

From Vulnerable to Resilient: Building Stronger Pathways to Early Childhood Success for At-Risk Children

OU Health Sciences Center

David Bard, PhD

Lana Beasley, PhD

Geneva Daniel

Tyler Smith

Leigh Ridings

Jennifer Daer

Smart Start Oklahoma

Debra Anderson

Cyd Roberts

Project Goals

- Evaluate participation in ECE for children in or at-risk of entering foster care
- Assess the need for policy changes resulting in fewer ECE barriers for foster care
- Increase provider and caregiver knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward ECE

Evaluation Data Sources

- Quantitative (Surveys)
- Qualitative (Focus groups & Individual interviews)
- Policy Review (policy, statutes, press releases from OKDHS, OSDH, Courts, etc.)
- Child Development Trainings (3-part series for CW & ECE pros & foster parents)

Growing Evidence on ECE Benefits for CW Children

- Preschool related to reduction in reading and math achievement gaps; BUT those who benefit most, attend the least (e.g., Tucker-Drob, 2012)
- ECE attendance is also associated with healthier habits for children, specifically a healthier diet and more physical activity (Belfield & Kelly, 2011).
- New evidence suggests ECE can improve CW outcomes of safety and permanency (Meloy & Phillips, 2012; Klein, 2011; Green et al., 2014; Reynolds & Robertson, 2003; Zhai et al., 2013) and developmental well-being (Merritt & Klein, 2014; Kovan et al., 2014; Lipscomb et al., 2013; Merritt & Klein, 2015).

Oklahoma's Children in Foster Care

- At the end of 2013:
 - 4650 children age 0-5 in foster care in Oklahoma
 - Only 582 (12.5%) of those children were enrolled in Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS).
 - Approximately 30% of impoverished Oklahoman children age 0-5 were enrolled in HS/EHS
- Data are not consistently collected for Early Childcare and Education (ECE) services for children in foster care, so it is currently impossible to paint a complete picture regarding the frequency of utilization in this population. However, the proportional underrepresentation of foster children in HS/EHS is puzzling.

Recommendation 1

Increase public awareness of ECE and its benefits

- Include information regarding the benefits of ECE in materials distributed to foster families during trainings, as well as through mailers, emails, and occasional texts
- Public service campaign where information about the benefits of ECE is provided on a mass scale (e.g. TV commercials, radio announcements)

Growing Evidence on ECE Benefits for CW Children

- Preschool related to reduction in reading and math achievement gaps; BUT those who benefit most, attend the least (e.g., Tucker-Drob, 2012)
- ECE attendance is also associated with healthier habits for children, specifically a healthier diet and more physical activity (Belfield & Kelly, 2011).
- New evidence suggests ECE can improve CW outcomes of safety and permanency (Meloy & Phillips, 2012; Klein, 2011; Green et al., 2014; Reynolds & Robertson, 2003; Zhai et al., 2013) and developmental well-being (Merritt & Klein, 2014; Kovan et al., 2014; Lipscomb et al., 2013; Merritt & Klein, 2015).

