

Executive Summary

Beginning in 1997, along with the devolution¹ of workforce development programs to 28 local workforce development boards, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) devolved the child care subsidy program for low income families. Currently, changes in child care policies and practices are still happening and boards are responding to these ongoing changes in their policy environment. In addition to tracking changes on child care policy and usage, this research project is documenting the transition processes and the variations in both process and policy outcomes among the different boards. These include board-level policy changes, practices, resources, opportunities, and constraints. To this end, the research team engaged in semi-structured qualitative telephone interviews with the child care management staff for each board. (In most cases the boards employ at least one staff member to manage the child care program.) The following report includes the preliminary findings of the first round of 28 interviews conducted during 2001-2002, the first year of the project.

The qualitative interviews allowed researchers to elicit detailed accounts of the policy process and the resulting decisions, as well as the factors that influenced both. The interview schedule covered nine main topics: (1) History and background of the child care staff serving the board; (2) Board structure; (3) Program administration and operation (4) Child care management structure; (5) Child care decision-making processes; (6) Child care variables (including eligibility criteria, recertification procedures, waiting list, parental co-payments, reimbursement rates, access to care, outreach efforts, etc.); (7) Child care provision methods; (8) Quality improvement activities and (9) Funding.

The telephone interviews on which this report is based were conducted in the spring and summer of 2002. The initial analysis, reported in part in this document, is designed to identify the range of experiences and attitudes among child care management staff, particularly as they relate to seven of the nine topics from the interview. Child care variables and provision issues will be developed in next year's report. This report also raises a number of questions and topics to be explored in the next year of the research project. The findings emphasize some of the key elements of the transition process and their presentation complements the profiles of each of the local workforce development board presented in a companion report.

This report begins with a description of the role of the child care management staff, both in the board structure and in the wider community. A brief outline of board structures follows. The third section sketches the overall transition of child care responsibilities through time, as described in the course of the interviews. Descriptions of recent policy changes illustrate the outcomes of the policy-making process. Next, the report describes quality improvement activities, a core component of board activities. The final section examines the role that boards play in shaping their own current and future activities by raising funds within their community, in addition to managing the funds provided by the Texas government.

¹ Devolution is a process of transfer from a more centralized to a less centralized authority.