



OVERVIEW OF THE QRIS RESOURCE GUIDE

The QRIS Resource Guide is intended as a tool for States and communities to explore key issues and decision points during the planning and implementation of a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). The Guide is divided into nine sections. Each section contains a set of questions, with guidance for addressing the questions, for States to consider and discuss when planning, implementing, or revising a QRIS. The sections can stand alone, but it is recommended that the whole Guide be read in its entirety before starting to use it in a planning process.

The Guide gives examples throughout the sections to illustrate strategies States used to develop and implement their QRIS, plus publications and other resources on specific topics.

This section is an overview of the information covered in each section of the QRIS Resource Guide.

Section 1. Introduction to QRIS

The development of QRIS began in the 1990s with States rewarding higher quality providers with higher subsidy reimbursement rates for those that were accredited. They found, however, that few providers were able to achieve accreditation. Due to the large difference between licensing and accreditation standards, States saw the need for steps in between to help providers bridge the gap. At this same time, States were creating comprehensive professional development systems and seeking to align their many different quality initiatives. The first statewide QRIS was implemented by Oklahoma in 1998. Since then, 25 States have implemented statewide QRIS, and most of the remaining States are developing or exploring QRIS as a mechanism for organizing quality initiatives into one coherent system.

Section 2. Initial Design Process

Planning a QRIS requires many considerations, and the process must be handled thoughtfully and with great deliberation because it lays the groundwork for everything that follows. If done well, the process can unify a wide range of constituencies and lead to greater understanding and support for early childhood care and education. This section includes information on setting the vision and goals, beginning the design process, determining which programs will participate, and gathering information on the current workforce and the licensing program.

Section 3. Approaches to Implementation

Most States have found that full funding for a comprehensive quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) initiative is difficult to achieve initially, even with the redirection of existing resources. A pilot or a phased-in approach can be an affordable way to demonstrate the value of the program and may lead to increased support among stakeholders. States are also using pilots increasingly to test QRIS elements, with positive results. This section includes issues to consider when conducting a pilot and a description of how some States have used a phased-in approach as an alternative to full implementation.

Section 4. Standards and Criteria

Standards are the agreed upon markers of quality established in areas critical to effective programming and child outcomes. Taken together, standards are used to assign ratings to programs that participate in quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS), providing parents, policymakers, funders, and the public

with information about the components and levels of quality. States typically use licensing standards as the base of the system, a foundation on which to build higher levels of standards. Every QRIS contains two or more levels of standards beyond licensing, with incremental progressions to the highest level of quality, as defined by the State. Systems vary in the number of rating levels and the number of standards identified in each level. Most QRIS award easily recognizable symbols, such as stars, to programs to indicate the levels of quality. Standards used to assign ratings are based on research about the characteristics of programs that produce positive child outcomes. This section includes information about categories of standards and criteria used to assign ratings, approaches States have used to organize the standards and assign ratings, ways States have incorporated other State, Federal, and national standards into their QRIS, the inclusion of specific program types and groups of children into QRIS standards, and the use of environment rating scales (ERS) and other program assessment tools.

Section 5. Accountability and Monitoring

When a State decides to pursue a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), it is important to engage providers, partners, and other stakeholders in a strategic process to determine appropriate policies and procedures for accountability and monitoring. This section addresses the areas of documenting compliance with the standards and criteria, determining the rating levels, deciding how frequently they will be determined, choosing which assessment tools to use, monitoring the rating, and facing a possible loss or reduction of a rating level.

Section 6. Provider Incentives and Support

An essential element of a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) is the support offered to child care providers to assist them in understanding and meeting the standards and quality criteria. States may already have support services in place that can be linked to the QRIS, or they may need to invest in new services, or both. This section addresses various types of support services, such as professional development opportunities and targeted technical assistance approaches, as well as financial incentives for programs and individual staff.

Section 7. Data Collection and Evaluation

Data collection and evaluation are often an afterthought when developing a new system. The emphasis is usually on the design and implementation because the driving force is the urgent need for the change. Typically, a shortage of resources results because most are committed to implementation. It is often only when implementation issues arise or there is a need to document the success of the new system that thought is given to data collection and evaluation. At that point, much of the opportunity to collect baseline data and incorporate the data collection process into the existing data collection systems may be lost. Then data collection and evaluation become much more expensive. This section addresses how to include data collection and evaluation in the initial planning for a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). Considering the questions posed may help to plan for data collection and also result in an improved evaluation process, as well as a more successful design and implementation process. Discussions on the use of data in planning and implementation are included in the “Initial Design Process” and “Approaches to Implementation” sections.

Section 8. Cost Projections and Financing

Because financing for the QRIS and its various elements is critical for long-term success, initial projections and sustainability review are important parts of planning. This section addresses the issues of projecting costs based on a proposed or revised QRIS model, identifying existing resources that can be realigned to support the QRIS, and securing additional sources of funding.

Section 9. Consumer Education

Assisting parents in understanding, choosing, and evaluating early and school-age care and education programs is one of the primary reasons States create a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). For a system to be successful, however, messages should be designed for various audiences to promote its value to a wide range of stakeholders. This section addresses various strategies for reaching parents, consumers, and providers, as well as building support among policymakers, State and community leaders, and funders.

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QRIS RESOURCE GUIDE: SECTION 1

The QRIS Resource Guide is intended as a tool for States and communities to explore key issues and decision points during the planning and implementation of a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). States are involved in various activities to improve the availability and quality of early and school-age care and education programs. Most often these activities are supported by quality set-aside funds from the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). States increasingly use CCDF funds to create QRIS or elements of QRIS.

The development of QRIS began in the 1990s with States rewarding higher quality providers with higher subsidy reimbursement rates for those that were accredited. They found, however, that few providers were able to achieve accreditation. Due to the large difference between licensing and accreditation standards, States saw the need for steps in between to help providers bridge the gap. At this same time, States were creating comprehensive professional development systems and seeking to align their many different quality initiatives. The first statewide QRIS was implemented by Oklahoma in 1998. Since then, more than half of the States and the District of Columbia have implemented statewide QRIS, and most of the remaining States are developing or exploring QRIS as a mechanism for organizing quality initiatives into one coherent system. Additional information about the development of QRIS is available in Mitchell's (2005) Stair Steps to Quality at

http://www.earlychildhoodfinance.org/downloads/2005/MitchStairSteps_2005.pdf.

- [What is a QRIS?](#)
- [Why develop a QRIS?](#)
- [What are the elements of a QRIS?](#)

What is a QRIS?

A QRIS is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. Similar to rating systems for restaurants and hotels, QRIS award quality ratings to early and school-age care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards. By participating in their State's QRIS, early and school-age care providers embark on a path of continuous quality improvement. Even providers that have met the standards of the lowest QRIS levels have achieved a level of quality that is beyond the minimum requirements to operate.

Why develop a QRIS?

QRIS are intended to improve the quality of early and school-age care and education programs through the alignment and coordination of systemwide initiatives. A QRIS may offer States several opportunities:

- Increase quality of early care and education services.
- Increase parents' understanding and demand for higher quality early care and education.
- Increase professional development opportunities, benchmarks, and rewards for a range of early care and education practitioners and providers.
- Create a cross-sector framework that can link standards, technical assistance, monitoring, finance, and consumer engagement for programs in a range of settings, including family child care homes, child care centers, school-based programs, Head Start programs, early intervention, and others.

- Develop a roadmap for aligning many pieces of the early care and education system, such as child care licensing, prekindergarten and Head Start program oversight, national program accreditation, early learning guidelines, subsidy administration, technical assistance, training, quality initiatives, professional development systems, and others.

What are the elements of a QRIS?

QRIS are composed of five common elements:

1. Program Standards

QRIS standards assign ratings to programs that participate in QRIS and provide parents and the public with information about each program's level of quality. States have chosen QRIS standards that are grounded in research about factors that contribute to positive child outcomes. States typically use child care licensing standards as the base of the system, and then build on those. All QRIS contain two or more levels of standards beyond licensing, with incremental progressions to the highest level of quality, as defined by the State. Systems vary in the number of levels and the number of standards identified in each level.

2. Supports for Programs and Practitioners

QRIS include provider supports, such as training, mentoring, and technical assistance, to promote participation and help programs achieve higher levels of quality.

Most States currently have professional development systems, or elements of a system, to assist practitioners. These systems organize training opportunities, recognize practitioners' achievements, and help ensure the quality of available training. States may use these systems to help programs meet higher professional development standards and progress toward higher QRIS ratings.

States also promote participation in QRIS for improved quality by providing technical assistance. A mentor or coach may be used with a program to facilitate the rating process. In addition, partnerships may be formed with existing technical assistance providers in the State, such as child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agencies, and programs participating in the QRIS may be given priority to receive this assistance. Some States invest in specialized technical assistance, such as support in caring for infants and toddlers or integrating children with special needs. Nongovernmental agencies typically provide classroom assessments, technical assistance, training, and other support, and often work under contract with the State.

3. Financial Incentives

QRIS use financial incentives to help early and school-age care and education providers improve learning environments, attain higher ratings, and sustain long-term quality. Financial support can be a powerful motivator for participation in QRIS. All statewide QRIS provide financial incentives of some kind, including increased CCDF subsidy reimbursement rates, bonuses, quality grants, or merit awards; refundable tax credits; loans linked to quality ratings; and priority on applications for practitioner wage initiatives, scholarships, or other professional development supports.

4. Quality Assurance and Monitoring

Accountability and monitoring processes provide ways to determine how well programs meet QRIS standards, assign ratings, and verify ongoing compliance. Monitoring also provides a basis of accountability for programs, parents, and funders by creating benchmarks for measuring quality improvement.

In most States, the licensing agency alone, or in partnership with the subsidy agency or a private entity, monitors the QRIS. States use a variety of approaches (alone or in combination) to monitor QRIS standards, such as onsite visits, program self-assessments, and document reviews and verifications. Many States also gather rating information from child care licensing agencies to ensure that minimum requirements are met, and from training registries and accrediting bodies, where appropriate.

5. Consumer Education

QRIS provide a framework for educating parents about the importance of quality in early and school-age care and education. Most QRIS use easily recognizable symbols, such as stars, to indicate the levels of quality and inform and educate parents. Easy and widespread access to information about ratings is important. Many States post ratings on Web sites; others promote QRIS through media, posters, banners, certificates, decals, pins, and other items that rated programs can display. In addition, CCR&R agencies play a vital role in parent education.

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QRIS RESOURCE GUIDE: SECTION 2 INITIAL DESIGN PROCESS

Planning or revising a QRIS includes many decision points, and the process must be handled thoughtfully and with great deliberation because it lays the groundwork for everything that follows. If done well, the process can unify a wide range of constituencies and lead to greater understanding and support for early childhood care and education. This section includes information on setting the vision and goals, beginning the design process, determining which programs will participate, and gathering information on the current workforce and from the licensing program.

- [Establishing a Shared QRIS Vision and Goals](#)
- [Beginning the Design Process](#)
- [Determining Participation](#)
- [Mapping the Early and School-age Care and Education Workforce](#)

Establishing a Shared QRIS Vision and Goals

Clearly defined vision and goals

QRIS is a powerful tool that can help attain multiple goals, including strengthening system alignment and finance reform, improving quality in a range of care and education settings, expanding supply, and helping to increase demand for high-quality programs. Clearly defining the vision and goals and determining the outcomes or expected results will guide all other design and implementation decisions and is a critical first step in the process. For example, a State's vision may be focused on all children in early and school-age care settings or on children from low-income families.

COLORADO CREATES NEW VISION FOR REVISED QRIS

When Colorado initiated an inclusive planning process for the next generation of their QRIS, they began with the development of a vision statement, goals, and guiding values.

Vision Statement

To develop a Quality Rating and Improvement System that is inclusive, accessible, and available to all providers, is embedded in licensing, and is reflective of evidence-based practices for successful outcomes for all children and families.

What are the goals?

- To make QRIS available and affordable for all early learning and school-age programs
- To improve the quality of early learning and school-age programs
- To include centers, family child care homes, preschool and school-age programs
- To change Child Care Licensing regulations to reflect higher quality standards
- To develop a rated license in Colorado

What are the guiding values?

- Every child deserves quality
- Quality begins at Level One
- Input from all interested stakeholders is valued
- Rating levels are only part of the conversation
- The aspects of quality represented at each rating level will be based on practices that support positive child outcomes
- Status quo is not an option—this is a continuous improvement process.

Additional information is available at <http://www.coloradoofficeofearlychildhood.com/#!qris/c6ch>

In a Child Trends issue brief, *Issues for the Next Decade of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems* (2009), Tout, Zaslow, Halle, and Forry propose the use of logic models to “help QRS stakeholders develop realistic expectations for the program, identify resource or service needs, and articulate outcomes of QRS activities....QRSs target outcomes at multiple levels including communities, programs, families, and children. Logic models can be a useful tool for guiding evaluation of QRSs at each of these levels” (p. 7). The issue brief, which provides an outline of a sample logic model, is available at http://childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/Child_Trends-2009_5_19_RB_QualityRating.pdf. Additional information is available in the “Data Collection and Evaluation” section.

LOGIC MODEL HELPS GUIDE MASSACHUSETTS QRIS REVISIONS

In conjunction with five other states through the QRIS National Learning Network, Massachusetts used a logic model approach to develop an Outcomes Map for each of the components of QRIS. The Outcome Map documents the interconnected relationships between each of the components and to the expected child outcomes of school readiness and future success.

In revising their QRIS, Massachusetts used the logic model to guide their process. Inputs in the logic model included the provisional standards used for the pilot, stakeholders' and pilot participants' perspectives and insights, pilot documentation, national experts' knowledge, the scientific literature, the licensing standards and existing tools and measures, best practices in the field, and agency leadership. The model illustrates how inputs and resources inform activities and link to final outcomes. The project activities presented in the model include gathering input through regional forums, survey and interviews, a literature review, the development of a cross-walk of the provisional standards with licensing regulations and national assessment tools and standards, and refining recommendations to ensure standards could be documented. The model then aligns these requirements resulting in both interim and ultimate outputs including the final revised standards and the launch of the revised system. The logic model is included in the Final Report which can be found at:

http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs1/qris/20110307_ma_qris_provisional_study_final_rpt.pdf.

States have established varied goals to achieve their specific vision for their QRIS, many of which are outlined in two documents by Anne Mitchell:

- *Quality Rating and Improvement Systems as the Framework for System Reform* (2009), available at http://www.earlychildhoodfinance.org/downloads/2009/QRISasSystemReform_2009.pdf.
- *Stair Steps to Quality: A Guide for States and Communities Developing Quality Rating Systems for Early Care and Education* (2005), available at http://www.earlychildhoodfinance.org/downloads/2005/MitchStairSteps_2005.pdf.

The most common goals established by States include:

- Improve the quality of care for all children;
- Increase the reimbursement that child care providers receive and access to quality for low-income families;
- Provide consumer awareness and a method for families to evaluate child care;
- Encourage and recognize providers that increase their level of quality;
- Promote a well-qualified and compensated workforce;
- Encourage parent involvement in child care settings.

