



Evaluation of Minnesota's Infant Toddler Specialist Network



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Overview

The Minnesota Department of Human Services has allocated resources to develop an Infant Toddler Specialist Network (ITSN) within the state to support licensed child care providers. The intent of the network is to provide relationship-based coaching, technical assistance, and consultation to licensed child care providers who want to enhance and improve their knowledge of and skills with high quality services for infants and toddlers. The Center for Inclusive Child Care (CICC) at Concordia University—St. Paul is charged with leading these efforts and has hired experienced coaches to work with child care providers to meet the goals of the network.

The intent of this evaluation is to: 1) determine what components of the Infant Toddler Specialist Network programming support meeting the identified outcomes; 2) determine what components of the programming inhibit the fidelity of implementation; 3) identify any potential gaps in information, services, and supports; 4) describe the lessons learned from both the network and the field; and 5) scale-up this system so that it is eventually available for all child care providers throughout the state.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation questions are as follows:

1. To what extent are Infant Toddler Specialists (ITS) implementing the goals of the network?
2. To what extent does the quality of care and education improve for infants and toddlers?
3. To what extent does knowledge of infant toddler competencies improve for providers, teachers, and directors?
4. To what extent are collaborations developed and/or improved between childcare and community partners?

Methodology

This evaluation is using a mixed methods approach. Coaches complete a pre- and post-survey about their knowledge and coaching skills each year. Child care providers complete a pre- and post-survey during the time they receive coaching. Year 1 interviews have been conducted with all coaches. Near the end of Year 1, a representative sample of child care providers and CICC personnel will also be interviewed.

Coaches complete an end-of-event survey for each professional development activities they attend, including once-per-quarter, in-person training, monthly webinars with their project coordinator, and monthly reflective practice sessions they have with a licensed clinical social worker endorsed at Level IV in infant and early childhood mental health through the MN Association of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health.

Social network analysis will be conducted in Year 2 of the project.

Participants

The program started with 12 ITSN coaches. The coaches are all women, one of whom identified herself as Latina. The average age of the coaches is 53 years old, with a range from 34-70 years old. Seven coaches reported having a post-graduate degree, four have a bachelor's degree, and one has an associate's degree.

The coaches have, on average, worked in the field of child care for more than 19 years; however, half of the coaches reported that they have been coaching in the child care field for less than one year.

Additional coaches are being hired as the need for coaching increases. These coaches will be included in the future data collection activities.

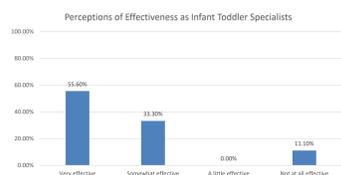
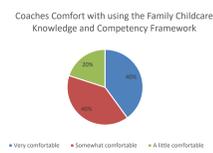
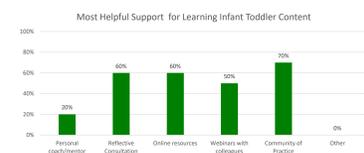
Analysis and Results

Quantitative Data Analysis

Survey results were analyzed using MS Excel and SPSS. Descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, percentages, means, etc.) were primarily used.

Overall, the coaches reported receiving training on multiple infant toddler content areas and felt that their knowledge of infant toddler content was above average. The coaches also reported feeling effective in their role as an Infant Toddler Specialist. The coaches stated that they want additional training in trauma-informed care, infant toddler development, developmentally-appropriate practices, and referral to early intervention.

The majority of coaches perceived their coaching skills as proficient, while still recognizing the need to enhance their skills in cultural competency and active listening. The coaches also reported feeling confident in their ability to share infant toddler content with child care providers. The coaches reported that they felt somewhat or very comfortable using the Minnesota Knowledge and Competency Frameworks in their coaching practice. Finally, the coaches stated that cultural responsiveness and trauma-informed care were most challenging for child care providers to implement. All coaches identified coaching as the best method for supporting child care providers with implementing high quality practices.



Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed for themes, using NVivo.

Several themes emerged from the interviews. All coaches were able to describe relationship-based professional development and how they use it in their work with child care providers. The coaches also provided details regarding their coaching process, including initial contact, how they work with the providers, and how they typically follow-up. Most often, coaches call the provider as their first point of contact. Once onsite, the coaches meet with the providers to discuss needs for support, conduct observations, and provide feedback. All coaches stated that they begin their coaching by pointing out what the providers are doing well. Typical requests for support include social emotional development, environmental issues, and safe sleep practices. Coaches reported feeling competent to provide the support that is being requested of them.

All of the coaches reported how beneficial the reflective practice sessions are to their work. They want to hear how other coaches are handling situations that arise in their work, as well as process their own emotions about the work.

When asked about additional support needs, the coaches identified mentorship of new coaches, including sharing concrete examples of how coaches approach the work. All coaches reported that CICC personnel were extremely supportive and non-judgmental in their guidance.

The coaches reported that meeting a provider where they are, active listening, asking open-ended questions, and building trusting, collaborative relationships are the most effective skills. When asked what was the most important part of the coaching process, all coaches identified the relationship that gets developed between the coach and the provider. They recognize that having a trusting relationship is the only way to facilitate long-term change.

Discussion

The quantitative data provide insight into the early work of the ITSN coaches, their current level of knowledge, their self-perceptions about their coaching skills, and their perceptions of the child care providers with whom they work. The coaches are well-educated and report high levels of infant toddler knowledge, while simultaneously recognizing the need for additional supports in knowledge and practice. The qualitative data support the quantitative results and provide additional insight into what coaches believe to be working and where there are needs for changes and/or additional supports. These data can be used to enhance and modify existing professional development and supports for coaches, as well as develop new methods for ensuring that the ITSN coaches are executing their roles with fidelity.

Pre-survey data will be combined with post-survey data in the future to determine any change in coaches' knowledge, attitudes, and skills over the first year of the grant period. Pre- and post-survey data from the child care providers receiving coaching will also be collected. Coaches will be interviewed in Year 2 of the grant and complete another post-survey near the end of that year. At the end of both Year 1 and Year 2, data from coaches and providers will be analyzed for similarities and differences.

Results from this report should be viewed with caution, as all data are self-reported and there are only 12 coaches participating in this work at this time.