



University of Pittsburgh

**Office of
Child
Development**

Project Description

**The Early Childhood Initiative Demonstration Program
(ECIDP)**

Background of the Early Childhood Initiative (ECI)

The concept.

In 1996 a group of funders, with the help of many leaders from government, private business, universities, service agencies, school systems, parent groups, and communities, established an ambitious project, called the Early Childhood Initiative (ECI), designed to provide quality early childhood educational programs for low-income children birth through five years of age in an anticipated 80 targeted neighborhoods in Allegheny County at an estimated cost of \$59.4 million over five years. The United Way of Allegheny County agreed to create, manage, and implement the project during its initial years and then transfer project management to another organization.

The Early Childhood Initiative Demonstration Program (ECIDP)

Consistent with the original design, two major funders (The Howard Heinz Endowment and The Richard King Mellon Foundation), in cooperation with the United Way, transferred the

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management of a smaller version of the ECI program to the University of Pittsburgh in the Spring of 2001. The University designated its Office of Child Development (OCD) to handle the administrative and management duties of this new version of ECI, now called the Early Childhood Initiative Demonstration Project (ECIDP). ECIDP is a three-year project for approximately 300 participating children.

OCD was selected in cooperation with the funders to manage ECIDP because of 1) its commitment to improving the welfare of children, youth, families, and the neighborhoods in which they live; 2) its substantial experience in managing comprehensive, community-based, demonstration intervention programs in low-income neighborhoods; and 3) its potential to provide a strong academic focus to underpin the quality component of the program and bring the expertise of the region's local universities to ECIDP. ECIDP is located within the Division of Service Demonstrations of OCD. The evaluation of ECIDP will be independently conducted by the SPECS Team of the Child Development Unit of Children's Hospital.

The reduced scope.

ECIDP will consist of ECI facilities in two communities, Braddock and Wilkinsburg, which were selected by the funders because of their relative progress in establishing ECI services. Braddock consists of seven neighborhoods (East Pittsburgh, Prospect Terrace, Braddock, North Braddock, Rankin, Hawkins Village, and Swissvale). The Heritage Health Foundation is the lead agency. In Wilkinsburg, Hosanna House is the lead agency and provides center care in one location with additional children receiving programming in child care homes.

ECIDP's purposes.

Although ECIDP no longer has the scale of the original ECI, its goals of bringing neighborhood-designed, high quality early childhood services that are integrated across all domains including health, education, and welfare, otherwise remain the same. Further, OCD is specifically charged with 1) enhancing the quality improvement practices, 2) establishing financial accountability and sustainability at the community level, 3) reducing the private dollar cost and increasing use of public support while maintaining a level of quality sufficient to produce the desired benefits in school readiness and social behavior in participating children, 4) cultivating family child care and early childhood system practices and policies that will promote

an early childhood and family system of services, and 5) integrating ECIDP into a broader context of university and community professional activity.

More specifically, ECIDP is designed to answer several practical questions: 1) can a cost-effective system of comprehensive early childhood educational and family services be implemented in these two communities, 2) can a model for quality assurance and technical assistance be created that will support quality programming in communities, and 3) can the region's professional resources be integrated to support ECIDP and early childhood programming in general? Conceptual questions to be addressed include 1) will the program of services in these communities produce positive mental, social, and academic improvements in participating children; 2) will there be differences in the progress of children as a function of the type of service (e.g., center vs. family home care); and 3) does the creation of a network of early childhood services benefit parents and professionals in their communities?

Implementation of ECIDP

ECIDP has several components to its implementation over three years.

Component One: Transition and Planning (Year One). OCD will review existing technical assistance materials available locally and nationally; work with the lead agencies and university faculty to refine and improve these materials and plan for the development of future products to fill remaining needs; and, in collaboration with the communities, assess and improve (if necessary) the quality component of ECIDP within budget constraints. The quality of early childhood educational and family services will be assessed against the original high ECI standards and best practices as defined by the research literature on child and family outcomes of successful programs.

Component Two: Administration (Year One). Several administrative tasks are also to be addressed immediately in Year One:

- ! **Improve management.** In collaboration with the lead agencies, OCD will help to create a comprehensive and uniform model of administration and management pertaining to personnel hiring, training, supervision, and oversight as well as complete fiscal monitoring and control of expenses.

- ! **Clarify policy issues.** Policy issues will be identified and clarified that promote or challenge the implementation of quality programming in a seamless system of family services. These issues are related to defining quality services, attaining cost efficiency,

reducing costs to the private sector by increasing public contributions and subsidies to families, and building an integrated network of services for young children and their families across the health, education, and child welfare domains.

- ! **Coordinate with the evaluation.** OCD will collaborate with and make use of findings, but not manage, the independent evaluation of ECIDP conducted by the SPECS Team of Children's Hospital. An Advisory Committee will be appointed, composed of university and community professionals, funders, and policymakers, which will advise and coordinate the service program, management, and evaluation components of ECIDP.

- ! **Plan collaborations.** OCD will coordinate the intellectual resources of local universities and community professionals to provide scholarly, practical, and best practice knowledge as a support for an emerging early childhood and family service system in the region. This will be part of an overall university-community partnership that will 1) develop materials and training curricula to support quality services in the region and beyond; 2) overcome system barriers; 3) understand reimbursement strategies, training resources, and program regulations; 4) assess new funding sources; and 5) share lessons learned in quality programming.

Component Three: Implementation of Collaborations (Year Two). In addition to continuing the initiatives of Components One and Two, Component Three will consist of convening relevant faculty and community professionals to guide and produce materials and create and implement a model of quality technical assistance at reasonable cost to ECIDP neighborhoods and ultimately others.

Component Four: Transfer of Services (Year Three). This phase will focus on transferring the procedures, materials, models, and management systems developed in the earlier phases of ECIDP to the communities and to prepare to implement a model of centralized technical assistance that is available to a wider range of neighborhoods in the County.

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