Better Beginnings

THE SEEDS TO SUCCESS MODIFIED FIELD TEST:

Implementation Lessons

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The Early Learning Initiative

In 2006, the Gates Foundation launched the Early Learning Initiative to improve the school readiness of Washington State's children through three main strategies: (1) development of high-quality, community-wide early learning initiatives in two communities; (2) enhancement of statewide systems that support early learning; and (3) support for implementation of promising practices. The foundation joined with other private funders and state officials to form Thrive by Five Washington (Thrive) to energize development and support of high-quality early learning opportunities for all children in the state.

In tandem with the formation of Thrive, the Gates Foundation sought two communities with a high level of need for early learning services and the capacity to develop and implement high-quality, community-wide early learning initiatives. After researching possibilities and consulting with community stakeholders, the Gates Foundation selected White Center, an unincorporated area just outside Seattle, and East Yakima, a neighborhood in the central Washington community of Yakima. Thrive has worked with an intermediary agency in each community to develop and implement the initiative. In East Yakima, Educational Service District 105 serves as intermediary through its Ready by Five project. In White Center, Puget Sound Educational Services District (PSESD) operates the White Center Early Learning Initiative (WCELI). Three key partners, Child Care Resources (CCR), the Seattle King County Department of Public Health, and Open Arms Perinatal Services, work with PSESD to manage the initiative and provide services.

Thrive, the two communities, and other stakeholders worked closely with the Washington State Department of Early Learning (DEL) to develop a quality rating and improvement system for child care. In 2009, Thrive and the communities began a field test of a streamlined version of the DEL system, referred to as the Seeds to Success Modified Field Test (Seeds). This field test included an impact study (a randomized controlled trial to assess the effectiveness of the model) and an implementation study (to determine if the model was implemented as planned). Ready by Five and CCR implemented the field test in East Yakima and White Center, respectively; this included recruiting participants, training coaches, delivering the coaching model, and administering the financial grants.

About the Evaluation

Mathematica Policy Research conducted an impact evaluation and an implementation study of the Seeds modified field test (Boller et al. 2010a). The impact evaluation was designed to determine whether the coaching model and financial incentives implemented as part of Seeds affect the quality of services provided by participating child care businesses (in both family home and center settings) as compared to services provided by businesses that did not receive Seeds. Across the two communities, 52 family child care providers and 14 centers that volunteered to participate in the Seeds field test were randomly assigned into treatment and control groups.[1] Businesses in the treatment group received coaching, quality improvement grants, professional development opportunities, and access to funds. The impact of Seeds was defined as the difference between businesses in the treatment and control groups after the seven-month study period, controlling for baseline differences. A companion brief presents key findings from the impact study (Boller et al. 2010b).

The goals of the implementation study were to determine whether Seeds successfully provided intensive, high-quality coaching and other supports to participating businesses and to capture lessons learned by the participating agencies and businesses. This brief highlights key findings from the implementation study.

[1] For the Seeds field test, Ready by Five and CCR focused the initiative on providers serving infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children.

The Seeds to Success Modified Field Test: Implementation Lessons

The Seeds to Success Model: An Overview

For the modified field test, the Seeds model had two quality categories: curriculum and learning environment and professional development and training.

For the modified field test, the Seeds model had two quality categories: curriculum and learning environment and professional development and training. Each participating business received a Seeds rating based on its scores on the two quality categories. Quality ratings ranged from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. Businesses could achieve a 5 if they met the ratio requirements in the curriculum and early learning area and met the level 4 Seed rating requirements in all other areas. The Seeds ratings for the modified field test were calculated using the following information:

1. A curriculum and learning environment score was calculated by taking an average of the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) items for family child care providers; for child care centers, a center-level score was calculated by taking the mean of the classroom-level ERS scores.[2,3]
2. A professional development and training score was determined by the education and experience data reported by family child care providers and their assistants and center-based staff (including directors, lead teachers, and assistants) on self-administered questionnaires and interviews.

In the Seeds model, a participating business must meet the requirements in every category of a level to qualify for a rating at that level. The overall Seeds ratings were then calculated by taking the minimum value among the curriculum and learning environment score and the lowest score from the professional development and training scores.

