

## **Child Care Expansion Initiative: Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) Report**



**July 15, 2013**

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**Abstract** | From September 2012 to February 2013, the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Family Development conducted group interviews in nine states as a part of a broader evaluation of the multi-state Child Care Expansion Initiative. This report includes a description of Ripple Effect Mapping methods, findings, and recommendations from the group interviews. In an effort to protect participant states' confidentiality, states are not identified in this report. The conversations illustrated the unique contexts that situate child care systems, including policies, state size, and resources. The role of partnerships and funding were common themes in improving the quality and quantity of child care in the states. Recommendations to project leadership and partners include: 1) continuing to create opportunities for collaboration with players in each state that are key to child care systems change; 2) assisting states with developing an awareness of the slow and strategic nature of systems change, as well as an awareness of their own stage of development in child care systems; and 3) specific communication strategies like a mentoring system and forums for sharing successes and strategies.

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## PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 2010, the Military Community and Family Policy launched an initiative to expand the capacity for Active, Guard and Reserve families who are geographically dispersed or unable to access childcare programs on military installation. This initiative is designed to improve the awareness and availability of quality childcare by utilizing existing local, state and federal resources. The initiative supported the coordinated Federal Government-wide approach to supporting military families detailed in the 2011 Presidential Directive report *Supporting Our Military Families: Meeting America's Commitment*. Federal agencies were committed to increased collaboration focusing on improving the availability and quality child care for military children and families.



As part of this initiative, the Military Child Care Liaison Initiative (MCCLI) and the Childcare and Youth Training and Technical Assistance Project (CYTTAP) were designed. Collectively known as *The Child Care Expansion Initiative*, the MCCLI and the CYTTAP is expected to help 1) improve the quality of existing home and center-based child care and school-age/afterschool programs by utilizing existing local, state, and federal resources and 2) increase access to child care services for military-connected children by increasing the number of practitioners.

The Military Child Care Liaison Initiative (MCCLI) is funded by the Department of Defense (DoD) who contracts with Child Care Aware of America (formerly National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies-NACCRRA) to carry out the goals of the initiative. MCCLI's goal is to expand the availability of quality, affordable, community-based childcare for military families in 13 states identified as having the highest concentration of off installation military children and families.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Four additional states were added to the MCCLI and CYTTAP in summer of 2013.

Under the auspices of a memorandum of agreement between the United States Department of Agriculture-National Institute of Food and Agriculture and the Department of Defense Office of Family Policy/Children and Youth, The Childcare and Youth Training and Technical Assistance Project (CYTTAP) is a three year initiative led by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension (UNL) in partnership with Penn State University Extension's Better Kid Care Program (online professional development system). CYTTAP is designed to develop and deliver training (online, face to face, and train-the-trainer) for early childhood professionals in 13 states and focuses its efforts on providing professional development for individuals who care for children ages 0-12 from off installation military families, particularly Guard and Reserve families.

The hours providers earn are accepted for Child Development Associate (CDA) formal education hours. In addition, most of the participating states credit the trainings towards state-approved professional development hours required to maintain licensing/certification or quality improvement ratings. The CYTTAP project also recruits and trains new home-based childcare providers. The primary goal of this project is to therefore increase the quantity and quality of childcare services for off installation military children and families.

## **METHODS**

### *Ripple Effects Mapping*

Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) is similar to existing evaluative strategies such as Outcome Mapping (Outcome Mapping Learning Community, 2011), Concept Mapping (Trochim, 1989), Mind Mapping (Buzan, 1987), and Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis (PIPA) (Douthwaite, Alvarez, Thiele, & MacKay, 2008). Unlike methods that develop interventions or identify a program theory prior to implementation, REM is designed to more fully understand intended and **unintended results** of an effort both during its implementation and upon its completion. It is a qualitative technique that is ideal for exploring impacts of complex, multi-layered systems or efforts. REM includes initial brainstorming through an Appreciative Inquiry group interview process, organizing those ideas into a form of Mind Mapping, then validating the results by the group (Kollock, Flage, Chazdon, Paine, & Higgins, 2012).