However, in a series of meetings held by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families' Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation in 2008, participants described *improving children's outcomes* as a more recent goal identified by many QRIS architects (Tout, Zaslow, Halle, & Forry, 2009). The focus on research-based criteria that can be directly linked to improved school readiness and other positive child outcomes continues to increase among States.

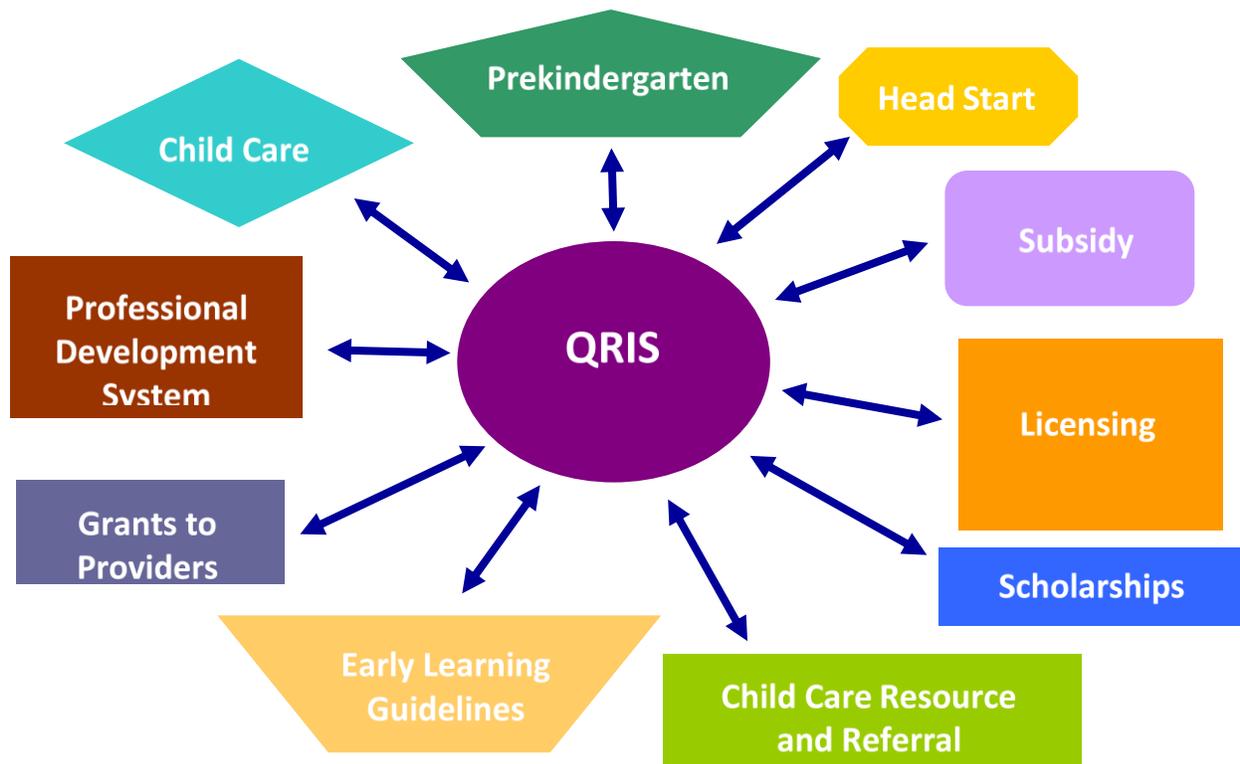
Many States develop a QRIS vision and goals with an initial focus on early care and education programs. Later, some States begin developing QRIS standards for school-age programs. At that point, a review of the vision and goals with school-age stakeholders may help ensure that the expanded scope of the QRIS includes the perspective of the school-age field.

QRIS as a framework for quality improvement efforts

With a new national emphasis on cross-sector and integrated early and school-age care and education systems, States are using a QRIS to link supports for quality improvement into a broad and inclusive infrastructure. Doing this provides assurance that investments and supports are tied to standards and a system of accountability. Linking participation in QRIS to access or eligibility for quality improvement supports provides both an incentive for QRIS participation and more targeted quality improvement efforts. A QRIS framework can help States guide system reform by creating alignment of program standards and requirements and promoting collaboration among each component of the system. Such reform can make it easier for States to tap multiple and varied funding streams, reduce duplication of efforts, and monitor investment results based on progress toward program quality.

Following is an illustration of early and school-age care and education system linkages. Note that the arrows go in both directions. For example, the professional development system can grow and benefit from the QRIS standards for increased qualifications and training, but it also supports providers so that they can successfully participate in the program.

Figure #1. QRIS Systems Linkages



DELAWARE QRIS PART OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SYSTEM

Delaware Stars for Early Success is part of the State's plan for early care and education, Early Success. It is a public-private partnership between the State (departments of Education, Health and Social Services, and Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families); The Family & Workplace Connection, a division of Children and Families First; Nemours Health and Prevention Services; and United Way of Delaware Success by 6®. From its inception and at the direction of the Delaware Early Childhood Council, quality standards were developed with significant input from the early childhood community. A larger project, Vision 2015, is a collaborative effort by education, government, business, and civic leaders throughout Delaware to provide a world-class public education to every student in the State. The mission and vision of Delaware Stars is aligned with that of Vision 2015. A new Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood was formed in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Delaware and in 2010 Delaware Stars moved from the public sector to the University of Delaware. The following year, a complete system redesign began after extensive research, moving the system from a building block system to a points system and switching to a new evidence-based technical assistance model. Additional information is available at <http://www.delawarestars.udel.edu/>.

ALIGNMENT OF QUALITY IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS IN NORTH CAROLINA

The North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) aligns all initiatives to support improved early care quality around the **Star Rated License**. Performance measures based on the Star Rated License are integrated into contracts with the child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agencies and with Smart Start, the State early childhood initiative. These measures help DCDEE determine how well partners are integrating and streamlining services and aligning their efforts around the standards of the rated license. Some examples of alignment efforts include:

- The four- or five-Star rating is the basic requirement for a NC Pre-K classroom in child care or Head Start programs.
- CCR&R agencies must align all training and technical assistance with the Star Rated License standards and provide ongoing consumer education about the Star Rated License.
- All local Smart Start partnerships direct their technical assistance to achieving performance measures that align with the Star Rated License, such as achieving an average among all child care programs in their area of at least a 3.5 Star rating.
- The following early care system partners use the same shared data sources to ensure consistent and aligned assessment of their outcomes: DCDEE Regulatory and Subsidy Reimbursement Databases, Smart Start Secondary Reporting System, NC Pre-K, Head Start, and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

Additional information is available at http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr_sn2_ov_sr.asp

Educating and building support among policymakers and State and community leaders

Support from policymakers is key to the success of a statewide QRIS. Although a few States have piloted QRIS with private sector leadership, experience suggests that public support is essential to go to scale and to sustain quality through mixed financing strategies. In many States, public support began with staff

in the CCDF lead agency. In others, legislators have played a leadership role. Regardless of how QRIS begins, public support contributes to long-term success.

Policymakers that can champion the initiative include the Governor or Lieutenant Governor, legislators, State agency directors, and State child care administrators. They are influenced by other State agency staff, the media, the public, and service providers. Several States, including **Minnesota**, provided presentations to legislative committees to increase support and created talking points for advocates to use. If possible, recruitment of legislators with more tenure and influence is advisable. Regardless of whether the QRIS is included in legislation, building legislative awareness and support is important for sustainability.

The following sources can help in making a strong case for QRIS:

- State demographic data that demonstrate the need for early childhood education quality improvement, e.g., the number of licensing violations and complaints, average wages of providers, access to benefits, number of accredited programs.
- Data on the workforce, e.g., the number of providers by level of education, linked with research on child outcomes influenced by provider qualifications.
- Research on the economic benefits of and return on investment in quality early childhood education.
- A comparison of how the State's licensing requirements compare to other States to demonstrate areas that need enhancement, e.g., staff-child ratios, parent involvement, curriculum, administrative policies.
 - ◆ Research briefs about trends in child care center, family child care home, and group child care home licensing regulations and policies for 2011 and other information products about licensing requirements by the National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement are available at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/topics/licensing-standards>.
 - ◆ National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies. (2013). *We CAN Do Better: 2013 Update. NACCRRRA's Ranking of State Child Care Centers Regulations and Oversight*. <http://www.naccrra.org/node/3025>.
- A national perspective on how States are using QRIS as a vehicle to improve quality, e.g., research on the impact on quality, testimonials from other State leaders, Federal resources.

PENNSYLVANIA'S COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFORTS

Pennsylvania's Local Education and Resource Network (LEARN) partners conduct community outreach in their local communities and work with organizations and individuals interested in quality early education. LEARN partners can bring together early childhood programs, parents, school districts, and child-serving organizations to assess what quality early learning programs are currently available in the community and to develop ways to encourage quality early learning. LEARN partners may also work with school districts and community-based early learning programs to develop ways to make smooth transition from preschool to kindergarten for children, parents and teachers. Pennsylvania's Promise for Children is a statewide campaign to raise awareness about the importance of quality early education in a young child's life and motivate everyone to learn, get involved, and tell their story. LEARN partners, Regional Keys, PA Key and the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) are critical partners in achieving Pennsylvania's Promise for Children. In part of a team effort, the close partnership between the Regional Key and LEARN partners is vital to developing a strong early childhood system in each county. Additional information is available at <http://www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Community>

ARKANSAS CAMPAIGN FOCUSES ON WHY QUALITY MATTERS

Before **Arkansas Better Beginnings** was launched, ARRA funding was used to increase public awareness of the importance of quality child care to school readiness and to Arkansas' economic development. Better Beginnings was launched in October 2010 with an engaging Web site that included clips from the celebration kickoff. This was followed by a large scale public awareness campaign to help parents, caregivers and communities know that children are born learning. Television commercials included the program's focus on increasing the level of professionalism in the field. The website includes information for parents on choosing and paying for child care and a 12-minute video featuring national experts, business and political leaders speaking on "Why Early Childhood Matters." The Web site is at <http://www.ARBetterBeginnings.com>.

NORTH CAROLINA WEB SITE RAISES AWARENESS

North Carolina's First 2000 Days, the time between when a baby is born and they enter kindergarten, is the outgrowth of a series of forums—Smart Investing—held across the state in 2010 and attended by more than 800 people from across the state. The Web Site uses power point presentations, videos, slideshows, fact sheets and research summaries on why early care and learning is important and how North Carolinians can engage others on this issue. There is a strong emphasis on how early childhood investments produce sustained results at the local, state, and national level. The message is reinforced through video interviews with business, religious, education, medical, and law enforcement leaders and social service and early childhood professionals. Supporters are encouraged to post the site on Facebook, sign up for email alerts, contact their legislators, and request a presentation. The project was started by the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. with a grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation. It is now being developed and managed by the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation. The Web site is at www.first2000days.org.

Evaluation data are also important when expanding a QRIS or increasing available financial incentives and supports. If a State has not invested in an evaluation of the program or collected data on its impact, it may be necessary to explain why that information is unavailable, e.g., the cost of research and the lack of resources. Additional information is available in the "Data Collection and Evaluation" section.

Educating and building support among private funders and businesses

The private sector can offer vital leadership and support for QRIS. In addition to serving as key spokespersons, private sector partners can provide direct financial support, link an existing private sector initiative to QRIS participation, or encourage the public sector to increase funding for the effort. Businesses and employers are likely to deepen their support of QRIS if they understand the impact that quality, reliable child care has on their current and future workforce.

Identifying QRIS advocates and detractors in the State can show that you are intentional about involving them. Some influential advocates, e.g., media, business, and philanthropic leaders, can help build support among policymakers and other key stakeholders, so thinking strategically about how and when to use them is advised. Since ill-informed individuals can spread misinformation and seriously undermine the process, States have found that it is better to have detractors at the table where their concerns can be understood and addressed; however, exactly how and when to involve these individuals will vary.

The following resources provide strategies on building support with business leaders and others:

- *Strong Start for Children Toolkit for Early Learning Advocates* (2013), from the National Women's Law Center, provides resources for advocates and community leaders to promote early learning. It's available at http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/nwlc_strongstart_toolkit.pdf.
- *Partnering with the Business Community & Economists to Advance a Birth to Five Policy Agenda* (2007) by Robert H. Dugger, Managing Director, Tudor Investment Corporation and Chair of the Advisory Board, Partnership for America's Economic Success and Debbie M. Rappaport, Project Director, ZERO TO THREE Policy Network, is available at http://www.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/Partnering_with_the_Business_Community_final.pdf?docID=4361.
- United Way's *Business Champion Toolkit* helps State and local United Ways deploy business leaders already committed to early learning as public champions for early childhood education. Materials include speaker and trainer PowerPoint presentations, frequently asked questions, a tip sheet, and a 5-minute video that shows how early learning matters. Additional information is available at <https://www.bornlearning.org/campaign-central/mobilize/business-champion-toolkit>.
- Cornell University's Linking Economic Development and Child Care Project provides tools for making the business case for child care. These tools can be accessed at <http://www.mildredwarner.org/econdev/child-care>.
- The Harvard Family Research Project's *User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning* (2009) for advocates, evaluators, and funders provides guidance on how to evaluate advocacy and policy change efforts. The guide, which recommends that evaluation planning begin at the start of the advocacy effort, is available at <http://www.hfrp.org/content/download/3460/99060/file/UserGuideAdvocacyEvaluationPlanning.pdf>.
- Alliance for Early Success provides resources, reports, and tools on advocating for young children at <http://earlysuccess.org/resources>.

OKLAHOMA RECRUITS BUSINESS CHAMPIONS

Oklahoma Champions for Early Opportunities (OKCEO) is a statewide coalition of executives supported by the Potts Family Foundation, the Oklahoma Business Roundtable, and Smart Start Oklahoma to promote early childhood issues to the business community. Its goal is to build a permanent, sustainable network of business champions who understand the connection between investment in quality early childhood experiences and a strong Oklahoma economy, and who can effectively communicate this message to other business leaders, business groups, policymakers and the State's workforce. Over 50 volunteer leaders have received training and then given presentations to civic groups and other state and local organizations. They also provide interviews with various media outlets; e.g., early morning news shows, radio spots; write letters to the editor; and help educate friends and acquaintances. OKCEO has been profiled in newspapers and online news sources, including editorials in the state's two largest newspapers. To keep spokespeople well-informed, they receive a monthly newsletter with facts to share. For more information, see <http://okceos.org/>.

WINNING BEGINNING NY PROMOTES QRIS

Winning Beginning NY is a statewide coalition working toward the goal of high-quality, affordable and accessible early care and learning for all New York families including the implementation of **QUALITYstarsNY**. Its members include parents, employers, children's advocates, service providers, labor unions, educators, pediatricians, law enforcement, research, and community groups. A video features business leaders who discuss the need for rigorous accountability for state resources and the need to direct funds to early childhood programs with a proven track record of success. Private dollars have been used to increase the number of participating sites in the highest need communities and sponsor learning communities that bring program staff together to focus on common issues and to take responsibility for each other's learning and success. The Web site urges people to become an E-advocate by signing up for notices from the Grassroads Action Center. The Web site is at <http://www.winningbeginningny.org/>.

