

---

# Director's Survey for Contracted Slots Pilot Program: At the End of Year 1

*Roberta B. Weber*  
*Deana Grobe*

# **Director's Survey for Contracted Slots Pilot Program**

This Report was made possible by the generous funding from the Early Learning Division, Oregon Department of Education. The contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not represent the official views of the funding agency, nor does publication in any way constitute an endorsement by the funding agency.

# Contents

- INTRODUCTION ..... 1
- PARTICIPATION IN THE CONTRACTED SLOTS PILOT PROGRAM ..... 2
- METHODS ..... 3
- FINDINGS ..... 4
  - PROGRAM PARTICIPATION IN PARTNERSHIPS, VOUCHER AND FOOD PROGRAMS..... 4
    - Partnerships with Community Early Learning Programs*..... 5
    - Children Eligible for DHS Vouchers*..... 5
    - Child and Adult Care Food Program*..... 5
  - PERCEPTIONS OF BENEFITS ..... 6
    - Perceived Benefits for Children/Families*..... 6
    - Perceived Benefits for Programs* ..... 7
  - PERCEPTIONS OF DISADVANTAGES ..... 8
    - Perceived Disadvantages for Children/Families*..... 8
  - PERCEIVED DISADVANTAGES FOR PROGRAMS ..... 9
  - EXPERIENCE OF PROGRAMS WHO RECEIVED A CONTRACT ..... 10
    - Getting and Managing a Contract* ..... 10
    - Marketing Contracted Slots* ..... 11
    - Recruiting Children/Families* ..... 12
    - Enrolling Children/Families* ..... 13
    - Retaining Children/Families* ..... 14
    - Reporting* ..... 15
  - IMPACTS OF PARTICIPATION AND FUTURE PLANS..... 16
    - Impact on Financial and Enrollment Stability* ..... 16
    - Overall Experience*..... 17
    - Thoughts on Ideal Mix of Children* ..... 18
    - Plans for Year Two* ..... 18
- DISCUSSION ..... 19
  - PARTICIPATION OF ELIGIBLE PROGRAMS: COUNTS AND COMPLETION RATE ..... 19
    - Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten Programs (OHSPK)*..... 19
    - Oregon Programs of Quality (OPQ)*..... 19
  - EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH COMPLETION..... 20
  - CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR MEETING THEM..... 20
    - Managing Contracts* ..... 21
    - Recruitment*..... 21
    - Retention*..... 21
    - Concerns about Families* ..... 21
  - IMPACT ON PROGRAM ENROLLMENT AND FINANCES..... 22
- CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... 22
- APPENDIX A: IMPROVEMENTS TO DHS HEAD START CONTRACTED CHILD CARE ..... 24
- APPENDIX B: INITIAL DIRECTOR'S SURVEY..... 25
- APPENDIX C: POST DIRECTOR'S SURVEY ..... 28

# Introduction

With the launch of the Early Learning Initiative, Oregon's education reform efforts highlighted the importance of the early years. Ensuring children are ready for success in kindergarten has become a shared Oregon goal. A key strategy for meeting this goal is making sure that children who are served through the state's child care subsidy program receive care and education in programs of high quality. In 2012, early learning partners created a pilot program designed to ensure stability in highly rated early learning programs. The program, known as Contracted Slots, is being piloted from July 2012 through June 2015.

Contracted Slots is designed to address the need for both quality and stability. Research has shown a need to increase stability in early learning experiences for the children served in Oregon's subsidy program. Numerous studies have documented short durations of participation in Oregon's Employment Related Day Care Program (ERDC)<sup>1</sup>, thus threatening the building of stable adult/child relationships essential to healthy learning and development. Contracting for 12-month slots in programs of high quality is a strategy for providing low-income children access to stable, high quality care.

Since the early 2000s, the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) has contracted with providers of Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten (OHSPK) programs to ensure stable care in programs of documented quality to children whose parents meet ERDC eligibility requirements. In fall 2012 the Contracted Slots Pilot program was expanded to include Oregon Programs of Quality (OPQ) and the Contracted Slots policies were revised (See Appendix A). The quality of OPQ programs has been documented. OPQ is a forerunner of Oregon's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) that enables regulated child care and education programs to document the level of quality they offer. With the addition of OPQ programs, the program became known as the Contracted Slots Pilot program.

In the three-year pilot, OPQ providers and OHSPK grantees may contract for 12-month child care slots for families eligible for the ERDC program. A rule change in 2014 made TANF families also eligible to participate. The expansion to include community-based programs of documented quality provides increased parental choice and access to continuous care in quality programs. Qualifying families must meet specific work hour requirements and require full time care for their children. Once enrolled, families receive 12-month continuous protected eligibility for full-time care while in these designated programs. The three key goals for the pilot are:

- Children have access to continuous quality care and education;
- Families have continuity of quality child care and education to support their employment; and,
- Providers have stable funding in order to serve low-income children in quality programs.

As partners created the Contracted Slots Pilot program they implemented an evaluation study in order to measure the extent to which the program works as planned. Oregon State University (OSU) is providing the evaluation. The overall evaluation is designed to inform decisions on the extent to which Contracted Slots is an effective approach for providing stable, high quality services to low-income children. The evaluation design includes assessment of both the process of implementation and the impact on families and providers.

---

<sup>1</sup> These studies can be found on the Oregon Child Care Research Partnership website at <http://health.oregonstate.edu/sbhs/family-policy-program/occrp-childcare-subsidy-publications>.

An initial study documented provider perspectives of the Contracted Slots Pilot program as it was being expanded to include OPQ programs (Weber & Grobe, 2013). This report of the second study documents provider experiences and perspectives after the first year of operation and the impact of participation on their program enrollment and finances.

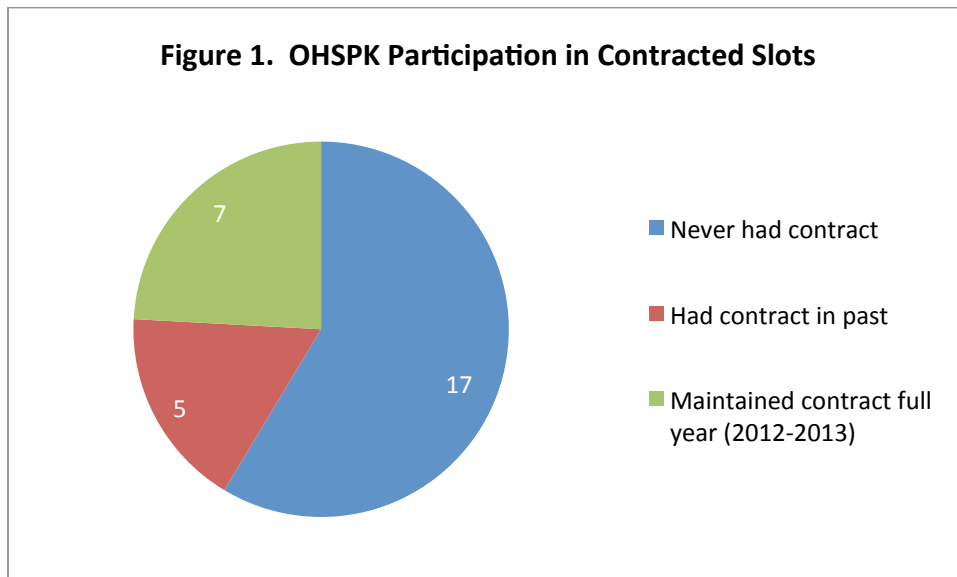
This part of the evaluation specifically asks:

- Of all eligible programs, what number participated in the pilot? Why and why not?
- Of participating programs, what number participated for a full year? Why and why not?
- For participating programs, what worked and what challenges were encountered in regard to the contracting process, reporting requirements, interactions with the agencies, and other operational aspects of managing the contract?
- What impact did participation have on program enrollment and finances?

We collected data from providers at the time the program was launched for the first study and again at the end of the first year of the program for this second study.

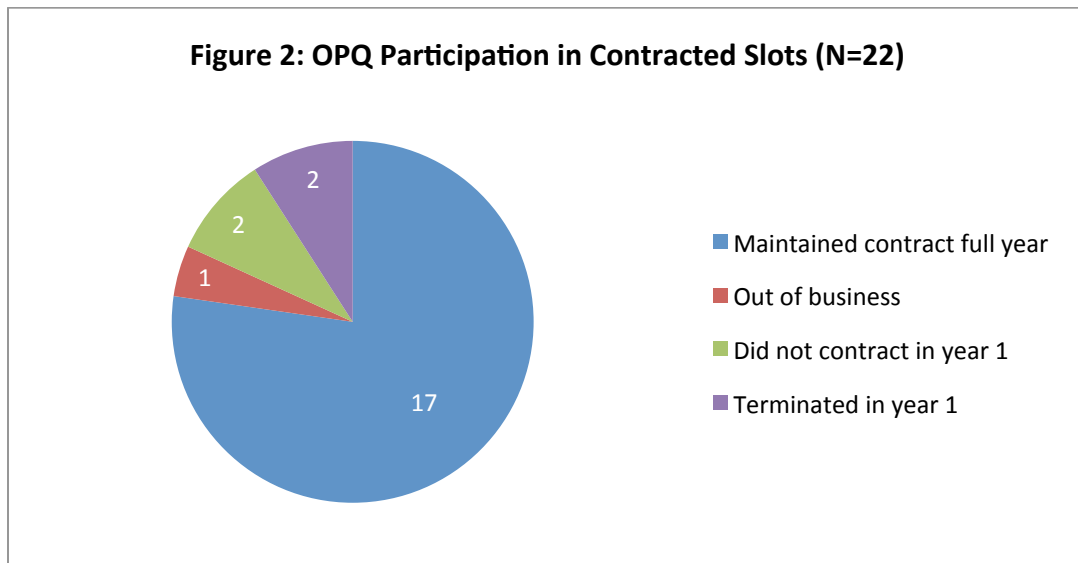
## Participation in the Contracted Slots Pilot Program

Level of participation in the Contracted Slots Pilot program varied by type of program eligibility: designation as an Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten Program (OHSPK) or as an Oregon Program of Quality (OPQ). Among Oregon’s 29 OHSPK programs 17 had never participated in the Contracted Slots program since it began in early 2000 (see Figure 1). Another five had in the past but were not doing so at the time the program was expanded to include OPQ programs. We found a strong relationship between OHSPK programs having at least one full-day classroom and having a contract. Only one of the 17 OHSPK programs that never had a contract had a full-day classroom at the beginning of the Pilot. Three of the five with past, but not current, contracts did not have a full-day classroom at the time of the survey. Seven OHSPK programs signed contracts for 2012-2013, all had at least one full-day classroom, and all retained the contract for the full year.



