

CHILD CARE CENTER DIRECTORS' PERCEPTION OF  
OKLAHOMA'S "REACHING FOR THE STARS":  
A QUALITY IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE

By

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Research on child care issues and policy have increased in the last few years (Groginsky, Robison, & Smith, 1999). In 1997 President Bill Clinton introduced new child care initiatives to improve the quality of child care for working families in America. The President's fiscal year budget of 1999 allotted approximately \$22 billion over a five year span which was the largest amount ever committed in the history of the United States for child care (Jacobson, 1998). The initiative recognized the need for providing affordable child care and promoting early learning (National Child Care Information Center, 1997).

Research has shown that quality child care is essential in preparing children for school readiness and learning (Collins & Dry, 2002). As a result, many states are now engaging tier quality strategies to meet the goal of improving quality. Some states are offering multi-levels of quality criteria. Examples of tier criteria include: "licensing status/compliance, accreditation, creating a learning environment, staff and/or director qualifications/training, staff: child ratio/group size, staff compensation, parental/family involvement, and administrative policies and procedures" (Dry & Collins, 2004, p.2). An additional component of the initiative is the benefit of offering higher reimbursement rates for the care of children whom are subsidized by the state in facilities meeting higher quality standards.

In the past, child care and education were viewed as separate goals (Schumacher, Irish, & Lombardi, 2003). Today, however, child care and learning are no longer viewed as being disconnected. Quality child care settings now offer a nurturing environment and provide stimulation to learn (Groginsky et al., 1999). It is crucial that child care centers strive to ensure the health, safety and well being of children, along with constructing a learning environment that prepares them for kindergarten and promotes positive outcomes in their lives.

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services and the Division of Child Care realize the importance of quality child care and the effect it has on the development of children in a child care setting. The Division's mission statement: "is for Oklahoma's families to have access to licensed, affordable, high quality care where children have the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential in a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment" (Oklahoma Department of Human Services, 2002 p. 2). In assisting child care centers to improve their quality of care, the Division offers child care centers the opportunity to participate in the "Reaching for the Stars" initiative which began in 1998. The Stars program is an initiative, which requires criteria beyond the minimum licensing requirements. The Star levels are listed below.

- One-Star centers meet licensing minimum requirements;
- One-Star Plus centers meet a portion of the Two-Star criteria. One-Star Plus facilities must meet the Two-Star criteria in 24 months or be reduced to the One-Star status;
- Two-Star centers meet the criteria or can meet criteria if facility is nationally accredited;
- Three-Star centers meet the Two-Star criteria and are nationally accredited.

The concept of licensing requiring “minimum” standards has been elevated with the implementation of the Stars program. The criteria consist of provider education and training, parent involvement and program evaluation. The benefits of participation in the Stars program are a higher reimbursement rate for subsidized child care, increased salary for child care staff, a scholarship program and salary supplement offered to staff as long as they remain in the field of child care.

With the Reaching for the Stars initiative, Oklahoma currently provides a high percentage of child care programs that have successfully met improvement of quality above basic minimum requirements. According to NCCIC, 2004:

Oklahoma’s system combines a higher rate for child care programs that achieve one or more levels of quality beyond basic licensing requirements-with a quality rating indicator that is embedded in the States’ quality criteria Levels (p. 2).

### The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study to review the child care center directors’ perception of the Stars Initiative and provide policy makers a better understanding of the views of the gatekeeper to the implementation of this program, the center director. This study revealed the attitudes of child care directors, which can impact the implementation of the Stars initiative.

This study will examine:

1. The responses of directors toward the initiative by the auspice of the facility by comparing the reactions of profit/non-profit child care centers directors. Previous research has found differences in program quality between profit and nonprofit programs (Ghazvini & Readdick, 1994; Nuttall, 1992) and it is possible that



reaction to a quality improvement initiative could also vary by program auspice.