### *Appreciative Inquiry*

An important component of REM is the Appreciative Inquiry interviewing technique, a qualitative data gathering strategy utilized when the groups meet face to face. Appreciative Inquiry is an interviewing strategy that focuses on the **positives** of an issue or situation rather than the negatives. It is not about problem solving (what went wrong, what are the important lessons to be learned, how can we improve it) rather, the strategy is intended to understand **positive results and achievements** (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). Positives that could be explored include, but are not limited to: assets, unexplored potentials or results, innovations, strengths, elevated processes, created opportunities, high point moments, value stories, expressions of wisdom, insights into the deeper core of organizations/partners, and visions of possible futures.

### *Recruitment*

Recruitment of group interview participants was led by the Military Child Care Liaisons (MCCLs) who were advised to invite colleagues in their states that they connected with on issues around quality child care. In six of the states, MCCLs invited an existing group, statewide committee, or collaborative to participate in the interview, thus those interviews took place in conjunction with existing meeting times. In some cases, additional colleagues outside of the group were invited to join the interview portion. In the three remaining states without existing meetings, MCCLs invited individual colleagues whose work naturally connected to child care issues to participate in the group interview. Determining who should be at the table to share success stories was left up to key individuals within each state. In some states the Military Child Care

Liaisons (MCCLs) initiated the coming together of these various partners, while in others it served to bolster existing collaborative efforts. Four of the initial 13 states chose not to participate in this evaluation method and the four states added in 2013 were not invited. The decisions not to participate or not to invite were largely due to timing of the projects and other statewide efforts.

*Participant characteristics*

Each group interview had between nine and fourteen participants. In states where a group already existed prior to the Child Care Expansion Initiative, particular group dynamics stood out. These groups are fluid in nature and actively engage and seek other members, based on their interest and expertise. Across states, representatives from diverse organizations engaged in the REM group process. The following table includes individuals and organizations across the states who participated in the REM process.

<p><b>Local/State Participants</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Regional and State Health and Human Services (Social Services, Family Protective Services, Child Welfare and Prevention, Children &amp; Families)</li> <li>•State Department of Education (Early Childhood Education)</li> <li>•Child Care Licensing</li> <li>•University (Extension, Health, Human Development, Military Family Research Institute, Institute of Disability and Community, Early Childhood Development and Education)</li> <li>•Non-profits: Infant mental health, hunger, children’s centers</li> <li>•Quality Rating Improvement Systems representatives</li> <li>•Child Care Resource &amp; Referral</li> <li>•Child Care Providers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Military Participants</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Active duty (near installations)</li> <li>•Reserve</li> <li>•Military One Source</li> <li>•National Guard Family Readiness Support</li> <li>•National Guard Child and Youth Programs</li> <li>•Family Assistance Centers</li> <li>•Military Family Life Consultants</li> </ul>
<p><b>National/Federal Participants</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Office of Head Start and Office of Child Care</li> <li>•American Red Cross</li> <li>•Child Care Aware of America (formerly NACCRRRA)</li> <li>•ZERO TO THREE National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families</li> </ul>

## **FINDINGS**

The collective success stories shared by REM participants were dynamic and rich. The following represent some emergent themes based on stories across the nine states as they worked to improve quality childcare in their states.

### *Military representation*

Military participation in the group interview varied widely across the states; in some states there was strong military presence while some had no military presence. It should be stated that a lack of a military representation during the group interview did not necessarily indicate that the group lacked connections with military partners and the initiative's efforts were not directly tied to an installation. Most states were partnering with key military representatives and organizations with shared interest in providing quality child care.

### *Historical context for childcare*

Cross-state analyses of the group interviews revealed great diversity in the states' history of childcare work as well as state-wide system, policy and legislative support. On one end of the spectrum are states that report years of high degree of state-wide institutional support for child care initiatives. In these states individuals and organizations have worked together sometimes over decades to advocate for continued supports and improvements for child care issues in the state. In other states, they report long histories of effective collaboration among several smaller groups that are just now coalescing into connected state-wide efforts due to major shifts in state's priorities or infusion of major funding (e.g., Race to the Top grants). On the other end of the spectrum are states reporting a limited history of collaborative efforts towards child care in the states. This was explained through an assortment of contributing factors such as infrastructure, state priorities in other areas, and cultural attitudes.

A common element across these diverse historical contexts, however, are the "torch bearers" who have been involved in child care issues in the state for decades who "keep the flame going" during times of low-level statewide supports and energy. The torch bearers are positioned to emerge quickly to mobilize key entities when there is once again energy around this issue. In nearly all cases, partners could name the persons or groups who are the torch bearers in their state.