Twenty-two early learning programs (11 centers, 11 certified family) had earned OPQ status and were thus eligible to negotiate a contract. Of the 22 OPQ programs shown in Figure 2:

- 1 business (certified family) closed before negotiating a contract.
- 2 programs (1 center, 1 certified family) planned to negotiate a contract but did not do so; one because it delivered services for only part of the year (center).
- 2 programs signed contracts that were terminated within the first year:
  - 1 because having religion in its curriculum made it ineligible for Child Care and Development funding (center), and
  - 1 because of noncompliance with child care licensing rules (center).
- 17 OPQ programs (8 centers, 9 certified family) signed and retained contracts for the first year of the pilot.



## Methods

As part of the process evaluation for the Contracted Slots Pilot program, OSU conducted an on-line survey of directors from OHSPK and OPQ programs that had participated or had planned to participate in the Pilot Project in its first year. The purpose of this survey was to document perceptions of the Contracted Slots Pilot program after a year of participation in it. In the initial survey questions (see Appendix B) focused on their perceptions of:

- The value of the Contracted Slots Pilot program,
- Challenges in negotiating a contract, and
- Recruiting children, participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and program revenue.

At the end of the first year the survey questions (see Appendix C) focused on their perceptions of:

- The value of the Contracted Slots Pilot program,
- Number of contracted slots filled and the difficulty in filling those slots,
- Challenges and strategies that worked in recruiting and retaining children,
- Impact of program on budget and stability of enrollment, and
- Overall experience in the program and future plans.

The purpose of repeating some of the questions on a survey conducted at the end of the first year was to assess the extent to which the first year of experience changed the director's perceptions of the program.

Twenty-six programs (7 OHSPK and 19 OPQ) were invited to take part in the survey at the end of year one. The 19 OPQ programs included 17 that had a contract for the 2012-2013 year and the two that planned to have one but did not (the two that did not sign a contract were offered a modified survey). A total of **24 programs completed** the on-line survey (7 OHSPK and 17 OPQ). Thus all of the OHSPK programs and all but two of the OPQ programs that had a contract at the end of the first year completed the follow-up survey. Both of the programs that had planned to participate, but did not, completed the modified survey. One of the two non-respondents had not completed the initial survey administered prior to program launch. Thus we have findings at both points in time for all seven of the OHSPK programs and 15 of the 17 OPQ programs that had contracts at the end of year one. In addition we have findings at both time points from the two OPQ programs that had planned to negotiate contracts but did not do so in the first year of the project. It was important to administer the survey at the end of the contract year in order to capture program perceptions before the end of the first year of the pilot. Surveys were completed in August or early September of 2013.

While analyzing responses to the initial survey we found that directors gave almost the same responses to questions asking perceptions of benefits and disadvantages for children as they did for questions about families. Therefore, in the post survey questions were reworded to ask director perceptions of benefits/disadvantages for children/families together. We use the term children/families for ease of reading in the rest of this report.

Given that each of the 24 programs completed both initial and follow-up surveys, we report both what was reported at the end of year one and comparisons between responses on the initial and end of year one surveys.

## Findings

The report of findings begins with information on the extent to which participating programs were engaged with other programs designed to support financing and quality in child care facilities. We will then share programs' perceptions directly related to the Contracted Slots Pilot program including their thoughts on:

- Benefits,
- Disadvantages,
- Experience during the first year of the pilot,
- Impact on programs financial and enrollment stability, and
- Overall experience with the program.

## Program Participation in Partnerships, Voucher and Food Programs

Contracted Slots is part of a broader system of financial assistance and quality improvement. The extent to which programs participated in this broader system provides valuable context for findings about program perceptions of the Contracted Slots Pilot program. Thus, we begin the report of findings with information on programs' participation in: a) partnerships of community early learning programs, b) the DHS administered subsidy voucher program, and c) the Child Care and Adult Food Program (CCAFP).

## Partnerships with Community Early Learning Programs

In both initial and post surveys programs were asked if they participated in partnerships with community programs. In the initial survey OHSPK programs were asked, “Do you use community placements, that is, do community programs deliver care and early education services to children enrolled in your program?” In the post survey both OHSPK and OPQ programs were asked, “Do you have partnerships with community preschools to deliver care and early education services to children enrolled in your program?” Only five programs (3 OHSPK, 2 OPQ) reported partnering with community early learning programs in the post survey. Amongst OHSPK programs there was a slight decline in the number of partnerships from four to three over the first year of the pilot. Two OHSPK programs contracted for slots in high quality programs and another partnered for kindergarten transition services. One OPQ delivered educational services for other organizations and the other partnered to access support for children with developmental delays.

## Children Eligible for DHS Vouchers

Of the 24 programs whose directors completed the survey, 22 had contracts and two planned to contract but did not do so. Slightly over half of the programs (4 OHSPK, 9 OPQ with contracts, 1 OPQ without a contract) reported serving children eligible for DHS vouchers in both years (Table 1). Only two programs (one OPQ with a contract and one without a contract) reported serving children on vouchers on the post survey but not on the initial one whereas six (three OHSPK and three OPQ with contracts) had reported serving children on vouchers on the initial survey but not on the post survey. Only two programs had not served children on vouchers either on the initial or post survey and those two were OPQ programs with contracts.

Table 1. Number of Programs Reporting Serving Children with Vouchers

	OHSPK (n=7)	OPQ with Contract (n=15)	OPQ Planed for But No Contract (n=2)	All Programs (n=24)
<i>Reported serving voucher-eligible children on:</i>				
Initial and post surveys	4	9	1	14
Post and not on initial survey	0	1	1	2
Initial and not on post survey	3	3	0	6
Neither initial nor post surveys	0	2	0	2

## Child and Adult Care Food Program

Fourteen programs (7 OHSPK, 6 OPQ with contracts, and one OPQ without a contract) participated in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CAAFP) at the time of initial and post surveys (Table 2). On the initial survey four OPQ programs reported not participating but reported participating at the time of the post survey. Overall, three-fourth of programs (7 OHSPK, 11 OPQ) reported participating in CCAFP at the time of the post survey. No programs reported leaving CCAFP in the time between the initial and post



surveys. Six OPQ programs did not report participating in CCAFP at either point in time although two of the six reported that they had participated in the past.

Table 2. Number of Programs Reporting Participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CCAFP)

	<b>OHSPK (n=7)</b>	<b>OPQ with Contract (n=15)</b>	<b>OPQ Planed for But No Contract (n=2)</b>	<b>All Programs (n=24)</b>
<i>Reported participating in CCAFP on:</i>				
Initial and post surveys	7	6	1	14
Post and not on initial survey	0	3	1	4
Initial and not on post survey	0	0	0	0
Neither initial nor post surveys	0	6	0	6

Those who reported not participating in CCAFP were asked why they did not. Two OPQ programs reported not having information about the program. Other programs reported that the incomes of most of the families they served made these families ineligible for the program. One of these programs had formerly participated in CCAFP but *“Our financial analysts determined that the amount received from the program did not offset the manpower expended, and did not fit within our tight operating margin. In other words, our analysts determined we could not afford the program and directed us to discontinue.”* The other reported, *“We have tried a number of times to get set up yet it seems our program does not have enough qualifying families, to date anyway”*. One other program was not sure that families would qualify but planned to survey families now that they were serving a hot meal. One respondent simply said, *“Paperwork”*.

## Perceptions of Benefits

Overall, perceptions of the Contracted Slots Pilot program benefits were overwhelmingly positive. Below we report perceived benefits for children/families and early learning programs.

### Perceived Benefits for Children/Families

All but one program perceived the Contracted Slots Pilot program to be of benefit for children/families (Table 3). As noted above in the Methods section, in the initial survey directors were asked perceptions of benefits for children/families separately. Given that almost all respondents gave the same rating for each, in the post survey we combined the questions into a single question about benefits for children/families. For the post survey, 23 programs (96%) perceived the program as beneficial for children/families; all OHSPK programs and all but one OPQ reported benefits.

Table 3. Perceived Benefits for Children/Families at Time of Post Survey

	<b>OHSPK</b> (n=7)	<b>OPQ with Contract</b> (n=15)	<b>OPQ Planned But No Contract</b> (n=2)	<b>All Programs</b> (n=24)
<i>Perceived benefits for:</i>				
Children/ Families	100%	93%	100%	96%

Consistency, high quality, and low costs were the three benefits to children/families noted most frequently by directors. As one director responded, *“Families receive ongoing high quality, consistent care and do not have to change providers throughout the day. The lower co-pay is also a huge advantage for families that allows them to increase their self-sufficiency during the period they are enrolled.”* Another said, *“Children will have: consistent child care, develop nurturing relationships with providers, will excel in their growth and development.”* Several directors talked of increased access for parents and one Certified Family provider shared the special value of the program for families in rural areas, *“Utilizing this method in our rural areas would potentially ensure that we are serving children in areas where we cannot support opening an entire center.”*

We observed a slight increase in the perception of benefits for children/families from the time of the initial to that of the post survey. One OPQ program with a contract changed from perceiving the program as beneficial to not beneficial, but two OPQ programs with contracts changed from perceiving the program as not beneficial to beneficial for children/families. Twenty-one programs (7 OHSPK, 14 OPQ) perceived Contracted Slots to be beneficial for children/families on both the initial and post survey.