Launching an effective QRIS is fundamentally about raising public awareness about the importance of high-quality early and school-age care and education and changing behavior regarding how child care choices are made. To this end, it becomes important to engage many partners in spreading the word. The goal becomes encouraging all community leaders and stakeholders to consider QRIS when making decisions about choosing, funding, or monitoring early care and education programs.

Beginning the Design Process

Leading the QRIS design

Leadership in creating a QRIS can come from a variety of sectors, from the legislature or governor's office to State agencies or the private sector. In addition to identifying key stakeholders, part of the initial leadership role is to determine what agency or organization will coordinate and keep the design process moving forward. Administrative support may come from staff in State agencies, privately funded State or community groups, such as the United Way, or from business leaders. Some States have focused on implementation of a statewide system from the start; other QRIS have developed at the community level and provided the foundation for later expansion.

ARIZONA GOVERNOR SETS THE STAGE FOR A QRIS

In 2003, former Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, a supporter of early childhood education, completed appointments to a School Readiness Board and charged it with developing a framework to help young children be ready for kindergarten. Governor Napolitano insisted that increased public funds for early care and education would require increases in quality beyond basic regulation. With the Governor's support, the School Readiness Board proposed a QRIS along with other early childhood strategies. In 2006, a tobacco tax to support an early childhood development and health initiative was passed by the Arizona voters. This initiative became known as First Things First. In January 2007, the responsibility for the development and implementation of Arizona's QRIS, **Quality First**, transitioned from the School Readiness Board to the First Things First Board. Additional information is available at <http://qualityfirstaz.gov/>.

In most States, QRIS initiatives are administered by the agency that administers the CCDF and licensing program. These include State human services, health, education, employment, or early learning agencies. An exception is **Delaware** where it is administered through a public-private partnership. In most states, components of the QRIS, such as technical assistance and program assessment, are often contracted out to private entities. (See section on Accountability and Monitoring for additional information).

The most comprehensive QRIS have been supported by entities that are committed to addressing the diversity of programs that serve infants and toddlers, school-age children, children with special or diverse needs, and children in different settings. When evaluating administrative locations, the QRIS designers should consider:

- What agency or organization has an established relationship with the providers that are to be included in the QRIS?
- Which agency has the staff resources needed to implement a QRIS, e.g., to determine and monitor the rating, to provide or monitor contracts for QRIS support services?
- What agency or organization has the capacity to effectively utilize existing and new funding for the QRIS, as well as receive and distribute private dollars, if available?
- What agency or organization has leadership that is committed to innovation, cross-sector collaboration, building public and political support, and a comprehensive early and school-age care and education system?

Key partners in the planning and design process

QRIS design and planning committees (design committee) may be known by different names, e.g., task force, steering committee, advisory committee, or strategic planning workgroup. An existing group, such as a State advisory council, may fill this role, or, if its membership does not include the appropriate stakeholders, a subcommittee or new task force may be named. Whether the design committee has decisionmaking authority or serves in an advisory capacity to an administrative entity should be made clear from the beginning.

Being inclusive from the start can increase support for the QRIS and reduce the potential for misunderstanding and opposition. Mitchell (2005) notes that, “By far, the most successful strategy for increasing support and hearing and addressing concerns is to commit to open planning, design, and implementation processes. State experience shows that closed planning leads to speculation and misconceptions that can spread rapidly, undermining the effort” (p. 15).

A growing trend is to design a QRIS that unites early childhood programs under a common vision of quality that applies to all settings and sectors. In this case, it is important to have those settings (e.g., child care centers, family child care) and sectors (e.g., Head Start, State-funded preschool programs, programs serving young children under IDEA, and out-of-school time programs) represented from the beginning. It is helpful to recruit people who can speak for their agencies or constituencies and who have the authority to make decisions and contribute resources, or have access to managers who carry such authority. More influential members can extend an invitation to others and help ensure that all needed stakeholders are involved.

It is critical for participants in the process to understand their role in the planning and design phase, as well as their potential role in implementation of the QRIS. At a minimum, it helps to begin the planning and design phase with a clear designation of which entities have lines of authority for funding and operating the QRIS, and, therefore, final decisionmaking responsibility. It has also become clear from evaluations of national systems-building initiatives that authentic involvement of parents, clients, and program staff assures both buy-in and successful implementation.

ENGAGEMENT OF RHODE ISLAND PARENTS IN DEVELOPING A QRIS

As part of the development phase of Rhode Island's **BrightStars**, nine parent focus groups were held in different regions of the State to learn what mattered most and to give the groups an opportunity to offer input to the proposed standards. The discussions were held in English, Spanish, and Cambodian and reached 106 parents, mostly mothers. The Steering Committee that guided the development and now oversees the implementation of BrightStars has a parent representative from the Rhode Island Parent Information Network, an information and support agency for Rhode Island parents. Additional information is available at <http://www.brightstars.org/>.

The initial QRIS design committee might include representatives from the following organizations:

- State agency implementing child care quality initiatives;
- State subsidy agency;
- State licensing agency;
- State education agency;
- State department of education's Federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program;
- State agency overseeing prekindergarten programs;
- State early intervention programs (Parts B and C);
- State Early Learning Advisory Council;
- Providers, possibly through their professional associations and inclusive of infant-toddler and school-age programs;
- Parents and organizations that represent parents;
- State Head Start Collaboration Project and Head Start Association;
- State professional development council;
- CCR&R agencies;
- Organizations or initiatives that focus on specific populations or issues, e.g., infant mental health, family support, children with special needs;
- Statewide afterschool networks (funded in part by the C.S. Mott foundation in 41 States; additional information is available at <http://www.statewideafterschoolnetworks.net>);
- State legislative leadership from both political parties;
- Governor's office;
- Foundations and business leaders with an interest in early childhood education;
- Vocational-technical schools;
- Higher education institutions;
- State leaders with an interest in the intersection of health, mental health, early intervention, and parent support with early childhood education;
- Tribal child care;
- United Way, child advocacy organizations, and other groups working on early care and education in communities;
- Researchers and other child development experts; and

- Other partners that can contribute expertise or potential funding;

TEXAS EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL SUPPORTS QRIS REVISIONS

Texas Rising Star (TRS) Provider Certification Criteria were launched in 1991 for providers that had an agreement to serve subsidized children. The criteria and procedures have been updated by the Texas Workforce Commission, the CCDF lead agency, and implemented by 28 Local Workforce Development Boards (see <http://www.twc.state.tx.us/svcs/childcare/provcert.pdf>). The Texas Early Learning Council (TELC) utilized a portion of their federal advisory council funding to research a strategic plan for an integrated, statewide QRIS that focused on collaboration and child outcomes. The plan is available at http://earlylearningtexas.org/media/19246/texas%20qris%20strategic%20plan_final.pdf. In 2012, TELC released three online stakeholder surveys to solicit input from stakeholders. The final recommendations and a projected five year budget were submitted to the governor and are available at <http://earlylearningtexas.org/media/24507/qris%20recommendations.pdf>. TELC also funded other quality initiatives that would support the implementation of an improved QRIS including a Texas and national program standards comparison tool, a career lattice and workforce registry, early learning guidelines for infants, toddlers and 3-year-olds, a mentoring toolkit, and a public awareness campaign on school readiness. For more information on these initiatives, see <http://earlylearningtexas.org>. In 2013, legislation was passed creating a TRS Program Review work group charged with proposing revisions to the TRS standards to be considered in the development of rules to be proposed by September, 2014.

INCLUSIVE PLANNING PROCESS FOR NEW YORK QRIS

In early 2005, the New York State CCR&R network invited 75 citizens to an all-day meeting to learn about quality rating and improvement systems (QRISs) and determine whether to support a QRIS in New York. The geographically and ethnically diverse group represented a wide range of stakeholders: child care centers and homes, Head Start, schools, higher education, public sector agencies, United Way, legislative staff, professional associations, unions, private foundations, and business organizations. A core group met by conference call over the next year and a half to delve deeper into the content of QRIS in other States and develop a proposal. Work groups were then formed in four key areas: (1) quality rating scale and assessment, (2) provider support, (3) consumer information, and (4) financing the system. During 2007, the New York QRIS design process was enriched by a series of focus groups in eight locations across the State. The focus groups, which included 68 parents, 101 family child care providers, and 88 directors of centers and schools, provided information to small groups of parents and providers about the proposed QRIS, shared the draft rating program standards that had been developed by the design group, and obtained feedback from these critical stakeholders. After the standards were revised, a diverse group of about 40 additional stakeholders reviewed them. Additional information about **QUALITYstarsNY** is available at <http://qualitystarsny.org>.

PROVIDER INPUT VALUED IN THE MIAMI-DADE QRIS

The **Quality Counts** planning team in Miami-Dade County, Florida, hosted dozens of community listening sessions throughout the development of the QRIS. Meetings were held before the system was developed to learn more about what providers felt was important to measure. Draft standards were then shared with providers in different locations and at many points in the design process. The goal was to engage in regular communication to avoid surprises. The planning team culminated with an elaborate public launch that was attended by over 600 providers and featured high-profile speakers that expressed support for the effort. Additional information is available at <http://www.elcmdm.org/QualityCounts/index.htm>.

INCLUDING SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAM PERSPECTIVES IN PENNSYLVANIA

The school-age community played a key role in the development and implementation of Pennsylvania's voluntary four-star child care quality system, **Keystone STARS**, which has been operational since 2002. The Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning relied on a statewide school-age care committee, composed largely of providers and technical assistance providers, to offer feedback on how the standards would affect school-age providers. By involving the school-age care community in the planning process, Pennsylvania created a system that was responsive to quality issues unique to school-age care. Additional information is available at http://www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Programs_STARS.

Strategic Planning

Many state design committees guided the planning and development of a long-range strategic plan to help organize the process and track progress. Although some flexibility is necessary, timeframes in a strategic plan can keep the work moving forward when a window of opportunity exists.

QRIS are complex systems with many decision points that will significantly impact the future direction and funding priorities for a State system. Strategic planning should include identification of all programs and resources that can support the initiative, plus the identification of existing gaps in resources. Design committee members have their own priorities and strongly held beliefs. Some States have benefited from a chairperson that is skilled in directing and managing this type of process and who can guide an agreed upon decisionmaking procedure. It is often helpful to obtain the services of a trained facilitator to ensure that all members view the process as positive and respectful.

FACILITATOR LEADS TIMELY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

New Hampshire received a grant from a private agency to fund a facilitator to convene a broad group of stakeholders—providers, advocates, and State agency staff—to develop Licensed Plus, a tiered reimbursement system. After the initial meeting, a small steering committee was created and began meeting weekly. After each meeting, the committee communicated with the bigger group on any issues that needed feedback. This process resulted in a quick development process, just over 3 months. The success of this process led to its use for other work in the State. Additional information is available at <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcyf/licensedplus/quality.htm>. In the fall of 2011, New Hampshire launched a new, facilitated, inclusive planning process to develop recommended revisions to the QRIS. The current QRIS Task Force has developed a goal, guiding principles, a statewide definition of Quality Early Childhood Programs, and a logic model to guide their work.

The development of a new statewide QRIS is enhanced by a detailed and thoughtful analysis of all aspects of the State's current early and school-age care and education system, as well as a review of national resources and other States' systems. *QRIS Definition and Web Sites* provides links to statewide QRIS systems and is available at https://occqrisguide.icfwebservices.com/files/QRIS_Definition.pdf.

HAWAII PILOT PRODUCES COMPREHENSIVE GUIDELINES

Hawaii's Department of Human Services partnered with the Center on the Family at the University of Hawaii to develop and implement the pilot of their QRIS. In so doing, they created a comprehensive set of guidelines and forms detailing their QRIS. Among the materials available on their website is their *Quality Improvement and Rating System (QIRs) Design Model*, which includes background research, QIRs design, and stakeholder feedback on seven elements of their QRIS: assessment measures, rating, process, improvement, incentives and administration. Additional information is available at <http://humanservices.hawaii.gov/bessd/child-care-program/qris/>.

GEORGIA'S SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO QRIS DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Georgia began their work to create a QRIS with a strategic plan that would help them “ensure access to high quality early care and education by laying a foundation of learning and school readiness that will lead to future success for all Georgia’s children.” The system is research-based and informed by Georgia stakeholders and national experts. They first gathered Georgia stakeholders and partners to identify quality standards and indicators for Georgia programs. Then they brought in key research partners from FPG Child Development Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill to conduct an evaluation of quality in Georgia with a representative sample of child care programs across the state. Specifically, they were able to provide baseline quality assessments of the early care and education (ECE) system in three Georgia settings: child care learning centers in infant-toddler and preschool classrooms, Georgia’s Pre-K classrooms, and family day care homes. The findings from those evaluations presented the case for implementing the QRIS; furthermore, the data was also used to determine the feasibility of the tools for measuring the standards and indicators. There were other aspects of the ECE system that Georgia strengthened to support the QRIS: the early learning standards, CCR&R system, inter-rater reliability, and subsidy program. For example, before revising their early learning standards, they conducted a yearlong effort to provide the empirical data to assess the comprehensiveness and quality of their standards as well as their alignment with critical documents such as Georgia’s Pre-K Content Standards, Kindergarten through Third Grade Performance Standards and Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. They also brought in experts to help them use the principles of implementation science to examine their CCR&R system and prepare for a realignment of services to more closely fit the needs of their QRIS. They conducted a broad-based study of the potential fiscal impact of QRIS standards on child care programs, giving the state a cost model that guided decisions about standards and financial supports that would be critical for programs to achieve those standards. To assure the integrity of licensing as a foundation of the QRIS, they conducted an inter-rater reliability study of licensing visits. Finally, they did a thorough examination of their Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) subsidy program by convening a state-level task force to review all policies and procedures. The task force made recommendations for revisions that would connect CAPS policies to other key ECE initiatives in Georgia including the QRIS. For Georgia, ECE is a system and all components must be aligned and connected.

It may be helpful to assign various sections of the plan to subcommittees or staff who can report to the entire group. Subcommittees can include additional members with specific expertise in the areas being discussed. Focus groups of various constituencies, such as family child care home providers or parents, may ensure that the concerns of people most affected can be heard.

NEW JERSEY COUNCIL'S COMMITTEE STRATEGY FOR QRIS PLANNING

The overarching goal of the New Jersey Council for Young Children is to increase the quality of early learning and developmental experiences for the infants and young children of New Jersey in a coordinated system of comprehensive services. Each Council committee is charged with a different aspect of this goal. Central to the Council's effort is the refinement and implementation of New Jersey's QRIS, **Grow NJ**.

- Much of the Program Improvement Committee's work is centered on improving Grow NJ as a tool while also determining how best to introduce a QRIS into the varied configuration of New Jersey's early education and care programs.
- The Learning and Development Standards Committee developed New Jersey's *Birth to Three Early Learning Standards*, which are integrated into the steps of the Grow NJ system and will be introduced as part of Grow NJ's technical assistance.
- The Workforce Development Committee will use Grow NJ as part of a system to ensure coordinated, aligned professional development for the early childhood workforce.
- The Infancy and Early Childhood Mental Health Committee worked to cultivate a network of professionals to provide professional development to early learning and development practitioners on supporting the social and emotional needs of infants, young children and their families.
- The Coordinated and Targeted Outreach Committee will design strategies to communicate the benefits of Grow NJ participation as well as ensure that providers and schools have tools to maximize participation. This committee will also design strategies to help families recognize the value of choosing high quality early learning programs and the impact that high quality early learning experiences can have for young children.
- The Council's Coordinated Data Systems Committee is working to improve coordination among the state's many early childhood data systems.