As part of the Seeds field test, participating providers (those in the treatment group) received the following:

- **Coaching.** Each family child care provider, center-based classroom, and center director was eligible to receive eight hours of coaching per month. Coaching hours for center classrooms

Seeds Coaching Model

In 2008, Thrive developed the Consultative Coaching Program for Early Learning Professionals. This coaching program adapts the Coach Training Institute's Co-Active Coaching[a] model and incorporates Gary Bloom's Blended Coaching[b] techniques and principles of process consultation,[c] all within the early learning context. The goal of the Consultative Coaching Program is to train coaches to develop a trusting relationship with early learning professionals so that they can help early learning professionals reflect on their practice (1) in the classroom or in their business and (2) during interactions with the other providers in that setting, with families, and with the children that are in their care. The Seeds coaches were also trained to help the treatment group professionals stay motivated to attain their quality improvement goals and to help establish skills and behaviors that support continuous quality improvement.

[a] The Co-Active Coaching model is a relationship-based approach designed to create a relationship between the coach and the staff she works with. When applying the Co-Active Coaching model, coaches are to advise or problem solve together with the coaching recipient (The Coaches Training Institute 2010).

[b] The Blended Coaching model is based on more than 15 years of field work at the New Teacher Center, University of California, Santa Cruz. When applying the model, coaches are to move between facilitative and instructional approaches in their practice (Bloom et al. 2005).

[c] Process consultation rests on the belief that the client has the answers to questions about his practice, not the consultant/coach, and that the job of the consultant/coach is to help by facilitating the client's thinking and action rather than impose his own thinking on the client and her work (Schein 1969).

[2] The version of the scale used during the observations depended on the setting: the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales–Revised and the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale–Revised were used in child care centers; the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale–Revised was used in family child care homes (Harms et al. 1998; Harms et al. 2003; Harms et al. 2007).

[3] During the field test, Mathematica conducted the ERS observations.

In addition to funds for professional development, participating providers had access to funds to cover the costs of child care, release time, and books.

were divided between lead teachers and assistants, with more hours intended for lead teachers. Providers and coaches developed quality improvement plans (QIPs) that were used to guide the coaching sessions.

- **Quality Improvement Grants.** Programs received quality improvement grants based on their Seeds rating, with higher-rated programs receiving more funding (Table 1).
- **Professional Development Opportunities and Funds, Plus Supports.** Providers were offered professional development opportunities, including funds for training and course work. In addition, participating providers had access to funds to cover the costs of child care, release time, and books. In contrast, providers in the control group had access only to professional development opportunities and funds.

Implementation Approach

In this section, we describe the communities' approaches to staffing, recruiting and enrolling providers, and assigning coaches to providers. Table 2 provides an overview of the implementation approaches by community.

TABLE 1. Quality Improvements Grants by Seed Level and Program Type[a]

Seed Level	FCC (annual maximum amount)	Centers (annual maximum amount)
1	$1,200	$1,800
2	$3,600	$4,800
3	$5,400	$9,000
4	$7,200	$10,800
5	$9,000	$12,600

Source: Seeds to Success: Washington State's Quality Rating and Improvement System, Washington State Department of Early Learning.
[a] For the field test, providers recieved quality improvement grants that were prorated to account for Seeds lasting less than 12 months.
FCC = Family child care providers.

TABLE 2. Organizational Structure, by Community

	East Yakima	White Center
Implementing Agency	Ready by Five	Child Care Resources
Staffing Structure	The early learning professional development coordinator oversees Seeds; the early learning quality coordinator provides direct supervision to the coaches.	The assistant director of provider services and WCELI project lead oversees Seeds; the QRIS coordinator provides direct supervision to the coaches.
Coaches	Ready by Five hired 4 coaches to work full-time with providers.	CCR contracted with 12 coaches as consultants to work with providers.

Source: Mathematica implementation study, 2009.
QRIS = quality rating and improvement system.