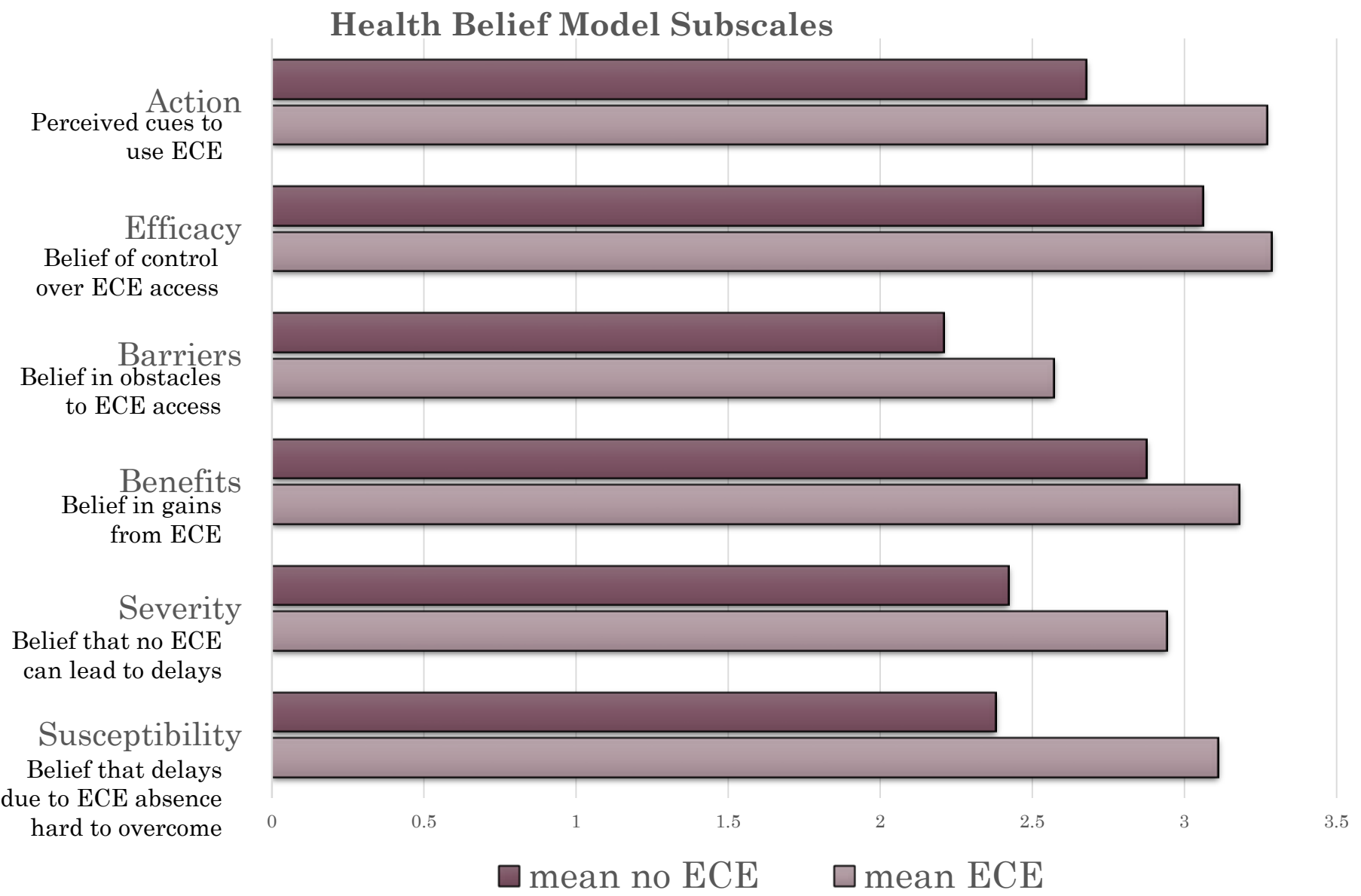
Survey Analysis for Health Belief Model:

Significant differences in each of the six HBM subscales for those utilizing versus those not utilizing ECE.

The strongest differences in opinions were in susceptibility and action

Response Scale:

- 0 = Strongly Disagree
- 1= Disagree
- 2 = Neutral
- 3 = Agree
- 4 = Strongly Agree



Bust the Caregiver-Bond Myth

- “The benefits of ECE for this particular age group deserves comment given that American parents tend to be more ambivalent about placing their infants and toddlers in ECE in comparison to older children (Ehrle, Adams, & Tout, 2001), perhaps because of concerns that placement in non-parental care will interfere with the maternal– infant bond and attachment. However, the research on [Early Head Start] suggests that this form of ECE, at least, is beneficial to infants and toddlers, not only in reducing the risk of maltreatment and recurring maltreatment (Green et al., 2014), but also in promoting development.” (Lee et al., 2015)
- One study even found use of child care subsidy was positively associated with greater foster parent retention (Meloy & Phillips, 2012).

“I think a lot of it may be just the families becoming aware of it... a lot of times there’s great programs out there, people may not know about them because they haven’t been either adequately publicized or promoted or maybe not in the areas our clients would [view]... “ –
Child Welfare Worker

What are your recommendations for the best ways to let foster parents know about ECE programs?

Parent 1: “Flyers, phone calls, emails. Mention it in training sessions.”

Parent 2: “I agree with that.”

Parent 1: “Even a mass text message. Text message is the best way to get ahold of me.”

Parent 3: “Yes, me too.”

