

CONNECTING SCHOOLS AND FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES

Research and Practice Issue Brief



Anna Jo Bodurtha Smith, Beth Lapin, and Matia Finn-Stevenson
School of the 21st Century

Yale University

Research and Practice Issue Briefs are published by Yale University, School of the 21st Century (21C) program. They are designed to summarize and disseminate current research on topics of special interest to educators and policymakers, as well as to provide information to facilitate the application of research to practice. The goal is to provide concise, objective, and constructive information and explore the implications for the 21C program and other school reform efforts.

Publication of this Issue Brief is made possible with support from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

The School of the 21st Century, Yale University
310 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06511-2187
Phone: (203) 432-9944, Fax: (203) 432-9945, Email: yale21c@yale.edu, www.yale.edu/21C

© Fall 2008

CONNECTING SCHOOLS AND FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES

One out of seven working parents place their young children in either small family child care homes, where one provider cares for a small number of children in her home, or larger settings known as group homes, where multiple providers care for more children in a provider's home.¹ Nationally, approximately 300,000 of these family child care (FCC) homes are licensed.² Regulations and licensing requirements of an FCC home vary by state and by the age of the children involved. Family child care is exempt from licensing in situations where providers care for fewer children than their state's licensing threshold, provide only part-time care, or care for relatives or friends (known as kith and kin care). Thus the actual number of FCC homes is estimated to be closer to a million.³

State regulations for family child care homes typically limit them to a six to one child-to-provider ratio, although some states permit larger groups for older children.^{4,5} State regulations also cover basic safety issues and building codes but rarely address program quality. Currently, only a fraction (about 2,000) family care providers are accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care,⁶ which addresses quality standards, sound developmental principles, and best practices in early childhood education. Thus, the connection between schools and family child care to improve quality is important. Schools working with young children have the means and opportunity to invite family child care providers to participate in staff training or work with these providers in other ways to ensure the provision of good quality care. In this research and practice issue brief, we discuss some of the characteristics, benefits, and challenges associated with family child care, as well as highlight examples of how schools reach out to, and work with, family child care providers.

Benefits and Challenges of Family Child Care

Benefits of Family Child Care Homes

When family child care homes are of good quality, they offer many benefits for young children and their parents. The warm, homelike atmosphere of family child care and its small group size have important developmental implications, especially for infants and toddlers, who need individual attention and the opportunity to begin social interactions with only a few children rather than a large group.⁷ In addition, as many parents can attest to, the small group size of FCC homes offers more opportunities for social interactions with an adult than is possible at a child care center enrolling many more children. Family child care homes are also more likely to have mixed-age groups, allowing younger and older children to learn from and teach each other.

For parents, there are many conveniences associated with this form of care. FCC homes may open earlier *and* close later than center-based care and are often in the neighborhood, making it easier for parents who commute to work.^{8,9} FCC homes may also be able to accommodate seasonal and/or off-hours child care needs and, in some cases, are less expensive than other child care options – a major consideration for many families.¹⁰

Challenges Affecting Family Child Care

Although family child care homes are potentially a good option for young children and frequently provide a welcoming and convenient setting, they have limitations, some of which can compromise the quality of care children receive.

Staff Education and Training

For example, child care staff educational background and training are essential components of good quality care. Studies demonstrate that children are better prepared for school when their providers have advanced education and participate in training.¹¹ Family care providers often have fewer years of education than center-based care providers, the latter typically being required to have a degree or, at minimum, certification in child development, such as the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential. Nationwide, 55 percent of family child care providers have some college education, in comparison to 80 percent of center teachers.¹² Only 16 states require training in early care and education before granting licenses to family child care providers.¹³

Issues Related to Family Child Care as a Profession

Some of the benefits of family child care, such as small group size and lower fees, which are helpful to parents on a low budget, impose economic hardships to family child care providers. The child care field in general is known for low staff salaries and, with FCC providers, salaries are lower than average. In 2006, the national average income for child care providers in general was only \$18,820, but state and national studies suggest that compensation for family child care providers was even lower. In addition, most family child care providers are self-employed and thus lack access to employer-based benefits, such as health and dental insurance.¹⁴ Low financial compensation and limited benefits can cause job dissatisfaction for providers and contribute to providers leaving the field, forcing parents to make other child care arrangements. Beyond the difficulty this poses to providers and parents, it is a problem for children; frequent staff turnover – causing children to miss the opportunity to get to know and rely on one caregiver over time – negatively impacts a child's development.¹⁵

Some FCC providers may have difficulties stemming from the home/business interface. Family child care providers must negotiate appropriate relationships with the parents of children in their care, who may be friends or acquaintances.¹⁶ Also, since providers use their home as a business location, the success of the enterprise depends on support from a provider's family members. However, some of these relatives may prefer more privacy and find the noise and constant presence of children disturbing.