TABLE 3. Key Trainings for Seeds Coaches

Training	Description
Orientation	Overview of the Seeds to Success modified field test
Consultative Coaching	Instruction on the consultative approach; skill building on developing a strong coaching relationship
Introduction to Assessments	Training on the ERS, including understanding ERS scores
Introduction to ETO	Training on ETO, including how to document visits and complete QIPs in ETO

Source: Mathematica implementation study, 2009.

ERS = Environment Rating Scales; ETO = Efforts to Outcomes; QIPs = quality improvement plans.

Lead Agencies

In East Yakima, Ready by Five is the lead agency responsible for the implementation of Seeds. In White Center, CCR is the lead agency.

Staffing Structure

At both Ready by Five and CCR, a lead staff person provides oversight of Seeds implementation, and a site coordinator directly supervises the individuals hired or contracted to coach child care providers. Coaches in East Yakima are full-time employees of Ready by Five; coaches in White Center work as consultants for CCR.

To identify coaches, both agencies advertised widely for individuals with experience and expertise in early childhood development, child care, culturally appropriate practice, and adult learning theories.

To identify coaches, both agencies advertised widely for individuals with experience and expertise in early childhood development, child care, culturally appropriate practice, and adult learning theories. In addition, the agencies sought bilingual individuals to work with the providers in their communities. Ready by Five hired four coaches, and CCR contracted with 12 consultants.

Training and Supervision

In preparation for implementation, site coordinators and coaches participated in multiple training sessions, including trainings on coaching, the ERS, and using the ETO data system (Table 3).[4] Coaches were supervised during team and one-on-one meetings. In the Ready by Five program, coaches met weekly during the field test. In White Center, the coaches met monthly with the site coordinator. In addition, coaches from both communities had the opportunity to meet one-on-one or as a group with a mentor coach hired by Thrive.

Provider Recruitment and Enrollment

Participating providers initially volunteered to enroll in the Washington State Department of Early Learning quality rating and improvement system field test. However, due to state budget constraints, the field test was suspended. Thrive then decided to implement a modified version of the state model and invited providers that had volunteered for the state field test to participate.

Linking Coaches and Providers

The two communities took different approaches to linking coaches and providers. CCR let providers choose their coach, while Ready by Five assigned the coaches to providers. CCR prescreened the coaches based on the coaches' availability and whether they spoke the same home language as the provider. The coordinator then gave each provider a list of three possible coaches along

[4] Thrive contracted with Social Solutions, a provider of performance management software, to develop a web-based data system for the Seeds modified field test. Social Solutions developed a data system using its Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) software. Social Solutions was responsible for training staffon ETO and providing ongoing technical assistance.

with the coaches' resumes and allowed providers to rank the coaches in order of preference. Ultimately the CCR site coordinator made the match between the coaches and providers taking into account the availability of the coaches. Because all Ready by Five coaches were fluent in both English and Spanish, the site coordinator assigned coaches to providers at random.

Implementation Experiences

Participating child care providers in the treatment group received one-on-one coaching, quality improvement grants, and funding and supports for professional development. In this section, we report on the services provided as reported in ETO and described during site visits.

Coaching

Coaches aimed to provide support to family child care providers as well as to child care center directors, teachers, and assistants as they worked together to improve the quality of care they provided.

Coaches aimed to provide support to family child care providers as well as to child care center directors, teachers, and assistants as they worked together to improve the quality of care they provided. The relationship between the coaches and the providers was a key component of the Seeds model. The providers were expected to determine the agenda for coaching visits, and the coaches served as a support to advance the providers' goals. During site visits, coaches said that they emphasized the importance of listening to providers' goals and aspirations, being respectful of their knowledge and skills as caregivers, and spending time with them in the classroom and with the children to build and sustain positive relationships with them.

Quality Improvement Plans and Coaching Content

A key activity of the Seeds model was developing and maintaining quality improvement plans (QIPs). To develop the QIPs, coaches and providers worked together to identify goals for areas of improvement. As providers achieved the goals in their QIPs, they worked with coaches to develop new goals. In both communities, the coaches developed one QIP with each family child care provider, center director, and lead teacher. During site visits, coaches and providers described the main sources of information that they used to inform the plans as comprising provider input, ERS scores, and coaches' observations. QIPs were entered into ETO and tracked over time.