2. The responses of directors' to the quality initiative criteria based on their programs' involvement in other quality improvement initiatives. Bryant, Maxwell, and Burchinal (1999) reported that child care quality in North Carolina child care centers was higher in programs that participated in more quality improvement initiatives. It was thought to be possible that programs that are already accessing other services for improving child care might respond differently to this tiered reimbursement initiative than those that have not been accessing such services.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The theoretical framework used for this review was the dynamic system theory of development. This included a review of literature research to such components of quality as teachers' education/training, parents' involvement, the learning environment, teachers' salaries, auspice, Environmental Rating Scale, a discussion of quality strategies and a review of other state initiatives was included as well as research related to responses to initiatives.

#### Theoretical Framework

Buell and Cassidy (2001) presented complex dynamic systems theory or chaos theory as a framework for examining child care quality. It can be defined as a new awareness of our understanding of how the world works. When associated with quality, the child care state initiatives cause and effect were not always predictable. A small change in center's staffing and enrollment or a parent's dissatisfaction can have a falling domino effect and ultimately disrupt the strategy of the program. However, this disruption can produce dynamic interactions that can lead to challenges and create new ideas to allow the program to function in the manner intended (Mossberg, 1997).

There are several identified beliefs of chaos theory. However, for the purpose

of this study three have been discussed. Among them are: decomposability, sensitivity to initial conditions and feedback mechanisms.

Decomposability is a system that consists of the entire structure. Any occurred changes from the top to the bottom or from bottom to the top can have an effect on the overall system. An example of decomposability would be a new policy to require parents to volunteer in their child's classroom at least once a month. This would meet the Stars program criteria of meeting the parent involvement but could also disrupt the classroom normal daily activities.

Sensitivity to initial conditions can be characterized by an incident's result on subsequent behavior. A small change or variation at the beginning of a situation can have a large impact at the end. An example of sensitivity to initial conditions would be a child care facility where none of the staff were attending classes or involved in training programs. One of the teachers decided to participate in the Scholars for Excellence program, which is the state's scholarship program funded by the Department of Human Services and the Division of Child Care, to acquire a Child Development Credential (CDA). As the teacher implemented her new skills in the classroom, the other teachers would notice the difference in the teacher/child relationship. Once the CDA is obtained, the teacher now qualifies for a bonus and an increase in salary and is now able to participate in the salary supplement program. As a result, more teachers now wish to enroll in classes and acquire a credential. The action of the one teacher had "profound effects on later behavior" (Buell & Cassidy 2001, p. 212).

Feedback mechanisms may be described as the effects of an interaction that is bestowed back into the system. An example of feedback mechanisms was a director satisfied with her working conditions. The director is in a favorable position to motivate and influence staff and promote the quality initiative. As a result of the director's attitude the results "are fed back into the system as input for subsequent interactions. (Buell, et al., 2001, p. 213). Chaos can be a benefit by allowing new ideas and perspectives to be reviewed by policymakers as it relates to early child and education programs.

#### Characteristics of Quality Associated with Child Care

There has been much study of child care characteristics. Such characteristics as structural and process features are examined regarding the effects on children and their learning. Structural features have been defined to include staff salaries, training/education and child/staff ratio (Patten & Ricks, 2000, p. 2). The structural features provide a dynamic framework of the overall program. However, "children directly experience classroom processes, and the quality of these influence their well-being and developmental outcomes" (Cryer, Tietze, Burchinal, Leal, & Palacios, 1999, p. 2). Process features are these that influence how children experience child care. This involves the teacher/child relationship, the use of language in the classroom, and individualization of care.

With more mothers employed in the labor force, the demand for child care outside of the home has increased in the last several years (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002). Extensive research was reviewed and supports the importance

of staff training, parent involvement/communication, learning environment, an increase of teacher's salaries to reduce staff turn-over and the Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) program assessment conducted on the facility as some of the features of child care quality (Blau, 1997). The effects of these factors of quality can lead to the development and positive outcomes for children.

Research has shown that consistent kindergarten success results from a quality preschool experience . This was important because it supports the initiative of children's readiness to learn (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001).