Additional information on New Jersey's Strategic Plan for Early Care and Education can be found at <http://www.nj.gov/education/ece/njcyc/>.

COLORADO DEVELOPS NEXT GENERATION QRIS

In 2010, Colorado leaders began the process to develop a new QRIS that was inclusive, accessible, and available to all providers, embedded in licensing, and reflective of evidence-based practices for successful outcomes for all children and families. The Governance Infrastructure committee acted as the steering committee while four work groups (Standards and Accountability; Provider Support and Financial Incentives, Financing and Sustainability; and Marketing and Outreach) were charged with making recommendations that were submitted to the Department of Human Services for review and approval.

Throughout the planning process, a Web site provided updates and encouraged visitors to submit comments or email questions. Results of a survey completed by 334 licensed providers were also posted on the Web site, and additional surveys throughout the process were planned. Information updates were sent to various statewide organizational newsletters and presented at conferences and meetings throughout the State. The participants in the four Work Groups and Governance Infrastructure committee developed a set of recommendations in 2010. Most of the stakeholders engaged during 2010 in the Work Groups and Governance Infrastructure Committee continued their participation in 2011 and 2012 under the Design Team. Phase II of the planning process began in March 2011 with the first priority to fully develop the Standards, followed by developing plans for Provider Supports and Financial Incentives and Financing and Sustainability. This work continued through 2012 under the Design Team, with assistance of national experts and a contractor, Oldham Innovative Research. In 2013 the focus shifted to implementation planning. Additional information is available at <http://www.coloradoofficeofearlychildhood.com/#!qris/c5ch>.

Statutory and administrative authority

In some States, the QRIS is created through legislation; in others, a State agency or private entity has initiated the program. The approach chosen by a State depends on several factors, including the needs of the State, the goals of the system, the type of system, and the State's political context. In a rated license system, each rated license is a property right that requires an appeal process to revoke, requiring statutory language. For States where the QRIS was created through State statute, e.g., **Kentucky**, **North Carolina**, and **Tennessee**, there is a legal mandate to create and maintain the initiative as well as the possibility of State funding. Because the specific QRIS policies and standards will be revised over time, States have intentionally limited the amount of implementation language included in statutes. Each approach has advantages, but the choice depends more on the leadership and opportunities in a State than on any other considerations. *QRIS in Statutes and Regulations* has additional information at https://occqrisguide.icfwebservices.com/files/QRIS_Statute.pdf.

ADVANTAGE TO QRIS THROUGH AGENCY ADMINISTRATIVE RULES:

- Generally provides more flexibility because changes may be easier to make, depending on the State administrative procedures process.

ADVANTAGES TO QRIS THROUGH LEGISLATION:

- Provides greater longevity when political or agency champions leave their positions.
- Increases the possibility that State funding could grow over time.

CHALLENGES TO QRIS IN LEGISLATION:

- If an attempt to get QRIS legislation passed is not successful, agencies are sometimes prohibited from proceeding with a similar policy effort.

- There is often legislative opposition to new regulations placed on businesses. There may also be opposition from child care providers or other sectors, e.g., public schools, nursing homes, that may fear that a rating process could be applied to them in the future.
- Legislation needs to be carefully written to allow for future changes in standards and policies without having to revise the law.

TEXAS LEGISLATION PROVIDES A QRIS FRAMEWORK

In Texas, legislation provided the impetus for the development of new rules but charged a Texas Rising Star Program Review Workgroup with proposing revisions to the standards. The TRS Workgroup consisted of the following entities:

- Texas Workforce Commission
- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
- Texas Education Agency
- Texas Early Learning Council
- Local Workforce Development Board Member
- Four Texas Rising Star providers
- Texas School-Ready! Project participant
- Three Local Workforce Development Board staff

The Workgroup was directed to consider the following in making its recommendations:

- Professional development standards for child-care directors and employees, including training and annual professional development requirements;
- Education and experience requirements for mentors and evaluators;
- Early learning and school readiness standards;
- Guidelines for infants and toddlers in child care;
- Training hours for providers;
- Playground standards;
- Best practices guidelines based on standards adopted by nationally recognized organizations, including head start program performance standards, national health and safety performance standards, national association of the education of young children program standards and accreditation criteria, national association for family child care standards, united states department of defense standards, national accreditation standards, and school ready certification standards;
- Research on infant and toddler brain development; and
- Strategies for the long-term financing of the trs program, including financing the payment of:
 - ◆ Incentives to child-care providers participating in the program; and
 - ◆ Grants and rewards to child-care providers that achieve and maintain high levels of service.

The workgroup established four subcommittees to conduct in-depth analysis of key focus areas. A wide array of stakeholders participated on these subcommittees from early education and child care.

Timeframe for development

The QRIS design process often takes at least a year of intensive work to develop recommendations on all aspects of the system. In several States, it has taken far longer. QRIS planning may include operating pilots or field tests, developing cost projections (initial and revised), cultivating support, and securing

funding. Over time, evaluation data, new research, changing funding levels, and lessons learned by other States can be used to inform periodic QRIS modifications.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION WORTH THE TIME IN RHODE ISLAND

As Rhode Island developed its QRIS, **BrightStars**, hundreds of individuals were involved. Annual community meetings open to all were held for three years to report progress and get feedback. These meetings were widely promoted through professional association networks, community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and State-funded projects using email lists and Web sites and well-attended.

A diverse 30-member steering committee oversaw the development of BrightStars and continues to guide implementation. The committee meets quarterly, or more frequently if needed, to advise, guide, and act as a sounding board on policies and big decisions about BrightStars. Steering committee members are champions of BrightStars in the community and through their connections to other groups. Although 4 years was a long time to develop a QRIS, participants say “it has been worth it” because the time allowed for ample communication and involvement. It was easy for anyone in Rhode Island to know about BrightStars and have a say in its development. Ultimately, even those who were not 100 percent satisfied with the program were still able to support it. Additional information is available at <http://www.brightstars.org/>.

PUERTO RICO UNDERTAKES 4 PHASE PROCES IN DEVELOPMENT OF QRIS

The development of the QRIS standards, known in Puerto Rico as the **Pasitos instrument**, was a rigorous process over two years and was divided into four phases. The first project year, October to September 2010, included Phase 1 (Development of the instrument) and 2 (Expert Evaluation). The second year, October to September 2011, covered Phase 3 (Pilot Study) and 4 (Development of Electronic Portal). PR staff worked with professors and graduate students at the University of Puerto Rico, as well as experts in early childhood education, in the development and evaluation of the tool. The pilot study involved 100 early childhood education centers from child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, licensed private schools and kindergarten. The electronic portal provides information to various audiences, e.g., schools, families, Council on Children, Administration for the Care and Development of Children, Department of Family, and the database stores all information collected and provides program reports. The Pasitos Instrument is divided into ten standards aligned to the standards of NAEYC Program Performance Standards, Head Start Content Standards, expectations of the Department of Education degree, regulations for the licensing and supervision of institutions for children, among others. The instrument enables each program to highlight areas of strength and need. The data analysis is intended to help in making decisions in establishing an action plan aimed at strengthening the quality of services offered.

Determining Participation

Identifying eligible early childhood programs

The goals of a QRIS will influence which programs are included. Although challenges to including all early and school-age care and education providers exist, a unifying, cross-system QRIS provides an excellent opportunity to link programs and resources into a more cohesive infrastructure and helps parents assess

a wide range of program options. Almost all States include regulated child care centers and family child care homes, although sometimes States may implement just center-based care with a plan to expand to additional types of providers later.

Operating as a licensed program is often, but not always, a prerequisite for participation in a QRIS. Some States have created an alternative QRIS pathway for providers that are not required to be licensed, but that seek to participate. The providers that fall into this category vary by State and may include school-age programs, faith-based programs, part-day nursery schools, prekindergarten programs, school-sponsored early childhood programs, and others. Some of these alternative pathways include the following:

- **Arkansas'** Better Beginnings allows registered family child care homes (a voluntary status for home providers caring for 5 or fewer children) to participate at Level 1 with no additional requirements. To achieve Level 2, they must meet the staff-child ratios in minimum licensing requirements, and at Level 3, family child care homes must be licensed.
- **Indiana** allows license-exempt registered ministries to enroll in its QRIS by becoming licensed or choosing voluntary certification.
- **New York's** pilot QRIS included "any program regulated by the State of New York or the City of New York," which would include day care centers in New York City (NYC) that are required to be licensed, family homes and day care centers regulated by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), nursery schools outside NYC that are registered with the State Education Department, and public school prekindergarten programs that are regulated by the State Education Department.
- **Pennsylvania** has developed an accreditation crosswalk template for use by other nationally recognized programs such as Head Start and accredited programs such as NAEYC to determine the level of alignment between Keystone STARS and their program or accreditation standards. Gaps are identified and as part of a differentiated designation process, only those items not demonstrated by the program or accreditation process are reviewed by Keystone STARS.
- **Pennsylvania** Pre-K Counts, the state funded prekindergarten program in Pennsylvania, requires that all classrooms meet standards that are similar to and aligned with the Keystone STARS standards, such as achieving a particular score on an environment rating scale assessment. After a phase-in period across provider types, all Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts classrooms must now have teachers who hold early childhood education teacher certification.
- **Delaware's** professional development system supports QRIS in a cross sector model, including the special education initiatives in the State, and inclusion is supported through technical assistance and quality improvement plans.

A strategy in designing a cross-sector QRIS is to align or incorporate other sets of program standards into the QRIS standards—such as the Head Start Performance Standards, accreditation, , and prekindergarten standards. For example, in **Minnesota's** QRIS pilot, programs that meet standards of another entity are automatically eligible for 4 star status. These programs include Head Start, school-based programs, and accredited child care programs. **Maine** has a separate track and QRIS standards specifically for Head Start programs. **Oklahoma** does not require accredited programs to have an Environment Rating Scale (ERS) assessment, and Head Start programs can use their CLASS assessment in lieu of the ERS. Additional information is available in the "Standards and Criteria" section.

NEWLY IMPLEMENTED EXCELERATE ILLINOIS INCLUDES CROSS SECTOR CENTER-BASED PROGRAMS

ExceleRate Illinois was launched on July 1, 2013 for child care centers, Early Head Start/Head Start, Preschool for All (State-funded prekindergarten programs) and center based prevention initiative programs. Currently rated QRS centers will transition into this cross sector System which has a common set of quality standards that programs can meet through various paths of evidence. (ExceleRate Illinois for licensed family child care providers will be implemented in 2015.)

There are **Circles of Quality** which programs can attain:

- Licensed- all licensed centers are included and recognized at this Circle. A program must prepare for and apply for a Circle of Quality above this level.
- Bronze- focuses on a program's efforts around training and education
- Silver- signals that the provider has completed a rigorous self-assessment process and made the improvements indicated.
- Gold- acknowledges the programs improvement efforts as verified by an independent assessor.

More information is available at <http://www.exceletrateillinois.com/>.

HEAD START IS A STRONG PARTICIPANT IN MAINE QRIS

Quality for ME, the QRIS in Maine, includes a separate track for Head Start programs. Meeting Head Start Performance Standards is a criterion for Level Four, the top QRIS rating in Maine, under the program evaluation standard. The Maine Roads to Quality provider registry also tracks data for Head Start programs. Because the QRIS is linked to this database, screens populate automatically when the unique license identification number is entered. All full-day and most part-day Head Start sites in the State currently participate in Quality for ME. Additional information is available at <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/qualityforme.htm>.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND HEAD START PROGRAMS ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN MIAMI QRIS

Quality Counts, the QRIS in Miami-Dade County, Florida, was designed to include public school prekindergarten classrooms, as well as community-based early childhood programs, including those that receive Head Start and Early Head Start funding. The program has been well received, largely because the QRIS offers an easy-to-follow road map on how to improve quality in early childhood classrooms, resources along the way, and data to track progress. Head Start and the public schools cover the cost of technical assistance, training, and improvements, and the Quality Counts project funds similar supports for privately operated programs. As of December 2012, all Miami-Dade Head Start programs and 4% of public school pre-K classrooms, along with 32% of centers and 24% of family child care homes, were participating in Quality Counts. There is a waiting list of 151 programs wanting to participate in Quality Counts with 141 centers and 10 family child care homes. Another key strength of Quality Counts is that it offers schools and community-based programs a common language, and it has enabled leaders to begin a conversation about curriculum alignment and improved transitions. Additional information on Quality Counts is available at <http://www.elcmdm.org/QualityCounts/index.htm>.

INCLUDING PUBLIC PREKINDERGARTEN IN VERMONT'S QRIS

STARS was developed to include all regulated settings and public Pre-K programs have been regulated for several years prior Vermont's QRIS (Step Ahead Recognition System, or STARS). Some public schools with prekindergarten chose voluntarily to participate in STARS. Pre-K programs receive the same initial STARS bonuses for participation but school operated programs generally didn't benefit from the increased Child Care Financial Assistance rates because they do not charge a fee to parents. By 2007, about 7 percent of programs in STARS were public school Pre-K programs, which was barely 1% of all regulated programs. The 2013 annual STARS report indicates that programs providing public Pre-K services are now approximately 30% of the STARS participating programs and approximately 8% of the total number of regulated programs in VT.

In 2009, the Vermont legislature determined that Public Pre-K programs must meet the STARS standards at the highest levels (4 or 5 stars). This legislation also determined that public Pre-K services could be provided in all types of regulated settings that met the following criteria: be nationally accredited OR have a minimum of three stars and a DCF/AOE approved plan to achieve four or five stars in 3 years. Programs must have at least two points in each of the five arenas and have a licensed teacher present a portion of the time and consulting with the program. Programs that are nationally accredited meet the STARS criteria. The opportunity to provide public Pre-K services and access public education funds provided an incentive for high quality programs to enter or move up in STARS.

The current standards for STARS have been legislatively approved and were developed and jointly by the Agency of Education (AOE) and Department for Children and Families (DCF). While the STARS standards are consistent across settings, the STARS applications are customized for the type of program applying. The administration arena has an option for documentation that is designed for programs managed by a public school and all programs appreciate the change from annual re-application to STARS to a 3 year certificate that is renewed annually. STARS rules and the applications are available at <http://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/stars/>.

WASHINGTON PILOT ON HEAD START AND PREK INCLUSION

The Washington Department of Early Learning (DEL) believes that ensuring consistent high-quality programs for children, regardless of the setting, is critical to improving outcomes for Washington's youngest learners. They conducted a voluntary pilot project with the goal of streamlining the process for Head Start and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) programs to participate in their QRIS, **Early Achievers**. ECEAP is a state-funded preschool program modeled after Head Start. DEL learned from the pilot that:

- Washington's Head Start and ECEAP programs align well with Early Achievers quality standards.
- Head Start and ECEAP programs are able to demonstrate high quality using their existing practices, procedures and policies.
- Head Start and ECEAP programs, on average, provide a level of quality equal to an Early Achievers quality Level 3 or higher.