The goals identified in the QIPs drove the content of the coaching sessions. Coaches recorded in ETO the amount of time they spent working on specific goals with each participant during each coaching session. The goals were grouped into six categories: (1) curriculum and learning environment, (2) family relationships and community partnerships, (3) health and safety, (4) management practices, (5) professional development, and (6) other.[5] Table 4 includes a list of the types of activities included in each goal type. In addition, they reported on times they met with staff but did not focus on a particular goal (we refer to this as general time and relationship building). As shown in Figure 1, coaching with family child care providers in both communities focused mostly on topics related to curriculum and learning environment goals. Coaching with staff at East Yakima child care centers focused largely on relationship building and curriculum and learning; in White Center, coaching focused on topics related to professional development and curriculum and learning.

Amount of Coaching Provided

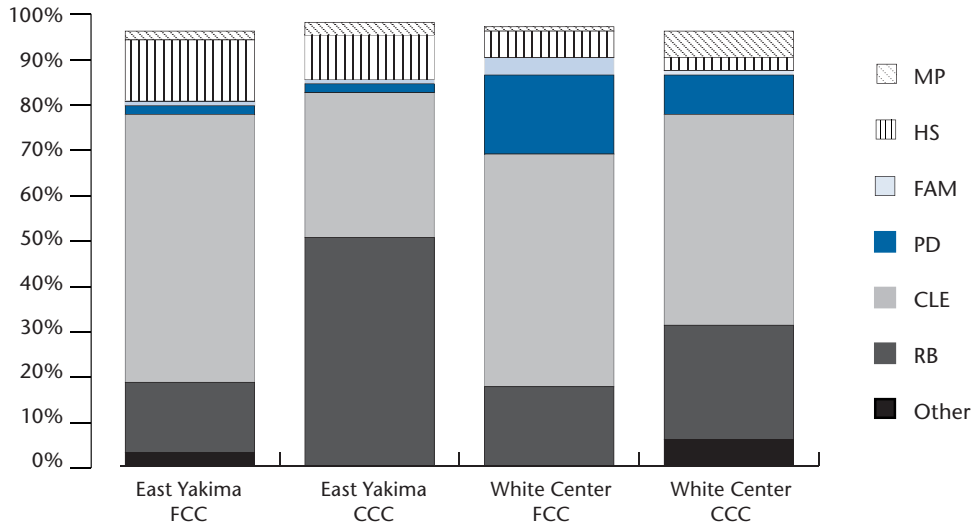
According to ETO data, on average family child care providers, center directors, and lead teachers received between four and seven visits per month, and the average amount of coaching

[5] In White Center, professional development goals included time coaches and providers spent identifying goals and professional development opportunities. The site coordinator from East Yakima explained that the coaches originally coded time establishing professional development goals as relationship building in ETO; they later learned from Social Solutions that this was incorrect and should have been coded as professional development. Coaches were not able to identify and correct all cases when this occurred and therefore the amount of time spent on relationship building may be an overestimate.

TABLE 4. Description of Goals Included in Each Goal Category

Curriculum and Learning
Improvements/enhancements to indoor learning environment
Improvements/enhancements to outdoor learning environment
Adding/enhancing a curriculum; adding/enhancing learning activities
Improvements/enhancements to teaching practices
Improvements/enhancements to classroom management and managing difficult behaviors
Adding/adjusting classroom schedules and routines; implementing center-wide schedules and routines
Adding/enhancing assessments and/or observations of children
Health and Safety
Improvements/enhancements to sanitation related to food preparation and meal times
Improvements/enhancements to sanitation related to toileting and diapering
Improvements/enhancements to other sanitation including hand washing (if not applicable to food preparation/mealtimes or toileting/diapering)
Professional Development
Developing professional development goals
Identifying professional development opportunities
Family Relationships and Community Partnerships
Improvements/enhancements of interactions with parents; providing opportunities for parent engagement (such as parent nights or parent-teacher conferences)
Improvements/enhancements of information shared with parents (about provider, child, and curriculum)
Management Practices
Improvements/enhancements to classroom management and managing difficult behaviors
Improvements or development of job descriptions, personnel policies, or other staff-related policies
Improvements to or development of a process for holding staff accountable or evaluating staff performance
Improvements/development of systems for supporting professional development for staff (including training, education, and membership in professional organizations)
Other
Any other goals that do not fit into categories listed above

FIGURE 1. Amount of Coaching Time Spent on Each Goal



Source: ETO, June 1 through December 31, 2009.