- ***Foster Parent Focus Group***

Recommendation 2

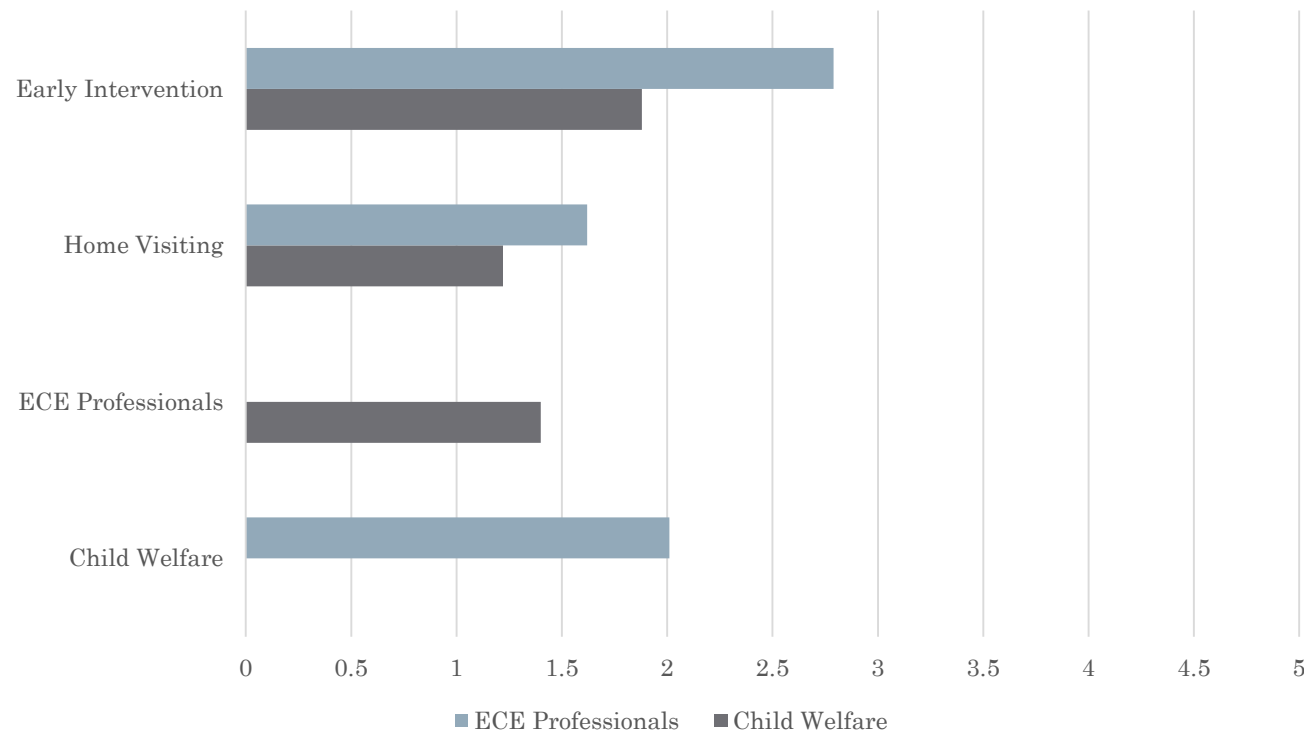
Increase focus on ECE in current child welfare policy and practice

- Augment OAC policy to specifically address ECE as a priority in the service plan of foster/at-risk children ages 0-5
- Require caseworkers and/or families to provide justification in the case file when a foster child age 3-4 is not enrolled in ECE
 - This ensures ECE is consciously addressed in each case, while not forcing families to utilize this service.
- Create guidance in OAC policy indicating caseworkers should provide a similar level of effort to keep children ages 0-5 in educational placement stability as they do with older children
- Educate staff on standard early intervention referral procedure for children age 37-60 months.
 - SoonerStart serves children 0-36 month. While children 3-5 must be assessed by a pediatrician, in practice, developmental screeners may not be performed in this setting

- “I have no idea. I don’t know if they’re given priority or not. I would like to think that they are, but I don’t know.” – *Child Welfare Worker*
- “Now policies, I am not aware of [any]. It is encouraged, like for instance, I just had to tell some of the workers that foster parents are eligible for Head Start services not based on income, but that they have foster children they want to put in Head Start if there’s a space they’re guaranteed that space. No cost to them with anyone else it would be based on income. I will tell you that’s something that was not widely known throughout the department.” – *Child Welfare Worker*
- “I don’t know of any policies per say. Like I know they can’t deny services to a child if they’ve been identified for service, but if they haven’t ever been identified, I’m not aware of anything that says you have to do this...” – *Child Welfare Worker*

Survey of ECE & CW Professionals

LEVELS OF COLLABORATION



ECE and Child Welfare Professionals were given a survey rating their perception of collaboration with stakeholders.

Both groups of respondents reported very low levels of collaboration

Response Scale Anchors:
0 = No Interaction
5 = Collaboration

Recommendation 3

Address the lack of differentiation of educational needs for younger foster children, specifically the developmental needs of children ages 0-5, to caseworkers and foster parents

- Provide training to all caseworkers and foster parents addressing early childhood development, including cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional development, as well as the impact of trauma on development. In these trainings, emphasize the benefits of ECE to the child and caregiver.
- Collect and publicly provide an easily navigable and comprehensive list of ECE providers, as well as resources to help caseworkers and families connect to services.
 - One of the greatest reported barriers to enrollment is a lack of knowledge about local programs. Families indicate the best ways to reach them are through websites and flyers.
- Disseminate existing literature regarding appropriate developmental practices (Oklahoma Early Learning Guidelines) to ECE providers.