#### Teacher's Education/ Training

Recent research is now focused more on the dimensions of quality which are important in determining the overall day-to-day functions of child care (Arnett, 1989). The results of a study conducted by Ghazvini and Mullis (2002), suggested the training of preschool teachers has a "beneficial impact" (p. 8) in defining quality child care. Educated preschool teachers are beneficial in providing an environment for children to develop cognitive, social and language skills. With improved teacher/child interactions there will also be fewer behavior problems. A teacher with college classes in early education will provide overall better care.

In the Ceglowski and Bachigalupa (2002) review of literature, they indicated that staff with formal training in early childhood education were more likely to be more sensitive to the needs of the children, concerned with the children's interests, always ready to ask and answer questions, and attentive to the children. Research also indicates that teacher education/training impacts quality more than

class size as far as parents that were interviewed in the focus groups was concerned (Harrist, Thompson, & Norris, Under Review). A key finding in linking quality with positive child outcomes were that “outcomes were better when children attended classes that met recommended....levels of caregiver training and education” (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 1999, p. 1).

Another study conducted by Bridges and Carlat (2003) indicated that:

children benefit from being with well-trained, consistent early care and education staff. Sensitive and responsive care giving--characteristic of staff with a high level of training in child development--is associated with children's positive cognitive, social, and emotional development (p. 1).

Fiene (1995) indicated the importance of improvement in classroom implementation by teachers who had 20 hours of training or workshops on developmentally appropriate practices. Staff member with less than 20 hours of related training did not implement the same level of skills in their classroom. Ackerman (2003), discussed quality child care as it links to teacher training and education and the benefit was not only to children and their families “but to society as a whole“(p. 27)

### Parent Involvement

A study conducted by Mooney and Munton (1998), examined the importance of parental involvement and how it relates to quality child care. Parental involvement gives parents the opportunity to read to children, assisting and educating staff on cultural awareness, and making contributions to daily activities.

Parent involvement and communication ranked high as a factor in defining quality. It allowed for interaction between parent and provider, which is important for the success of the child (Bryan, 2004). Research has indicated the potential of parent/teacher

communication as being associated with quality. However, the result of a study conducted by Ghazvini, et al., 1994, has shown that as environmental quality increased, teachers' perceptions of parent/teacher communication frequency indicated no significant increase as anticipated. These findings were unexpected since teachers in high quality child care centers would be more likely to conduct and encourage parental involvement in the classroom, parent/teacher conferences and meetings to include parents.

### Learning Environment

Creating a learning environment that invites children to explore was also a determinant of quality. The equipment and how it was arranged in the environment was essential because it relates to the development of social skills by teaching children how to play together and encourages them to recognize space as it relates to them and to others (Patten & Ricks, 2000).

Teachers using planned curriculum would "ensure that they are addressing all areas of children learning and development" (Schumacher, et al., 2003). Curriculum is important in that it encourages the teacher/child relationship and motivates children to become involved in appropriate learning activities. A planned curriculum encouraged children to ask questions (Singer, 1996), which promoted conversation which led to language development.

### Teachers' Salaries

Teachers' salaries are not an isolated function from the other elements of child care. They are a main predictor of quality. Teacher wages was a significant element associated with quality more than any other structural component for all classrooms

(Phillips, et al., 2000). For years there has been, in the child care industry, low salaries, poor benefits and no incentive toward career advancement for directors and teachers. This has been associated with high-turnover in child care staff. “High turnover can hinder children’s development because it can interrupt the continuity of care” (Groginsky et al., 1999 p. 7).

State policymakers have been concerned about recruiting and retaining providers. They understood the importance of education incentives and the linkages between the increase in level of education and wages. Many studies indicated wages as a key component of a quality child care program. However, research has shown that child care teachers earn such low wages that they qualify for food stamps and Medicaid (Groginsky et al., 1999). Low salaries and the lack of health benefits for teachers is the main source of staff turn-over in the field of child care. In an effort to reduce turn-over, many state initiatives have implemented higher salaries to early child care professionals who strive and complete additional education and training.