Note: CCC= child care centers; CLE = curriculum and learning environment; FAM= family relationships and community partnerships; FCC= family child care; HS = health and safety; MP = management practices; PD = professional development; and RB = general time and relationship building.

Number of coaching sessions (N) for East Yakima FCC = 274; N for East Yakima CCC = 516; N for White Center FCC = 356; N for White Center CCC = 749.

was between 6 and 11 hours per month (Table 5). Assistant teachers in White Center received on average less than 2 hours of coaching per month; in East Yakima, they received on average nearly 6 hours per month. Although on average participants received close to the targeted amount of coaching per month, participants had a range of experiences, with some participants receiving on average far fewer visits and hours of coaching per month.

During site visits, coaches and coordinators described a number of obstacles to meeting the targeted amount of coaching. Staff turnover, particularly for assistant teachers, was frequent, so the amount of time spent in the program was minimal. In addition, providers' openness to the coaching visits and their needs varied. Coaches reported that some family child care providers, center directors, teachers, and assistant teachers were reluctant to allow coaches into their homes or classrooms, explaining that they were too busy to meet with the coach; others experienced prolonged illnesses. In contrast, some family child care providers and child care centers had greater needs (such as administrative turnover or licensing violations) than others and therefore required more frequent visits.

Coaches had a fair amount of flexibility when deciding how to spend their time with providers. They could work one-on-one with specific staff or offer group sessions to a number of staff about a particular topic.

Type of Coaching Sessions

Coaches had a fair amount of flexibility when deciding how to spend their time with providers. They could work one-on-one with specific staff or offer group sessions to a number of staff about a particular topic. They also tracked time spent emailing and making telephone calls to providers. According to the ETO data, coaches almost always worked with family child care providers one-on-one (99 percent of the time in East Yakima and 95 percent of the time in White Center; Figure 2). Coaches in East Yakima spent 58 percent of their time at child care centers working one-on-one with staff and 38 percent of the time working with groups of providers. In White Center, coaches spent nearly all of their time (91 percent) at child care centers work-

TABLE 5. Average Amount of Coaching Received by Staff per Month, by Provider Type

	Number of Staff	Average Number of Coaching Sessions per Month	SD	Average Number of Hours of Coaching Received per Month	SD
East Yakima					
Family child care providers	13	4	1.0	7	2.5
Child care centers					
Director/owner	7	4	1.6	10	5.6
Lead teachers	18	4	1.6	7	4.6
Assistant teachers	11	4	1.8	6	3.6
White Center					
Family child care providers	13	4	0.9	7	1.7
Child care centers					
Director/owner	4	7	2.7	11	2.2
Lead teachers	19	4	1.5	6	2.6
Assistant teachers	20	2	1.7	2	2.3

Source: ETO, June 1 through December 31, 2009.

Note: Mathematica calculated an average for each participant and averaged across all participants with the same staff type.

SD = standard deviation.

Participating providers received quality improvement grants based on their baseline Seeds score.

ing one-on-one with staff. According to the ETO data, coaches spent very little time sending emails and making telephone calls to providers; however, during site visits coaches reported that they did not always log the time they spent on these activities.