- “I feel like it’s another set of eyes on our at-risk children. I mean if they’re there and there are signs or something that they need, they can report that. And some of our children, I feel like don’t get the food that they need or at-risk families and sometimes some of the schools will provide meals or snacks or something for the children. So I feel like they get that also while they’re in school.” – ***Child Welfare Worker***
- “...Making sure that they’re developmental milestones are met, making sure they don’t fall through the cracks of the system – you know, if we’ve got a kid that can’t get into Early Head Start what’s going to happen? Nothing until they start school.” – ***Child Welfare Worker***
- “Because foster parents just don’t know that certain things are out there for them to use so we never used them, we just feel like we’re stuck. So even if you feel your child needs these things it’s like well how do you go about getting them?”
– ***Foster Parent***
- “The one thing that I don’t like as a whole is that I don’t know exactly all of what they offer. Like when I had to find a daycare I think it would be beneficial if there’s a list of which ones that we can go to. I felt like I had to spend time on the phone calling like “Hey do you guys take DHS payment?” – ***Foster Parent***
- “And parents don’t know a lot of times what developmental milestones are for their own children [...] Or even kids in that three to five range who are now getting close to going to school but haven’t had access to a Head Start or some kind of Pre-K program. So they are already falling behind what the average kid in normal public school would be when they go to kindergarten or Pre-K.” – ***Child Welfare Supervisor***

Recommendation 4

Make child care universally available in some capacity to foster children, regardless of the employment status of the parent.

- Provide DHS subsidy for children in care regardless of the employment/training status of the parent to aid in social development and school readiness. This could be similar to the enrichment subsidy SSI recipient children receive for ECE.
- Create a daily subsidy rate for children in foster care not dependent on the number of hours present.
 - Interviews with ECE providers indicate the current policy schema may be a deterrent to enrolling foster children.
- Increase subsidy rate for foster children to increase incentive for child care centers to give priority.
- Dispel the myth that we are paying for foster parents to be the sole child care provider for the child.

- “Yeah that’s what I was told. If I wanted to, because I don’t work, I’m at home all day long with them I’d have to pay for daycare, preschool care, whatever. You’d have to pay for it right out of your own pocket.”
– ***Foster Parent***
- ***So you guys are running into a lot of daycares aren’t accepting state subsidy?***
“Yeah, they’re even dropping their card, I mean they’re dropping their dropping a whole machine because they’re losing money on it I mean some of them that’s their whole income and I mean, [...] I understand where they’re coming from.”
– ***Foster Parent***
- “You see that a lot of times these kids are behind when you go out to do the investigation. You see that they’re not having access to quality child care, they don’t. You know parents may not meet the qualifications for any kind of subsidy to even get them in a child care program. [...] but a lot of times Sooner Start hasn’t even been able to link up with this family..” ***Child Welfare Supervisor***
- “...those that have had services versus those who have not or even kids that stay home with foster parents versus kids even have the slight opportunity in going to a mother’s day out or some other kind of other early childhood program. You see socialization as a big thing there. And that helps their development as well so, seeing from all three of those perspectives has shown it’s definitely beneficial for kids who due to placement disruptions to all these other experiences inside the system and out, that they need that experience with an early childhood provider. – ***Child Welfare Supervisor***
- “I have been told that because we have a full time homemaker in the house, DHS would not pay for or allow us to leave our child in care or put her in a program. I would do it in a heartbeat if it was allowed and paid for and it would drastically improve life in our household and probably open our house up for additional placements.” – ***Foster Parent***
- *13% of foster parents surveyed said they would feel guilty accepting DHS money to then turn a child over to ECE staff*

Recommendation 5

Shift focus in current legislation and policy to address well-being as an equal priority to safety and permanency

- Create improvement measures similar to those being implemented via the Pinnacle Plan specifically to increase enrollment and accessibility of ECE programs for children in foster care
- Collect information related to ECE for children in foster care and maintain in the KIDS database and on the Children's Passport, including enrollment status and results of any developmental screening

“The only thing I can say there is um, the purpose of foster care really is not to get children in the system and then to sort of educate them in a way that makes them better than they were before they were removed or to improve their social skills or improve their language skills compared to what they had with their birth parents. The purpose of foster care is protection of the children. So, uh, you could say that it’s just not part of our purpose.” - *Child Welfare Worker*

“I guess like I said based on our job we our job is for safety reasons and so when we look at it for from a safety set point if it’s not for educational neglect and it’s like a physical abuse situation education are not going to be something that we are going to be concerned on and that may be something that we focus on later on but early on were gonna focus on making sure the child is safe.”-*Child Welfare Worker*

“As a child welfare worker, our job is to put the kid in the best possible position and make sure that they’re safe and things like that... that comes on us, you know.” -*Child Welfare Worker*