Beyond these issues, family child care providers may experience isolation and lack the social and professional development network enjoyed by center-based care providers. They usually are the sole adults in their business and are unable to take a day off or a leave of absence for professional development. Since providers' participation in professional development in part contributes to good quality care, it is not surprising that only a small percentage of FCC homes are of good quality. In a survey of these homes in the mid-1990s,¹⁷ researchers found that only 8 percent of homes surveyed provided "good" quality care (as rated by the Family Day Care Rating Scale), 58 percent were "adequate," and 34 percent were "inadequate." Given the importance of high quality child care for school readiness, these results emphasize the necessity of addressing quality in FCC home settings.¹⁸

Reaching Out to Family Child Care Providers

Much can be done to build on the strengths and benefits of family child care homes and, at the same time, address their limitations by offering providers the necessary support to operate high quality family child care homes. Research suggests that fostering a more professional environment, through networks, staff training, and resource materials, can boost professional commitment and job satisfaction,¹⁴ as well as contribute to good quality care.

Networking with local child care providers is one of the six components of the School of the 21st Century (21C) program. 21C is a school based, or school-linked, child care and family support program implemented in more than 1,300 schools around the country. 21C schools provide all day year round child care and other services and reach out to and work with family child care providers in the school's neighborhood. The 21C component that addresses family child care is described as follows: *to strengthen the quality of early learning opportunities and better prepare children for school, 21C schools offer workshops, training, support groups, and newsletters for childcare providers—both center-based and family day care homes—in the local community.*

Many educators in 21C schools outreach to family child care providers to ensure that all children succeed once they start formal schooling. After all, children who attend family child care as infants and toddlers will, within a few years, become students in the school. Of the many successful examples of how 21C schools work with family child care providers in their communities, we have highlighted several in this research and practice issue brief.

On-Site Services for FCC Providers

Because they are often the only adult supervising the children, family child care providers have a hard time leaving their homes during business hours. To accommodate providers, 21C programs deliver services directly to the provider's child care home. Examples of on-site activities performed by 21C staff include:

- Providing in-home screenings by early childhood specialists who can spot developmental delays and give referrals for early intervention. During these visits, 21C staff help providers learn warning signs that may warrant a call to the specialist.
- Delivering materials from 21C lending libraries/resource centers to family child care homes, enabling home providers to offer a rotating supply of books, video tapes, puppets, and other toys without the cost of purchasing them. These items can parallel curriculum materials in school-based preschool or state-recommended benchmarks to assist with a smooth transition from the family child care home to kindergarten.
- Visiting family child care homes to conduct regularly scheduled, developmentally appropriate story or activity presentations. In addition to enrichment opportunities for the children, such visits offer an opportunity for providers to brainstorm with parent educators about difficult issues, questions, or problems they are experiencing.
- Offering a home visiting program by educational consultants and/or parent educators to family child care providers. These one-on-one sessions include activity and curriculum ideas and professional articles for providers and school readiness information for parents.

Inviting FCC Providers to School

Bringing family child care providers to school is another way 21C schools reach out to and involve home providers. This can be an educationally, as well as socially, enriching experience for both providers and the children in their care. It has the added value of providing some relief to the isolation experienced by providers and increases the efficiency of sharing information. 21C school educators provide several school-based activities for family child care, including:

- Hosting play groups at the school where private providers can bring their children, experience story/activity time, and network with other providers.
- At these play groups, including school-based professionals who, working with the provider, conduct assessments of children's growth and development. Providers can then share results with parents, who benefit from early identification of developmental issues, while providers develop professionally and gain insight into age-appropriate benchmarks.
- Inviting children in family child care to attend activities and events at the school as part of their transition to kindergarten. This may include meeting potential teachers, seeing classrooms, finding bathrooms, eating in the cafeteria, and other details that facilitate the transition to kindergarten.

Networking and Training

Many family child care home providers have limited access to training and professional development opportunities. 21C schools can address this by scheduling trainings at convenient times for home providers and providing support, such as child care and translation, during meetings. Specific network and training examples are:

- Including family child care providers in local child care provider network meetings to offer an opportunity to network and gain professional development.
- Sponsoring *Make and Take* workshops where providers learn about new techniques in early education and make creative educational materials to bring to their children.
- Inviting home providers to ongoing staff development trainings that are in place for school-based early childhood staff. Including local providers in trainings that are already planned is an efficient way to extend professional development to these providers.
- Including FCC providers in parent education training that allows them to gain skills in dealing with children in their homes.
- Offering training for the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential to encourage continued professional development.
- Acting as a clearing house for all local trainings to keep providers informed of all professional development opportunities in the area.

Financial Support

Occasionally, school districts are able to provide financial incentives and benefits to family child care providers in their communities. School administrators see improving the quality of local family child care homes as a good investment since the children involved will become students in the school. Providing financial support can take several forms, such as:

- Providing tuition assistance to home providers for continuing education. As previously noted, higher education is a critical factor for improved quality.
- Purchasing school-based preschool curriculum materials for child care homes. This ensures that children will arrive at kindergarten exposed to similar instructional material.
- Supplying materials (learning activities and play equipment) to family child homes that improve their quality, using state or National Association for Family Child Care¹⁹ accreditation standards.
- Providing transportation/reimbursement for providers to attend trainings. Isolation and distance from resources is often a limiting factor for providers in rural areas.
- Linking family child care providers to organizations, such as T.E.A.C.H. (<http://www.childcareservices.org/index.html>), that provide tuition assistance and financial support to family child care providers trying to improve their quality of care.