### Perceived Benefits for Programs

Directors perceived benefits for programs being almost as positive as for children/families. Only two programs (both OPQ) did not perceive the Contracted Slots Pilot program to be beneficial for programs at the time of the post survey (Table 4). Interestingly, the two OPQ programs that did not actually negotiate a contract perceived the program as beneficial for early learning programs.

Table 4. Perceived Benefits for Programs at the Time of Post Survey

	<b>OHSPK</b> (n=7)	<b>OPQ with Contract</b> (n=15)	<b>OPQ Planned But No Contract</b> (n=2)	<b>All Programs</b> (n=24)
<i>Perceived benefits for:</i>				
Programs	100%	87%	100%	92%

Programs frequently reported financial stability as a benefit. One director shared that Contracted Slots provides families, and thus their program, the *“Ability to save the slot for the parent to return within 60 days.”* *“For our program, the contracted slots provides the financial stability for the student, which makes it less likely that we will have a mid year drop. Also, one of our goals is to increase diversity and these slots enable us to reach out to lower income families and share our quality program with more deserving children.”* Others amplified how Contracted Slots benefited the program by increasing diversity, *“Our community of teachers and families benefit from having more diversity and gaining more understanding, acceptance and support of families who may have greater needs.”* *“We are enjoying the*

participation of a broader range of socio/economic strata, with a clientele that looks more like our neighborhood.” Another theme was how the financial stability of this program enabled the provider to increase the quality of their program, “I am receiving calls from DHS families wanting to attend my program. This allows me income to hire a staff member and provide more individual time to each child. I am increasingly becoming more professional in the business administrative part of my business. I have always loved the interaction with the enrolled children and the learning/discovery aspect of my program.”

We observed little change in perceptions of benefit to programs. Twenty programs (7 OHSPK, 13 OPQ) perceived Contracted Slots as beneficial to programs at the time of both the initial and post surveys. Amongst OPQ programs, two that had initially perceived Contracted Slots to be beneficial to their program no longer thought so at the time of the post survey. Another two OPQ programs had initially perceived Contracted Slots as not beneficial to their program but at the time of the post survey did. Both of the programs that now saw the program as beneficial reported financial stability. One reported, “Regular consistent payments. I am sure there are others yet we have yet to experience any.” The other said, “Since the families have a lower copay, we have less money to try and collect from them. Also the income is more regular and steady.”

## Perceptions of Disadvantages

Positive perceptions of benefits of Contracted Slots for both children/families and programs were accompanied by perceived disadvantages for both. Those who had completed their first year of participation were more likely to see disadvantages for programs than for children/families. OPQ directors were the most likely to see disadvantages.

### Perceived Disadvantages for Children/Families

As already noted, in the post survey directors were asked about benefits and disadvantages for children/families in a single question as responses to separate questions in the initial survey showed almost no differences. Although the majority of early learning programs did not perceive disadvantages for children/families, some did. One-third saw disadvantages for children/families (Table 5).

Table 5. Perceived Disadvantages for Children/Families at the Time of the Post Survey

	OHSPK (n=7)	OPQ with Contract (n=15)	OPQ Planed for But No Contract (n=2)	All Programs (n=24)
<i>Perceived disadvantages for:</i>				
Children/Families	14%	33%	50%	29%

Providers perceived the way the program handles children who need part-time care to be a disadvantage. As one respondent said, “there is not part-time slot available and many children can't benefit of this program.” Another shared, “I have had the experience that if a family does not qualify for the low co-pay (their child is part-time), they are not interested in viewing my program. I feel sad, because I have a great program.” Many providers perceived the employment hour requirement as a disadvantage, “Difficult to access, too restrictive in working requirements.” In addition to the restriction to employment hours, another respondent found the need to meet the parent’s entire child care needs problematic, “Some families have not been able to qualify because they meet the minimum work/care

*hour requirements but are also students. The hours of care needed are a mix of school and work. We are not available to provide care for the entire work schedule (evening/weekend)."*

Fifteen programs (6 OHSPK, 9 OPQ) perceived no disadvantages for children or families at the time of initial or post surveys. Four programs (1 OHSPK, 3 OPQ) perceived disadvantages on both initial and post surveys. There was no change in perception of disadvantages for children/families amongst OHSPK programs. OPQ programs were slightly more likely to perceive disadvantages at the time of the post survey. Of the five directors that changed their perception of disadvantages for children/families, three perceived disadvantages on the post survey when they had not on the initial survey whereas two no longer saw disadvantages for children/families after the first year participating in Contracted Slots.

## Perceived Disadvantages for Programs

Overall programs were more likely to report disadvantages for programs than they had for children/families although this was only true for OPQ programs (Table 6). Almost three-fourths of OPQ programs with contracts perceived disadvantages for programs whereas one-third had for children/families. Interestingly, the OPQ programs without contracts perceived no disadvantages for programs at the time of the post survey.

Table 6. Perceived Disadvantages for Programs at the Time of the Post Survey

	OHSPK (n=7)	OPQ with Contract (n=15)	OPQ Planed for But No Contract (n=2)	All Programs (n=24)
<i>Perceived disadvantages for:</i>				
Programs	14%	73%	0%	46%

Although one OHSPK program perceived disadvantages for children/families it was a different OHSPK program that saw disadvantages for early learning programs. The OHSPK program that reported a disadvantage for programs shared, *"changes in eligibility for families has caused a significant reduction in the number of families that are eligible to be on the contract. We had to cut two full day programs for families due to the changes and are barely receiving enough funding to support the one main full day program that we have. We have to choose families with a standard 8-5 work schedule because families that work outside that schedule cause our program to have to track payments to alternate care providers for non-traditional work hours. This is a billing and invoicing burden on the program staff and not something that we receive enough funding to embed in our system effectively."*

The most commonly reported disadvantages reported by OPQ programs dealt with the time commitment required to do paperwork, recruit families, and keep slots filled. One reported, *"Difficult to fill slots, a great deal of paperwork, little assistance in finding families/children to fill slots"*. Another reported, *"It can be difficult to recruit for vacated slots. Sometimes we have children stay in care but are no longer eligible so there is not a opening for a new enrollment. Other times the waiting list or current inquiries are from ineligible families."* Two programs reported seeing characteristics of the eligible parents as a disadvantage, *"I am concerned that some families do not value the care they receive at such a reduced amount."* Another said, *"sometimes these families take our care for granted and do not comply with our policies as closely as those that are paying full price."*

Only six programs (4 OHSPK, 2 OPQ) reported no disadvantages for programs on either the initial or post survey. Nine programs (1 OHSPK, 8 OPQ) reported some disadvantages at both points in time. Six

programs (2 OHSPK, 4 OPQ) had reported disadvantages on the initial survey but not on the post survey. Both of the OPQ programs that had planned to contract but did not do so fell in this category. The final three programs (all OPQ) had reported no on the initial survey but yes to the question of whether or not participation in Contracted Slots had disadvantages for programs. By the end of the first pilot year, 12 directors reported disadvantages for programs compared to 13 that had perceived them before having program experience. Experience in the first year of the pilot slightly decreased perceptions of disadvantages.

## Experience of Programs Who Received a Contract

On the post survey directors were asked to share their experience of participating in the first year of the Pilot program. Their responses are reported to capture if over the year there were changes of perceptions of the challenges associated with:

- Getting and managing a contract,
- Marketing Contracted Slots,
- Recruiting families,
- Enrolling children/families into a contracted slot,
- Retaining children/families, and
- Reporting.

### Getting and Managing a Contract

Directors were asked to rate the level of difficulty their program experienced in negotiating a contract. They were also asked about managing the contract process including completing paperwork or completing other tasks associated with having a contract.

OHSPK programs found getting and managing the contract easier than did OPQ programs (mean score of 1.4 versus 2.3 on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 representing very difficult) (Table 7). The distribution of responses showed that 6 OPQ programs found the process difficult and more did so on the post than on the initial survey. About half of OPQ programs (8 of 15) rated getting and managing the contract as more difficult on the post survey than they did on the initial one.

Table 7. Perception of Difficulty Getting and Managing a Contract Reported on the Post Survey

	<b>OHSPK</b> (n=7)	<b>OPQ</b> (n=15)	<b>All Programs</b> (n=22)
Mean Level of Difficulty	1.4	2.3	2.0
Distribution of Responses	1=4 2=3 3=0 4=0 5=0	1=3 2=6 3=4 4=2 5=0	1=7 2=9 3=4 4=2 5=0

*Note:* Directors reported on a scale in which 1 represented not difficult and 5 very difficult. Only programs with contracts were asked the question.

