*
- 20% reported needing more education.
- 13% expressed the need for more technical assistance.
- 13% responded the need for teacher training.
 - “Most of the trainings are in central or north Arkansas, it difficult to travel some much which I'm located in south Arkansas. It's difficult to have 12-15 staff to travel also with 5:30 trainings after working all day.”*
- 13% responded they would need support related to PAS/BAS.
 - “I simply cannot produce the reports for the BAS...have to learn a new accounting software program...have not found one I can use as of yet. It takes so much of my time dealing with BAS and getting it together.”*

The Level 3 programs were asked, “If there were higher levels would you apply for a higher level,” and 83% answered yes (see Appendix E for all responses). We also asked about specific supports needed to maintain Level 3. There were 52 responses:

- 23% reported needing support with documentation.
 - "We are a preschool in a public school setting. A lot of the things Better Beginnings asked for was hard for me to find, since so much is done at district level. It would be beneficial for those in school settings, to have a "different" set of requirements."*
 - "We will have to reallocate a large portion of one staff member's time to prepare, maintain and provide documentation for this. It is a monumental task and one that is redundant with the DHS/ABC requirements."*
 - "We are working on documentation of policies & procedures as fast as we can but the daily life of the center comes first."*
- 17% reported the need for more training supports.
 - "I have to work on getting my staff trainings that are required and they are very hard to find in this area."*
 - "The support I need is availability for the required trainings, and a better explanation of the trainings."*
- 15% reported needing support specifically related to PAS/BAS.
 - "Organizing and prioritizing my time to meet BAS criteria and complete collecting BAS documentation."*
 - "Developing more systems in several areas to meet the qualifications on the PAS will greatly improve our program, but will also take a lot of time, resources and effort."*
- 15% expressed the need for technical assistance.
 - "We are currently searching for forms/people to come do a PAS TA visit."*
 - "Would like assistance getting started with YPQA."*
- 12% reported the need for funding.
 - "Money is an issue, trying to retain staff and make sure they receive the training they need is very hard, on a limited budget that keeps getting squeezed by everyone. I have enjoyed the Quality system and have seen great improvement to my center, however it is a lot of work and very hard to compete with school systems and programs that do not have the overhead that I do. I would love to see the vouchers system go to a tier system, so programs like mine who have made the commitment to quality care could reap the benefits and have money to invest back in the program."*
 - "The program adversely effects the incentive grant amount if you pass your ECERS and do well. If you don't need the Educational part of the incentive grant because your staff are overqualified you should be allowed to use that money for classroom supplies."*
- 10% gave an unknown response.
 - "unsure as we are in a school district and we are still unsure of how things are going to work for us"*
- 6% expressed need for TAPP support.
 - "Improvement in updating TAAP Registry"*

- 6% stated the need for more support in Strengthening Families.
"Families WEB site is not user friendly"
- 6% reported needing no additional support.
"Being in a large school district, we already must have required staff development and this district makes certain we have our required Early Childhood inservices."
- 4% reported the need for additional staff.
"It would be nice to hire additional staff (which requires more money) to have the time to take pictures (write documentation) and read through documents to find and highlight information to put into folders that demonstrate/document that we are meeting indicators."
- 4% had recommendations for communication.
*"Communication between ABC, DHS, ADE, ERS, and Better Beginnings needs to be better. It would be helpful if all institutions would be "on the same page" and have the same expectations."
"It would be nice to get a letter letting us know when our renewal application is due."*

Changes as a Result of Better Beginnings

Seventy-six percent of respondents reported that staff members have a better understanding of the components of a quality program after participating in Better Beginnings.

Only 33% reported that parents have a better understanding of the components of a quality program after enrolling their children in a Better Beginnings rated center. And only 8% believed that the Better Beginnings level was important to parents' decisions to enroll in the centers. .

We asked respondents if they have used their Better Beginnings level to promote their center and 58% reported yes. In terms of materials used in centers, 34% report that they have used brochures, 7% have used media kits, and 16% have used posters. Some other promotion materials were reported, such as framed copy of rating documents, information on their own website, and personal communication. Some respondents also reported needing more information about what is available (for example, "how do I order?")

