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SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Report on the Second Round of the Quality Child Care Initiative (QCCI)

Final Report

Chapter 6. QCCI Support for the Development of Centralized Eligibility Lists

This file contains Chapter 6 of the full report. The complete text of the report and an *Executive Summary* are posted on the web site of Action Alliance for Children at www.4children.org/QCCI.htm.

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VI. QCCI SUPPORT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CENTRALIZED ELIGIBILITY LISTS

INTRODUCTION

Centralized Eligibility Lists (CELs) are designed to: (1) simplify parental access to public child care subsidies, and (2) coordinate information about the supply and demand for subsidized child care. By simplifying the process of linking families to available subsidized child care slots, CELs are intended to benefit families seeking subsidized care, child care providers, and child care planners. Having a CEL in place enables parents to sign up for all child care subsidy programs at one time without the burden of having to fill out multiple applications at multiple sites. For providers, CELs are expected to increase the efficiency and reduce the administrative burden of filling available subsidized slots. For child care planners, the data collected by CELs are expected to provide information about the number of low-income households that need financial assistance to help pay for child care and the types of care most often needed. This information should be valuable to policy makers, planners, and advocates interested in setting the level of public child care subsidies, establishing eligibility for subsidies, and allocating subsidy dollars among different child care program types.

At the time that QCCI was taking shape, many counties had become interested in planning CELs. CELs were viewed as desirable both because of the increased demand for child care created by welfare reform and because of a new state legislative mandate that local child care planning councils consolidate local child care waiting lists. Because of the comprehensive nature of CELs, these local planning efforts strove to involve all members of the child care community, including representatives of parents, providers, child care planners, and resource and referral agencies.

QCCI first became involved in supporting CEL planning early in its first round of grantmaking. Among the early “linkage” grants awarded by QCCI in September 1998 were grants to organizations in three counties to bring together local child care planners and providers to begin developing

QCCI’s CEL Project was designed to help individual counties implement CELs as well as to convince state-level policymakers of the importance of CELs.

CELs. After recognizing the similarities between their individual planning concerns and learning experiences, the initial three QCCI grantees funded to develop CELs encouraged QCCI to support coordination of county CELs as an ongoing project. The resulting QCCI CEL Project—which is the subject of this chapter—was designed to: (1) help individual counties implement CELs as well as (2) bring the importance of CELs to the attention of state-level policy makers and administrators in the state of California.

One important goal of QCCI’s CEL Project was to assist the state in assuming a leadership role in guiding, supporting, and coordinating county-level CEL implementation. Through its early support of CEL research and planning, and its continued support of this project, QCCI has demonstrated that philanthropy can serve as a catalyst for state-level initiatives and can promote change in state policies.

SUPPORT FOR THE CEL PROJECT DURING THE FIRST ROUND OF QCCI

During its first round of grantmaking, QCCI contributed to the CEL Project in several distinct ways, including:

- Providing funds to support early CEL planning efforts in individual counties.
- Developing state-level leadership for the project by forming a State CEL Task Force and encouraging the state agencies to play a strong role in guiding, funding, and coordinating the counties’ CEL efforts.
- Facilitating agreements on core data items for CELs and encouraging private technology vendors to include these core data elements in the information systems they have developed for use by counties.
- Facilitating information sharing and networking between and among individual counties at different stages of CEL planning and implementation.

Supporting Early CEL Planning Efforts in Individual Counties

QCCI began its involvement in CELs by supporting individual county planning efforts through “Fast Track” grants. When QCCI subsequently announced the availability of competitive grants in its first RFP for child care-

related projects, several Bay Area counties had already begun work on their plans to develop CELs. Counties saw an opportunity through QCCI funding to ease the financial burden of meeting the state's requirement that each county consolidate its waiting lists for subsidized child care. Organizations in three counties—**Alameda County Child Care Planning Council**, **Community Action Marin**, and **Wu Yee Children's Services** in San Francisco—requested and received competitive grants from QCCI to help support their CEL planning efforts.

Shortly after the initial grants were awarded, these three counties encouraged QCCI to act as a catalyst for CEL planning by convening all Bay Area counties interested in CEL development. In December 1998, QCCI convened 26 representatives of child care organizations from eight Bay Area counties, as well as representatives from the California Department of Education, Child Development Division and the California Department of Social Services, to discuss issues involved in developing CELs. Attendees at this regional forum discussed: (1) the benefit of convening groups of counties to share information about CEL planning at the county level, (2) the need to get all counties to commit to developing CEL information systems built around a standardized set of data elements,¹ and (3) the importance of getting the state interested in supporting the development of CELs throughout California.