The major difficulty reported was paperwork, not just for the program but for families. Respondents reported that they needed to help families work their way through the paperwork process, *“Getting the parents to fill out the paperwork; keeping track of who has applied, who is in the process, who has been accepted; waiting for the new vouchers and tracking to ensure we are sending in the right one.”* Another reported, *“more paperwork to keep track of, more papers to try and collect from families.”* One sounded quite discouraged, *“Paperwork for little return. We are a Community Site for Head Start. It seemed like there was competition for families.”* The challenge of recruiting families was mentioned by another, *“recruiting-a lot of families that were DHS were not ERDC, other than that the process was very easy for us to manage.”* Another raised another issue, *“The biggest challenge is getting parents to participate. They are often reluctant because they have a relative or friend caring for their child during the non-Head Start hours. They are often reluctant to move their child from this child care setting into one that meets the qualifications.”* Time was an issue and was described by a respondent, *“The time it takes to complete the requirements. They are not lengthy, yet we are a busy staff and any additional work is a strain.”* Dealing with the DHS Branch Office was mentioned by one respondent, *“Many DHS workers that are not directly involved with the contracted slots do not have clear or correct information to share with families or to work in conjunction with HS to serve families.”*

### **Marketing Contracted Slots**

On the post survey program directors were asked if they were able to adequately market the Contracted Slots Pilot program? Over half reported that they were able to do so. This included all of the OHSPK programs and 40% of OPQ programs. The remaining 60% of OPQ programs reported they were not able to adequately market the program. Many had referred to challenges to marketing their programs in responses to other questions. When asked specifically about these challenges, their responses fell into three major categories:

- Restrictions imposed by the Contracted Slots Pilot program. *“I couldn't tell any DHS clients what low copay I could offer, I am the only program in my area that is contracted with the state and I couldn't advertise that.” “Also, in the beginning we were not to mention the contracts unless the family asked about ERDC. This was a big roadblock to information, and I think we could have enrolled more last fall otherwise.” “It was unclear as to what we could share or not share about it. It is not something we attempted to market, due to that issue.”*
- Lack of public knowledge about Contracted Slots. *“People have no idea what a contracted slot is, and so we get to explain in detail to each family. The one-page information sheet provided has been helpful, as has been a series of quick ledgers I developed explaining the parent obligation for each tuition group.”*
- Lack of access to eligible families. *“I live in a middle class area and did not seem to be able to find the qualifying families on my own. I tried at a large Church and a low income housing place among other places.” “We did not know who to market to.” “We would market during tours, and told Mult. Co. R&R about our program to help recruit but other than that we didn't know where to recruit.”*

An additional program noted that their slots were all full by the time they had a contract so they had not marketed the program. Their marketing plan for the second year of the pilot was to collaborate with Head Start.

## Recruiting Children/Families

Both OHSPK and OPQ programs perceived recruitment as more challenging than getting and managing contracts, although OPQ programs perceived them as more challenging than did OHSPK programs. On a scale of one to five with five being the most difficult, all programs reported an average of 3.6. The average for OHSPK was 2.9 while for OPQ programs it was 3.9 (Table 8).

Table 8. Perception of Difficulty Recruiting Children/Families Reported on the Post Survey

	<b>OHSPK</b> (n=7)	<b>OPQ</b> (n=15)	<b>All Programs</b> (n=22)
Mean Level of Difficulty	2.9	3.9	3.6
Distribution of Responses	1=2 2=1 3=1 4=2 5=1	1=1 2=1 3=4 4=1 5=8	1=3 2=2 3=5 4=3 5=9

Note: Directors reported on a scale in which 1 represented not difficult and 5 very difficult. Only programs with contracts were asked the question.

Perceptions of difficulty in recruiting children/families increased over the first year of the contract, about half of both types of programs perceived an increase in the level of difficulty (3 of 6 OHSPK programs that answered the question in both years and 9 of 15 OPQ programs). Only four programs (2 OHSPK, 2OPQ) thought the level of difficulty decreased. The remaining five programs perceived the level of difficulty associated with recruiting children/families stayed the same at both time points. OPQ programs wanted and expected more help recruiting children/families, *“We couldn’t find families who are eligible and couldn’t figure out who to turn to help us find children who are eligible.”* Some expressed disappointment that there was not help from DHS, *“There was not recruitment assistance from OPQ or DHS staff.”* *“I also found that contacting the DHS office as suggested was fruitless and frustrating, as the people I was transferred to were unfamiliar with the program, and messages left at the “right” desk were not returned. When I had spaces, I did not get help filling them.”*

As stated above, a common challenge was finding children/families that were eligible for Contracted Slots. Some programs described challenges associated with families’ work schedules, *“The main challenge is finding parents that qualify and have work hours that match our program hours. Many families work non-traditional hours.”* Another shared, *“Some families do not have work schedules that align with HS hours of operation. This makes putting them on the contract unaffordable for HS due to the need of paying secondary providers.”* Sometimes parents do not have sufficient employment hours, *“Families are often working just under the minimum total hours to qualify for the contract.”* Programs also described challenges dealing with parental preferences for care. An OHSPK program shared, *“The difficulty is that parents are reluctant to have someone other than who is already caring for their children do so.”*

OPQ programs struggled with eligible parents’ lack of knowledge about OPQ and costs to families as barriers to participating, *“Families did not know what OPQ was and did not receive information about the advantage of checking into an OPQ program. Most families I met had never heard of OPQ or understood what I could offer them.”* Another said, *“As our rates are high, even the low co-pay does not offset the true cost of care enough for some.”* Another shared, *“... as our program is expensive, families do not typically seek our services, only due to cost.”* One saw the reduced copay as important to

successful recruiting, *“I finally stated on my ad on Craig's list that I was offering a low co-pay of 27.00. This attracted the attention of parents qualified to receive DHS.”*

A number of respondents shared that timing was an issue, *“We didn't always have an eligible family at the same time we had a vacancy. At times we have ineligible families waiting for an opening.”*

## **Enrolling Children/Families**

We asked directors if it was clear how many slots they should fill or what was expected of their program in regards to enrolling children/families. Five programs (all OPQ) responded that expectations were unclear, while the other 17 programs (7 OHPK, 10 OPQ) reported that expectations were clear. Directors who reported goals were clear were then asked to describe the goal or expectation. A number of respondents responded by articulating the goals of the Contracted Slots Pilot program rather than describing the number of children/families they thought they were expected to enroll:

- *To help families who need it and getting the best care possible no matter how much money they do or don't have.*
- *Provide high quality childcare and preschool services to as many families and their children as possible.*
- *The goal was to have a specific number of children in the program. It was also to ensure that children were being cared for in quality settings while parents are at work.*
- *To provide high quality care that is stable and in place for an entire year. To work with the family to maintain good attendance and to support families in various areas to ensure success in the education of their child and their own employment goals.*
- *To work closely with DHS to recruit and serve the most qualified families in order to provide them stable child care in order to have stable employment*

Others answered the question more concretely, focusing on the number of slots they were expected to fill.

- *We were allowed a number of slots, determined by us, to begin with. We were expected to fill as many as possible, and if we found we had more applicants than we could serve, we could ask for more.*
- *We had initially asked for 6 slots for our current families; we increased to 10, then 13, then 18!*
- *We were expected to fill 12-16 slots, working with our DHS liaison to recruit and fill slots.*
- *I was told that we should estimate how many slots we thought we would fill but that we would not be penalized for going under or over that estimate.*
- *To get as many families signed up as possible.*
- *Fully enrolled on the first day of school.*

A final group focused on the challenges they faced in enrolling children/families:

- *We were trying to fill 5 slots, but only filled 2 (one family we targeted was eligible for DHS but not OPQ because of the hours).*
- *I expected to fill all my slots with families qualifying through OPQ. I did not know that there would be so little advertisement about what I was offering or a limit on how I could advertise the openings I had. I filled the vacancies in my program with private paying customers.*
- *I am expecting to fill up three spots for the fall. I am working on it.*
- *We expect to fill the slots. We believe the families are out there, but we can't reach them.*
- *I am in contact with the person in charge of OPQ-DHS. She answers any concerns I might have. I appreciate being able to contact her when I have questions.*



The number of children enrolled in Contracted Slots varied by type of program. Whereas two-thirds of OPQ programs served fewer than five children, only one OHSPK did. The other six OHSPK programs served more than eight children whereas only two OPQ programs served eight or more children in the first year. Three OPQ programs actually served no children. The three programs that filled no slots were asked the reasons. One reported that she did not recruit any new families in the last year, Contracted Slots or other. Another reported that they could not find any families that qualified and had an advertising campaign underway for the second year of the pilot. The third reported that they had not received any referrals and that no families had contacted them. They shared that they were too late in the process to collaborate with OHSPK programs in the first year but hoped that year two would be different.

### Retaining Children/Families

Programs perceived the challenge of retaining children/families as less difficult than recruiting them. On a scale of one to five with five indicating the most difficulty, all programs rated the level of difficulty at an average of 1.8. OPQ programs rated difficulty slightly higher than did OHSPK programs (2.0 vs. 1.4). The five programs that rated difficult at a level of 3 or higher were all OPQ programs (Table 9).

Table 9. Perception of Difficulty Retaining Children/Families

	<b>OHSPK</b> (n=7)	<b>OPQ</b> (n=15)	<b>All Programs</b> (n=22)
Mean Level of Difficulty	1.4	2.0	1.8
Distribution of Responses	1=4 2=3 3=0 4=0 5=0 . =0	1=8 2=1 3=2 4=1 5=2 . =1	1=12 2= 4 3= 2 4= 1 5= 2 . = 1

Note: Directors reported on a scale in which 1 represented not difficult and 5 very difficult. Only programs with contracts were asked the question.

All of the challenges to retention that programs reported were associated with changes experienced by the children/family including:

- Moving,
- Loss of employment or a substantial reduction in employment hours, and
- Entry into elementary school which meant not having sufficient child care hours to qualify.