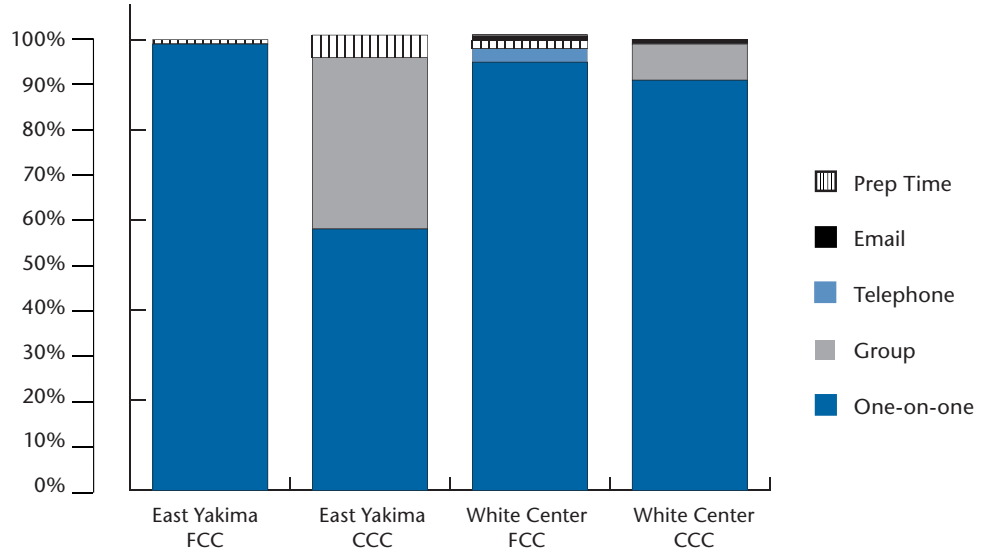
Quality Improvement Grants

Participating providers received quality improvement grants based on their baseline Seeds score. The grants were designed to help providers make improvements to their child care center or family child care home learning environments, as well as purchase items to help them improve their instructional or management practice, with an ultimate goal of helping them increase their Seeds score. The Seeds coaches worked with providers to help them identify uses for the grants. All purchases had to be approved by the Seeds coordinators.

Across all providers in East Yakima and White Center, quality improvement grants were mostly used for supplies and materials (Table 6). During focus groups, providers described using funds to purchase a wide variety of materials including books, art materials, dramatic play materials, and manipulatives. Providers and coaches also reported requesting funds to purchase larger items such as bookcases, child-sized tables and chairs, and outdoor play equipment and to make safety improvements. Other uses included purchasing curriculum materials and additional staff professional development.[6]

[6] Quality improvement grants used for staff professional development included English as a second language classes, membership for professional associations, and other opportunities not paid for by the professional development funds.

FIGURE 2. Mode of Delivery of Coaching



Source: ETO, June 1 through December 31, 2009.

Note: Number of coaching sessions (N) for East Yakima FCC = 274; N for East Yakima CCC = 516; N for White Center FCC = 356; N for White Center CCC = 749.

Professional Development Funds and Supports

Providers enrolled in Seeds were also eligible to receive funding for additional professional development opportunities[7] and support to help them access opportunities. The supports offered were funds for books, release time (or funding to pay for substitutes), and child care for staff while they attended classes and trainings. Coaches worked with providers to help them identify, and apply for, professional development opportunities. The coordinators in both East Yakima and White Center were responsible for working with professional development providers to ensure that opportunities were available to providers. They also reviewed and approved requests for professional development funds.

During site visits, the coordinators reported that the types of professional development opportunities available to providers included: (1) course work toward a bachelor's degree; (2) course work towards an associate's degree; and (3) noncredit professional development opportunities.

During site visits, the coordinators reported that the types of professional development opportunities available to providers included: (1) course work toward a bachelor's degree; (2) course work toward an associate's degree; and (3) noncredit professional development opportunities, including child development associate (CDA) classes, adult basic education, English as a second language, and training offered through local child care resource and referral agencies and other organizations. Ready by Five arranged for CDA course work conducted in Spanish and a Spanish literacy program for Spanish speakers called CONEVyT (an online program developed by the Mexican government). The program includes a training component on early childhood education. CCR offered community-based classes for providers in the Somali language.

According to Ready by Five and CCR program records, 4 of the 13 family child care providers in East Yakima and 4 of the 13 family child care providers in White Center received funding for noncredit professional development opportunities between June and December 2009 (Table 7).

[7] Providers assigned to the control group in the Seeds impact study were also eligible to receive funding for professional development. In this brief we detail the experiences only of the treatment group members (those providers who were offered quality improvement grants and coaching in addition to professional development funds).