#### Environmental Rating Scale

The Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) is highly regarded and greatly used as a measure of quality in child care centers. Recently there has been an increase in the use of the ERS by many states as an evaluation tool and a diagnostic tool in revealing areas of the program that may need improving (Glantz & Layer, 2000). The ERS is an assessment tool that evaluates areas to determine quality. These areas consist of physical setting, curriculum, caregiver/child interactions, health/safety, scheduling, indoor/outdoor play spaces and teacher qualifications and play materials of the classroom



(Harms & Clifford, 1980).

A study conducted by Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes and Cryer (1997), indicated that the scores of the Infant/Toddler Environmental rating Scale (ITERS) were significantly related to the:

lead teacher's background, classroom structure, teaching staff wages, and economic characteristics of the center. ITERS scores tended to be higher in classrooms where the lead teacher has a baccalaureate degree or at least some college (p.295).

The results of the study the ITERS has shown that classrooms with fewer children per staff and higher paid teacher were most likely viewed as offering better quality care (Phillipsen, et al., 1997).

In a study determining higher quality, the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) indicated that the higher scores were related to lead teachers with a baccalaureate degree or some college, better child/staff ratios, higher wages and in centers with a low percentage of infants/toddlers. According to the study, non-profit centers had significantly higher ECERS scores as compared to for-profit centers (Phillipsen, et al., 1997).

However, research has shown that the ITERS quality is significantly lower than the preschool classrooms (ECERS). In a study (Glantz & Layer, 2000) it was determined that the ERS is higher for centers that do not serve infants and toddlers than centers that do.

#### Profit/Non-Profit

The results of a study indicated when comparing the difference in wages, staff in non-profit center received higher wages than staff in a profit center (Nuttal et al., 1992).

Educational levels and early childhood training were also higher among teachers in non-profit centers and staff in non-profit center was found to be more experienced than teachers in for-profit centers.

In a comparison study conducted by Mullis, Cornille, Mullis, and Taliano (2003), child care center directors were surveyed regarding their work environment in profit and non-profit facilities. Directors were asked to respond to questions regarding educational training, staff turnover, and salary. These areas are a component of the state initiative. The results of the study indicated that the “education level of the directors of non-profit centers was significantly higher than those of for-profit centers” (p. 553). The study revealed that most directors in both types of centers had attended workshops and enrolled in college courses.

In the area of staff turnover, “for-profit centers had more full-time and part-time teachers leave their employment” (p. 551). Regarding director’s salary, “there was no significant difference in the annual salaries of directors in the two types of centers, with directors in non-profit centers being paid about \$2300 more than directors in for-profit centers” (p. 552).

In the “Reaching for the Stars” center validation study conducted by Norris, Dunn and Eckert (2003), the results of child care centers’ participation relating to program structure by auspice is given. The study indicated that of the four levels of Star status by auspice there were more for-profit facilities in Oklahoma participating in the One-Star and Two-Star program.

With supporting agencies, teachers, parents, privately owned or publicly operated, it

was the child care center director's responsibility was to ensure that the daily operations of the facility and the state initiative criteria were implemented and maintained (Mullis, et al., 2003).

#### Participation in Other Child Care Initiatives

With many states legislatures passing child care initiatives and developing policies and procedures, child care center directors may be hesitant to implement new and challenging programs. The actions require "systemically planning, implementing and evaluating strategies that impact both the organizations and individuals" (Hayden, 1999, p. 1). Therefore, for child care center directors to implement the state initiatives, there must be a benefit to the overall center and to the teachers.

North Carolina Early Childhood Initiative, referred to as Smart Start, began in 1993. Smart Start is a partnership between state government and local leaders. The goal of the program was to provide an opportunity for children to enter school healthy and ready to succeed. In order to meet the overall goal the sub-goals were:

- The quality and affordability of child care will be improved.
- Families will be more supported in their roles as the primary teachers of their children.
- Counties will make resources available to children and families.
- State and county agencies will engage in more collaborative decision-making concerning young children and their families (Bryant, et al., 1999, p. 450).