On the other hand, the strategies programs reported for retaining children/families were associated with program behaviors:

- Flexible hours. *“We have a good program that is also flexible in terms of before and aftercare to accommodate families and their changing needs.” “I try to accommodate my program hours with their work schedule, so they can fill the required full time hours.”*
- Sensitivity to family needs. *“Treating the individual needs of the families in crisis with whatever support available to us (food pantry, clothing exchange, emotional support).” “Meeting the needs of families and working with them individually to meet their needs.”*
- Selective recruitment. *“Selecting families that fit the work schedules that matched our program hours.” “We have found that children stay in the program when we recruit families that are a*

*good fit in the first place.” “Recruiting and enrolling the most stable families employed by stable businesses.”*

- Communication. *“Keeping communication open between families, us and DHS.” “Staying in close contact with families as their situations change. Developing collaborative relationships with the DHS contract case workers.”*

Many respondents reported that providing a high-quality program was the essential part of recruitment. One respondent expressed this thought this way, *“Having a extra quality preschool with some affordability.”*

We asked directors if any families had lost eligibility during the last year and if so, for what reason? Four programs responded that one or more of families enrolled in Contracted Slots had lost eligibility. Three of the four reported the reason for loss of eligibility was related to employment. For two of these cases it was not clear why the protected eligibility had not worked. Another case was more complicated but it was still not clear why protected eligibility did not allow the child/family to remain, *“Changing work hours in order to go to school part time; that meant the work hours were not consistent with the center hours and going to school was during the center hours portion. This put them under the required number of hours needed for the program.”* A final case raised a question about why the OPQ program had not gotten OPQ status for all of its sites, *“Moving from the center to one of our school based programs and that site is not an OPQ site.”*

## Reporting

Programs were asked to rate the difficulty of completing reports on a scale of one to five with five being the most difficult. Overall, programs did not perceive reporting requirements as very difficult; programs rated the level of difficulty at 1.8. OHSPK programs perceived submitting reports slightly less difficult than did OPQ programs (1.6 vs 1.9) (Table 10).

Table 10. Perception of Difficulty Completing Reports

	<b>OHSPK</b> (n=7)	<b>OPQ</b> (n=15)	<b>All Programs</b> (n=22)
Mean Level of Difficulty	1.6	1.9	1.8
Distribution of Responses	1=4 2=2 3=1 4=0 5=0 . =0	1=6 2=5 3=2 4=1 5=0 . =1	1=10 2= 7 3= 3 4= 1 5= 0 . = 1

*Note:* Directors reported on a scale in which 1 represented not difficult and 5 very difficult. Only programs with contracts were asked the question.

Programs described as being new to the Contracted Slots program found the reporting more difficult in the beginning. One shared that the reports were not difficult to complete and a number mentioned it was a time consideration. One mentioned how helpful DHS was, *“The initial process required extra time, and calls to Kelly Wilfong, to figure them out. Kelly was awesome to work with. Now we understand the system and it is not a problem.”* At the same time another complained, *“At times it was difficult to link up with the correct individual at DHS to complete the reports.”*

## Impacts of Participation and Future Plans

Programs were asked to:

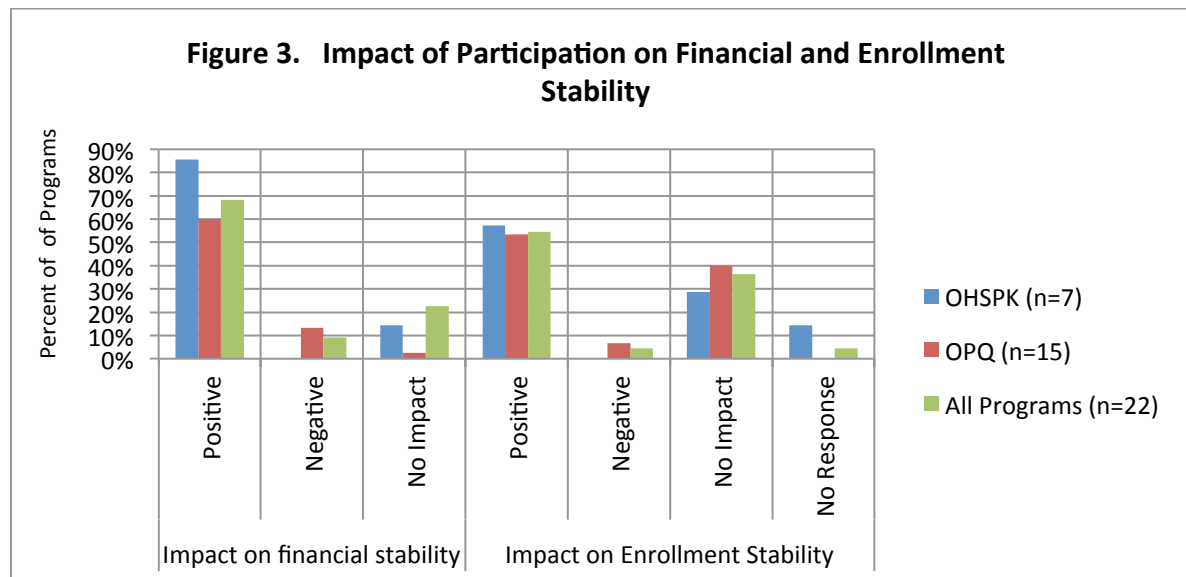
- Share impacts that participation in Contracted Slots had on financial and enrollment stability,
- Rate their overall experience,
- Share thoughts on ideal mix of children whose fees were funded with Contracted Slots compared to other sources, and
- Describe thoughts about the future.

### Impact on Financial and Enrollment Stability

Full and stable enrollment is a major component of financial stability. A goal of the Contracted Slots Pilot program is that it supports financial stability for high quality programs. Programs were asked if participation in Contracted Slots had a positive, negative, or no impact on both their program budget and on their enrollment.

Around two-thirds of programs (15) perceived participation in Contracted Slots to have a positive impact on financial stability although only slightly over half (12) thought it positively impacted enrollment stability (Figure 3). All but one OHSPK program perceived a positive impact on financial stability while six OPQ programs reported the impact as either negative (2) or neutral (4).

Slightly over 50% (12) of programs thought participation in the program positively impacted enrollment stability. Again, perceptions varied by type of program with about half of OHSPK programs reporting a positive impact on enrollment stability and only a third of OPQ programs doing so. No OHSPK and only one OPQ program reported participation in Contracted Slots having a negative impact on enrollment stability.



Despite the close association between financial and enrollment stability, some programs reported a positive impact on one and a neutral impact on the other. Amongst OHSPK programs, two programs reported a positive impact on budget with no impact on enrollment and one program reported no impact on financial stability and did not answer the question about the impact on enrollment. Amongst OPQ programs, one program reported that participation in Contracted Slots had a negative impact on

budget and a positive impact on enrollment. The director shared, *"I did not require the family to pay the excess beyond the DHS rate and our regular private pay rate."* Another two programs reported a positive impact on financial stability with no impact on enrollment stability. One program that reported a positive impact on budget with no impact on enrollment shared, *"It seemed that we had a normal amount of stability compared to previous years considering families both using DHS vouchers and regularly paying families."* One program reported an increase in enrollment sufficient to hire a staff person.

For the most part OHSPK programs reported that participation in Contracted Slots was very important to financial stability, *"We count on ERDC money to keep our EHS program open."* *"It assisted with the high cost of providing this service."* One reported difficulty collecting copays and noted that Head Start cannot deny access due to lack of payment. In terms of enrollment stability, one reported, *"It brought families to our program who needed a full day/full week program."*

OPQ programs noted the positive impact of Contracted Slots' policies on financial and enrollment stability, *"Having a secure monthly payment makes a positive difference creating a budget."* *"The payment for a vacant slot while we recruited was beneficial."* In a similar vein one program reported, *"More stability even if they don't work for a month or two."*

## **Overall Experience**

Directors were asked to rate their overall experience with the Contracted Slots Pilot program on a scale of 1 to 5 with a 1 representing very good and a 5 representing very poor. Eighty-three percent of programs rated Contracted Slots as good or very good (all OHSPK and 12 of 17 OPQ). One OPQ program did not respond, two rated the program fair, another as poor, and one as very poor. The programs that rated the program as fair shared their experience working with Contracted Slots Pilot staff, *"no opinion would have been a better option"* and *"People were friendly however the response time was not good."* The program that rated the program as poor reported, *"We were very disappointed to have put all that time into paperwork and recruiting to get no return on filled slots."* The program that rated the program as very poor shared, *"It was a lot of work for less money, for a family that didn't stay because of a move."*

Although rating Contracted Slots positively, some programs described areas they consider problematic. These included lack of clarity about recruitment, an issue that was mentioned numerous times. Others commented on the time commitment, especially when joining the Contracted Slots program. One Director shared her concern with time, *"Just the initial time commitment to sign up with the State. The State contract was huge! Getting signed up online was a challenge. Then the time commitment involved in the ongoing process."*

The overwhelming majority of participants in the Contracted Slots Pilot program described a positive experience for the families they served and for their own programs. Praise for those who managed the program was the most often reported reason for their positive experience. *"Kelly was SUPER great at communicating with me about the needs of our program and helping get slots processed."* Another shared, *"We always had our questions answered promptly and our program needs met."* Helpfulness of staff was a common theme, *"All staff associated with the Contracted Slots program have been very helpful."* One Director summed up the experience of many, *"Excellent program and Kelly Wilfong is very helpful- OPQ/DHS."*

Several Directors described what the program meant for the families they served, *"It was wonderful for the one DHS family we have enrolled. It made child care very affordable for her."* Another described her

own experience based on observing families she served, *“Experienced families mix of happiness, incredulous and thinking about more money for their families and not finding the words to thank us enough for what we do for their families.”*

Directors reported the program as good for their early learning programs as well as for the families they served, *“Our slot families were consistent and for the most part genuinely seemed to love and care about our program. We had consistent income and enrollment with the slots that were filled.”* *“We were very pleased to have a way to help families afford our program.”* *“This program is easy to navigation and supports high quality full day childcare for our families.”* *“It was very beneficial to families and not too taxing on our administration.”* *“Overall it's been a great thing.”*

### **Thoughts on Ideal Mix of Children**

Programs were asked what they considered an ideal mix of children whose fees were funded with Contracted Slots and those whose funding came from other sources. The question was open-ended, meaning that the Director could respond in any way. The responses between OHSPK and OPQ differed substantively. OHSPK Directors seemed to interpret the question as asking the desired mix of children on vouchers with children in Contracted Slots. Responses included:

- *“The ideal is 3/4 of the families having access to contracted slots. Leaving 1/4 available to students parents and foster parents and parents who work nights and weekends and who do not qualify for contracted slots.”*
- *“We would like to be able to fill more contracted slots in order for families to be more financially secure. Many times with vouchers and co pay, they can't pay the co pay and then go to one of our part day programs and find alternate childcare that is not ideal.”*
- *“We would like to see as many contracted slots as possible. We do not have a parent pay option and the voucher system can fluctuate month-to-month. We would also love to see a contract option for our EHS program.”*

Another OHSPK director responded, *“20-25 children so we could open another classroom”*. Yet another reported that their ideal would be 50% Contracted Slots with 50% Early Head Start.