TABLE 6. Uses of Quality Improvement Grants and Funds Distributed, by Provider Type

	East Yakima (percentage of funds distributed)		White Center (percentage of funds distributed)	
	Family Child Care Providers	Child Care Centers	Family Child Care Providers	Child Care Centers
Supplies and materials	87	47	93	94
Curriculum materials	4	30	5	1
Staff professional development	9	23	0	4
Other	1	0	2	1
Number of providers	13	3	13	4
Total Amount of Funds Distributed	**$19,200**	**$7,800**	**$18,571**	**$15,452**

Source: Ready by Five and CCR program records, through December 31, 2009.
Note: Not all categories add to 100 percent because of rounding.

TABLE 7. Uses of Professional Development Funds, by Provider Type

	East Yakima		White Center	
	Family Child Care Providers	Child Care Centers	Family Child Care Providers	Child Care Centers
Number of Providers Receiving Funds for Professional Development				
Noncredit	4	1	4	4
Associate's-level classes	1	2	6	4
Bachelor's-level classes	0	1	0	1
Number of Providers Receiving Professional Development Supports				
Books	1	2	3	3
Child care stipend	1	2	5	3
Release time	2	1	0	1
Total Number of Providers	**13**	**3**	**13**	**4**

Source: Ready by Five and CCR program, June 1 through December 31, 2009.

One of the 13 family child care providers in East Yakima and 6 of the 13 providers in White Center received funding for course work toward an associate's degree; no family child care providers received funding for bachelor's-level course work. Among child care centers, one of the three centers in East Yakima and all of the centers in White Center received funding for noncredit professional development opportunities. In East Yakima three staff members received training using this funding and in White Center 37 staff members received training. Five staff members from two child care centers in East Yakima and 17 staff members from four child care centers in White Center received funding for course work toward an associate's degree. Two center-based staff in East Yakima and one in White Center received funding for course work toward a bachelor's degree.

Providers who participated in focus groups described several barriers that deterred them from using the professional development opportunities available through Seeds. Providers reported that courses offered filled up quickly, and they had limited time to make decisions about courses and enroll. Teachers explained that the trainings and courses offered were often repetitive and did not provide them with any new information or ideas. Family child care providers reported that much of the course work was not relevant for their work as home providers. Both teachers and family child care providers expressed frustration that obtaining higher credentials did not guarantee higher pay. Providers said they were more likely to take advantage of the professional development opportunities located close to their neighborhoods and said that, given their schedules, travel even a moderate distance from work and home was a challenge.

The implementation of Seeds by Ready by Five and CCR can provide useful information for future efforts to refine or expand the Seeds model.

Lessons Learned

The implementation of Seeds by Ready by Five and CCR can provide useful information for future efforts to refine or expand the Seeds model. In this section, we discuss lessons learned based on the success and challenges faced by Ready by Five, CCR, and the participating providers.

Implementing the Seeds Model Is Feasible

The Seeds evaluation found that it is feasible to implement a QRIS using an intensive-coaching model and that the incentives of the system are sufficient to motivate provider participation. All of the expected components of the Seeds model were implemented. Based on information Mathematica analyzed from focus groups, interviews, survey questionnaires, and ETO, we learned that the treatment group received Seeds scores and ratings and detailed information based on their ERS ratings and that they were offered coaching and given quality improvement grants based on their Seeds rating. In addition, they were informed that by working toward and achieving a higher score, they would receive larger quality improvement grants in the future. Despite developers' concerns at the outset of the pilot, child care businesses in the treatment group participated in coaching at close to the intended level. According to ETO data, family child care providers, center directors, and lead teachers received on average approximately four coaching sessions per month, ranging from 6 to 11 hours per month. Quality improvement grants were disbursed, and providers and center directors used them to address goals identified in their QIPs. During focus groups, coaches and child care providers in the treatment group reported being motivated to do what was necessary to increase quality as defined by Seeds and finding participation in Seeds rewarding and worthwhile.