### *Partnerships*

Beyond the torch bearers, broad-based partnerships are seen as critical to success stories of improving childcare in each state. Success stories were filled with multiple aspects and outcomes of the partnerships developed, maintained and nurtured by meeting as a group. Important and at times unexpected connections emerged from having diverse group membership at the table including both those with greater and lesser institutional power. States reported on the importance of group members with close connections to providers, cultivating grass root networks that inform efficient, collaborative systems. Several states described repeated examples of how relationships within the group created opportunities to consolidate and allocate resources and funding streams to maximize systems and eliminate redundancies. Group partnerships also became fertile ground for the dissemination of training opportunities for providers.

Two critical aspects of partnership building emerged from the states' success stories. First, states built a networked system of partners rather than relying on an individual or a small group of key entities or organization from which partnerships were routed. This way, when a key organization changes their leadership structure or loses funding or changes their priorities away from childcare issues, the networked partnerships can remain strong and can carry out the work vacated by that organization. Second, the success stories often included diversification of partnerships. The states are constantly innovating and thinking more broadly about their partnerships to include the whole child and their ecological context, connecting with sectors and entities that are not traditionally thought of as critical partners. For example, several states are looking for ways to more directly connect early childhood and school-age entities—thus moving away from traditional competition for resources to working together to advocate for the whole child.

### *State size*

The states varied tremendously in terms of geographic size, deeply impacting their processes to increase childcare quality and quantity. This is to such a degree that it is almost erroneous to compare the larger and smaller states in their efforts. For example, larger states require an immense amount of effort to complete inspections for licensure among remote counties and locations. Families and providers outside of city centers are often scattered across large distances making face to face contacts for training and on-site technical assistance extremely difficult. Distance learning and internet access are crucial components to larger states' abilities to create and maintain state-wide efforts. However, for many in remote areas of the larger states, technology infrastructure and access is limited. For smaller states, these concerns are far less impactful in terms of their ability to promote statewide systems for promoting quality childcare.

### *Resources*

Each of the states discussed the fundamental role of resources. Several states discussed the impact of federal funding such as recent “Race to the Top” grants. The availability of resources deeply impacted states’ ability to deliver the action steps and services needed to improve and maintain the child care system. This included their ability to offer trainings to providers, a critical piece of an effective state-wide system. Some states reported this period of time as being particularly good for funding streams for child-care while other states reported funding concerns; all states questioned what funding would look like in the future. Interestingly, states with limited resources for child care improvements showed characteristics such as resourcefulness and innovative collaborative partnerships that were particularly strong in light of having to adapt to less funding to work with.

### *Policies and priorities*

Across the group interviews, participants discussed the role of their state’s prioritization of child care as demonstrated through support at the legislative level. Legislative support reveals a philosophical commitment to the efforts of the childcare system and is shown through: 1) Passing legislation and 2) Enacting funding streams to back the legislation. Some states reported strong support at the legislative level, and cited examples specific to licensing or a Governor’s overt commitment to child care. Other states discussed challenges such as outdated regulations in need of overhaul and the difficulty of enforcing enacted legislation. Because state policies and priorities are keys to improving state-wide systems for quality childcare, states have been strategic in their advocacy work. In response to the lack of state department resources to update regulations, one state formed a volunteer-based working group that created a process and template for submitting and successfully creating regulation changes that improve safety in child care settings. In response to the challenge of high legislative turnover, one state reported coming together on a regular basis to create a shared vision and action plan so that they will be ahead of the curve when childcare friendly legislators come into office.





### *MCCLI and CYTTAP*

Each of states discussed the strategic integration of the MCCLI and CYTTAP into their existing states' framework and filling gaps in collaborative systems. In some states this was aided through the extensive relationships MCCLs already developed and maintained with members of the state child care world. In all states, the MCCLs' ability to build relationships, to take leadership of group processes and to foster energy was cited as a vibrant center to the success of the initiative. For many of the MCCLs, their current role is a reflection of a life's work committed to child care quality and quantity and their personal and professional ability to be a catalyst for change.

States reported specific contributions of CYTTAP around supporting the implementation of new provider trainings like *Better Kid Care Instructor Modules* and providing supplemental resources for existing training initiatives like *I am Moving I am Learning* and *Rock Solid Foundations*. Registration data indicates that as of April 30, 2013, the CYTTAP hosted 317 child care provider trainings and train-the-trainer events across the nation that were attended by over 5,900 individuals. The MCCLI and CYTTAP were involved in changing aspects of the professional development of child care providers, such as increasing the number of required training hours for providers and improving coordination of training opportunities through online databases. Additionally, some of the states, for the first time, accredited online delivery of provider trainings, specifically to improve access to training opportunities for providers. To date, 1,100 individuals in the Child Care Expansion Initiative target states have completed 16,457 on-line training hours via *Better Kid Care On Demand*.

