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Targeted-Approach to State ECE Program Monitoring Systems

BLOG POST



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For most adults, Labor Day marks the end of the summer months, but for educators and children, it marks the beginning of a new school year. My godson, Christopher, will begin his very first school experience at three-years-old thanks to New York City's universal pre-K program. He is so excited for school and is beginning to talk about it frequently.

When a child first starts school families have a mixture of excitement and anxiety. Our family is no different. The start of the school year can be daunting, particularly if your child is attending school for the very first time. All over the country, families entrust teachers and administrators with their children, expecting that they will receive the safest and best education possible. The same is true for families sending children to center- or home-based early learning programs.

To ensure children's well-being state regulators and the federal government monitor programs serving young children in school- or center-based early learning environments as well as in family child care homes. Monitoring systems maintain and raise the quality of education and care in all settings. In addition to government monitoring, national organizations, like the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association for Family Child Care Homes (NAFCC), accredit programs, assuring families that their children are in safe, high-quality environments.

Monitoring is an essential component to any successful early care and education system. The passing of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014 has raised the overall quality of monitoring nationwide. Now, all programs that receive funding from CCDBG must have at least one annual inspection, and all individuals that provide care for children must undergo background checks. In a blog post last year, my colleague Clare McCann [discussed](#) the importance of these changes to the law in greater detail.

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One approach that HHS and ACF highlight in the report is the use of differential monitoring. This monitoring philosophy focuses on improving the quality of programs that have failed to comply with some standards and regulations. In this system, providers with a history of non-compliance would have more frequent unannounced and announced on-site inspections. Conversely, early learning program providers that have a history of complying with safety and care regulations would receive less frequent inspections.

Richard Fiene, a researcher at Penn State University, has been [studying](#) the use of the differential monitoring approach and has found that using a risk-assessment that evaluates programs across key indicators can allow states to target technical assistance resources. Kansas, Washington, California, and Illinois are examples of states currently using or developing a differential monitoring system approach using a risk assessment to identify programs in most need of immediate improvement. The ACF report states the benefits of this approach include targeted inspections and technical assistance, reduction in administrative burden for compliant providers, a better protected and more efficient system for children in all settings, and the ability to continue to monitor programs effectively even with reductions in resources.

For instance, in Illinois, the Division of Licensing and Monitoring at the state's Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is working with Feine to develop a key indicator approach that analyzes risk to children's safety, development, and health. Currently, every licensed provider in Illinois receives an annual, unannounced, comprehensive inspection. The weighted indicator system will enable DCFS to focus on the most serious violations with in-depth monitoring and allow providers with few or no compliance issues to receive a streamlined inspection.

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toddlers' first experience outside of their care.

Look out for future posts on the best practices for state early care and education monitoring systems."

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