Quality Rating Systems

How States Are Improving the Quality of Early Care and Education Programs

Prepared by the National Child Care Information Center

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What is a Quality Rating System (QRS)?

• A method to assess, improve, & communicate the level of quality in early care & education settings.

What Does QRS Look Like?

• Builds on foundation of licensing and adds multiple steps between licensing standards and higher quality criteria
• Supports/incentives for reaching higher levels
• Easily recognized symbols for higher levels

Why Develop a QRS?

• The overall goal of QRS is to improve the quality of programs through system wide improvements.
• Opportunity to:
  — Increase quality of care and education for children
  — Increase parents’ understanding and demand for higher-quality care
  — Increase professional development of child care providers

Why Develop a QRS?

• Create alignment between licensing, subsidy, and quality and across child care, pre-K, and Head Start
• Link the current structures of care and education with a framework
• Provide an accountability measure for funding

Connecting Existing Initiatives
Phases of development

- No activity
- Exploring/developing
- Piloting
- Implementing

More than 25 States Exploring/Designing QRS

13 States with Statewide QRS

- All include child care centers and family child care homes
- Most include school-age programs and Head Start
  - Meeting Head Start performance standards in criteria
- A few QRS include Pre-K
  - Is Pre-K licensed?
  - Done at the local level

Funding Sources for QRS

- All but one use Federal CCDF
- Other common sources:
  - Other Federal sources (TANF, SSBG)
  - General State dollars
  - Private dollars
  - Tax revenue
  - Tobacco settlement

Common Elements of QRS

- Standards
- Accountability
- Program and practitioner outreach and support
- Financing incentives specifically linked to compliance with quality standards
- Parent/consumer education

Determining Quality Criteria

• States choose criteria which research has shown to have significant impact on quality:
  – Classroom structure: child-staff ratios and group size;
  – Staff qualifications: caregivers’ education, training, experience, and administrators’ experience; and
  – Program dynamics: curriculum, learning environment, and parent engagement.

Accreditation and QRS

• Accreditation is included in all* of the 13 Statewide QRS.

• How accreditation is included varies:
  – At the highest rating (or level) of the QRS
  – Separate category of quality criteria
  – One of the criteria for reaching the highest “step” within a quality criteria
  – Criterion for which points are awarded

*North Carolina only uses accreditation for QRS with family child care homes

Accountability

• Accountability of compliance with quality criteria, through assessment and monitoring:
  – Creates benchmarks for measuring improvement
  – Accountability for funding
  – Guide for aligning program and practitioner support
  – Builds the case for additional funding

Common Categories of Criteria

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<tr>
<th>Categories of Quality Criteria</th>
<th>Number of QRS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Children with Special Needs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Classroom Assessments

• 11 of the 13 Statewide QRS are using an environment rating scale (ERS)*

  – Variations in using ERS with QRS:
    • Frequency of assessment
    • Percent/Number of classrooms observed
    • How scores are used
      – Averaged
      – Required score for a particular level with the quality criteria

* ERS: Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-revised (ECERS-R), Infant/Toddler Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R), Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS), and School Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS)

Agencies Monitoring Quality Criteria

Source: Collins, J., & Dry, T. (2004, July) and information provided by NCCIC State Technical Assistance Specialists.
Program and Practitioner Outreach and Support

- Technical assistance
  - Mentoring and coaching
  - Help with accreditation
- Professional development and training
  - College courses leading to degrees, distance learning
- Financial incentives
  - Compensation awards, quality bonuses, tiered reimbursement
- Outreach on participation in the QRS
  - Orientation sessions, outreach staff

Source: Mitchell (2005)

Financing Incentives Linked to Compliance with Quality Standards

- Tiered reimbursement rates
- Quality bonus payments and incentives
- Contracts
- Quality grants
- Scholarships
- Wage supplements

Source: Mitchell (2005)

30 States Have Statewide Tiered Reimbursement

30 States Have Statewide Tiered Reimbursement

- Development of a quality rating indicator (or symbol) that families can use as a consumer guide:
  - Posting quality rating symbol
  - Child care resource and referral agencies
  - Public awareness campaigns
  - Press releases
  - Informational brochures, Web sites, etc.
  - Publicize ratings
  - Partnerships

Source: Mitchell (2005)

Parent/Consumer Education

- What is the impact of a Quality Rating System?
  - On program quality
  - On teachers
  - On families

Source: Mitchell (2005)

Evaluation of Impact

- Oklahoma
  - Higher star level programs connected to better educated directors and teachers
  - Less turnover
  - Higher salaries
- North Carolina
  - Increase in rating scale scores connected to increased teacher education levels in centers and homes

Source: Mitchell (2005)
Evaluation Impact

- **Tennessee**
  - Child care quality across Tennessee has improved at both centers and homes
    - Including, average infant and toddler scores rose 9.9 percent
  - Parents across the state had evaluation results and report cards to help them make more informed child care choices
  - Caregivers received detailed information about what they were doing well and ways to improve their services

QRS Resources

- For more information about Quality Rating Systems, visit the NCCIC Web site at http://nccic.org/poptopics/index.html#qrs.

Sources

- Information from State documents.
- Information provided by NCCIC State Technical Assistance Specialists.