Data were collected in 1994 and 1996 to measure the quality of care by the ERS.

Center directors were interviewed to gather information regarding center characteristics and services along with a checklist of their participation in 14 Smart Start quality

enhanced activities during the previous year. The results of the study indicated an increase in child care quality from a large group of centers that participated in Smart Start quality improvement initiatives. The data also showed greater participation in different programs was “related to increase preschool classroom quality” (Bryant, et al., 1999, p. 462).

The KIDS NOW (Kentucky Invests in Developing Success) initiative was passed in 2000 to establish support for the idea that “all young children in Kentucky are healthy and safe, possess the foundation that will enable school and personal success, and live in strong families that are supported and strengthened within their community” (Kentucky Department of Education, 2005, p. 1). There were a host of proposals from the state initiative for the purpose of improving child care. The initiatives included “pre-kindergarten programs, rating systems for child care programs, professional development for child care providers, and welfare-reform related subsidies for low-income families” (Brown & Hallam, 2004, p. 20). It is important to consider the stakeholder perspectives regarding implementation of the state’s initiatives.

KIDS NOW initiative provided tuition to teachers in early childhood education that are returned to school and enrolled in nine credit hours. However, directors were faced with teachers that are non-traditional learners. Many child care teachers had very little or no exposure to the post-secondary higher education environment. As a result, many were intimidated by the process of registering for classes and feelings of insecurity in the academic arena. Some states now offer on-line classes and career-ladder classes with advisors as an option (Ackerman, 2003).

### Directors' Reaction to the Reaching for the Stars Criteria

With many states implementing quality initiative programs to improve child care, the success or failure of the program may be determined by the reaction of directors. Directors play a critical role “in determining the overall quality of a child care program” (Rafanello, 1993, p.70).

Child care centers have the option to participate in the “Reaching for the Stars” program. The results of an open-ended interview suggested that centers with high percentage of subsidy had more interest in the program (Norris, et al., 2003). The list below is a summary of the results:

- Forty-five Directors said that the higher reimbursement rates attracted their center to the Stars program.
- In contrast, two directors said that they would not participate in the stars program because they do not enroll children with DHS subsidies and therefore have no incentive to participate.
- One director commented that parents of DHS-funded children were excited about the program because they could now use better programs that previously had not accepted children with subsidies.
- In contrast, a second director noted that fee paying parents were hesitant to use a facility in which there might be high concentrations of children receiving DHS subsidies (pp. 10-11).

However, as of June 1, 2004 centers providing subsidized child care are required to be at the One-Star Plus level or higher before they are allowed to contract with DHS.

Overall, directors that were interviewed indicated that the Stars program had a positive influence. Directors responded that the program had increased the level of quality in their centers and in the state (Norris, et al., 2003).

This study examined the reactions of directors' to the quality initiative criteria based on

program involvement in other quality improvement initiatives. Some of the challenges, in the program identified by directors overall, were the difficulties in finding and retaining teachers that qualified to meet the Star criteria of Master Teacher status. Directors expressed assistance was needed to help the facilities to improve the care provided, more training options be accessible for their programs and more support and assistance from DHS staff.

### Conclusion

The importance and value of quality child care has been established in the literature review. Policymakers are sensitive to the needs of children from low-income families and the strain of parents seeking affordable quality child care. Legislatures also realize the importance of preparing children to learn with the “no child left behind” initiative (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004) and by staffing child care centers with teachers that have appropriate skills to teach and support young children in their development. As a result, many states are implementing tier quality strategies to enhance the quality of care for children.

One factor that appears to have been overlooked, as lawmakers passed the child care initiatives, was the input of the center directors. Directors are expected to be responsible for “setting the tone” (Larkin, 1999, p. 26). There is a need for research to examine the perception of the child care director since the success or failure of the program is in their hands. Current study shows both positive and negative components regarding the programs.