As a result of the pilot findings, ECEAP and Head Start programs that opt to participate in Early Achievers will:

- Enter Early Achievers at a Level 3.
- Be strongly encouraged to demonstrate quality levels 4 or 5 through a full on-site evaluation and streamlined rating process.
- Have the opportunity to apply to become training resource centers once they are rated at Level 4 or 5. Training resource centers will receive a contract to share training and professional development with other Early Achievers participants.

Head Start and ECEAP are not eligible to receive quality improvement awards that are available to licensed child care providers who participate in Early Achievers. The Executive Summary of the pilot is available at http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/elac-qrisc/docs/Early_Achievers_pilot_summary_HS_ECEAP.pdf.

Washington has started planning the development of a school age component for Early Achievers which will include developing the standards and framework as well as conducting a pilot prior to statewide roll-out. We will begin this process with partner agencies in 2014, with the goal of piloting in 2015.

A number of States exempt certain types of programs from licensing requirements. Common types of license-exempt programs include programs operated by public schools, recreation and drop-in programs, and programs operating for limited hours per day or weeks per year. Some States choose to exempt programs from a subset of requirements only; for example, school-based programs may be exempt from facilities requirements. In most States, license-exempt school-age programs are required to voluntarily become licensed to enter a QRIS, a barrier that may keep many providers from participating. For a QRIS to be feasible as a way to improve quality in a range of settings, States may consider addressing this challenge through a number of strategies:

- Provide outreach and technical assistance to exempt programs to demonstrate the value of the QRIS and assist them in becoming licensed.
- Develop an alternative process to licensing, such as registration, where license-exempt providers give basic information to the State and can participate in the QRIS.
- Allow school-based license-exempt programs that meet health and safety requirements through the State department of education to participate.

Although most States do not include family, friend, and neighbor care in their QRIS because they are generally license-exempt and experience a high turnover rate, States are not precluded from offering

recognition and incentives specifically targeted toward this population. In **Illinois**, publicly funded, license-exempt, home-based providers receive a training tier award certificate (three tiers) and a quality add-on, based on the amount of State-offered training they have received.

ILLINOIS QUALITY COUNTS INCLUDES LICENSE-EXEMPT FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

For licensed family child care providers, there are four Star Levels to achieve for **Quality Counts Quality Rating System (QRS)**. At Star Levels 1 and 2, assessment is required, along with meeting provider/staff qualifications. At Star Level 3, there is a choice of assessment or state approved accreditation as the accepted path. At Star 4, both assessment and accreditation are required. Quality add-ons range from 5% at Star 1 to 20% at Star 4 for each subsidy child in care.

For license-exempt family child care providers, there are three tiers of training to achieve for the Illinois Quality Counts QRS. Training at each Tier includes modules from the Illinois Gateways to Opportunity ECE Credential Level 1, and covers topics such as, health, safety, nutrition, and child development. Providers completing Training Tiers receive a QRS Training Tier certificate. After completing the first tier, license-exempt providers get a quality bonus payment of 10 percent above the base subsidy rate; after completion of the next two tiers, bonuses are 15 percent and 20 percent, respectively. According to the Quality Counts Web site, as of September 30, 2013, 536 license-exempt providers had earned one of the training tier certificates, and 296 licensed family child care providers had achieved a Star rating. Additional information is available at <http://www.ilqualitycounts.com/qrs/license-exempt-family-homes>.

In 1998, Tribes were involved in the planning and implementation of **Oklahoma's** statewide QRIS, and many Tribal child care programs currently participate in Reaching for the Stars. Licensing is a requirement of the QRIS, and tribal programs can be licensed through the State or Tribe. Through the Oklahoma Tribal-State Child Care Network, QRIS managers meet with tribal CCDF administrators on a quarterly basis to share updates and resolve any issues. During the initial launch of the State of **Washington's** QRIS, seven out of 22 Tribal Centers chose to participate in Early Achievers. Nationally, many Tribes have chosen to participate in their state's QRIS while others are exploring the possibility of developing a QRIS for the state's tribal CCDF grantees. The National Center on Tribal Child Care Implementation and Innovation has written the first of a series of briefs, *Tribal Child Care: Exploring Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) #1*, providing Tribes an overview of QRIS. Subsequent briefs will discuss QRIS relative to the importance of quality and ideas on how to connect and participate with States that have developed QRIS. The brief can be found at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/tribal-child-care-exploring-quality-rating-and-improvement-systems-qris-brief-1>.

Unfortunately, fiscal realities may also influence which providers are allowed or encouraged to participate in QRIS. After decisions are made on which types of providers should be included, cost projections for the numbers of providers and at what level they will enter the system may determine whether the QRIS needs to be phased in over time. Additional information is available in the "Cost Projections and Financing" section.

Voluntary versus mandatory participation

Participation in most State QRIS is voluntary. When participation is optional, the QRIS often receives less opposition, and it may be more manageable to implement on a limited basis. On the other hand, mandatory participation by a significant number of the State's early and school-age care and education providers allows the QRIS to be more effective in empowering parents as consumers and improving the overall quality of services. Many States have strategically linked the QRIS to licensing in a way that engages all providers required to be licensed. For example, quite a few States craft QRIS standards so that all licensed programs are automatically placed at the first level. Thus, all licensed providers can easily participate in the system at least at level one; movement to a higher level is optional and requires

that the provider demonstrate compliance with the standards at higher quality levels. This approach ensures that consumers can access ratings for most, if not all, programs. Full participation by all eligible providers at some level increases the credibility and legitimacy of the system.

In several States (**Colorado, District of Columbia, Maryland**), State-funded prekindergarten programs are encouraged to participate in QRIS; but in **Vermont** they are required to be licensed and participate in the QRIS. In North Carolina, public school prekindergarten programs are required to become licensed and participate in QRIS at a four or five star level in order to receive State prekindergarten funding.

TENNESSEE APPROACH TO QRIS IS BOTH MANDATORY AND VOLUNTARY

Tennessee's QRIS includes a mandatory report card and a voluntary rated licensing component (**Star-Quality program**). All licensed child care providers receive a report card evaluation annually. This evaluation requires an on-site visit. . During the process of renewing a license, the State evaluates a provider on several key indicators of quality. Family and group homes are evaluated on five areas and child care centers are evaluated on seven areas. The Star-Quality Child Care Program and the report card program are assessed on the same criteria. These programs recognize child care providers that meet a higher standard of quality. Providers that qualify for the Star-Quality program can receive a one, two, or three star rating. Additional information is available at <http://www.tennessee.gov/humanserv/adfam/ccrcsq.html>.

Some States make QRIS a requirement for public funding including participation in the child care subsidy system. A Policy Interpretation Question (CCDF-ACF-PIQ-2011-01) issued by the federal Office of Child Care clarifies that parental choice provisions do not preclude the establishment of policies which require that child care providers serving subsidized children meet certain quality requirements or standards, such as a specified rating level within a QRIS. However, parents receiving subsidies must continue to be allowed to choose from a range of child care provider categories (center-based, group home, family child care, and inhome care) and types of care (non-profit, for-profit, sectarian providers, and relatives who provide care). The Policy Interpretation Question can be accessed at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/piq2011_01.pdf.

- **Oklahoma** requires licensed child care centers to meet One Star Plus or higher in the QRIS to contract for the care of children receiving child care assistance. Family child care homes must be on a permit and one star plus or higher to obtain a contract but once licensed, may be at the One Star level to receive child care assistance payments. Participation in the QRIS above the One Star Level is voluntary.
- **New Mexico** requires all licensed child care programs receiving child care assistance to meet 2-STAR requirements. Basic licensure includes 1-STAR and 2-STAR requirements of the AIM HIGH Quality Rating and Improvement System. STAR level 2 is voluntary for providers who do not accept child care assistance and STAR levels 3, 4 and 5 are voluntary for all licensed child care providers. Registered home child care providers receiving child care assistance are not required to participate in the QRIS.
- Participation in **Maine's** QRIS (Quality for ME) is mandated for any licensed provider receiving child care assistance payments. Head Start programs are also required to join Quality for ME.
- In **Wisconsin**, participation in the QRIS is mandatory for child care programs who receive child care assistance through the Wisconsin Shares Program, and voluntary for all other regulated child care programs. Providers receiving child care assistance payments must be at 2 Star or higher rating. Programs receiving a 2 star rating receive a 5% reduction in rates Providers receive the base child care assistance rate at 3 Stars. Programs that receive a 4 Star rating receive an increase of 10% and programs that receive a 5 Star rating receive a 25% increase in tiered reimbursement rate.
- **North Carolina** requires all licensed child care programs receiving child care assistance to meet the 3 – 5 star license level. Basic licensure is at the 1 star level, but programs can ask to be assessed for a higher level of license (2-5 stars). State legislation passed in 2011 mandates limiting child care

assistance payments to the higher quality programs and allows for exemptions where there are inadequate child care slots available at the higher star levels.

In States that link public funding to QRIS level, private sector funders, such as the United Way, may follow suit and require the providers that they fund to participate as well. In that case, participation is technically voluntary, but it is required if the program wants to receive third-party funding.

Mapping the Early and School-age Care and Education Workforce

Using data to inform planning

QRIS planning is strengthened by data, especially in determining QRIS standards and criteria and projecting costs. It is helpful to collect as much information as possible on the number, type, and quality level of early and school-age care and education programs, the ages of children served in various settings, the educational qualifications of the practitioners, and available resources in the State. These data can be used to inform planners on the possible number of participants and assess the need for supports, such as scholarships, to help practitioners achieve higher levels of education to meet the QRIS standards. (A Provider Cost of Quality Calculator is described in the section on Cost Projections and Financing.) These data can be derived from a wide range of sources, including the State's social services department, education department, regional Head Start office, CCR&R network, and others. Many States have also conducted early care and education economic impact studies that include helpful data. A searchable database of studies is available through Cornell University's Restructuring Local Government Web site at http://cms.mildredwarner.org/economic_impact_studies. The number of nationally accredited programs in a State can be determined by going to the Web sites of the accrediting organizations. Additional information about accreditation as a QRIS standard is available in the "Standards and Criteria" section of this guide.

Workforce demographics

Studying the demographics of the workforce provides valuable information for the identification of QRIS standards that can move the profession forward but can also be attainable for most providers. These data also allow for more accurate cost projections.

Although several State licensing programs maintain workforce data, the most likely place to obtain State-specific data is from a professional development registry or a workforce study. More than 30 States have registries, and a map with links to the State registries is available at The National Registry Alliance Web site at <http://www.registryalliance.org>. Although most States do not mandate participation, registries may still provide helpful data if a representative sample of the workforce is included. Following are some other potential sources of data:

- CCR&R databases;
- Expanded market rate surveys that include questions on the workforce;
- Provider surveys of training supply and demand;
- Head Start's Program Information Report data;
- State department of education teacher data;
- Higher education data on students studying early childhood education or child development; and
- State employment and labor agencies.

If State-specific data are not available or are limited in applicability, national data can be helpful.

Licensing data

Licensing databases can be a valuable source of information in projecting participation at each QRIS level. These databases will vary significantly in both the data elements collected and the ability to access the data and generate reports. At a minimum, the number of licensed programs by category can be determined, and some databases may also include staff qualification and training information. More advanced systems can identify how many programs would be able to meet the standard on licensing compliance, i.e., operating in good standing on a full license, no serious noncompliance or substantiated complaints.

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QRIS RESOURCE GUIDE: SECTION 3 APPROACHES TO IMPLEMENTATION

Most States have found that full funding for a comprehensive quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) initiative is difficult to achieve initially, even with the redirection of existing resources. A pilot or a phased-in approach can be an affordable way to demonstrate the value of the program and may lead to increased support among stakeholders. States are also using pilots increasingly to test QRIS elements, with positive results. This section includes issues to consider when conducting a pilot and a description of how some States have used a phased-in approach as an alternative to full implementation.

- [Conducting Pilot Programs](#)
- [Phasing In Programs](#)

Conducting Pilot Programs

Determining the purpose of the pilot

Some States (**Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Mississippi**) conducted pilots before implementing a statewide QRIS, where all eligible providers can participate from any geographic area within the State. States may implement a pilot to measure the efficacy, sustainability, and applicability of a QRIS across diverse age ranges and care settings within their State. Whether a State decides to pilot a QRIS or go statewide from the beginning depends on resources and stakeholder support. Some possible reasons to engage in a small-scale pilot or field test include the ability to:

- Target available funding in order to build support. Stakeholders may feel it more appropriate to start slowly and produce some positive results on a smaller scale as a way to garner support for statewide implementation.
- Allow time for implementation approaches to be tested and refined before large numbers of programs are involved in the process. By investing the time and effort to conduct a pilot, a State can enjoy the benefits of customer and community feedback to better inform and revise both the program and the process.
- Evaluate aspects of the system such as rating scales or professional development supports. For example, a State may be considering different rating scales and may like to compare them in a controlled environment rather than launch something on a larger scale that later needs to be changed.
- Assess potential program participation and capacity for implementing once the QRIS goes statewide. This will allow for better budget estimates and planning processes.

ALABAMA PILOTS QUALITY STARS

Alabama worked with a state level stakeholders group for a little over three years to develop a five star rating system for child care centers. In October 2013, Alabama launched an eight month pilot which is being conducted by the University of Alabama, with 50 participating centers who meet the licensing requirements. Ratings will be given in the form of feedback to the participating centers with focus groups to assess the effectiveness of the new system. The ratings will be based on information submitted by the center and two onsite assessments: The first is a three to four hour assessment of the center's leadership and management practices using the PAS assessment and the second is an ERS assessment of randomly selected classrooms. After the pilot, when **Quality STARS** goes live, programs who volunteer to participate will receive ratings that are good for three years.

OREGON USES RESEARCH PARTNERS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF QRIS

Oregon contracted with Western Oregon University to conduct the field test of the QRIS, working with the CCR&R system which provides improvement specialists to the child care programs. Western Oregon University will conduct a process evaluation of the QRIS. Oregon has also contracted with Oregon State University to conduct the validation study of their QRIS field test. One critical goal of Oregon QRIS is to increase the quality of care for children with high needs. Focusing on this goal has opened up a dialog regarding "children with high needs" including how to identify care and education programs who serve these populations and target them for recruitment into the QRIS.

PUERTO RICO UNDERTAKES 4 PHASE PROCESS IN DEVELOPMENT OF QRIS, PASITOS

The development of the QRIS Standards, known in PR as the **Pasitos** instrument, was a rigorous process over two years and was divided into four phases. During the first project year (October to September 2010) were Phases 1 (Development of the instrument) and 2 (Expert Evaluation). The second year (October to September 2011) were performed the tasks described in Phases 3 (Pilot study) and 4 (Development of Electronic Portal).

PR staff worked with professors and graduate students at the University of Puerto Rico, as well as experts in early childhood education, in the development and evaluation of the tool. The pilot study involved 100 early childhood education centers from child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, licensed private schools and kindergarten. The fourth and final phase was the creation of an electronic portal that provides information to various audiences (e.g., schools, families, Council on Children, Administration for the Care and Development of Children, Department of Family) and will serve as access to the database that will store all information collected and provide program reports.