### *Improving systems*

Each of the participating states was at a different stage in improving their child care system. Each described unique processes and elements as they strived to improve systems that would ultimately enhance quality childcare in their state. Where states are in terms of system-level improvements and successes can be organized into three broad stages of development-- early, mid-level and mature stages. While there were variations across the states, typical types of statewide efforts occurring at the various stages are outlined in the chart on the following page.

States in Early Stages:

- Establishing or revising the statewide child care licensing and regulation
- Building procedures for implementing licensing and regulation across the state
- Building new partnerships and re-engaging existing partners
- Focusing communication and training on what is in the regulation and licensing processes
- Developing new and enhancing existing professional development opportunities for providers and those who work with providers as a result of new/revised regulatory systems

States in Mid-level Stages:

- Targeting work with whole sectors or key groups to improve professional development and improving quality (e.g., Military, Head Start, rural settings, etc.)
- Increasing awareness of and access to information and resources through strategic networks for communication and utilization of technology
- Restructuring existing systems to improve direct impact on quality (e.g., regionalizing their professional development system)
- Focusing work on quality that goes beyond licensing or regulations (e.g., increasing required provider training hours to build on quality and not just quantity)

States in Mature Stages:

- Establishing a systematic Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) with attention paid to fidelity in implementation
- Building incentives to attain quality rating (small grants, star ratings on a registry list, etc.)
- Establishing and working toward explicit benchmarks (e.g., by 20XX, 100% of all Head Start programs in the state will receive a minimum of 4 out of 5 on quality rating)
- Developing and disseminating tools across the state like videos to show how quality issues can be adopted under field conditions
- Striving to become a national leader and sharing best practices and resources
- Building a career lattice for child care workers/providers
- Sharing a robust, comprehensive data system accounting for the ecologies in which the child develops (e.g., neighborhood data, school data, health data, etc.)

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The most common element across the nine states that participated in REM is diversity. The diversity of states' contexts, history, policies, partnerships, and even size all greatly impacted the successes achieved on behalf of quality childcare in their states. There is no right or wrong way to proceed in developing and sustaining quality childcare systems. Each state must work with sensitivity to their unique history and environmental conditions; what works in one state may not work in another.

The results of REM, however, did shed light on some common elements of successfully achieving systems-level improvements in childcare quality. Key partners including DoD, NIFA, UNL, Penn State and others may want to consider the following recommendations as they continue to improve the Child Care Expansion Initiative.

- Regardless of statewide history, support and contexts, there are those individuals/organizations that carry the torch for childcare issues—identify them early. These are the people that will create momentum when little exists and will move for action when conditions are right. They know how to share resources across the system to promote quality childcare. Those who attended the REM events were able to identify such entities. It may be strategic for an initiative such as the Child Care Expansion Initiative to infuse funding to multiple entities or networks rather than to individuals or single organizations.
- When bringing on new states, the needs assessment activities could include an articulation of which stage of development they are in—allowing initiatives like the MCCLI and CYTTAP to focus their supports and training more strategically. For example, states in early stages could use more information connected to statewide licensing and regulations, how to update or overhaul long-standing regulations, strategies for advocating at the legislative level and more strategically connecting provider training to licensing or regulation issues as well as broader child development and health promotion contents. Perhaps a checklist could be developed for identifying where the states are in their systems-level work.
- Connect mature states with early stage states with similar demographics in a mentoring type of situation. States in mature stages have decades of lessons learned to share.
- Create a forum where successes can be shared more strategically across states—states are communicating at some level, but often not systematically. States are already developing “how to’s” for advocacy, QRIS systems, etc. but efforts like the Child Care Expansion Initiative can jump-start or expand a state’s ability to share their resources across states.

States understand that systems change processes are incremental and require long-term vision. No outside entity or funding stream can come in and make major shifts in a matter of months. Having said that, we believe much of the work connected to the Child Care Expansion Initiative is about creating conditions that improve the readiness for change when opportunities arise within each state to improve systems for quality childcare.



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