## Chapter III

### *Methodology*

#### *Procedure*

As part of a larger study, directors were interviewed at their center. Several questions were asked about the characteristics of the center, staff participation and state quality improvement initiatives. Directors' interviews were collected from Fall 2001 - Spring 2002 which was 3½ to 4 years after implementation of the "Reaching for the Stars" program.

At the conclusion of the interview, directors were asked open-ended questions about the "Reaching for the Stars" program. This portion of the interview was taped and transcribed by employees of the Bureau of Social Research. Directors were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. If permission to tape was denied by the director, then the interview ended.

The open-ended questions were:

- What is your reaction to the Reaching for the Stars program?
- What has contributed to your feelings about the Stars program?
- Have you chosen to participate in the Stars program? Why or Why not?
- What would make the Stars program better?
- What reactions have you had from parents about the Stars program?

In addition directors completed and mailed in a demographic survey. A total of 246

questionnaires were returned.

### *Sample*

Interview results for 277 child care center directors were analyzed for this study.

There were 237 female directors (96.3%) and 9 male directors (3.7%) with a median age range of 40-49 years. The average number of years directors had been employed at their centers was 5.6 years with a range from less than 1 and more than 33 years. The level of Education of the directors was as indicated in Table 1:

Table 1

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#### *Directors 'Level of Education*

Source of Education	N	%
High School	34	13.8%
Vocational School	27	11.0%
Some College Credit Hours	80	32.5%
Associate's Degree	28	11.4%
Bachelors Degree	51	23.1%
Graduate Degree	20	8.1%

Other results that were analyzed indicated there were 14 (5.7%) directors that were single/never married, 201 (81.7%) were married/single with partner and 31 (12.6%) were separated/divorced/widowed. Most of the directors were White 191 (77.7%), Black or African-American 28 (11.4%), American Indian 19 (7.7%), Hispanic or Latino 2 (.8%), Asian 2 (.8%), Biracial/Multiracial 1 (.4%) and other 3 (1.2%).



Of the child care center that participated 175 (63.2%) were for-profit while 79 (28.5%) were not-for-profit. The Star status of the centers was 83 (30.0%) One Star, 73 (26.4%) One Star Plus, 79 (28.5%) Two Star and 42 (15.5%) Three Star/Accredited.

### *Measures*

Creation of the initiative variable was used for directors to identify the different state improvement initiatives that had been used by employees in their centers. On the interview form, directors were asked to indicate which initiatives their staff had participated. The statewide Quality Strategies initiatives included grants, training and support projects. A participation rate for the sample has been presented in table 2.

Table 2

*Directors' Participation in Other State Initiatives*

	N	%
Grants		
Participation in DHS Quality Improvement Grants	109	39.4%
Participation in School-Age Child Care Start-up/ Expansion Grants	23	8.3%
Participation in Infant-Toddler Child Care Start-up/ Expansion Grants	33	11.9%
Participation in Special Needs Child Care Start-up/ Expansion Grants	4	1.4%
Support Project		
Participation in Accreditation Support Project	33	11.9%
Receive Scholarships from CECPD	132	47.7%
Participation in TEACH Project	152	54.5%
Participation in REWARD Supplement Program	144	52.08%
Participation in College Scholar Coordinator Services	32	11.16%
Participation in DHS Vouchers to Attend Conferences	230	83.0%
Received Training or Technical Assistance from CECPD's Registry	78	28.2%
Participation in Model Observation Site Program	38	13.7%
Training		72.6%
Participation in DHS SATURN Training	201	70.8%
Participation in Child Care Careers Courses	196	16.6%
Participation in Entry Level Child Care Training	46	49.1%
Participation in Video Leading Library at CECPD	136	47.3%
Participation in National Administrators Credential	131	40.8%
Participation in Directors Advanced Training	113	

Each initiative operated in the state at the time of the study.