80% of providers report that they feel that Better Beginnings, as currently implemented, provides a fair representation of their program.

Suggestions for Improvement

Finally, we asked providers to share with us what changes they would make to the Better Beginnings system. Appendix F contains all open-ended responses and coding.

There were 78 respondents to the question. The majority of the responses included reducing paperwork, and providing more funding, training, and support:

- 27% suggested reducing paperwork.
"We would rather not participate because of the extreme high amount of paperwork. But, we feel pressure from state to participate."

"It requires a great amount of paperwork in addition to running a quality program already. It is very repetitive in the paperwork asked by ABC monitors, ECERS monitors, etc."

- 14% had suggestions for training.

"There needs to be a training specifically on how to complete the application."
"More trainings made available to childcare workers"
- 10% suggested increased and/or timely communication.

"Send us notification when it is time to reapply."
"I believe that they should answer questions more accurately and return phone calls to centers who are trying to better their program."
- 10% suggested more funding.

"The program needs to provide better financial incentives. It seems to me that programs not participating in the program are being led to believe that the financial incentives are greater than they are. I was really surprised to learn what was meant when we were told that grant monies were rolling over to better beginnings. I was shocked to learn that not only had CDA scholarships been cut, but what we in Better Beginnings being offered was not enough to make any real difference in our program. The professional development money is no really useful when all of your employees have degrees."
"More grant money to make changes with"
- 10% suggested changes with accepting/processing TAPP credits.

"TAPP needs to accept out of state and Head Start trainings"
"The TAPP trainings are excellent, but the system is bogged down and nobody understands it."
"TAPP system is very slow. TAPP doesn't always give credit for all our training, especially out of state seminars"
- 8% suggested changes to Better Beginnings components.

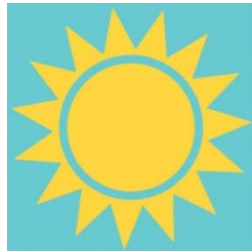
"I would refer other centers to seek quality which I feel is more environmental as assessed by ERS or YPQA. Although PAS is important in running a successful business and having systems in place for a quality center, I don't feel that it determines a quality learning environment for young children."
"Take out the ARKIDS components and healthcare and child development. That is added work and costs that we don't have time and money for. If you provided a pamphlet or handout then it would not be so bad, but why should I worry about if they have a medical home--I have worked in child care and not one time has a parent asked me about a doctor unless they have moved to this area because when their children are born they have Medicaid or a private insurance and have a doctor."
- 9% desired adjustments or allowances according to program type.

"Head Start does not need this. We have federal reviews"
"I think that Better Beginnings should respect and adopt the ideals and philosophy of a unique center for example a Montessori school and try to assess that particular center based on its philosophy."

"I think there should be some adjustments made concerning Coop directed centers. Monitoring our budget and any handling of funds should be done at the coop, where information is kept and current, with the people who plan and implement those plans."

"Make provisions for centers that serve children with special needs. It is not possible to provide a "preschool" rated room when children are on an infant-toddler developmental level."

- 8% desired greater clarity.
 - "Better info on needed doc. Needed info from center in black and white Don't not change rules and regs in the middle of a year. Give all changes to us in May."*
 - "Make language used while explaining easier to understand."*
 - "Better forms and instructions for PAS and Strengthening the Families."*
- 6% desired improved systems alignment.
 - "To make it more compatible with the ABC regs already in place."*
 - "Work with DDS and Childcare licensure so all parties are on the same page and not each with different rules"*
 - "Recommendation that Better Beginnings requirements are coordinated with DHS Licensing Requirements"*
- 5% suggested more technical assistance.
 - "More hands on support [visits/examples/suggestions/to-do lists/etc.] from a higher level mentor!"*
- 4% had suggestions related to advertising.
 - "More advertisement in the community"*
 - "The commercials don't mean anything really - people do not know much at all from the commercials and many people have complained that the music on the commercial is completely inappropriate."*
- 4% wanted assistance with the application process.
 - "Less complicated application system, more support from the developers of BB so we can know what we are doing!"*
- 4% requested more print or Spanish resources.
 - "A packet of materials on child development and community resources for providers to have at their facility to distribute to parents."*
 - "Spanish resources"*
- 4% commented they were not given enough time.
 - "I feel there should have been at least a year given for everyone involved to actually been in the system and been through the review before bringing it to the public. This would have given all of us in child care time to better prepare. There was talk about this for over a year but was not presented to us until last spring. This year should have been a year for preparation and next year made public."*



