

Capital Quality Offers Opportunities for Professional Development and Peer Learning

Insights from Child Care Providers in the District of Columbia

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KEY FINDINGS

Most child care providers in our study reported **improving the quality of their programs as a top reason for participating in Capital Quality.**

Many of the providers in our study said they believe **Capital Quality is important for achieving program quality-improvement goals.**

A sizable share (about 40 percent) of providers said participation in Capital Quality **is important for their own professional development.**

Participating child care providers reported applying what they gained from peer learning and professional development opportunities to their programs. Several noted they **enhanced their family engagement practices, used curriculum to support child growth and development, and used screenings to identify opportunities for early intervention.**

Child care quality matters for young children's learning and development and for parents engaged in work and school activities. Families depend on finding safe, stable, and stimulating care that can meet their needs. To increase the quality of its licensed child care programs, the District of Columbia implemented a new quality-rating and quality-improvement system, Capital Quality, District wide in 2018. Capital Quality offers various professional development supports to directors of child care facilities and family child care providers. To understand child care providers' perspectives on Capital Quality, a research team at the Urban Institute conducted qualitative phone interviews with 36 child care providers and collected survey data from a subsample of these study participants. The providers shared perspectives about different aspects of Capital Quality, including their thoughts about the professional development and peer learning opportunities they had engaged in.

In this summary, we begin with a short description of the professional development opportunities Capital Quality provides. We then present findings from child care providers about the benefits they gained from the professional development and peer learning experiences. We conclude with their recommendations for improving Capital Quality professional development.

WHAT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES DOES CAPITAL QUALITY OFFER?

Capital Quality offers professional development opportunities to child care providers with the aim of supporting quality improvement, including

- coaching from a quality facilitator with expertise in early care and education (see accompanying summary listed under "Additional Reading" for more information),
- in-person and virtual learning on topics ranging from curriculum to business practices,
- formal instruction,
- peer sharing through monthly meetings of communities of practice,
- and informal peer sharing.

WHAT DO CHILD CARE PROVIDERS SAY ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF CAPITAL QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

Providers reported that they gained new knowledge from their participation in professional development and peer learning. Specifically, they learned how to do the following:

- **Engage with their peers, community members, and professional development providers to learn from one another.** Child care providers said they benefited from learning alongside their peers and being able to form a community. Several noted the facilitated conversations helped them feel less isolated and grow personally and professionally.
- **Develop specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals to guide quality improvement.** Several providers reported working with their coaches to develop these goals and adjust them over time based on achievements and new knowledge.
- **Prepare for observations and use ratings to improve quality.** Some professional development focuses on helping providers prepare for observations. Several study participants reported learning about the importance of routines and other components of observations, such as how to arrange rooms to support child development.
- **Engage families and community members.** Some study participants reported they learned how to better engage families and learned about resources available to families and community members.
- **Implement curriculum and develop tailored lesson plans.** Several study participants reported they learned how to implement an evidence-based curriculum to support children's growth and development. Some reported tailoring lesson plans to support children's socioemotional, gross motor, and cognitive development. Several providers said they learned how to incorporate science and math concepts into their lessons to encourage children to learn about science through play.
- **Communicate effectively with teaching staff and support their growth and development.** Several providers reported they learned how to effectively support their teaching staff. Some said they either directly trained their staff or asked the quality facilitator to provide professional development to their staff.
- **Administer early childhood screenings.** Some study participants reported learning about the components of specific screening tools, such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaires, which are used to measure developmental progress in children between the ages of one month and five-and-a-half years.

DC Child Care Providers Reflect on How Capital Quality Professional Development Helped Them

Learning from peers and local experts. *"We get to ask questions and compare what goes on within our facility with other providers, which is great because a lot of the time you think you're the only one going through something, and then you find out it's not just you."*

Strengthening community partnerships. *"Well, for a couple of my partners, it's being able to extend or learn of community resources that are available to families. To be able to cotrain with other center staff. We hosted leader trainings here, and I was able to invite staff from neighboring centers to participate. With another center down the road, they had resources for families that are regularly available every single month that I had no idea about. I was able to extend that resource and have somebody come on site to explain to our families the resources that are there but are available to them as well. That is a great partnership that we have."*

Improving staff motivation and engagement.

