

# PROOF POINTS

## How the ExceleRate™ Pilot is Strategically Funding Quality Improvement in Early Learning in Illinois



### The Research

Early learning and development programs play a pivotal role in giving young children the best start in life. Decades of research suggest that to improve these programs, we need to invest in continuing education, curriculum assistance, and reflective practice for teachers and assistants. Additionally, we need more focus on providing these professionals with the compensation they deserve.

### The Problem

Most attempts to improve the quality of early education and care fail because 1) programs are too short-staffed to allow teachers adequate support, professional development, and out-of-classroom planning time, and 2) programs experience very high staff turnover largely due to low compensation. This leads to a year-over-year trend in program stagnation.

### The Solution

New, targeted funding approaches are needed to support quality improvement and teacher compensation. The State of Illinois developed the ExceleRate Pilot to set up child care centers and early education programs statewide with more ideal conditions to produce better outcomes for children.



### HOW IT WORKS

Programs receive targeted funding to support additional staff to cover release time for teachers to plan and reflect. Staff turnover is addressed through wage supplements that allow programs to meet or exceed a model wage scale for staff that rewards the attainment of higher credentials and is competitive within the overall labor market.

### WAYS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES



#### Continuing Education

Building greater knowledge of child development and pedagogy



#### Curriculum Assistance

Providing concentrated time to focus on planning



#### Stable Staffing

Providing higher compensation to reduce turnover

## The Results

Data is extremely encouraging from the first two years of the ExceleRate Pilot. Among the 34 participating programs statewide, more than 100 new staff were hired with a marked increase in the number of staff attaining higher-level credentials.

Most importantly, center directors found that the ability to meet the new wage scale greatly improved their ability to 1) recruit and retain well-qualified staff, and 2) motivate existing staff to enroll in college courses.

"This salary scale and the assistance to pay people more through the pilot has been a complete game changer as far as hiring. We are now able to grow our own teachers and our current staff is very motivated to further their training and education. It has been such a gift. I hope it can continue."

– Jill Andrews, Center Director

## The Lessons

This work proves the value of investing up front in compensation and funds for additional staffing, rather than only rewarding quality improvement once in place. Additionally, continued refinement has been key to the ExceleRate Pilot's success. When the state grant process became too cumbersome for many of these small centers, a streamlined contract was developed to pay fixed per-hour wage supplements tied to each staff member's credentials. Programs submit payroll reports to demonstrate compliance with the required wage scale.



### WHAT THIS MEANS

The ExceleRate Pilot shows the power of a "funding first" approach to supporting quality improvement. Other states and communities can experiment with new grant and contract structures that pair quality supports like coaching with the financial resources programs need to stabilize staffing, incentivize higher credentials, and implement reflective practice.

### DATA AT-A-GLANCE



**15%**

increase in  
total staff

100 new hires during a time of severe staff shortages in child care statewide



**30%**

increase in staff  
attaining credentials

including 52 assistants who secured teacher qualifications

Want to learn more? Let's talk.  
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