Attendees at the first Bay Area regional convening acknowledged that it would also be beneficial to bring together CEL planners in other regions of the state. To allow the emerging QCCI CEL Project to take on a statewide focus, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation provided funds to support regional meetings of CEL planners in other geographic regions of the state.

Developing State Level Leadership

To foster state-level guidance and leadership for the CEL Project, QCCI offered to facilitate a strategic planning process involving key state stakeholders. To secure input from stakeholders, QCCI invited

¹ Standardization of CEL data items would allow child care planners and advocates to aggregate county-level CEL data to assess the level and nature of the demand for child care subsidies throughout the state.

representatives of key groups to participate in an interagency state-level CEL Task Force, jointly sponsored by QCCI and the State of California. The CEL Task Force had representation from interested counties, state agencies, and state-wide membership groups involved in child care issues, including but not limited to the California Alternative Payment Program Association, the California Child Development Administrators' Association, county welfare agencies, California Head Start Association, and the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network.

Respondents indicated that the QCCI Director was able to play a key role in the successful formation of the CEL Task Force because of her stature as an established stakeholder in the child care community who could bring together others concerned with child care. State agencies welcomed QCCI as a player because of its ability to create an atmosphere conducive to collaborative decision making. According to one state level respondent, the QCCI Director was able to establish a feeling of collaboration; the meetings she convened were always regarded as a time when work would get done. At a time when there was very little state staff available to support the development of the CEL Task Force, QCCI acted as the "driving force" to ensure state involvement in CEL issues and keep CELs on the state agenda.

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These efforts bore fruit in October 2000, when the Child Development Division of the California Department of Education announced the availability of \$1.35 million in one-time state funding to support a Centralized Eligibility List Pilot Project. The establishment of a state CEL Pilot Project at the initiative of the Governor was a notable accomplishment that denoted: (1) the engagement of the State Department of Education in the CEL development process, (2) the Governor's interest in using CEL data to support fiscal planning in the child care field, and (3) an expectation that, if individual county CELs were shown by the pilot to be feasible and effective, the state might provide expanded funding in the future to implement a statewide CEL system.

The state invited local child care planning councils to apply for pilot funds to (a) start-up or (b) maintain, improve, or expand a local CEL. Simultaneously with the commitment of state funding to support ten CEL

pilot counties, staff of the Child Development Division within the California Department of Education started assuming much of the responsibility for administering the CEL Pilot Project. The QCCI role gradually “faded” as the state administration of the Pilot Project grew. However, QCCI continued to play a unique role in sharing information with counties not participating in the state CEL Pilot Project and helping to coordinate the interests of state agencies, local child care planning councils, and child care stakeholder organizations in the further development of CELs. It also continued to play a role in helping to disseminate information about effective CEL designs and practices.

Facilitating Data Agreements and Encouraging Involvement of Technology Vendors

QCCI played an important role in facilitating agreements about standard data elements to be used by individual CEL systems. The regional meetings of CEL planners convened by QCCI in the spring of 1999 provided initial forums at which CEL planners agreed on standardized data collection procedures. Once CEL planners had agreed on a set of standardized data elements, QCCI also worked with state-level stakeholders to negotiate agreements on the standardized data elements. Finalizing the standardized data elements was seen by members of the Task Force and the counties as a significant achievement that was subsequently approved by the Deputy Superintendent of the Child Youth and Family Services Branch of the California Department of Education.

QCCI also worked with potential technology vendors to ensure that the standardized data elements would be incorporated into software products developed for use by counties operating CELs. Because of QCCI’s preliminary footwork and persistence, the state will be able to aggregate the most important information (i.e., the standard data elements) from multiple counties and develop regional and state-level estimates of the unmet demand for subsidized child care.

Facilitating Information Sharing and Networking Among Counties

The QCCI CEL Project has played an important role in promoting peer to peer information sharing among counties that are planning or

Because of QCCI’s preliminary work on standardized CEL data elements, the state will be able to aggregate important data across counties’ individual CEL systems.

implementing CELs. In carrying out this role, QCCI has sponsored periodic regional meetings of CEL planners and managers and developed an initial web site on the CEL project to disseminate available information about county progress.