In order to conduct the analysis necessary to answer the questions, a median split participation variable was created. Those participating in 0-7 initiatives were included in the lower participation group while those in the 8 or higher group participated in more initiatives.

For this study, very board detailed coding categories were created to code each response to the questions. This resulted in a very fine toned picture as to the responses given and resulted in hundreds of respond categories. For analysis purposes for the study, 8 broad themes that matched were identified with both a positive and negative response for a total of 16 variables (See Table 3). If directors made comments to a particular response then they received a score of 1 if not then a 0.

Table 3

*Directors' Responses to the Stars Initiative*

Variables	Response
Positive Quality	Benefits Children Helped parents identify quality Training helps teachers
Negative Quality	Teachers not interested Stars doesn't prove quality Staff needs more training on requirements
Positive Procedures	Advertising beneficial Sets Goals Training provides new ideas
Negative Procedures	Takes too much time Too much work Needs less paperwork
Positive Information	Licensing representative helped Information easy to follow Heard positive things
Negative Information	Not enough information Licensing representative knew nothing Confusing
Positive Money	Pay staff more Money improves quality We can offer staff incentives
Negative Money	Not enough reimbursement Centers only involved for the money Can't afford to pay staff enough to be part of Stars
Positive Impression	Improves pride Improves overall quality Better care for children
Negative Impression	Bad first impression Overwhelming They take to long going through our paperwork

*Directors' Responses to the Stars Initiative*

Variables	Responses
Positive Training	Training provides new ideas Training improves daycare High training expectations
Negative Training	No time for training Training requirements confusing Better training guidelines
Positive Education	Education shows need for quality care Education helps teachers CDA Classes helped
Negative Education	Education not necessary Money for education Meeting education requirements
Positive Participation	Benefits everyone Like being more involved Filling of accomplishment
Negative Participation	Forced to participate Difficult to obtain Do not want to participate

## Chapter IV

### *Results*

Looking at the research question number1 of the study, *it was thought to be possible that reaction to a quality improvement initiative could vary by program auspice.* The only significant (See Table 4) directors' reaction by auspice was that more positive comments about procedures were made by for profits directors (16%) than not for profit directors.

Table 4

<i>Directors' Perception of Stars by Auspices</i>				
Response Category	Profit		Non-Profit	
	N	%	N	%
Positive Quality	38	21.7%	29	28.%
Negative Quality	3	1.7%	2	2.0%
Positive Procedures	28	16.0%	8	7.8%
Negative Procedures	15	8.6%	8	7.8%
Positive Information	3	1.7%	2	2.0%
Negative Information	4	2.3%	6	5.9%
Positive Money	18	10.3%	7	6.9%
Negative Money	28	16.0%	18	17.6%
Positive Impression	1	.6%	2	2.0%
Negative Impression	9	5.1%	9	8.8%
Positive Training	28	16.0%	14	13.7%
Negative Training	32	18.3%	16	15.7%

*Directors' Perception of Stars by  
Auspices*

Response Category	Profit		Non-Profit	
	N	%	N	%
Positive Education	6	3.4%	3	2.9%
Negative Education	4	2.3%	2	2.0%
Positive Participation	9	3.2%	9	8.8%
Negative Participation	164	93.7%	92	90.2%

Looking at research question number 2 *It might be possible that programs that were already accessing other services for improving child care might respond differently to this tiered reimbursement initiative than those that have not been accessing such services* (See Table 5).

