

Study Tasks in Progress

The findings presented in previous chapters are interim results of the *Family Child Care Homes Legislative Changes Study*. Abt Associates, under contract with USDA, is currently conducting data collection activities to address additional questions on the effects of the changed CACFP reimbursement structure on sponsors, providers, and the families served by the program. The research objectives and associated data collection activities are summarized below.

Additional Questions to be Answered

The continuing activities of the study are being conducted to address seven research objectives, which are listed below. The first six objectives were formulated in direct response to Congress' information request in Section 708 of PRWORA. The seventh was added to assist CACFP program staff in understanding the burden imposed on sponsors of family child care homes by the requirement to determine the appropriate tier status of participating homes and children.

1. Determine the effects of the legislative changes on sponsors' operations and characteristics.
2. Determine the response of providers to the legislative changes, and determine the changes in provider and program characteristics that result from these changes.
3. Compare the nutritional aspects of meals served by Tier 2 homes before and after the implementation of the legislative changes.
4. Determine why some homes that participated in the program before the implementation of the changes have since dropped out.
5. Compare the meals served by homes that participated in the program before the implementation of the legislative changes to meals served by homes that have dropped out of the program.
6. Estimate the proportion of low-income children among all children participating in CACFP homes before and after the implementation of the legislative changes.
7. Assess the difficulty of sponsors' determinations of homes' eligibility for Tier 1 reimbursements and of children's eligibility for Tier 1 reimbursements when in Tier 2 homes.

Survey Activities

To address the research objectives of this study, the Economic Research Service contracted with Abt Associates, which has developed and is currently conducting five surveys:

- ! The **Survey of Family Child Care Sponsors** is a self-administered questionnaire designed to be completed by all sponsors participating in the study. It includes questions about characteristics of the sponsor, the percentage contribution of CACFP revenue to its total revenue, other child care programs sponsored, the number and type of homes sponsored, monitoring visits made to sponsored homes, and training of providers. The survey also includes questions about changes in the sponsor's activities since January, 1997, when the legislative changes that are the subject of the study were first announced. Finally, the survey includes questions about the burden of a number of sponsor activities (e.g., filing claims, certifying providers as Tier 1 homes), information used to qualify Tier 1 homes, and their method of filing claims for Tier 2 mixed homes.

- ! **Surveys of Family Child Care Providers** include questionnaires for three groups of family child care providers: (1) active Tier 1 providers; (2) active Tier 2 providers; and (3) former CACFP participants who left the program sometime after January, 1997, and are still providing child care. All three groups of providers are asked to complete a self-administered mail survey. The surveys ask for information on provider characteristics including the number of children in care, types of meals and snacks served, fees charged to parents, provider's own household income, and the proportion CACFP reimbursements are of total business income. The questionnaires also ask about changes in meals and snacks and fees charged to parents since the legislative changes went into effect. There are two separate questionnaires: one for current CACFP participants (Tier 1 and Tier 2 providers) and one for former participants. Former participants are asked whether their child care home is still licensed and their reasons for leaving the CACFP.

- ! The **Menu Survey**, which is completed by Tier 2 and former CACFP providers, gathers information on meals and snacks offered to children in child care during a specific five-day period, referred to as the "target week." The information will be used, in combination with observation data, to evaluate the food and nutrient composition of meals and snacks served to children of various ages.

- ! **Meal Observations** are conducted by field interviewers in one-third of participating Tier 2 homes. On two consecutive days, prior to each meal and snack offered, observers weigh and measure representative portions of each food item. While children are eating, observers record information on the number of portions served to or taken by all children between one and 12 years of age. The observation data will be used to determine reference portion sizes for use in the nutrient analysis of meals and snacks recorded in the Menu Surveys.

- ! The **Household Survey** is a brief telephone interview conducted with parents or guardians whose children are in Tier 1 and Tier 2 homes. The interview collects information on characteristics of the sampled child and his/her family including the hours children spend in child care, whether meals are brought from home, household income, household size and composition, participation in other Federal assistance programs, and whether an application for Tier 1 reimbursement was received and filled out. A self-administered version of this survey is used for households that are not reachable by telephone. For households that are not reachable by telephone or mail, the interview is being administered in person by field staff.

Status of the Surveys

At this writing, the first three stages of sample selection have been completed. These have involved drawing a nationally representative sample through selection of 20 states, about 300 sponsoring agencies within the 20 states, and approximately 900 Tier 1 homes, 900 Tier 2 homes, and 2,000 former CACFP providers from those sponsors. The fourth and final stage of sampling involves selecting about 850 children from 150 of the Tier 1 homes, and a roughly equal number from Tier 2 homes, for the household interview. After selecting the sponsors, homes, and families of children in care, it is necessary to recruit them to participate in the study, a process completed in the spring of 1999.

Data collection activities began in January, 1999 and are expected to run through August, 1999. Data preparation and analysis are planned to continue through the summer of 2000. The final report of the findings from the *Family Child Care Homes Legislative Changes Study* will address objectives one to seven above and update information in this interim report to the most recent available time period. The final report is expected to be available early in 2001.