The Pasitos Instrument is divided into ten standards aligned to the standards of NAEYC Program Performance Standards, Head Start Content Standards, expectations of the Department of Education degree, regulations for the licensing and supervision of institutions for children, among others. The instrument enables each center or hall can highlight areas of strength and need. The data analysis is intended to help in making decisions to establish an action plan aimed at strengthening the quality of service offered.

Designing the pilot

Many factors influence how and where to launch a QRIS pilot, including the availability of funding for a particular geographic area, priority population, or type of program. Some States, such as **Pennsylvania**, involved both centers and family child care providers in a statewide pilot but limited the number of participants to 400. Other States, such as **Kentucky** and **Ohio**, started in selected communities or counties. **Virginia** limited the pilot to both selected communities and program type, center-based care.

INDIANA IMPLEMENTS FIRST QRIS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The following timeline highlights Indiana's approach to launching its **Paths to QUALITY QRIS**.

- Paths to QUALITY initiative was launched in 2000 by the Early Childhood Alliance in Allen County, a family support organization that offers child care resource and referral (CCR&R) services.
- One year later, the initiative was expanded to four surrounding counties served by the Alliance, with incentives secured through local community foundations.
- In 2005, 4Cs of Southern Indiana implemented Paths to QUALITY in 11 counties with the support of a local community foundation.
- In May 2006, the Bureau of Child Care, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) convened a State Child Care Quality Rating System Advisory Group and began considering the feasibility of implementing a statewide QRIS.
- In March 2007, a license agreement was signed between the Bureau of Child Care and the Early Childhood Alliance to adopt Paths to QUALITY as the State's QRIS.
- According to the FSSA Web site, there are 2,364 providers enrolled in Paths to Quality as of September 2013. Providers include child care centers, family child care homes, and certified ministries.

Additional information is available at <http://www.in.gov/fssa/2554.htm>.

TARGETING PARTICIPATION IN THE ROLLOUT OF A QRIS IN ARIZONA

Six hundred programs throughout the State were selected to participate in the first phase of Arizona's **Quality First**. Four hundred of these programs were center based and 200 were family child care homes. This represented roughly 10 percent of the State's centers and 5 percent of its homes. The first step in the selection process was to use the percentage of regulated settings (licensed and certified centers and homes) by region to equitably divide the available slots among regions, thus reducing geographic and rural/urban competition. Then the following selection criteria were applied, each of which had different point values related to priorities of First Things First and State agencies:

- Percentage of children enrolled in child care subsidy (in three tiers with the higher percentage earning higher priority points)
- Percentage of children enrolled who qualify for free/reduced lunch
- Whether the program was a full-year program
- Whether the program was a full-day program
- Whether the program served children on weekends or evenings
- Whether the program had never (or in the last 3 years) been accredited
- Whether the program had never (or in the last 3 years) participated in any of its State's quality improvement initiatives (such as a Self-Study program through Child Care and Development Fund monies or a United Way Hands on Quality initiative)
- Whether the program served infants or toddlers

These criteria were used to rank applicants within a region from highest to lowest point value.

Additional information is available at <http://qualityfirstaz.com/>.

Length of the pilot

The length of time a State will maintain its QRIS in a pilot phase is often determined by the amount financial resources; stakeholder, participant, and community support; and whether the goals for the pilot have been met. Pilots can grow slowly into larger systems by adding new communities, additional provider types, or new/expanded quality levels. For example, some States began their QRIS with a focus on Star 1, and then opened participation for other star levels as the system grew. Pilots can last from a few months (**Pennsylvania**) to 1 or 2 years (**Ohio, Missouri, Kentucky, and Delaware**) to multiple years (**Indiana and Virginia**).

MULTIYEAR ROLLOUT OF MISSISSIPPI SYSTEM

The Mississippi **Child Care Quality Step System** used a 4-year pilot phase for its program and implemented it in cohorts as it expanded across the State. During the pilot phase, 80 centers volunteered to be rated. Of those, 78 percent earned 1-Star ratings and 15 percent earned 2-Star ratings. Three centers earned a 3-Star and one center earned a 5-Star rating. Enrollment more than doubled each year during the pilot phase of the system, with 31 centers in the first cohort, 66 centers in the second, and 153 centers in the third. Thirty-six percent of child care centers are participating. The Mississippi State University Early Childhood Institute provided technical assistance during the development and implementation of the system and continues to enroll and rate centers. Additional information is available at <http://earlychildhood.msstate.edu/programs/qualitystars/>.

Collecting and using data to inform the QRIS

The goals set for the pilot by the State and its partners will influence what data will be collected and by whom, how it will be recorded, and how it will be analyzed and used for adjustments and refinements. QRIS standards are generally informed by and aligned with existing standards such as licensing, national accreditation, Head Start, prekindergarten, or State early learning guidelines. The pilot is often used as a way to test how best to align and layer all of these standards into a common QRIS. The procedures for applying for the program, conducting ratings, reviewing documentation, assigning levels, and communicating outcomes can be tested in the pilot as well.

Types of data to be collected in a pilot might include:

- Participation rates—overall rates, as well as by facility type, size, level, and geographic location
- Percentage of children served in the QRIS programs
- Percentage of providers that are able to meet various criteria (such as degree requirements)
- Utilization rates for incentives and support services, such as professional development or training opportunities, technical assistance supports, or financial incentives
- Subsidy participation rates for participating providers
- Participation rates at varying levels of quality
- Baseline data from assessment tools
- Parent/consumer awareness of QRIS
- Feedback from providers on clarity and ease of process and forms/documents

NEW YORK FIELD TEST INFORMS REVISIONS

A Field Test of **QUALITYstarsNY**, coordinated by the NY Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, City University of New York, was completed in 2010. The goals of the field test were to:

- Evaluate the ease and efficiency of the process of QUALITYstarsNY's application, documentation, and assessment system under a variety of community conditions (high/low presence of quality improvement supports, geography, program setting types, demographics of children).
- Validate the standards and the rating scale, i.e., determine whether the points weighting is accurate and whether the star ratings distinguish levels of quality.
- Demonstrate the value/use of community supports for quality improvement.
- Gather information about what kinds of improvements programs plan to make to move up in the system. This was done to inform content and the nature of later support efforts.

An independent evaluation was conducted as part of the field test to assess the validity and reliability of the draft program standards. The evaluation data informed decisions necessary for the statewide implementation of QUALITYstarsNY. Based on the field test, the standards for center-based and family-based programs were revised to better reflect the feedback from programs and providers. NY also has standards for public schools and has tested the draft version of standards for school-age child care programs in some programs across the state. Additional information is available at <http://qualitystarsny.org>.

REDESIGNING MONTANA'S QRIS FOR EXPANSION

Montana's **Star Quality Child Care Rating System** has been operating since 2002; an inclusive and broad-based participatory review began in late 2007. The Stars redesign process has become the State's strategic plan for all early care and education, not just subsidized child care. The goal is to have the professional development and infrastructure support to help providers increase quality, whether or not they are formally enrolled in Stars. The field test of the new system began in June 2010. In May 2012, at a STARS event for directors, there was a unanimous vote to extend the field test. The Early Childhood Services Bureau received additional unexpected funding in early 2013 which allowed for the planning and implementation of a Phase II for the field test. There have been updates to both the center matrix and the family/group matrix for Phase II. All changes and updates came about directly from provider and coach feedback, as well as information and data gathered by the Early Childhood Services Bureau (ECSB). The original Star Quality system had three levels: licensing, one level above licensing, and national accreditation (National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Association for Family Child Care, Council on Accreditation). The redesign focused on adding gradual steps and increasing supports to encourage participation. The new Best Beginnings STARS to Quality system has five levels and includes the following:

- Research based criteria
- Workforce support through the Montana Early Care and Education Career Path, encouraging professional development along a continuum of training
- Maintaining quality over time; renewal based on validation of Level and program improvement plan
- Monetary Incentives for continual program improvement based on Level achieved
- Resources and support to move through the Levels provided by Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, the Early Childhood Project, and other state-determined resources.
- Program Assessment Tools are incorporated including the Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) and the Program and Business Administration Scales (PAS and BAS) The Center on Social & Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) and The Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS) scale are part of the coaching experience for programs using the Pyramid Model.

Information about the new STARS to Quality system is available at <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/bestbeginnings/bestbeginningsstarstoquality.shtml>.

Data can be collected in a variety of ways and from a variety of sources. The centers and homes involved in the pilot can provide critical feedback through self-assessments, self-reporting, and documentation. The staff involved in managing the pilot can collect feedback through interviews, observations, and document reviews in such areas as the clarity of explanatory documents, standards, and the application process; sources of evidence or documents to include or accept; the amount and complexity of paperwork; time required to complete various requirements; and availability/accessibility of appropriate training opportunities.

It is important to consider a State's capacity to gather appropriate and sufficient data to assign accurate ratings, redesign standards, implement procedures, or develop or change providers' supports. Gathering data that seems "interesting" is only a worthwhile exercise if it is used at some point to inform the system. Otherwise, the process can become costly and frustrating, and can be perceived as unresponsive. Many States have engaged researchers to evaluate their QRIS pilots. These individuals can be helpful in selecting the most appropriate data elements for monitoring and implementation as well as for process and formative evaluation.

EVALUATION AND PILOTING TO REVISE QRIS STANDARDS IN RHODE ISLAND

Over several years, a broadly representative community-based group drafted standards and quality criteria for **BrightStars**. A pilot and random sample evaluation was conducted by researchers from the Frank Porter Graham (FPG) Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina. Additionally, FGP helped train BrightStars staff to collect data in a valid and reliable manner. The draft center framework included 62 criteria across 28 standards. The pilot evaluation revealed that using all 62 criteria resulted in small quality distinctions. The criteria were reviewed to ensure that each was (1) not already in State licensing, (2) actually feasible to measure, (3) supported by research related to program quality and child outcomes, and (4) able to adequately measure differences in quality. This pared the number of criteria down to 22 grouped into nine standards. Differences between the levels are now meaningful but achievable. The evaluation not only improved the BrightStars standards and measurement tool, it also provided a baseline measure of program quality in a random sample of centers, homes, and school-age programs. Additional information is available at <http://www.brightstars.org/>.

Implementing the QRIS

Once a State and its partners determine they are ready to move from pilot to statewide implementation, a detailed plan and timeline should be developed. An analysis of available funding, along with each agency's capacity to implement and manage the system, will also be critical factors in this process.

Most States subcontract the management of some QRIS components. States may have an existing system in place that can be leveraged to support the QRIS. Some States have utilized CCR&R networks and postsecondary institutions to support professional development activities. **Virginia** provides an example of how some States use a request for proposals process to select and engage local coalitions to manage the QRIS pilot.

One of the strengths of a QRIS is the ability to consistently engage parents through strategic messaging. This can be a problem if the pilot phase is limited to a particular jurisdiction or type of care, or if there are multiple, but different, pilots occurring at the same time. To this end, a critical consideration in the parent education component is "when"? Some contend that a consumer education campaign should be launched early in the process to help build the demand for the system. Others have conducted limited marketing of the QRIS to the general public until they felt the system was fairly well established with enough participating programs and accessibility to parents. **Arizona** opted to make ratings available to the public after the QRIS was well-established. Ratings are currently available on Arizona's Quality First Web site, accompanied by an explanation of the rating, at <http://qualityfirstaz.com/parents-and-families/>.

Additional information on communicating with families is available in the "Consumer Education" section.

Implementation without a pilot

If a State does forego a pilot phase and chooses to benefit from lessons learned in other State pilots, it can be especially critical to engage providers and other partners and stakeholders in a strategic implementation process. Although much information can be gleaned from research and lessons learned in other pioneer States, it is important to remember that each State is unique. A State must consider its landscape, history, infrastructure, and overall early and school-age care and education environment, and adapt the information to its particular set of circumstances. A State can test its QRIS standards prior to implementation by distributing them widely, seeking feedback in various ways. Web surveys can be developed for this purpose. Some States have conducted focus group discussions with parents and programs to review and revise standards as well as to discuss application and rating processes. In yet other States, the QRIS plan may be implemented with a periodic review included in the plan. Additional information is available in the "Initial Design Process" section.

OKLAHOMA MAKES ADJUSTMENTS IN RESPONSE TO FEEDBACK

The first QRIS was launched in Oklahoma in 1998. **Reaching for the Stars** included only two star levels. One year later, the State funded a Three Star level for programs that met Two Star standards and were also nationally accredited. After two years and lagging participation levels, program designers identified that the gap between One star licensing and Two star standards was greater than most providers could accomplish. They created a midpoint, a One Star Plus level, that provides financial incentives and recognition for providers that need more support to progress to higher star levels. Additional information is available at <http://www.okdhs.org/programsandservices/cc/stars/>.

Phasing In Programs

Phasing in the QRIS

Although a phased-in approach may be necessary due to limited funding and staff resources or a lack of broad support, policymakers should be reminded that anticipated changes in program quality may not occur with incremental implementation. A phased-in strategy requires careful consideration of which approaches to administration, monitoring, provider supports, and incentives are most likely to be cost-effective in terms of improving quality, ensuring accountability, and increasing participation.

It is also important to realize that a limited implementation strategy is only the first step toward a comprehensive, statewide QRIS. The value of expansion to a statewide QRIS is that it allows all parents and providers to benefit, provides a consistent standard of measurement, and improves opportunities for realignment of resources. Planning for full, statewide implementation and the projection of total costs should be part of the process, even when a phased-in approach is necessary.

Making decisions about how and when to phase in implementation of a QRIS can be guided by the cost projection process. The Cost Estimation Model (CEM) described in the “Cost Projections and Financing” section can help with projecting costs at scale and guide decisions regarding where and when to reduce costs, if necessary. It is possible to develop multiple cost projections for a statewide program using the CEM. Projections can be made for strategies, such as:

- A comprehensive plan that anticipates full funding for the next 5 years for each component of a fully implemented QRIS.
- A midrange or scaled back plan to get started and build support for future expansion, e.g., limited participation, reduced provider incentives.
- A basic program with fewer provider supports and incentives and fewer accountability measures.

In addition to projecting the cost of various implementation strategies, several other factors may influence decision-making about when to fully implement a QRIS. These include:

- **Rate at which changes are made to QRIS standards or criteria.** Changing them too quickly after implementation may be difficult for providers and could potentially erode their trust in the system and their feeling of success and confidence. Generally, States revise a QRIS about every 3 to 5 years. Small changes can be made annually, especially ones that are responsive to participant feedback.
- **Financial incentives and supports.** Making a range of financial incentives and provider supports available early on is likely to increase participation among providers. Limiting or targeting incentives and supports is likely to slow participation growth.
- **Level of participation.** Early and strong participation will affect how people view the success and value of the program and is likely to help build support for increased funding.

State examples of a phased in approach

A phased-in approach can take several forms.

