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ARTICLES

The Strengthening Families Initiative and Child Care Quality Improvement: How Strengthening Families Influenced Change in Child Care Programs in One State

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Abstract

Research Findings: This study investigated how the Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education initiative in Illinois (SFI) influenced change in 4 child care programs. Findings indicate that SFI influenced quality improvements through 4

primary pathways: (a) Learning Networks, (b) the quality of training, (c) the engagement of program directors, and (e) the organizational climate at programs. SFI's

multilevel model of implementation was key to its effectiveness. Two barriers to improving family partnership practices were identified: lack of cultural competence and a negative organizational climate. *Practice or Policy:* First, quality improvement and professional development efforts are likely to be more effective in promoting real change when they target multiple levels of the context in and around child care programs. SFI's multilevel implementation approach is a model. Second, quality improvement efforts in the area of family engagement may be more effective when specific attention is given to strategies for creating a supportive organizational climate and collegial relationships among staff. Relationships within programs set the tone for relationships with families. Third, cultural competence requires increased attention to efforts to improve the quality of family partnership practices. A focus on organizational cultural competence may provide the workplace environment necessary to support culturally competent practice among program staff.

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