OPQ programs responded in terms of combining private pay families with children from low-income families whose access depended on support from DHS through either a Contracted Slot or voucher. The most striking difference in concept of ideal between OHSPK and OPQ dealt with the percentage of Contracted Slots children. Whereas OHSPK Directors responded in terms of whole classrooms or large percentages (75% or 100%), OPQ programs reported that from 5% to 50% of children on Contracted Slots would be ideal. One program expressed the desire to serve children/families from diverse backgrounds, *“Having a wide range of families from different social and cultural background. (wealthy, middle, low income and children with specials needs under the same quality care).”* *“In a perfect world, I would have to have a mix of one-half DHS vouchers and one-half payments from privately paid parents.”* Four programs did not answer or reported not knowing what the ideal mix would be.

### **Plans for Year Two**

Although all seven OHSPK intended to contract in the second year, only 14 of 17 OPQ programs (13 with current contracts and one that had planned to contract but did not do so) reported being very likely to negotiate a contract in the second year (2013-2014). Two OPQ programs reported being unlikely or very

unlikely to sign contracts. One of the programs that had not contracted in year one although they had planned to do so, was not sure of whether or not they would contract in year two.

## Discussion

A survey of early learning programs that had participated or had planned to participate in the Contracted Slots Pilot program was conducted at the end of the first year and was designed to answer the following questions:

- Of all eligible programs, what number participated in the pilot? Why and why not?
- Of participating programs, what number participated for a full year? Why and why not?
- For participating programs, what worked and what challenges were encountered in regard to the contracting process, reporting requirements, interactions with the agencies, and other operational aspects of managing the contract?
- What impact did participation have on program enrollment and finances?

As the first two questions were so closely related we have combined what we learned about both in the discussion below. Thus the following section addresses:

- Participation of eligible programs and completion,
- Early learning program characteristics associated with completion,
- Challenges and strategies for meeting them, and
- Impact of participation on program enrollment and finances.

## Participation of Eligible Programs: Counts and Completion Rate

Levels of participation and reasons for participating or not participating varied by type of program as did the percentage of those that retained a contract for the whole year.

### **Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten Programs (OHSPK)**

Seven of 29 OHSPK programs participated in the Contracted Slots Pilot program. Having a full-day classroom appears to be associated with an OHSPK program's participation in Contracted Slots. Among the 29 OHSPK programs, 17 have never participated in Contracted Slots program and only one of the 17 had a full-day classroom. Of the five that have had a contract in the past, but not currently, three did not have a full-day classroom at the beginning of the Pilot. All seven of the programs with contracts in the pilot year had full-day classrooms. All seven contracted OHSPK programs retained their contract for the full year. Six of the seven OHSPK programs served nine or more children in contracted slots. At least one of the OHSPK programs thought of enrollment in terms of a classroom; having enough children on Contracted Slots to operate a full classroom.

### **Oregon Programs of Quality (OPQ)**

Although 22 OPQ programs were eligible for Contracted Slots, only 19 signed a contract. One nonparticipating program went out of business and the other two planned to sign a contract but did not. Of the 19 that signed a contract, two became ineligible during the first year, one due to noncompliance with child care regulations and the other because of a CCDF policy that programs that included religion in the curriculum were ineligible for funding. Thus, only 17 had a contract at the end of the first year. Of the 17 with contracts, three did not enroll any children in a contracted slot. Only two OPQ programs

served nine or more children in a contracted slot and two-thirds reported serving fewer than five children in a contracted slot.

## Early Learning Program Characteristics Associated with Completion

Not all programs appear to be a good match for the Contracted Slots Program. Certain program characteristics appear to increase the likelihood that an early learning program will negotiate a contract and then successfully recruit and retain students. For OHSPK, having a full-day classroom increases the likelihood of participation. For OPQ programs, being located in a middle class area made it hard to find qualifying families. Some directors expressed uneasiness in serving low-income families as indicated by comments such as *“some families do not value the care they receive at such a reduced amount”* or that *“sometimes these families take our care for granted and do not comply with our policies as closely as those that are paying full price.”* This reported unease is in contrast to a program that reported that participation enabled their program to meet a goal of increasing diversity in their program.

Findings point to the following as characteristics of early learning programs that may increase the likelihood that a Contracted Slots site will successfully recruit and retain eligible children/families:

- History of regulatory compliance,
- Nonreligious curriculum,
- Location that is accessible to low-income families,
- Experience serving low-income children/families, and
- Evidence of ability and desire to recruit and serve the targeted population.

Participation in programs associated with supporting low-income children/families and quality may indicate ability to recruit and retain children/families in contracted slots. The ERDC voucher program, CCACFP, and partnerships that secure additional services for children/families are examples of programs associated with support of low-income children/families. Goals of these programs include serving low-income children who qualify for vouchers, partnering with other early learning programs to improve and extend services, and participating in the Child Care and Adult Food Program to improve children’s nutrition and enhance programs’ financial stability. Participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CAAF) has been seen as a source of revenue to help programs provide quality caregiving. Participation in ERDC, CACFP, and early learning partnerships may also be characteristics that indicate that a program is likely to be successful in recruiting and retaining eligible children/families in a contracted slot.

## Challenges and Strategies for Meeting Them

We asked what worked and what challenges were encountered in regard to the contracting process, reporting requirements, interactions with the agencies, and other operational aspects of managing the contract. For the most part the systems in place worked for participation early learning programs; the majority of early learning program directors reported positively about their experience in the Contracted Slots Pilot program. Over four in five directors report their overall experience in the Pilot as good or very good - all OHSPK and 70% of OPQ programs. More OPQ than OHSPK program directors saw disadvantages for children/families and programs and experienced more challenges. For both types of programs their perception of the difficulty in meeting the challenges increased over the first year.

Challenges fell into the following categories:

- Getting and managing contracts,
- Recruitment,
- Retention, and
- Concerns about families.

OPQ programs reported more challenges than did OHSPK programs and the nature of the challenges varied by type of program.

### **Managing Contracts**

Almost half (6 of 15) of OPQ programs reported difficulty associated with managing the contract. Over half (8 of 15) of programs rated getting and managing the contract as more difficult on the post survey than they did on the initial one. Only one OHSPK rated managing the contract as difficult. Reasons for differences in perceptions may be related to OHSPK directors' increased experience with contracting in general and with the Contracted Slots program in general. It is important to note that contracting is an issue for OPQ programs and the perception of difficulty increased over the first year. Concerns about the amount of paperwork involved were high. Access to staff within DHS and OCC to answer questions and resolve issues emerged as important as did problems with persons working in DHS branches.

### **Recruitment**

Difficulty with recruitment was a theme for both types of programs. Although OPQ programs expressed a higher level of difficulty, three of seven OHSPK programs rated recruitment as difficult or very difficult. Importantly the perception of recruitment as a challenge was greater at the time of the post survey than at the time of the initial survey for both types of programs. The two types of programs have different challenges. Most of the OHSPK programs described challenges with meeting family work schedules and finding eligible families. OPQ programs reported parents' lack of knowledge about Contracted Slots and lack of public understanding of what it means to be an OPQ program. They also reported the challenge that their fees posed for families. Considerable confusion about allowable messaging and marketing was noted primarily by OPQ programs. Training around marketing could assist with recruitment efforts. Programs also seemed confused about the number of contracted slots they could aim to fill. Substantial differences in the number of contracted slots by type of program were striking. Expectations for enrollment in Contracted Slots do not appear clear and will benefit from further clarification.

### **Retention**

Retention of children/families in a contracted slot was related to recruitment as the fit between children/families recruited and the services offered affected how long a family stayed. Yet programs reported less difficulty retaining than recruiting children/families. Only three programs (all OPQ) reported that retaining children/families was difficult or very difficult. Reasons for loss included family moves, aging out of programs, and loss of eligibility due primarily to employment changes. Four programs reported that children/families lost eligibility for Contracted Slots and all but one reported the reason for the loss was associated with employment. Since the program was designed to protect children/families from loss of eligibility, careful attention to such cases seems warranted. More clarity on the meaning and operationalization of protected eligibility may be needed.

### **Concerns about Families**

Directors from both types of programs expressed concerns about the families they recruited. One OHSPK director talked of family preferences to use family caregivers during times that the center does



not offer care. An OPQ director referred to families who did not value the program she offered. Others talked of the families as “those” families, implying that she perceived them as different from other families she served. Exploration of both of these concerns seems worthwhile. If children have the benefit of an OHSPK program part of each day, do they need to be convinced to not have relatives and friends care for their children for the other hours of care that the parent needs? If programs perceive low-income families as different will they provide a welcoming and safe environment?