- Limiting initial participation, e.g., implementing with child care centers and not family child care homes. **Pennsylvania** and **Virginia** took this approach.
- Implementing fewer than the anticipated number of levels, e.g., levels 1–3 of a 5-level system.
- Beginning with a limited number of provider resources and incentives. **North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Oklahoma** initially took this approach. For example, Oklahoma had quality improvement grants and scholarships available when it launched its Reaching for the Stars initiative in 1998. Over the next 10 years, in response to demonstrated need, the State added a wage supplement program, onsite technical assistance, specialized consultation, a director's leadership academy, and training on the environment rating scales.
- Targeting provider outreach, incentives, and supports to particular communities or providers, such as those serving large numbers of low-income children. **Colorado's** Qualistar QRIS took this approach.
- Relying on administrative data (e.g., links to data from licensing or a professional development registry or another third-party source) and self-assessments only, rather than requiring the collection of new data or limiting time spent onsite (e.g., conducting environmental rating scale classroom assessments only when providers apply for higher quality levels). When **Pennsylvania's** process evaluation revealed that making technical assistance "responsive" rather than automatic was a much wiser use of resources, taking the pilot statewide became more feasible.

FILED TEST AND PHASE-IN OF QUALITY INDICATORS (QI) AND OREGON PROGRAM OF QUALITY (OPQ)

Oregon's Quality Indicators looked at 7 structural indicators of quality. Researchers have identified the following "structural" indicators of quality that are proven to be associated with positive child outcomes:

- Ratio of children per adult
- Group size
- Education
- Specialized training of teachers/caregivers
- Teacher compensation level
- Staff turnover or stability in caregiver-child relationships
- Accreditation

QI Process

1. Data collected by Licensing Specialists on all licensed facilities
2. Data analysis conducted by Family Policy Program, Oregon State University
3. Reports shared with child care facilities and publicized

Results

- Baseline information about child care quality in a community
- The Child Care Report—
 - ◆ Brief description of indicator's affects in child care
 - ◆ National standard for indicator (Caring for Our Children)
 - ◆ County average score on each indicator
 - ◆ Facility score on each measure
- Parents have information to select child care that meets needs/values
- Child care facilities can highlight strengths and areas to invest
- Policy makers and investors have measurable, research-based information to guide policy and investments in child care

In addition, Oregon developed a State designation of quality (OPQ) that served as a stepping stone between program licensure and national accreditation.

OPQ was designed to:

- improve program quality,
- recognize higher quality programs, and
- increase the number of programs eligible to partner with Head Start and Early Intervention

(Continued on next page)

FIELD TEST AND PHASE-IN OF QUALITY INDICATORS (QI) AND OREGON PROGRAM OF QUALITY (OPQ), CONTINUED

OPQ standards resulted from a crosswalk of six common areas across:

- Head Start Performance Standards,
- NAEYC accreditation standards,
- Oregon's early learning guidelines, and
- State licensure requirements.

The field test began in January 2011 with a cohort of 25 diverse programs from across the State. Programs were required to complete orientation, develop a quality improvement plan, and submit a portfolio demonstrating how they meet the standards at the end of a 7-month period. Participating programs received customized technical assistance and up to \$5,000 in quality improvement awards.

Early in 2013, Oregon began the field test of a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS), which was designed using national and state standards, including OPQ and QI. An articulation plan was developed to accelerate the process for nationally accredited programs (NAEYC, NAFCC, and ACSI) and programs in Oregon Program of Quality to become a part of the TQRIS. Work is almost complete for an articulated entry for Head Start programs.

WASHINGTON STATE DEVELOPMENT AND PHASE IN OF EARLY ACHIEVERS QRIS: LESSONS LEARNED

Washington State followed a careful development process for their QRIS: 2008-2010 field test in 5 communities/counties; 2011 infrastructure development; 2012 regional roll out started; 2013 statewide roll out. The Department of Early Learning built their QRIS on licensing as the foundation, working with licensors to get them on board. They worked with Child Care Aware WA to do the regional implementation, reaching out to recruit programs and then offering help in the form of technical assistance, training and coaching. Another key partner, the University of Washington has developed the **Early Achievers** Coach Model and trains coaches, conducted an evaluation of the QRIS process and is collecting data on the system. One key piece of advice they give other states is to start building a data system from day one to protect the integrity of the QRIS. Another lesson learned is that they found they started with more standards than they have now but realized they were measuring elements twice or that some elements could not be measured. They advise other states to define their goals and then develop standards that will lead to a measurement that will assess achievement of those goals. Additional information on the Early Achievers (QRIS) is available at <http://wa.childcareaware.org/providers/EA>.

Selected Resources

- Arizona Quality First.
<http://qualityfirstaz.com/parents-and-families/>
- Mitchell, A. W. (2005). *Stair steps to quality: A guide for states and communities developing quality rating systems for early care and education*. Alexandria, VA: United Way of America.
http://www.earlychildhoodfinance.org/downloads/2005/MitchStairSteps_2005.pdf

- National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement (NCCCQI). (2013). *QRIS definition and web sites*. Washington, DC: Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://occqrisguide.icfwebsiteservices.com/files/QRIS_Definition.pdf
- Zellman, G. L., & Perlman, M. (2008). *Child-care quality rating and improvement systems in five pioneer states: Implementation issues and lessons learned*. Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation. http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG795.pdf

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QRIS RESOURCE GUIDE: SECTION 4 STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

Standards are the agreed upon markers of quality established in areas critical to effective programming and child outcomes. Taken together, standards are used to assign ratings to programs that participate in quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS), providing parents, policymakers, funders, and the public with information about the components and levels of quality. States typically use licensing standards as the base of the system, a foundation on which to build higher levels of standards. Every QRIS contains two or more levels of standards beyond licensing, with incremental progressions to the highest level of quality, as defined by the State. Systems vary in the number of rating levels and the number of standards identified in each level. Most QRIS award easily recognizable symbols, such as stars, to programs to indicate the levels of quality. Standards used to assign ratings are based on research about the characteristics of programs that produce positive child outcomes. This section includes information about categories of standards and criteria used to assign ratings, approaches States have used to organize the standards and assign ratings, ways States have incorporated other State, Federal, and national standards into their QRIS, the inclusion of specific program types and groups of children into QRIS standards, and the use of environment rating scales (ERS) and other program assessment tools.

- [Development of Standards and Criteria](#)
- [Application of Standards to Settings and Sectors](#)
- [Licensing as the Foundation for QRIS](#)
- [Content of QRIS Standards](#)
- [Incorporating Learning and Development Guidelines into QRIS Standards](#)
- [Addressing the Care of Groups of Children](#)
- [Structure of QRIS Ratings](#)

Development of Standards and Criteria

Graduated program quality standards

Program quality standards describe the expectations for the characteristics or quality of early care and education settings (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement [NCCCQI], 2011). They reflect the structure and practices of programs to provide safe, legal, and effective services to children. It is important to not confuse program standards with learning and development guidelines that describe what children need to know and be able to do, and standards for practitioners that describe what early childhood teachers/providers must know and be able to do to work effectively with young children. However, to realize the greatest outcomes, program standards should link to learning and development guidelines and practitioner standards.

States have developed several types of program standards—some are mandatory and must be met in order to operate legally, and some are voluntary and reflect a higher level of quality. There are also sets of Federal program standards that apply to programs receiving payment from specific funding sources.

Quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) standards are used to assign ratings to programs that voluntarily participate in QRIS. These standards provide parents and the public with information about each program's quality. States typically use licensing standards as the starting point or base of the system, upon which graduated levels of quality standards are built.

Every QRIS contains two or more levels, or tiers, of standards beyond licensing, with incremental progressions to the highest level of quality as defined by the State. Systems vary in the number of levels and the number of standards identified in each level. The types of standards that are used to assign ratings are based on research about the characteristics of programs that produce positive child outcomes. Early and school-age care and education programs that choose to improve their quality and meet the QRIS standards often receive supports (e.g., technical assistance, professional development) and financial incentives (e.g., tiered subsidy reimbursement, bonus payments and awards) to help them meet and sustain the higher levels of quality. Additional information about those components of QRIS is found in the "Provider Incentives and Support" section.

Using research to develop the standards and criteria

States have used various research to help determine the indicators of quality that will be in their QRIS standards. Generally, research indicates that structural and process quality indicators are interrelated, and that both affect child development and school readiness. The results of the research may apply to multiple categories of standards and may be combined with other indicators to influence child outcomes.

Following are some examples of publications and resources that summarize research findings States can use to develop and revise early and school-age care and education program standards:

- *Stepping Stones to Caring for Our Children, 3rd Edition* (2013), by the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, and the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, presents 138 essential standards from *Caring for Our Children* intended to reduce the rate of morbidity and mortality in child care and early education settings.
<http://nrckids.org/index.cfm/products/stepping-stones-to-caring-for-our-children-3rd-edition-ss3/>
- *Caring for Our Children, National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care, 3rd Edition* (2011), by the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, and the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, presents a set of standards, with a rationale based on research, to be used in planning and establishing a high quality early and school-age care and education program.
<http://nrckids.org/CFOC3/index.html>
- *Defining and Measuring Quality in Home-Based Care Settings* (2010), by Barbara Dillon Goodson and Jean Layzer, presents considerations for designing and evaluating quality measures for home-based settings.
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/define_measures.pdf
- *The Quality of School-Age Child Care in After-School Settings* (2007), by Priscilla M. Little, identifies the features of high-quality afterschool settings that have emerged from the research and are reflected in program quality tools.
<http://www.childcareresearch.org/childcare/resources/12576/pdf>
- *Thirteen Indicators of Quality Child Care: Research Update* (2002), by Richard Fiene, Pennsylvania State University, provides guidance for State agencies as they think about revising their State child care regulations and developing other standards for early and school-age care programs.
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/ccquality-ind02/>
- *Child Care Quality: Does It Matter and Does It Need to be Improved?* (2000), by Deborah Lowe Vandell and Barbara Wolfe, provides evidence from large- and small-scale studies of the effects of child care on children's development.
<http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/sr/pdfs/sr78.pdf>

- *The Quality in Child Care & Early Education* topic on the Child Care & Early Education Research Connections Web site provides the latest research about the impact of child care on young children's development.

<http://www.researchconnections.org/content/childcare/find/publications.html>

INDIANA'S RESEARCH REVIEW

Indiana published a review of research by an external evaluation team during the pilot phase of its QRIS, **Paths to QUALITY (PTQ)**. In *Paths to QUALITY*, Elicker, Langill, Ruprecht, and Kwon (2007) looked at existing research to determine whether the proposed Indiana QRIS levels and criteria would result in increasing the quality of child care that children receive. Evidence of the validity of the standards was shown by defining the standards and criteria, connecting the standards with other measures of quality, and relating the standards to children's development and well-being. The researchers used a scale of "some or limited," "moderate amount," and "substantial" to describe the amount and quality of the scientific evidence for the standards and criteria. The authors came to the following conclusions:

- A thorough review of 10 main quality indicators (including 12 additional sub-indicators) within the PTQ levels and standards revealed substantial scientific evidence for the validity of the PTQ quality criteria.
- Seventy-five percent of the quality indicators the authors examined had "substantial evidence" for their validity.
- Most of the PTQ quality indicators had significant evidence that they support children's development, learning, or well-being in child care.
- There is significant support for the validity of the PTQ quality indicators in the child development and early education scientific literature.
- Most of the PTQ standards have the support of prominent early childhood education organizations, which have designated them as "best practices."

The final report from this work is available at <http://www.in.gov/fssa/files/PurdueValidityReport2007.pdf>. Additional research on the Paths to QUALITY system can be found at <http://www.in.gov/fssa/pathstoquality/3764.htm>

GOALS FOR NORTH CAROLINA'S QRIS STANDARDS

North Carolina began by reviewing the current status of its early childhood system, such as licensing standards, technical assistance, quality supports, subsidy policy and reimbursement, workforce status, and available databases. The State's goal was to develop a QRIS that included State-specific requirements and standards that providers could achieve and understand and that were research-based and feasible to monitor. The State accomplished this by setting the following goals for the standards:

- Understandable to providers and the public: Providers are able to explain how they document meeting each standard and the public knows what the ratings mean and how they are achieved.
- Achievable: Programs can meet the standard at some level. For example, an analysis of the workforce indicated a significant number of providers had earned additional education in the form of an Early Childhood Credential and there was a scholarship fund to meet the demand for additional education required by standards.
- Research-based: There is some research to show the connection of the standard with higher quality programs, e.g., ratios and teacher education.
- Feasible to monitor: Standards can be assessed objectively, in a timely fashion, and with available resources.

Additional information is available at http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/parents/pr_sn2_ov_sr.asp.

PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKS FOR THE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM WITHIN PENNSYLVANIA'S QRIS

A QRIS needs clear expectations and standards for the support systems that assist programs. Pennsylvania's accountability system for the Regional Keys originally focused on inputs such as employing qualified staff, meeting reporting obligations, and achieving outcomes defined as increasing the proportion of programs reaching higher **Keystone STARS** levels in the region. This approach could not measure the improvement STARS programs made within a STARS level. To address this, a three-level rubric was created in each standard to differentiate gradations of practice in a level, using the qualifiers of "good enough," "better," or "best." This rubric is also expected to improve a program's understanding of how it is progressing and provide guidance to help it improve. Additional information is available at <http://www.pakeys.org/pages/starsDocs.aspx>

Considerations for developing and revising standards

The following are a set of questions intended to help States think through considerations as they develop and/or revise standards and criteria. It is recommended that these issues be explored with each standard to assess if it should be included in the QRIS.

- How will the rating assessors determine that the standard has been met? This might include observation, interviews, automated or manual submission of evidence, and records pulled, including number or percentage of records.
- Is the standard appropriate for different types of care, including:
 - ◆ Child care centers
 - ◆ Family child care homes

- ◆ Group child care homes
 - ◆ Before and after school providers
 - ◆ Head Start
 - ◆ Prekindergarten
 - ◆ School district-operated early childhood programs
- Who will incur a cost associated with meeting the standard and how significant is the cost? Is the standard critical enough to justify that cost to programs? Will the cost be subsidized? What is the collective cost to meeting all the standards?
 - How much time will it take to comply with the standard?
 - How much time will it take for rating assessors to verify compliance with the standard? How much of this time is onsite and how much is off site?
 - What kind of expertise must rating assessors have to verify compliance with the standard?
 - How much support will programs receive to help them meet the standard?
 - Is the standard similar to other standards? In other words, does it overlap or is it redundant?
 - Could the standard be better addressed through training? Consider this especially if it is a difficult standard to assess or if assessing it might be intrusive into the privacy of programs.
 - Would it make more sense to include the standard in licensing requirements?
 - Is the standard tied to positive child or program outcomes?
 - Do you anticipate pushback from providers on the standard? If so, is the standard critical enough to justify the repercussions of the pushback?

Application of Standards to Settings and Sectors

Standards for child care centers and family child care homes

Most statewide QRIS have standards that apply to both centers and family child care homes, with separate sets of standards for each program type. The standards are either in separate documents or in one document, with a clear delineation of which standards apply to centers and which apply to family child care homes. QRIS Quality Standards Web Sites (2013a) by NCCCQI provides links to all of the States' standards documents. It is available at https://occqrisguide.icfwebsites.com/files/QRIS_Standards_Websites.pdf.

Standards for Head Start programs, state-funded preschool programs, and out-of-school time programs for school-age children

Children attend early and school-age care and education programs in a variety of settings. There are some specific types of programs or funding sources that have their own program standards. In developing standards for QRIS, States have found ways to accommodate the various standards of these programs and make them eligible to participate in the QRIS.

