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Abstract

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) ranks high on the political agenda in Germany, with particular priority given to expanding opportunities for children under three. One question frames the current debate: Will it be possible to provide access to an ECEC center or daycare services for every child over the age of one, as required by law starting August 1, 2013? Creating these new placement options poses financial issues as well as a wide range of other challenges: Building ECEC centers and setting up the necessary administrative processes often takes much longer than anticipated, and the increased demand for qualified personnel looms as an additional barrier, though the situation differs across geographical regions. These urgent issues sometimes obscure the fact that institutional early childhood education and care will promote children's education and development only when the quality is right. In other words: The quality of early childhood education centers and daycare services still ranks too low on the political agenda. Though expectations are high, such services will fall short unless they meet quality standards. This is especially true for institutional settings where there are children under three years old.

The objectives and tasks involved in structuring early childhood education and care outside the family setting are becoming ever more complex. Our 2013 State by State Report is designed to provide policymakers, administrators, and the general public with up-to-date facts and figures for the 16 ECEC systems in user-friendly state profiles. Addressing the topics of ensuring participation, investing funds effectively, and promoting education – ensuring quality, each profile presents a transparent overview to provide a solid foundation for political decisions.

For example, the profiles report the proportion of children who attend an ECEC center or receive daycare before they reach school age. They also list up-to-date figures for spending on ECEC in each state. They provide a broad spectrum of information on the structural quality of ECEC centers – particularly on the qualifications of pedagogical staff and the proportion of full-time and part-time employees.

In addition, the 2013 State by State Report focuses on ECEC directors: They are ultimately responsible for ensuring that their facility meets the expectations of parents, sponsors, the community and the state. How many directors work at the facility? Do they perform leadership tasks on top of their pedagogical work, or do they have a specific amount of time allotted for such responsibilities? Does the situation of ECEC directors differ from state to state? The official Statistics on Child and Youth Welfare provide new data on these topics, which the 2013 State by State Report has now made available to inform the public discussion and (educational) policy debate. This information highlights the need for a more differentiated approach to one group of the pedagogical staff that profoundly influences the quality of the education and care provided in ECEC facilities: its directors. For despite their central role, until now they have received little attention. It is high time to introduce to the landscape of early childhood education what is already taken for granted in schools: Directors should not have to neglect educational work with children in order to perform leadership tasks. This means that ECEC directors must have an adequate allotment of work time, guaranteed by uniform nationwide standards, as well as support systems such as professional training and supervision. This makes it possible to create the foundation for professional leadership of ECEC centers. In the future, these structural conditions must gain higher priority on the political agenda, because effective early childhood education and care demands the very best quality.

The English version of the "German State by State: Monitoring Early Childhood Education" will be available in autumn 2013.