When Providing Intensive Coaching, Full-Time Staff with Increased Availability and Flexibility May Reduce Obstacles to Completing Visits

During site visits, coaches and providers described a number of challenges associated with completing coaching visits. Coaches said that holidays, vacations, and other commitments, such as attending trainings and conferences, limited their ability to complete all of the coaching visits they planned for a given month. Providers reported that some days they were too busy to meet with their coaches because of specific activities going on in their classrooms or centers; others described cancellations due to brief illnesses (by either the coach or the provider) and in some cases due to periods of prolonged illness. In White Center, providers and coaches described some difficulties arranging their schedules. For example, providers reported preferring a specific day of the week for the coaching visits but explained that their coaches were not available those days. Providers requested a set schedule for coaching visits so they could plan their week around them. In addition, they said some flexibility within the parameters of

the visit is also helpful. For example, a coach may visit a classroom for a period of time in the morning and then schedule to meet with the teacher at naptime to discuss what she observed. With family child care providers, the coach may need to debrief with the provider while children are sleeping or follow up in the evening by telephone.

Balancing the time dedicated to coaching visits with the time dedicated to administrative tasks can be challenging, especially for part-time staff with other commitments. During site visits, coaches from Ready by Five described their caseloads as manageable but said they could always use more time to spend with the providers. Some of the CCR coaches reported that they struggled to complete their coaching visits, attend meetings, and record service tracking information in the time they allotted to their position as a Seeds coach. In addition, coaches from both communities reported spending more time entering data into ETO than originally expected. Given the challenges associated with using consultants whose time is less flexible than full-time staff, we recommend that programs consider hiring coaches as full-time staff in the future.

Trusting Relationships Facilitate Quality Improvement Efforts

During site visits, teachers and family child care providers described their initial concerns about having someone in their classroom or home commenting on their practice. However, as the field test progressed and they built relationships with their coaches, teachers and family child care providers said they welcomed the coaches' suggestions. In particular, providers said they liked that the coaches did not just come into their classrooms or homes and try to tell them what to do. Rather, the coaches observed the circumstances of each provider and talked through possible ideas for improving practice with the providers. Coaches also stressed the importance of relationship building and of respecting providers as professionals and experts. In addition, coaches said that having the same culture and language as the providers was helpful; when that alignment was not the case, taking the time to learn about the providers' culture was important.

Staff turnover at child care centers requires coaches to build new relationships and revisit quality improvement topics. The participating child care centers experienced high rates of turnover among teaching staff (as is common in child care businesses). When new staff members were hired, coaches spent some time building a relationship with the new staff and working with them to identify goals; then they began discussing ideas for improving practice. As a result, the progress they were making to improve quality within a given classroom was often delayed by the staff changes.

Despite Supports, Barriers Exist that Deter Providers from Participating in Professional Development Opportunities

Providers who participated in focus groups described a number of barriers that deterred them from making use of the professional development (PD) opportunities available through Seeds. Teachers explained that the trainings and course work were often repetitive and did not provide them with any new information or ideas. Family child care providers reported that much of the course work was not relevant for their work as home-based providers. Both teachers and family child care providers expressed frustration that obtaining higher credentials did not guarantee higher pay. Providers said they were more likely to take advantage of the PD opportunities located close to their neighborhoods and said traveling even a moderate distance from work and home was a challenge, given their schedules. Center directors and family child care providers reported that the release time offered through Seeds was not sufficient. Center directors said a shortage of substitute teachers made replacing teachers difficult, and instead they often relied on existing staff for coverage. Family child care providers explained that they were reluctant to leave a substitute in charge of their homes.

Child Care Businesses Need Clear Guidelines About Accepted Uses of Quality Improvement Grants

Quality improvement grants have the potential to encourage provider participation and support quality improvement efforts, however some child care directors and family child care providers whose requests for items were not approved expressed frustration about the process. They described having set ideas for how the funds would be used to meet their needs and experiencing disappointment and frustration when they were told they could not use the funds in that way. In contrast, coaches and some providers explained that Ready by Five and CCR might consider delaying the distribution of the quality improvement grants because the purchases the providers prioritized early in the field test might not align with the purchases they might identify after a few months of coaching. In either case, participating child care providers requested that Ready by Five and CCR set clear policies about the uses of quality improvement grants and communicate this guidance to them from the start.

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