Sponsoring Regional Meetings of CEL Managers

During its first round of grantmaking, QCCI sponsored two rounds of regional meetings of potential county CEL planners to enable them to: 1) learn from one another, 2) inform QCCI and the state of their technical assistance needs, 3) learn about successful CEL models, and 4) discuss statewide compatibility issues within the context of local flexibility and control.

An initial round of regional meetings was held between October 1999 and February 2000. At these meetings, QCCI presented information about the identified successful CEL models in California and other states, and helped counties discuss and negotiate agreements about standardized data items. According to meeting attendees, these meetings were effective in creating “buy in” and overcoming resistance to the CEL concept among counties that had previously been skeptical about whether such a tool could be useful in their local area.

The QCCI CEL Project sponsored a second round of regional meetings between March and May 2001. This second round of meetings once again provided local CEL planners the opportunity to learn from each other and share information and experiences. At this meeting, a representative from the California Department of Education, Child Development Division provided information about the state’s CEL Pilot Project funding in ten counties. Vendors that had created CEL programs provided information about CEL software program capabilities and other technology issues.

According to one CEL Task Force member, QCCI’s continued involvement in hosting regional meetings kept up the momentum of CEL planning and reminded attendees of the overarching vision of improved information on household needs and improved allocation of child care subsidies. As a result of these meetings, counties were able to express

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concerns and celebrate accomplishments. The second round of QCCI-sponsored regional meetings also provided an opportunity to bring the pilot and non-pilot counties together to bridge their varying experiences and progress in creating a CEL. QCCI saw that a link needed to be created early on in the learning process to promote peer learning between the pilot and non-pilot counties. While the state has funded and is administering the CEL Pilot Project, it has done little to keep non-pilot counties involved. Through the spring of 2001, the QCCI CEL project continued to play an important role in keeping non-pilot counties informed and involved in CEL implementation issues.

Sponsoring a Web Page to Disseminate Information to All Counties

To accomplish its goal of encouraging communication on CEL planning efforts, the QCCI CEL project also developed a web page (www.celproject.org) dedicated to disseminating information across the state. This effort by QCCI helped to keep all counties (i.e., not just pilot counties) abreast of new developments in CEL design and implementation. The site provides a summary report on the development of CELs. It also provides an overview of the CEL Pilot Project, information about regional meetings and events, links and contact information for key CEL planners/managers in the fifty-eight California counties, a directory of vendors providing CEL software packages, a list and explanation of the CEL Standard Data Elements, and links to many useful child care resources.

CONTINUATION OF QCCI SUPPORT FOR THE CEL PROJECT DURING ROUND 2

With the implementation of the CEL Pilot Project by the State of California during 2001, much of the day-to-day leadership of the CEL initiative transferred to the public sector—specifically to staff within the Department of Education’s Child Development Division. However, QCCI continued to play an important supporting role in facilitating meetings of the state’s CEL Task Force and supporting networking on CEL design and implementation issues among all counties in the state.

QCCI’s regional CEL meetings sustained the momentum of CEL planning and reminded attendees of the overarching vision and benefits of CELs.

In the fall of 2002, after the state-funded CEL Pilot Project had been underway for a year, QCCI organized and co-sponsored a third round of regional meetings of CEL planners and managers from counties throughout the state. Topics discussed at this round of meetings included strategies for securing future funding for continued CEL implementation in the pilot counties and expansion of CELs to additional, non-pilot counties. In addition, counties participating in the CEL Pilot Project shared details regarding the implementation challenges they had encountered and how these challenges had been addressed.

SUMMARY OF CEL PROJECT OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

As described above, QCCI has made important contributions to the development of CELs in California's counties. These contributions have been particularly critical in: (1) supporting the early planning for CEL design and implementation at the county level; (2) assisting the state to play a leadership role in guiding county implementation efforts; (3) building a consistent framework for CEL data collection and information management and encouraging technology vendors to support the standardized data elements; and (4) supporting information-sharing between pilot and non-pilot counties. Stakeholders assert that without the logistical planning and support provided by the philanthropic community, individual counties and the state would not be as far along as they currently are in testing the CEL approach.

The QCCI CEL Project has not only helped to prepare the way for a statewide CEL system, but has also provided a model of how philanthropy can work with the public sector to address the needs of children and their families.

QCCI's CEL Project has not only helped pave the way for a statewide CEL system, but has also shown that philanthropy can work with the public sector to address the needs of children and their families.