PART 3

RECOMMENDATIONS

Training

Given recent communication with DCCECE, some of the difficulties and suggestions for improvement that providers have reported around training have already been addressed. For example, professional development grants in Better Beginnings can now be used to help cover the costs associated with trainings for the entire staff and not just those attaining CDA or other college-level courses. While this is a welcome change on the part of providers, it's important to balance provider need with what we know about effective professional development: college preparation is the ultimate goal and most likely related to optimal outcomes for children.

Another repeated comment is that trainings are available only during the day, are limited to particular geographic locations, and are geared towards providers in centers as opposed to family care. These barriers limit providers' access to information and opportunities to meet the training hour requirements of Better Beginnings. The state is moving toward providing more training online, which will address some of the issues inherent in state-wide distribution of information and will allow more flexibility in the timing of training. Again, while these changes are likely to improve the accessibility of trainings across the state, the existing literature suggests that trainings that are longer term and customized to the recipient are more successful. Therefore, it may be necessary to add in some additional technical assistance support around trainings that do not meet the criteria established in the research literature.

It is the goal of the next year of the Better Beginnings evaluation to better understand the quality of trainings available to and used by providers. This information can be used to determine additional ways to use resources available for quality improvement efforts.

Administrative Functioning

There were multiple concerns from both participating and non-participating providers about administrative elements of Better Beginnings. The majority of provider concerns were related to the amount of time required to document administrative practices for the PAS/BAS assessment. There were also concerns about the Strengthening Families component of the administrative process review, in this case mostly related to uncertainty in the requirements.

Program and Business Administration Scales. The PAS and the BAS are reliable, valid instruments useful in highlighting strengths and weaknesses of business functions. Rationale behind these administrative scales is strong, but the instruments are new; PAS and BAS scores have not been analyzed alongside child outcome variables. In the general ECE literature, there is evidence that strong leadership and well-informed administrative practices contribute to the global quality of a program, which in turn supports child development; however, the evidence also suggests that PAS items omitted from Better Beginnings may be important to the measure's validity and overall usefulness.

DCCECE and Arkansas State University, the technical assistance and assessment contractor for PAS/BAS, have shared concerns about the ability of providers to keep businesses in operation. More children can be served if family and center programs are equipped with the skills to run a business and make a decent living. More research is needed to validate PAS/BAS in this regard. Because considerable resources of time and money on the state and program level are being used for this assessment, investigation of whether PAS/BAS is related to indicators such as program longevity, revenue, or student retention and capacity is warranted.

The items most related to child outcomes have been removed from Better Beginnings scoring because they are too far beyond the norm of common practice in Arkansas. However, providers still report PAS/BAS to be overly burdensome, and business practices have not been related to child outcomes in the literature. Therefore, we recommend investigating the replacement of full PAS/BAS assessments with assessment of fewer key elements of business practices, as has been the choice of other QRIS states. We encourage continued use of PAS/BAS as a training and technical assistance tool.

Strengthening Families. Research related to Strengthening Families suggests that increases in protection for children are likely if parent involvement and supports are comprehensive, intensive, sustained, and also combined with non-maternal care exceeding the quality of Better Beginnings Level 3. We would expect use of the Strengthening Families model to heighten awareness and to improve relational helping skills if all staff members, not just administrators, receive more intensive training than currently designated. Most of the provider concern was related to a lack of understanding about what the component entails. Therefore, more education for this component may waylay concerns. However, if providers continue to refuse participation because of the Strengthening Families requirements, it is an area to further consider revision. As currently implemented, Strengthening Families is less likely to lead to major benefits for children. Reducing the burden to providers while retaining the assessments of the elements of care that most strongly benefit children (such as the ERS) is recommended.