## Impact on Program Enrollment and Finances

Almost all programs reported either a positive or no effect on both program enrollment and finances. Despite the close association between financial and enrollment stability, some programs reported a positive impact on one and a neutral impact on the other. Amongst OHSPK programs, two programs reported a positive impact on budget with no impact on enrollment. Amongst OPQ programs, one program reported that participation in Contracted Slots had a negative impact on budget and a positive impact on enrollment. A second director reported negative impact on both enrollment and finances.

## Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations

Based on reports from directors of early learning programs that participated in the first year of the Contracted Slots pilot program (2012-2013), the program is beneficial to children/families and programs and for the most part its policies and practices work well. Problem areas that emerge center on contract management, recruitment, retention, and concerns about families.

A theme that emerges is that participation in Contracted Slots is not a good fit for all OHSPK or OPQ programs. Having at least one full-day classroom emerges as a key characteristic of OHSPK programs that have joined and remained with the Contracted Slots Pilot program. Only 10 of the 29 OHSPK programs report having at least one full-day classroom. Seven of those had contracts at the end of the first year and all seven plan to continue in the Contracted Slots Pilot program in Year 2. Seventeen of the original 22 OPQ programs negotiated a contract and completed the first year. Of the 17 OPQ directors that completed the survey (15 of the 17 that finished the first year plus two that had planned to have a contract but did not), 14 planned to negotiate a contract for the second year. Determining which program characteristics predict a good fit between an early learning program and the Contracted Slots program seems important for the future of the program.

The following recommendations address areas in which the program can be strengthened.

1. Not all eligible programs engaged in the program and among those that did not all finished the first year. In addition to documentation of a high level of quality, we recommend creation of a set of characteristics programs must demonstrate in order to be able to negotiate a contract:
  - a. OHSPK programs must have at least one full-day classroom or provide evidence of their interest and ability to do so.
  - b. All early learning programs should:
    - i. Demonstrate experience successfully serving low-income children/families.
    - ii. Be accessible to low-income families; for example, be located in a community with a significant numbers of low-income children/families or a history of serving this population.
    - iii. Provide evidence of understanding the needs of low-income families and respect for families of all incomes and types.

- iv. Provide evidence of participation in programs and initiatives designed to support low-income children and improve quality such as CCAFP and other quality initiatives.
2. Access to knowledgeable staff appear critical to program success. Therefore:
  - a. Continue dedicating staff time to assist program staff and families in resolving any issues that arise
  - b. Either enable program and families to deal only with designated staff or provide training to DHS staff in branch offices so that they are able to resolve issues associated with the Contracted Slots program.
3. Recruitment of families into the Contracted Slots Pilot program is perceived as an issue for both OHSPK and OPQ programs. The following could be expected to enhance recruitment efforts:
  - a. Increase awareness of Contracted Slots program within DHS and the public.
  - b. Continue and enhance marketing efforts.
  - c. Help OHSPK programs identify characteristics of families that would benefit from enrollment in Contracted Slots.
  - d. Consider partnerships with Early Learning Hubs, a partnership which would support Hub efforts to serve targeted populations at the same time as supporting recruitment efforts.
4. Confusion about Contracted Slots Pilot program policies was evident in some director responses. Increased clarity and training are recommended on the following:
  - a. How many children/families the Contracted Slots program would like to serve.
  - b. Protected eligibility—e.g., whose eligibility is protected (slot only or does it include vouchers for other children in the same family)? What happens when parents lose work hours or a job?

# Appendix A: Improvements to DHS Head Start Contracted Child Care

Effective September 2012, planned improvements were made to Head Start contracts. Expanding contracted slots allows more children access to quality programs and continuity, which is a priority. The following improvements were made last year to enhance the contracts based on feedback received from local DHS and Head Start programs. These changes include:

<b><i>Improvements beginning in September 2012.</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Eligibility look back-</b> Allowing for entrance into a contracted slot without a new application when eligibility had been determined within the current or previous 3 months.</li><li>• <b>Parent work hours-</b> Parents are required to work a minimum of 25 hours a week. Families appropriate for the slots agree to meet the minimum requirement of 136 hours a month.</li><li>• <b>Payment process-</b> Billing forms are sent directly to DHS Direct Pay Unit (DPU) for review and payment processing. This helps to expedite the payment.</li><li>• <b>Proration of payments-</b> There is no proration of payments. Consistent payments provide more stable funding. The child is expected to attend 136 per month.</li></ul>
<b><i>Previous contract years</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Eligibility look back-</b> Entrance into a contracted slot without a new application when eligibility had been determined within the current month.</li><li>• <b>Parent work hours-</b> The previous contract required parents to work a minimum of 32 hours a week to be eligible for the contract. This has been lowered to 25 hours a week. Lowering the minimum work hours allows a larger number of families to be potentially eligible for a contracted slot.</li><li>• <b>Payment process-</b> In the previous contract, billing forms were sent to the local DHS staff member for review prior to being sent to DPU.</li><li>• <b>Proration of payments-</b> The previous contract prorated payment if the average attendance dropped below 136 hours a month.</li></ul>

## Appendix B: Initial Director's Survey

The Department of Human Services and the Child Care Division are partnering in a program that aims to provide children eligible for a child care subsidy stable, high quality care and education. The Head Start/Oregon Program of Quality Contracted Slots program (Contracted Slots) builds upon almost 10 years of the Head Start Contracted Slots program.

Oregon State University is evaluating the extent to which the Contracted Slots Pilot program achieves its stated goals. The first step in implementing this program is the enrollment of eligible programs. In August 2012 your program received an invitation to participate in the Contracted Slots Pilot program. We would like to learn what you knew of this Contracted Slots program at this time and your perceptions of the costs and benefits to your program and the children and families your program serves as participants in the pilot.

This survey is completely voluntary and your answers will be kept strictly confidential. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your program's status in the Contracted Slots program. If you have any questions about this survey contact Bobbie Weber at 541-737-9243 or [bobbie.weber@oregonstate.edu](mailto:bobbie.weber@oregonstate.edu) for more information. The survey will take about xx minutes to complete. You may choose to skip any question or end the survey at any time.

**1. In Summer 2012 did your program receive an invitation to participate in the Contracted Slots Program?**

- Yes
- No
- Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

- Were you aware the Contracted Slots Program would be available?
- Yes
  - No

**2. Are you an Oregon Head Start PreKindergarten Program or an Oregon Program of Quality?**

- Oregon Head Start PreKindergarten Program
- Oregon Program of Quality

**3. These next questions are about benefits you may have perceived as part of your program's participation in the Contracted Slots program.**

3a. Do you perceive any benefits of participation in the Contracted Slots program for <b>children</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
3b. Do you perceive any benefits of participation in the Contracted Slots program for <b>families</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
3c. Do you perceive any benefits of participation in the Contracted Slots program for <b>programs</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

If YES for Q3a

→ What do you perceive as benefits of participation in the Contracted Slots program for **children**? [open ended]

If YES for Q3b

→ What do you perceive as benefits of participation in the Contracted Slots program for **families**? [open ended]

If YES for Q3c

→ What do you perceive as benefits of participation in the Contracted Slots program for **programs**? [open ended]

**4. Looking back to August and September, how many children from ages zero to four did your program enroll?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of children enrolled from ages 0-4

***Only Oregon Head Start PreKindergarten Programs (determined from Q2) will answer Q5.***

**5. Has your program participated in the Contracted Slots program over the last 10 years?**

- Yes  
 No  
 Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

→ 5a. What school years has your program participated? [check all that apply]

- |                                    |                                    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2002-2003 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2007-2008 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2003-2004 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2008-2009 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2004-2005 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2009-2010 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2005-2006 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2010-2011 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2006-2007 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2011-2012 |

5b. If your program is no longer participating, please indicate why you no longer participate? [check all that apply]

- Not interested in offering full-day, full-week, full-year care
- Families we serve do not need full-day care
- The majority of families we serve have an unemployed parent
- Participation in contracted slots would require too many fiscal and human Resources
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Everyone will answer Q6.

**6. Does your program or is your program negotiating a contract for slots with DHS?**

- Yes
- No

6a. What factors were taken into account when setting your programs minimum, maximum, and targeted slots? [Open-ended]

6b. If your program is no longer participating, please indicate why you no longer participate? [check all that apply] [**Note:** for OPQ programs this response will be open-ended]

- Not interested in offering full-day, full-week, full-year care
- Families we serve do not need full-day care
- The majority of families we serve have an unemployed parent
- Participation in contracted slots would require too many fiscal and human Resources
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

6c. Please share the reasons why the Contracted Slots Program was not a good fit for your program? [check all that apply] [**Note:** for OPQ programs this response will be open-ended]

- Not interested in offering full-day, full-week, full-year care
- Families we serve do not need full-day care
- The majority of families we serve have an unemployed parent
- Participation in contracted slots would require too many fiscal and human Resources
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Only those programs that answered YES to Q6 will answer Q7.

	Not Difficult				Very Difficult
	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
<b>7. Please rate the level of difficulty your program experienced in gaining a contract?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Only those program that answered greater than "not difficult" response will answer Q8-9.

**8. What were the challenges in negotiating the contract? [open-ended]**

**9. What helped you overcome the challenges in negotiating the contract? [open-ended]**

# Appendix C: Post Director's Survey

## Post Survey Instrument to Child Care Program Directors – *Currently Have a Contract*

Congratulations on your contribution to the Contracted Slots program in 2012-13. Welcome to a survey of the Directors of Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten programs and Oregon Programs of Quality that participated in the Contracted Slots program this past year. The purpose of this survey is to learn what worked and what challenges were met through your participation. We also want to verify basic information on your program. Some of the questions we asked last fall will be asked again in order to assess if your perceptions have changed over the past year. The survey questionnaire should take less than 15 minutes to complete. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey by entering in the box below the Personal Access Code we emailed to you.