Table 5

*Directors' Perception of Stars that  
Participate in Other Initiatives*

Response Category	7 or Fewer		8 or More	
	N	%	N	%
Positive Quality	25	5.2%	42	37.5%
Negative Quality	1	.6%	3	2.7%
Positive Procedures	24	14.8%	12	10.7%
Negative Procedures	15	9.3%	7	6.3%
Positive Information	1	.6%	4	3.6%
Negative Information	8	4.9%	2	1.8%
Positive Money	13	8.0%	11	9.8%
Negative Money	25	15.4%	21	18.8%
Positive Impression	2	1.2%	1	.9%
Negative Impression	5	3.1%	13	11.6%

Positive Training	24	14.8%	18	16.1%
Negative Training	26	16.0%	20	17.9%
Positive Education	6	3.7%	3	2.7%
Negative Education	3	1.9%	3	2.7%
Positive Participation	10	6.2%	8	7.1%
Negative Participation	148	91.4%	106	94.6%

The only significant difference between directors' perception of Stars was that more positive comments about quality were made by directors that participated in 8 or more state initiatives (37.5%) than directors' that participated in 7 or fewer initiatives (15.2%).



## Chapter V

### Discussion of Results

The results of this study showed the importance of quality child care during the early years of a child's development. In order to offer affordable quality child care, many states have implemented tier quality strategies to meet the goal.

This study looked at the responses of 277 directors to the Stars initiative by comparing profit/non-profit child care centers. Of the study's 16 variables, for profit centers responded at a higher percentage to the interview questions than the non-profit. This may indicate that for-profit centers respond to the many benefits offered by the Stars program with training/educating staff, increase in subsidy funds and the overall improvement of quality. The indication of positive participation response both profit/non-profit showed a low number of responses. However, the responses for negative participation were the highest percentage than any other variable. This may be the result of center directors' perception of being forced to participate in the program. With the implementation of new DHS policy, centers can no longer contract with DHS unless they are at least a One Star Plus. This has left many directors feeling the pressure of participation. There were exceptions to the change in policy for centers located in rural areas where child care was limited. Based on negative quality, the percentages for profit/non-profit indicated a small difference.

A larger percentage of center directors that participated in 8 or more state initiatives

indicated that Stars had improved quality than directors that participated in 7 or less. The percentages were about equal in looking at the directors' perception of Stars regarding positive/negative training. The directors' were aware of the need for training but may feel that the time to do it, while maintaining proper child/staff ration, was a dilemma. However, when looking at directors' participation in other state initiatives, training initiatives such as Child Care Careers Courses, DHS Saturn Training and the Video Leading Library at CECPD had most of the highest percentage than the other initiatives. But, the highest percentage was the support project participation in DHS vouchers to attend conferences. With many conferences being offered on Saturdays, the need for directors' concern about maintaining child/staff ratio has been eliminated, registration cost is affordable, with the vouchers, and the staff can acquire the required training.

The directors' willingness to participate in the initiative determined the success or failure of the Stars program. With directors being the gatekeepers of child care centers, it is important to research their perception. It is essential to encourage directors to attend focus groups and public hearings when state officials are seeking information regarding child care state initiatives.

#### Recommendation of Future Research

There was a limited amount of research conducted on child care center directors' perceptions of their center's program. There was a very limited amount of research on directors' perception on implemented state initiatives. Most of the studies were on the topic of caregiver and parent perceptions. The director was seldom included in these

studies.

The implementation of the Stars program may be determined by how directors view the initiative, which can impact the overall quality of a center. This study showed a higher percentage of negative participation from directors regarding the Stars program. This researcher believes that many directors do not understand the purpose of the initiative. The directors also face the fear of not being able to achieve and maintain their Star level. One-on-one support and assisting with the application process will help to improve directors' perception regarding the program. Future research should be conducted after a time span to study the attitudes' of directors after receiving personal assistance.

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*ABSTRACT:* With the nation's focus to improve early care and education, many states have developed quality initiatives programs. Oklahoma's "Reaching for the Stars" program was implemented to offer affordable quality child care to young children and their families. Characteristics of quality associated with child care, for the purpose of this study, were determined by Teacher's Education/Training, Parent Involvement, Teacher's Salaries, Learning Environment and the Environmental Rating Scale. These are components in meeting criteria for the Stars program. A look at profit and non-profit centers were compared as they participate in the Stars program as well as directors' reaction to other state initiatives. Data were collected by an interview conducted with 277 child care center directors.

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