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Mid-Valley Campus Child Development Center: CCAMPIS Program Qualitative Evaluation



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Background

Research has shown that the success of women with children in postsecondary education is tied closely with their ability to find adequate childcare for their children (Adelstein, Sedlacek, & Martinex, 1983; Grottkau & Davis, 1987; Pandey, Zhan, Neely-Barnes, & Menon, 2000). As part of the effort to improve access to education for low-income parents the federal government created the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) grant as part of the Higher Education Act (HEA). This type of grant provides funds that are “used to support or establish campus-based child care programs primarily serving the needs of low-income students enrolled in IHEs” (U.S. Department of Education).

The vision of the Mid-Valley Campus’ Child Development Center (MVC-CDC) is to “provide a better quality of life for our children, family and community” (South Texas College Mid-Valley Child Development Center [STC MVC-CDC], intro.). Furthermore, the MVC-CDC’s mission states that “the center will provide an educational program for children of students pursuing their education” (STC MVC-CDC, intro.).

As part of its funding requirements as well as its efforts to continually provide quality services to families who utilize the MVC-CDC, staff has decided to conduct focus groups each semester to examine the satisfaction level of parents who receive assistance with child care at the MVC-CDC through the CCAMPIS grant. This report involves data collected at the end of the Fall 2009 semester.

Purpose of Study

This study seeks to examine satisfaction levels of STC students who utilize the MVC-CDC as part of the CCAMPIS program as well as to identify areas for improvement. In addition to this being a necessary aspect of the grant that is received, information provided as part of this study could be used to meet the mission set forth by the MVC-CDC, which states:

The South Texas College – Mid Valley Campus Child Development Center will serve as a model program to train early childhood professionals and as a catalyst for quality care and education for children and their families. The center will provide an educational program for children of students pursuing their education, children of faculty / staff, and children of families from the community as availability permits. The Center sees itself as a supplement to the child's family by providing quality care for children ages 18 months through 5 years while parents participate within the college community. (STC MVC-CDC, intro.)

This particular study seeks to uncover levels of satisfaction with various aspects of the center and the program so that MVC-CDC staff can use the data collected for quality control purposes as well as to gauge where and if there is room for improvement in the services offered.

Methodology

Parents who have children enrolled at the MVC-CDC met with a member of the STC research staff at the end of the Fall 2009 semester to participate in a focus group. Focus group members were recruited by MVC-CDC staff. All the participants had one or more children enrolled at the

MVC-CDC and received assistance through the CCAMPIS program. In exchange for their participation, study subjects received a coupon for a free lunch special plus a drink at any STC Cafeteria.

Research Questions

Students were asked a number of questions regarding their opinions of different aspects of the CCAMPIS program, the effect that the program has had on their both their personal and academic lives, as well as the childcare center in general (please see Appendix A for the complete list of questions). These questions were meant to gather feedback regarding the childcare center and the CCAMPIS program.

Findings

Participants indicated an overall satisfaction with various aspects of the MVC-CDC and specifically the CCAMPIS program. All indicated that they were grateful for the program and appreciated the opportunities afforded to them by the CCAMPIS grant.

Staff and Administrators

Parents displayed an overall satisfaction with MVC-CDC staff. They stated that the staff “seem to really care. They have patience.” Another parent stated, “It’s a little bond that they have with the kids, too.” The only improvement that they recommended in terms of staffing was that a few more staff members be hired, but emphasized that any additional staff that is brought in be as well trained as the staff that is currently in place.

Participants also felt that the administrative staff is helpful. They felt that administrators at the MVC-CDC “are always available if you have questions.”

Children’s Education

Participants of the study made it clear that the MVC-CDC was providing their children with more than just basic childcare and stated that their children were being educated as well. The majority of the parents had examples of how enrollment in the MVC-CDC had assisted their children in developing/advancing their speech capabilities, learning bilingual (English/Spanish) terms as well as learning social skills such as independence and sharing.