Bottom Line

By reaching out to family child care providers, fostering professional networks, and providing training, resource material, and support, 21C schools can be a powerful force in improving the quality of family child care services. In the long run, this can positively impact school readiness, while simultaneously increasing provider commitment and satisfaction – a win-win situation!

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the following School of the 21st Century programs for sharing their methods of working with family child care homes: Arkadelphia, AR; Ashdown, AR; Batesville, AR; Bristol, CT; Cabot, AR; Monticello, AR; Paragould, AR; and South Side/Batesville, AR. We also appreciate the research assistance of Amy Hart, who contributed to this issue brief, and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation for its support of the 21C initiative in Arkansas where many 21C schools – as shown here – work with providers in family child care homes.

ENDNOTES

¹ Sonenstein, F.L., Gates, G., Schmidt, S.R., & Bolshun, N. (2002). *Primary Child Care Arrangements of Employed Parents: Findings from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=310487>

² Hamilton, W. L., Stickney, E., and Crepinsek, M.K. (1999). Family Child Care Homes and the CACFP - Participation After Reimbursement Tiering (An Interim Report of the Family Child Care Homes Legislative Changes Study). Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report No. (FANRR3) 64 pp, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr3/>

³ National Association of Child Care Providers. (1996). Family Child Care. Newsletter Issue 8.

<http://www.naccp.org/goto.cfm?page=www.nccic.org&returnto=displayassociationlinks.cfm>

⁴ National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center. (Jun 2007). "Definition of Family Child Care Homes," <http://www.nccic.org/pubs/cclicensingreg/definition-fcc.html>

⁵ National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center. (Sept 2007). "School-Aged Children in Regulated Family Child Care Settings." http://www.nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/family_childcare.html. See also

<http://www.nccic.org/pubs/cclicensingreg/threshold.pdf> for a state-by-state licensing thresholds.

⁶ <http://nafcc.org/accreditation/acclist5db.asp>

⁷ Paulsell, D. Nogales, R. and Cohen, J.. (2003). *Quality Child Care for Infants and Toddlers: Case Studies of Three Community Strategies*. Washington, DC: Zero to Three.

(<http://www.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/qualitychildcare.pdf?docID=1726>)

⁸ Atkinson, Alice. (1994). *Rural and Urban Families' Use of Child Care*. Family Relation, 43(1), 16-22.

⁹ Larner, M. (1996). *Parents: perspectives on quality in early care and education*. In: Kagan S.L. and Cohen N.E.

(eds.), *Reinventing Early Care and Education*. San Francisco, CA: Joeey-Bass. In: Seo S., *Early Child Care Choices: a theoretical model and research implications*. Early Childhood Development and Care, 173(6), 637-650.

¹⁰ National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. (Mar 2008). "2007 Price of Child Care".

http://www.naccrra.org/randd/docs/2007_Price_of_Child_Care.pdf

¹¹ NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2000). *Characteristics and quality of child care for toddlers and preschoolers*. *Applied Developmental Science*, 4, pp 289-301.

¹² Center for the Child Care Workforce. (May 2002) Estimating the Size and Components of the U.S. Child Care Workforce and Caregiving Population." <http://www.ccw.org/pubs/workforceestimatereport.pdf>.

¹³ National Child Care Information Center. (June 2007). "Child Care Licensing Requirements: Minimum Early Childhood Education (ECE) Preservice Qualifications, Orientation/Initial Licensure, and Annual Ongoing Training Hours for Family Child Care Providers."

<http://www.nccic.org/pubs/cclicensingreg/cclr-famcare.pdf>.

¹⁴ National Women's Law Center. (April 2008). "Child Care Providers: Increasing Compensation Raises Women's Wages and Improves Child Care Quality." <http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/ProvidersApril2008.pdf>

¹⁵ National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Association. (2006). "Child Care Workforce."

<http://www.naccrra.org/randd/data/childcareworkforce.pdf>.

¹⁶ Nelson, M. (1989). "Negotiating care: relationships between family child care providers and mothers." *Feminist Studies*, 15(1), 7-33.

¹⁷ Due to the lack of regulation, quality in family child care homes is for the most part unknown and no more recent studies have been located.

ENDNOTES (continued)

¹⁸ Helburn, S., et al. (1995). "Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers." Public Report, Economics Department, University of Colorado at Denver. In: Vandell, D.L. and Wolfe, B. (2000) *Child Care Quality: Does it Matter and Does it Need to be Improved?* Institute for Research on Poverty. University of Wisconsin-Madison.

¹⁹ NAFFC accredits high quality family child care as NAEYC does for center and school-based programs