

Instrument 2: State and Local ECE Stakeholders Interview Protocol

VIQI Project

Background

Thank you for joining me today. This discussion is being conducted as part of the *Variations in Implementation of Quality Interventions* project, also called the VIQI project.

By talking with you today, we're hoping to learn more about the state and local context in [state/locality] over the 2021-2022 school year that may have affected early care and education centers – for example, economic and employment conditions, the COVID-19 pandemic, and changes to early care and education standards or requirements. I expect this conversation to take no more than 60 minutes.

Please know that your participation is voluntary. If you need to leave early or don't want to answer certain questions, that's fine – just let me know. We will not use your name or otherwise identify you when we report our findings. Your name or other identifying information will be protected and will not be shared outside the research team. The information you provide will help contribute to the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation's understanding of the successes and challenges early care and education centers experienced during the year they participated in the VIQI project to help inform how we think about the findings that come out from this study.

This study has a Certificate of Confidentiality from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services which says that we cannot be required to share any identifiable information, even under a court order or subpoena. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB # is 0970-0356 and the expiration date is 02/29/2024.

Do you agree to participate in this interview?

We are also asking to audio record the interview. The audio recording is to help our team keep track of what you said; the audio recording will never be shared beyond our research team, the recordings will be deleted after transcription, and your name will not be attached to the transcription.

Do you give permission for me to audio record?

Do you have any questions before we start? Please feel free to ask me questions at any time.

Interview Protocol

From this point on, the discussion guide is meant to be tailored to the state and local stakeholder being interviewed. The questions below are illustrative and include example probes. Interviewers may adjust probes as needed to follow-up with stakeholders, depending upon their responses.

Module 1: Early Care and Education Systems Changes

[Interviewer: Tailor this section to the specific state/city and be prepared to prompt on specific changes that happened in that locality in the past year, in case the interviewee needs help remembering.]

First, I'd like to understand what the early care and education (ECE) landscape in [state/city] has been like this past school year – that is, 2021-2022.

1. Tell me about any changes made in [state/city] this past year to policies, requirements, or standards for ECE centers.

- a. [Ask for each, if not mentioned in response to initial question]: For example, changes to:
 - i. Curricula
 - ii. Professional development for center staff or the delivery of professional development
 - iii. Assessments
 - iv. Data management systems
 - v. Ratio requirements
 - vi. Enrollment
 - vii. Funding
- b. [Ask for each change mentioned]:
 - i. Was this change a policy change that ECE centers had to follow or a change in early learning standards?
 - ii. When did this change take place?
 - iii. Tell me about how this change affected ECE centers.
- c. Tell me about how changes made at the Federal level to policies, requirements, or standards for ECE centers affected ECE centers in [state/city] this past year.

2. What are some important recent initiatives to improve ECE quality at the state and local levels?

[Probe]: Any major recent changes to ECE curricula? Teacher professional development opportunities?

- a. How has this been impacted, if at all, by the COVID-19 pandemic?
- b. Other initiatives led by foundations or regional/state/local early childhood coalitions?

3. What are the top priorities for the ECE system now?

[Probe]: For example, in terms of curricula, professional development, assessments, data management systems, staffing, enrollment.

- a. In what ways, if at all, have these priorities changed from previous years?

Module 2: COVID Context

Next, I'd like to understand how the COVID pandemic may have affected the ECE landscape this past year – the 2021-2022 school year.

4. Tell me about how [state/city] has responded to the COVID pandemic this year.

[Probe]: What type of requirements or restrictions were in place (for example, mask requirements, vaccine requirements)? What type of guidance was given to the public?

- a. What guidance or mandates have been issued by the state or locality on how ECE centers should change their usual operations in response to the COVID pandemic this year?

[Probe]: For example, number of children per classroom, the ratio of teachers to preschool-aged children, priority populations of children served.

5. In [state/city], who determines when an ECE center or classroom must close when there is a COVID case?

- a. If this is determined by someone at the state or locality level, what is the process for deciding to close the center or classroom?
 - i. How is this information communicated to ECE centers? How did that communication go?

6. Besides what we've already discussed, what has the ECE landscape been like this past year – the second year of the pandemic?

Module 3: Economic and Employment Conditions

Next, I'd like to learn about the employment and economic landscape in [state/city] this past year.

7. Tell me about employment and the labor market in [state/city] this past year.

- a. How did this compare to previous years?
- b. In what ways, if at all, has [state/city]'s employment conditions and labor market this past year affected:

- i. The operations of ECE centers?

[Probe]: Staffing at ECE centers?

- ii. Families with young children?

8. In what ways, if at all, has [state/city]'s economic conditions this past year affected:

- a. The operations of ECE centers?
- b. Families with young children?

9. Besides what we've already discussed, what were the main challenges [state/city] faced this year, with regards to the economic and employment landscape?

Module 4: ECE Challenges and Looking Forward

Finally, I have a few more questions about how this past year compared to previous years for the ECE field in [state/city].

10. Tell me about the types of supports ECE centers requested this past year.

[Probe]: Supports for their general operations, for their staff.

- a. How does this compare to previous years?

11. Tell me about the general challenges ECE centers faced this past year.

- a. In what ways did these challenges vary by ECE provider? For example, how did the challenges faced by Head Start compare to challenges faced by childcare?
- b. How did these challenges compare to previous years?

12. Besides what we've already discussed, is there anything else that was different this year in [state/city] that may have affected ECE centers?

13. Looking to next year, tell me about any ECE systems changes you anticipate being made. For example, changes to ECE program standards or requirements, changes to COVID guidelines?

Module 5: Ending the Interview

14. Lastly, is there anything else you would like to tell me about the context in [state/city] this past year that may have affected ECE center operations?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today!