Adaptations by Program Type

There were multiple comments related to making adjustments for certain types of programs. Comments ranged from difficulties of part-time and family care programs in meeting requirements, to better alignment of state systems (such as with ABC programs), and to reciprocity for some programs that have federal reviews (such as Head Start). UAMS is currently conducting interviews with providers across the state to better understand the needs of programs of different types and will report to DCCECE by the summer of 2011. We also know that the state is currently realigning the regulations of ABC to better match Better Beginnings, which will alleviate some provider concern for duplicity of documentation. While we do not see immediate reciprocity to Head Start programs being granted, the review of performance standards conducted as part of the first-year evaluation of Better Beginnings highlighted vast areas of overlap where additional documentation for rating could be waived given the current Better Beginnings system.

Head Start. Better Beginning's administrative section is mostly met by the federal Head Start review and program performance standards around family involvement. We recommended that when results from the Head Start program's three-year evaluation can be obtained and alignment with Head Start performance standards verified, Head Start programs should not have to complete the administrative components.

For staff qualifications and professional development, Head Start performance standards currently require at least 15 hours of professional development each year for staff, and staff members working with infants and toddlers are required to have a CDA credential within one year of being hired. Moreover, Head Start is actively raising the level of teacher qualifications (as of October 2011, 50% of all teachers in center-based programs must have a CDA, an AA in Early Childhood Education or a related field, state certification, or have a BA and participate in the Teach For America program. In 2013, the qualifications will rise to 50% having a BA in ECE or a related major). These standards meet or exceed the requirements for a Level 3 rating.

For the learning environment, Head Start requires "planning for routines and transitions so that they occur in a timely, predictable and unrushed manner according to each child's needs" and requires the implementation of curricula that meet specific criteria. Portfolio use is not specifically required, although it may occur as part of a chosen curriculum. Centers are required to provide indoor and outdoor space and equipment and adult guidance to promote active play and the development of gross and fine motor skills.

Head Start has adopted the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)¹ as its measurement of the classroom environment. There is modest overlap between ECERS-R and CLASS. CLASS was designed to measure interactions between teachers and children, the primary mechanisms through which children learn and develop in the classroom, and does not measure the physical environment or provision of materials. Theoretically and empirically, the structural components of the classroom would provide teachers with the materials needed to optimally interact with students. Although there is minimal

¹ Pianta, R., La Paro, K., & Hamre, B. (2008). *Classroom assessment scoring system (CLASS) manual, pre-k*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company..

overlap between the constructs, CLASS scores of at least 3.25 have been shown positively related to children's outcomes (Burchinal, et al., 2010)² and could be used in lieu of ECERS-R scores as a rating of Level 3 quality for programs in compliance with performance standards when assessments are completed by independent reviewers.³ If additional levels of quality are adopted, this substitution would need to be reexamined.

Finally, Head Start is known for its emphasis on and comprehensive support for child health and development, and standards exceed those in Better Beginnings. The Head Start standards address universal screening, subsequent referral, and treatment for children who need medical or developmental care, and parental education, communication, and coordination.

As a whole, Head Start programs are required by federal regulations to meet many of the standards in Better Beginnings. Documenting that programs are in good standing as a result of federal review, verifying that CLASS scores meet the cut off as shown to positively relate to child outcomes, and limiting the additional assessments required for Better Beginnings would be an appropriate cost-saving measure for the state and has the potential to increase participation among Head Start programs.

Summary

The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education is devoted to creating a voluntary Quality Improvement initiative that will benefit Arkansas children and their families. DCCECE has already made changes to the implementation of its professional development grants to make them more useful to providers. Future changes to Better Beginnings should thoughtfully balance the needs of providers willing to make program improvements with elements of care linked to children's health and development in research.

² Burchinal, M., Vandergrift, N., Pianta, R. C., & Mashburn, A. J. (2010). Threshold analysis of association between child care quality and child outcomes for low-income children in pre-kindergarten programs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25(2), 166-176.

³ Independent review of Head Start programs occur triennially, at which point CLASS assessment will be conducted.

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