"I immediately saw improvement in the way we were engaging our students, the way our classroom looked, the quality of instruction, the patience the teacher exhibited. I saw improvements in communication, how the teachers were talking and communicating with the kids and with the parents and how they were communicating with each other. I saw this increase in interest in professional development. It was no longer about, 'Oh, let me just rush through these trainings and get these CEUs [continuing education credits].' It was more about, 'Let me find out how I can do my job better.'"

WHAT DO CARE PROVIDERS RECOMMEND FOR IMPROVING CAPITAL QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

- **Account for child care providers' needs to balance time spent on training with maintaining staffing requirements.** Participation in Capital Quality takes time, and many facilities face staffing shortages. Several study participants reported that attending training while leaving their programs understaffed was difficult. Some providers said virtual professional development opportunities offered during the pandemic allowed them to attend training while remaining at their facilities, which reduced their total time out of the office. However, some mentioned that while in virtual training, they are focused on the training content and not the children in their care, which is problematic.
- **Provide additional supports for program leaders to pass along knowledge to program staff.** Several providers mentioned they tried to pass on the knowledge they gained to their staff, but they did not have enough time to communicate it fully. Additional supports focused on leaders could address this challenge.
- **Better align expectations for Capital Quality participation with child care licensing and other quality initiatives.** Several providers expressed frustration at the lack of alignment and the redundancies between Capital Quality, child care licensing, and other quality improvement efforts, including the District's Quality Improvement Network (QIN) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children accreditation, which many facilities choose to maintain. Participants shared that following multiple sets of standards simultaneously was challenging, especially when the standards were contradictory. Identifying and offering solutions to conflicts like this and streamlining the documentation required across systems, among other strategies, can help providers efficiently meet the range of standards across initiatives.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE, AND RESEARCH

Based on an analysis of the data collected from the child care providers in our study, we find the following could improve Capital Quality's professional development programming:

- **Provide tailored trainings and resources to support advances in instructional and caregiving activities.** Study participants reported some benefits of existing opportunities but recommended tailoring coaching and training to meet their knowledge and experience and their facilities' needs. Several reported a lack of professional development opportunities designed for experienced providers, whereas others reported that the entry-level courses they needed were often filled before they could sign up.
- **Make it easier to attend trainings.** At the time of data collection, providers said offering more trainings during the evenings and online could make attending less burdensome for them. Currently, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education is offering more online trainings. Also, at the time of data collection, several providers similarly recommended that streamlining Capital Quality and QIN trainings to make them less duplicative for providers participating in both would make more efficient use of their time. Since then, monthly coordination meetings between Capital Quality and QIN have been reinstated to reduce duplication.
- **Consider compensating providers for time spent on professional development and related quality-improvement activities.** Study participants reported that they were stressed by balancing work, family

responsibilities, and ongoing professional development activities but valued the professional development. Compensating providers for time devoted to professional development and related quality-improvement activities would reflect the value of these Capital Quality components.

- **Conduct follow-up research to learn if the benefits of professional development are sustained.** Findings from additional research and evaluation could identify whether Capital Quality is improving care quality and inform improvements in the professional development it offers.

ADDITIONAL READING

Child Care Providers' Reflections on Quality Improvement (full report)

Diane Schilder, Heather Sandstrom, Eleanor Lauderback, Catherine Kuhns, Natalie Spievack, Erica Greenberg, and Peter Willenborg <https://urbn.is/3O3MB6k>

Capital Quality Offers Individualized Coaching to Support Quality Improvement (summary)

Eleanor Lauderback, Diane Schilder, Heather Sandstrom, and Catherine Kuhns <https://urbn.is/3Qx1rEv>

Reflections on Capital Quality during the COVID-19 Pandemic (summary)

Catherine Kuhns, Diane Schilder, Heather Sandstrom, and Eleanor Lauderback <https://urbn.is/3QplPq2>