



Why Study Child Care Collaboration?

Collaborations between child care and other early care and education programs have the potential of helping partners more efficiently and seamlessly support children and families.

Child care collaborations can offer parents full-time,

accessible care for their children while the parents work or attend school. And, through collaborations, child care providers can offer education and comprehensive services to children. To better understand collaboration, we conducted research in Maryland and Vermont. This brief summarizes what we learned.

What Barriers Prevent Providers From Collaborating?

Our qualitative analysis of open-ended survey questions and interviews with providers highlighted the reasons why providers do *not* participate in collaborations (for example, with federally funded initiatives, professional associations, or organizations that provide resources and workshops).

Lack of Time. About half of all respondents reported that they required more free time in order to collaborate. Although these organizations and initiatives are designed to support child care providers and simplify and streamline some requirements, finding the initial start-up time can be difficult. One family child care provider spoke for many with her response that, *“We have to be open in order to attend to the needs of our clients – most of us cannot afford to close our door for the day to attend a seminar, meeting, or training.”*

Lack of Funding. Related to the lack of time is the lack of any funding to cover costs related to collaboration. A center director explained something that others reported, *“As this is a profession with virtually no ‘financial fat’ the availability of ‘extra’ staff to allow for collaboration time may not even exist in many/most small programs.”* Other providers cited the lack of money to pay for travel, course fees, and child care for their own children.

Lack of Awareness. A small number of providers responded that they simply did not know about opportunities to collaborate. For some, this was due to information overload, illustrated by a provider who admitted she does not always open the email because it feels like *“one more thing”* to do. Another interview subject explained that she originally ignored information about her state’s quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), but a persistent individual from a state organization helped her through the first steps.

Lack of Status. Family child care providers shared that collaboration efforts seem to be geared toward school-based providers. Different types of providers (center-based, family child care, school-based) adhere to different regulations. The time and effort needed to meet another set of standards—in order to collaborate—is not an option for all providers. This difference can leave center-based and family child care providers feeling *“powerless”* or like there is *“an uneven playing field.”*

What Would Lead to More Collaboration? Providers suggested strategies to increase collaboration. Many indicated they would happily participate if they had more time. Time could be in the form of paid time off (extremely difficult for family child care providers who own their own business), opportunities to meet online during non-traditional hours, or more weekend meetings.

Others suggested that receiving Professional Development Credits would make them more likely to engage. Immediate, concrete benefits like sharing resources among providers may also lead to ongoing collaborative relationships. Finally, monetary incentives are important in a field that is too often underpaid.

Next Steps. Research that includes the perspective of child care providers can lead to policies that address key areas of need. For example, required professional development can be offered at multiple times, locations, and/or online. Acknowledging the different barriers faced by family child care providers or centers in rural areas will broaden the reach of new initiatives or opportunities. Child care providers, like any professionals, want their experiences reflected in policy decisions.

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