### 1. Are you an Oregon Head Start PreKindergarten Program or an Oregon Program of Quality?

- Oregon Head Start PreKindergarten and/or Early Head Start Program
- Oregon Program of Quality [skipto Q3]

1a. Please confirm which of the following services your program delivers. [Check all that apply]

- Center-based program—part-day classrooms only
- Center-based program—at least one full-day classroom
- Home-based program
- Family Child Care
- Head Start program option variations (please describe): [open-ended]

1b. How many classrooms do you have in your program? [Number]

1c. How many of the classrooms are full-day classrooms?

- 0
- 1-3
- 4-6
- More than 6

1c1. Would you have a full-day classroom if you were not participating in the Contracted Slots Program?

- Yes (Please describe): [open-ended]
- No (Please describe): [open-ended]

1c2. How many full-day classrooms do you think you would have if you were not participating in the Contracted Slots Program? [Number]

### 2. Do you have partnerships with community preschools to deliver care and early education services to children enrolled in your program?

- Yes
- No

2a. Who are your partners? [open-ended]

2b. What services are they providing for your program? [open-ended]

**3. Does your program currently participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program?**

- Yes
- No

→ 3a. Have you participated in the Child and Adult Care Food Program in the past?

- Yes
- No

3b. Why is your program not currently participating in the Child and Adult Care Food program? [open-ended]

**4. In the Fall of 2012 we asked what you perceived to be the benefits and disadvantages of the Contracted Slots Program for children, families, and programs. We are asking these questions again in this survey because your experiences in the past year may have changed your perceptions of the benefits and disadvantages.**

**These next questions are about what you perceive as benefits of participation in the Contracted Slots Program. The benefits could be for children and families or for programs. We are going to ask about each separately.**

4a. Do you perceive any benefits in the Contracted Slots program for participating <b>children/families</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4b. Do you perceive any benefits in the Contracted Slots program for participating <b>programs</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

If YES for Q4a  
→ What do you perceive as benefits in the Contracted Slots program for participating **children/families**? [open ended]

If YES for Q4b  
→ What do you perceive as benefits in the Contracted Slots program for participating **programs**? [open ended]

**5. These next questions are about what you perceived as disadvantages of participation in the Contracted Slots program. The disadvantages could be for children/families or programs. We are going to ask about each separately.**

5a. Do you perceive any disadvantages in the Contracted Slots program for participating <b>children/families</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5b. Do you perceive any disadvantages in the Contracted Slots program for participating <b>programs</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

If YES for Q5a  
→ What do you perceive as disadvantages in the Contracted Slots program for participating **children/families**? [open ended]



If YES for Q5b  
 → What do you perceive as disadvantages in the Contracted Slots program for participating **programs**? [open ended]

	Not Difficult	▼	▼	▼	▼	Very Difficult
6. Please rate the level of difficulty your program experienced in <i>managing the contract process</i> (negotiating contract, completing paperwork, etc).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Only those program that answered greater than the “not difficult” response in Q6 will answer Q7.**

7. What were the challenges in managing the contract process? [open-ended]

All programs will answer Q10-Q12.

8. How many contracted slots did your program fill this past year?

Number \_\_\_\_\_

→ If number is equal to 0, then ask:

8a. Why did you not fill any contracted slots this past year? [open-ended]

	Not Difficult	▼	▼	▼	▼	Very Difficult
9. Please rate the level of difficulty your program experienced in <i>recruiting children</i> into the contracted slots.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Only those programs that answered greater than the “not difficult” response in Q9 will answer Q10.**

10. What were the challenges in recruiting children? [Open-ended]

All programs will answer Q11-Q13.

11. What strategies worked in recruiting children? [Open-ended]

12. As part of the Contracted Slots Program, was it clear how many slots you should fill or what was expected of your program in regards to recruiting children?

- Yes
- No

→ 12a. Please describe the goal or expectation? [open-ended]

	Not Difficult ▼	▼	▼	▼	Very Difficult ▼
13. Please rate the level of difficulty your program experienced in <i>retaining children</i> in the contracted slots for the full year.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Only those program that answered greater than the “not difficult” response in Q13 will answer Q14.**

**14. What were the challenges in retaining children?** [open-ended]

All programs will answer Q15.

**15. What strategies worked in retaining children in the Contracted Slots Program?** [open-ended]

**16. Did any families in your program lose eligibility to be in the Contracted Slots Program?**

- Yes
- No

→ 16a. What specifically made these families lose eligibility? [open-ended]

**17. During this past year, did your program serve children whose families qualified for vouchers (full or partial payment of your fees by DHS for a parent not in Contracted Slots)?**

- Yes
- No

**18. Did participation in the Contracted Slots Program have a positive or negative impact on your program budget?**

- Positive impact on budget. Please explain [open-ended]
- Negative impact on budget. Please explain [open-ended]
- No impact on budget

**19. Did participation in the Contracted Slots Program have a positive or negative impact on the stability of your enrollment?**

- Positive impact on enrollment stability. Please explain [open-ended]
- Negative impact on enrollment stability. Please explain [open-ended]
- No impact on enrollment stability.

**20. Was your program able to adequately market the contracted slots program?**

- Yes
- No

→ 20a. What were the challenges in marketing the program? [open-ended]

- |   | Not<br>Difficult<br>▼    | ▼                        | ▼                        | ▼                        | Very<br>Difficult<br>▼   |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 21. Please rate the level of difficulty your program experienced in <i>completing reports</i> related to participation in the contracted slots for the full year. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

*Only those program that answered greater than the “not difficult” response in Q21 will answer Q22.*

22. What were the challenges in completing reports? [open-ended]

All programs will answer Q23.

23. In your opinion what would be the ideal mix of contracted slots and slots funded from other sources (include payment by parents and payments by parents with a voucher from DHS)? [open-ended]

24. How would you rate your overall experience in the Contracted Slots program over the past year?

- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very poor

24a. Please describe the reasons why you chose this rating? [open-ended]

25. How likely or unlikely are you to participate in the Contracted Slots Program in 2013-14?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

26. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about your experience with the Contracted Slots Program? [Open-ended]

Learning from you is vital to the success of the Contracted Slots Program. Thank you for making the time to complete the survey.

**Post Survey Instrument to Child Care Program Directors – *Planned to Have a Contract***

Welcome to a survey of the Directors of Oregon Programs of Quality that planned to participate in the Contracted Slots Program this past year. The purpose of this survey is to learn why your program was not able to participate in the Contracted Slots Program and to verify basic information on your program. Some of the questions we asked last fall will be asked again in order to assess if your perceptions have changed over the past year. The survey questionnaire should take less than 10 minutes to complete. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey by entering in the box below the Personal Access Code we emailed to you.

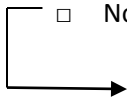
**1. In a survey conducted in the fall of 2012 your program indicated that you planned to have a signed contract for the 2012-13 contracted year. According to DHS records you did not enter into a contract. Please indicate why you did not participate in the contracted slots program?** [open-ended]

**2. Is your program a center, certified family, or family child care?**

- Center
- Certified Family
- Family child care

**3. Does your program currently participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program?**

- Yes
- No



**3a. Have you participated in the Child and Adult Care Food Program in the past?**

- Yes
- No

**3b. Why is your program not currently participating in the Child and Adult Care Food program?** [open-ended]

**4. In the Fall of 2012 we asked what you perceived to be the benefits and disadvantages of the Contracted Slots Program for children, families, and programs. We are asking these questions again in this survey because your experiences in the past year may have changed your perceptions of the benefits and disadvantages.**

**These next questions are about what you perceive as benefits of participation in the Contracted Slots Program. The benefits could be for children and families or for programs. We are going to ask about each separately.**

4a. Do you perceive any benefits in the Contracted Slots program for participating <b>children/families</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4b. Do you perceive any benefits in the Contracted Slots program for participating <b>programs</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

If YES for Q4a  
 → What do you perceive as benefits in the Contracted Slots program for participating **children/families**? [open ended]

If YES for Q4b  
 → What do you perceive as benefits in the Contracted Slots program for participating **programs**? [open ended]

**5. These next questions are about what you perceived as disadvantages of participation in the Contracted Slots program. The disadvantages could be for children/families or programs. We are going to ask about each separately.**

5a. Do you perceive any disadvantages in the Contracted Slots program for participating <b>children/families</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5b. Do you perceive any disadvantages in the Contracted Slots program for participating <b>programs</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

If YES for Q5a  
 → What do you perceive as disadvantages in the Contracted Slots program for participating **children/families**? [open ended]

If YES for Q5b  
 → What do you perceive as disadvantages in the Contracted Slots program for participating **programs**? [open ended]

**6. What do you perceive as the challenges in negotiating a contract?** [open-ended]

All programs will answer Q7.

**7. During this past year, did your program serve children whose families qualified for vouchers (full or partial payment of your fees by DHS for a parent not in Contracted Slots)?**

- Yes
- No

**8. In your opinion what would be the ideal mix of contracted slots and slots funded from other sources (include payment by parents and payments by parents with a voucher from DHS)?** [open-ended]

**9. How would you rate your overall experience working with the staff in the Contracted Slots program over the past year?**

- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very poor

10a. Please describe the reasons why you chose this rating? [open-ended]

**10. How likely or unlikely are you to participate in the Contracted Slots Program in 2013-14?**

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

**11. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about your experience with the Contracted Slots Program? [Open-ended]**

**Learning from you is vital to the success of the Contracted Slots Program. Thank you for making the time to complete the survey.**

**For information about this report, contact:**

Oregon Child Care Research Partnership,  
OSU Family Policy Program  
231 Hallie Ford Center  
Corvallis, Oregon 97331-6406  
Telephone: (541) 737-9243  
Email: [bobbie.weber@oregonstate.edu](mailto:bobbie.weber@oregonstate.edu)

---