In regards to speech development, one parent stated, “My little girl, or my daughter...in May she didn’t talk at all. She is three and since she [started] going here to the daycare, she started therapy [and] she is like already conversing with people. But, she didn’t talk at all.” Another parent pointed out how their child’s vocabulary had increased in both English and Spanish.

The fact that many of their children had become more independent as a result of attending the MVC-CDC was also noted by parents. “Before she was very attached to me and I couldn’t go anywhere because she would start crying. Now she is like more independent.” Parents stated that their children were able to play on their own, were less hyper, and had learned to share and play with their siblings and other children in an easier manner than they had prior to their enrollment.

Parents did voice concern over the way that their children were grouped together with other children. At least two participants noted that their children had difficulties that they attributed to the fact that their children were the youngest members of their respective groups. “She had trouble transitioning from her 3 or 2 [year-old group] and we didn’t understand what was going. Later, down the road, we figured it out. She is the youngest out of the whole group. The rest of them were 4 or 5 and she is still 3 years old.” Another parent stated that the same thing had happened to her child.

In all, there was an overwhelmingly positive response to the care that children were receiving. Parents even stated that they wished that the MVC-CDC would extend their program to include elementary level education.

Parents’ Education

There seemed to be a general consensus among the focus group participants that participation in the CCAMPIS program provided through the MVC-CDC was central to their participation in postsecondary education. As stated by one parent, “I stayed home for a very long time until they picked up the development center. That’s why I started coming to school.”

Parents stated that finding adequate, affordable childcare is difficult when school schedules and study time is taken into consideration. It is apparent that the MVC-CDC does its best to accommodate students with children so they are able to succeed in school. When questioned about scheduling difficulties, one student stated, “If [your schedule doesn’t fit in] they will work

with you. I know they worked with me this semester for me to take college algebra at night. In order to pass, I needed to take [a certain] professor because I heard that the others are difficult. [They] said it was ok and approved it.” Students also felt that the hours provided by the MVC-CDC afforded them time to study: “I study while she is in day care. So I use the extra time to study. That has been very helpful.”

Parenting Workshops & Classes

In general, the parents found the parenting classes and workshops offered as part of the CCAMPIS program to be helpful and the majority of participants indicated that they had utilized the lessons and parenting techniques taught to them in class.

Parents understood that the gatherings were part of the hours required for the program, but felt that it was difficult to complete the time required of them due to being in certain academic programs — specifically Nursing and Allied Health programs — and the fact that less scheduled opportunities were offered to them than in previous semesters: “I found it more difficult this year because they didn’t have that many meetings.”

The participants felt that the MVC-CDC should offer more workshops and classes and suggested that more general parenting classes be made available in addition to workshops on specific topics such as activities to do with children and helping children transitioning from one level to another.

Recommendations

Based on the feedback from these parents, it is recommended that the MVC-CDC review its child placement procedure to insure that children are placed with a group close to their own age level. Although parents stated that their children adjusted after some time when placed with older children, they felt that their children would benefit more from interaction with children in their own age group.

The MVC-CDC should increase the number of workshops and classes available to parents. In addition to helping students meet the number of hours required of participants in the CCAMPIS program, the parents found these courses to be informative and helpful.

The MVC-CDC should continue to follow the curriculum that is currently being utilized among the children at the center.

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Appendix A

1. How comfortable are you with the program as a whole?
2. What do you like most about using on-site child care? What do you like least about using on-site child care?
3. What would you like to improve about the child care program?
4. What do you like about teaching staff? What would you like to improve?
5. What do you like about the administration? What would you like to improve?
6. How does the availability of campus child care affect your decision to continue or not to continue in college?
7. How has your child benefited (or not) from his/her experience at this center?
8. How could the center better meet your family's needs and your child's needs?
9. Have the Student Support Sessions provided by the Counseling office benefited in your college career?