HEAD START

According to the *Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations* (2010) by Child Trends and Mathematica Policy Research, Head Start programs are eligible to participate in approximately 95 percent of statewide QRIS.¹

The following are examples of States that demonstrate specific alignment between their QRIS program standards and Head Start/Early Head Start Program Performance Standards:

- According to the **Delaware Stars Program Guide**, Head Start and Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP) programs, once accepted into Delaware Stars, must provide a copy of their most recent monitoring report and complete the Delaware Stars Orientation specific to Head Start/ECAP programs. Meeting Head Start Standards is required for programs receiving ECAP funding. Once the requirements are complete, programs are designated Star Level 4 and may keep their Star Level by maintaining good standing with Head Start and ECAP monitoring standards and by submitting copies of their annual monitoring reports to Delaware Stars. Programs may choose to maintain at a Star Level 4 or move up to a Star Level 5. To achieve Star Level 5, programs must request an ERS assessment and meet the minimum required classroom scores for that level. Programs are eligible for technical assistance when actively working on achieving Star Level 5, but are not eligible for any grants or awards. Additional information is available at <http://www.delawarestars.udel.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-Program-GuideR.pdf>.
- **Maine** has a set of QRIS standards specifically for Head Start programs. The standards are on the Quality for ME Web site at <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/qualityforme.htm>.
- **Massachusetts** has aligned the QRIS standards for center-based programs and family child care homes with the Head Start Performance Standards. Programs and providers have the option of documenting compliance with the Head Start standards as a method to achieve some of the QRIS standards. Additional information is available at http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs1/board_materials/20101214_qris_standards_ctr_based.pdf (center based) and http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs1/board_materials/20101214_qris_standards_fcc.pdf (family child care).
- **Michigan** has an Alternate Path for Great Start to Quality that allows eligible Great Start Readiness Programs, Head Start programs, and NAEYC accredited programs to receive a 4 Star rating without requiring an on-site validation or completion of a Program Quality Assessment® as long as enough points are achieved on the Self-Assessment Survey to earn a 4 Star rating. Programs that submit a Self-Assessment Survey with enough points for a 5 Star rating must request an on-site validation and have a completed Program Quality Assessment® with a score of 4.5 or higher to receive a 5 Star rating. Additional information is available at <http://www.greatstarttoquality.org/sites/default/files/Great%20Start%20to%20Quality%20FAQs%207-12-13.pdf>.
- In **Minnesota**, Accelerated Pathways to Rating (APR) are available to accredited child care, Head Start/Early Head Start, and Public School Pre-Kindergarten programs. To achieve a 4-star rating, programs using the APR must demonstrate that they have met two standards indicators:

¹ Data from the *Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations* are based on 26 QRIS systems. It is available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/resource/compendium-of-quality-rating-systems-and-evaluations>.

- ◆ Use a curriculum that is aligned with the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs), and all lead child care providers/lead teachers have completed at least eight hours of training on implementing curriculum.
- ◆ Conduct assessments using an approved tool with all children at least twice per year in at least the following domains: social emotional development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking and physical development, and all lead child care providers/lead teachers have completed at least eight hours of training on authentic child assessment.

Additional information about Minnesota's APR is available at <http://www.parentawaratings.org/en/accelerated-pathways-resources#faq>.

- In **Wisconsin**, Head Start programs that provide little or no child care in addition to Head Start service delivery may achieve a 5 Star rating by demonstrating compliance with the Head Start Performance Standards. Additional information is available at http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/head_start.pdf.

STATE-FUNDED PREKINDERGARTEN

According to the *Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations* (2010), State-funded prekindergarten programs are eligible to participate in QRIS in more than two-thirds of QRIS. To encourage participation, States are starting to align the QRIS quality standards with standards for state-funded prekindergarten. Rhode Island's QRIS standards include specific standards for State preschool programs approved by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (i.e., operated by public schools and exempt from licensing).

In addition, there are some States where prekindergarten programs are required to achieve specific levels in the QRIS to receive state prekindergarten funding. The following are examples of those States:

- In **North Carolina**, all classrooms in the NC Pre-K program must achieve and maintain a four or five star level license, and meet additional program requirements set by the Division of Child Development and Early Education. The rated license is North Carolina's QRIS.
- Community-based child care programs that receive **Pennsylvania** Pre-K Counts funding must have a Keystone Stars QRIS rating of Star 3 or higher. Pennsylvania phased in this process as the supply of programs at STAR levels 3 and 4 grew.
- In order for a program in **Vermont** to provide public prekindergarten services and receive public education funds, the program must be nationally accredited OR have a minimum of three stars and plan to achieve four stars in three years, with at least two points in each of the five arenas and have a licensed early childhood or early childhood special educator. In the case of registered family child care homes, at least three hours per week of regular onsite supervision by a licensed teacher can be used in lieu of the provider possessing the license.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS

Out-of-school time programs for school-age children are eligible to participate in more than 60 percent of statewide QRIS according to the *Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations*. Some States including **Arkansas, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Mexico, North Carolina**, and **Wisconsin** have separate sets of standards for out-of-school time programs. Additional States include specific adaptations in their standards for the care of school-age children in center-based programs. See the section about age groups for additional details. *QRIS Quality Standards Web Sites* (2013a), by NCCCQI, provides links to all of the States' standards documents. It is available at https://ocqrsguide.icfwebsiteservices.com/files/QRIS_Standards_Websites.pdf.

WASHINGTON STATE DEVELOPS EARLY ACHIEVERS RATING PROCESS THAT WELCOMES HEAD START

Washington State conducted a pilot to develop reciprocity between Head Start programs and the QRIS, **Early Achievers**. The streamlined process that was developed allows Head Start programs to enter at Level 3 where they are strongly encouraged to apply for a full on-site evaluation and streamlined rating process to demonstrate their meeting levels 4 or 5. This process provides an appropriate level of credit for meeting Head Start program performance standards, while, at the same time, acknowledging and taking into account that there may be variability in the level of quality from site to site. Head Start programs are not eligible to receive ongoing Quality Improvement Awards; however, they can receive a contract to become a training resource center if they are rated at level 4 or 5. A summary of the pilot project and results is available at http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/elac-gris/docs/Early_Achievers_pilot_summary_HS_ECEAP.pdf. Additional information is available at <http://www.del.wa.gov/care/qrisc/>.

Washington intends to develop a school age component for Early Achievers with the goal of piloting by 2015.

Licensing as the Foundation for QRIS

Licensing requirements, compliance monitoring, and enforcement

In most States, licensing is an integral part of the QRIS, serving as the foundation other standards build on. By law, licensing standards are minimum requirements that must be met in order to operate in a State. According to Licensing Curriculum developed by the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA), licensing rules ensure a basic level of quality, not an optimal level. State requirements vary tremendously in areas ranging from staff-child ratios and staff qualifications to facility requirements. On a positive note, several of the earlier QRIS States have been able to move QRIS criteria into minimum licensing requirements, raising the floor for all programs. A comparison of licensing requirements is available in three research briefs by the National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement (NCCCQI) about trends in child care center, family child care home, and group child care home licensing regulations and policies for 2011. The research briefs and other information products about licensing requirements are available on the Child Care Technical Assistance Network Web site at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/topics/licensing-standards>.

States also vary significantly in the level of licensing enforcement and compliance monitoring. A State may have strong licensing requirements but lack the resources or support to monitor compliance or use negative sanctions. *Trends in Child Care Center Licensing Regulations and Policies for 2011* (NCCCQI, 2013) notes that the most common frequency of routine licensing inspections is once a year, with seven States making routine licensing inspections three or more times a year and 14 States monitoring once every two years. More than half of the States use an abbreviated compliance form when inspecting centers; others determine the frequency or depth of monitoring based on the facility's prior level of compliance. If a license in good standing is included as a QRIS standard, it will be critical that the licensing enforcement is reliable and holds programs accountable. This research brief is available at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/research-brief-1-trends-child-care-center-licensing-regulations-and-policies-2011>.

Including licensing standards in the QRIS

State child care licensing regulations help protect the health and safety of children in out-of-home care. Licensing helps prevent different forms of harm to children, which can include risks from the spread of

disease, fire and other building safety hazards, and injury. Licensing also helps prevent developmental impairment from children's lack of healthy relationships with adults, adequate supervision, and developmentally appropriate activities.

Licensing sets a baseline of requirements below which it is illegal for providers to operate, unless they are legally exempt from licensing. States establish both regulations that include the requirements providers must comply with, as well as policies to guide the enforcement of those regulations. The National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education has the full text of State child care licensing regulations on its Web site at <http://nrckids.org/index.cfm/resources/state-licensing-and-regulation-information/>.

In most States, the first level of the QRIS simply requires programs to be in compliance with State licensing requirements. Some QRIS specify that the license be "in good standing," which often means that the program has no (or very few and not serious) violations on record. Alternatively, some QRIS require programs to meet licensing requirements and additional quality standards to achieve the first rating level. The following are examples of criteria in QRIS standards about licensing compliance:

- No serious licensing citations
- No substantiated complaints
- License in good standing
- Specified number of repeated, serious or multiple non-compliances

It is critical that licensing compliance be clearly defined and consistently measured due to the significant fiscal impact on programs when a higher QRIS level is denied or reduced. For example, while "a pattern of non-compliance" seems to capture the desired intent, a reduction in QRIS level based on that measure would be difficult to defend.

In addition, some States require providers to have been licensed for a specific amount of time, such as at least six months or one year, before applying for QRIS participation. This allows time for the provider to demonstrate compliance with licensing requirements. For example, in **Maine**, in order to participate in Quality for ME at a Step 1 rating, programs must have been licensed, without any serious licensing violations, for at least 12 months. **Oklahoma** eliminated this requirement when it posed a barrier to continued quality of care when there was a change in ownership and licensure. Star ratings are removed when there is a change in ownership, but new owners do not have to wait to reapply and regain the rating the program had before ownership changed if the requirements are still met.

Additional information about how licensing requirements are incorporated into each of the statewide QRIS is available in the document *QRIS Standards, Levels, and Rating Systems* (2013b), by NCCCQI, at https://ocqqrsguide.icfwebservices.com/files/QRIS_Levels_Rating.pdf.

In many States, child care providers that are exempt from licensing, such as relatives or family child care homes with small numbers of children, provide care for a large proportion of children. States typically base their QRIS on licensing requirements and seek participation from licensed providers; therefore, it becomes a challenge to include license-exempt providers in a QRIS. To help these providers improve their quality, States generally focus on offering training and technical assistance, connecting these providers to community resources, providing financial incentives (i.e., tiered subsidy reimbursement), or using similar strategies for promoting quality improvement.

NORTH CAROLINA'S REVISION TO LICENSING COMPLIANCE AS A QRIS STANDARD

North Carolina originally included licensing compliance history percentages as a component in its **Star Rated License** standards. A continuous review of the rating data over several years showed that more than 95 percent of the programs received the maximum points in licensing compliance, indicating that this standard was not effective at discriminating levels of quality. In 2005, the licensing compliance history was eliminated as a standard 5 years after its implementation, creating standards that more accurately differentiate levels of the quality. A minimum compliance level with key licensing standards became a requirement to keep a license, rather than a way to earn a higher star. A license in good standing is still required to reach the first star level in the QRIS. Additional information is available at http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/parents/pr_sn2_ov_sr.asp.

Content of QRIS Standards

Categories of standards and criteria for rating levels

Listed below are common categories of standards, as seen in the statewide QRIS, and examples of criteria used to assign levels under each category. The criteria for compliance within each standard reflect what programs must do to achieve a particular level, move from one level to the next, or earn points in a specific category of standards. The criteria vary widely from State to State. Web links to each statewide QRIS standards are available in *QRIS Quality Standards Web Sites* (2013a), by NCCCQI, at https://occqrisguide.icfwebservices.com/files/QRIS_Standards_Websites.pdf.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

All QRIS have standards for **preservice qualifications** for classroom teachers and family child care (FCC) home providers.² Most QRIS include a **bachelor's degree** for center-based classroom teachers as the standard for achieving the highest QRIS level. However, only a few have a bachelor's degree as the highest level for FCC home providers. Most States have the CDA or a state credential as the highest qualification for FCC. All QRIS for FCC include **training in early childhood/school-age content** at the first quality level. Most QRIS for child care centers have the **CDA or a state credential** at the first level. QRIS also frequently require participation in professional development activities, participation in a State professional registry system, or achievement of a level on a State career ladder/lattice.

Most QRIS have standards for **ongoing professional development**. Some QRIS also include criteria on the number of hours of ongoing training, often using the number of hours required by licensing as the lowest level and incrementally increasing the number of hours across QRIS levels. Most QRIS have standards for at least 15 hours of annual professional development at the highest quality level.

In 2011, The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment released *Staff Preparation, Reward, and Support: Are Quality Rating and Improvement Systems Addressing All of the Key Ingredients Necessary for Change?* This report is based on an investigation of both quality rating and improvement system supports for professional development and standards related to staff formal education, compensation and

² This analysis was conducted by reviewing program standards documents available on State Web sites.

benefits, and adult work environments in center-based programs. It is available at http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/CSCCEQRISPolicyBrief_2011.pdf.

CURRICULUM AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Planned learning activities that are based on expectations for what children need to know and be able to do are associated with improved child outcomes. Nearly all States' QRIS standards support children's learning through the use of **curricula/learning activities** that are based on the State learning and development guidelines.

Some QRIS require specific curricula, or curricula that aligns with the State's learning and development guidelines, or that the program demonstrate that staff use the guidelines to shape program activities. Frequently, the content of these standards include requiring programs to:

- Have a written plan of daily learning activities
- Use a planned or approved developmentally appropriate curricula
- Align curricula with learning and development guidelines
- Address multiple developmental domains
- Use environment rating scales to document developmentally appropriate use of curricula/learning activities

NEW MEXICO'S STANDARDS FOCUS ON MULTICULTURAL ISSUES

To better meet the needs of culturally diverse children, families, and providers, New Mexico has built cultural awareness into its **AIM HIGH QRIS**. At the two-star level, the environment component states that "positive examples of racial and cultural diversity should be represented in materials, equipment, and classroom displays." At the three- and four-star levels the curriculum and assessment components address the issues of linguistically appropriate assessment and daily programming. For example, an essential three-star element states "Each child's first- and second-language development should be taken into account when determining appropriate assessment models and in interpreting the meaning of assessment results." New Mexico's revised QRIS, currently being piloted, retains these core concepts and builds on them: The **FOCUS TQRIS** includes the requirements that participating programs include multicultural practices and inclusion practices in their continuous quality improvement plan which may include activities such as staff being familiar with New Mexico's Guiding Principles for the Inclusion of Every Child, complete a cultural competency checklist, hold scheduled parent/teacher conferences in the family's home language, demonstrate evidence of racial and cultural diversity in the environment, and ensure that curriculum components address linguistically appropriate child assessments and planning. Additional information is available at <http://www.newmexicokids.org>. *The Guiding Principles for the Full Participation of Young Children, Birth through Age Eight*, is available at <http://nmdev.unm.edu/pages/ocd/facInstMats/docs/GuidingPrinciplesBrochure.pdf>.

ADMINISTRATION AND BUSINESS PRACTICES

Many QRIS include content about **administration and business practices** in their standards. A review of States' standards reveals that the content covers a variety of administrative issues, including the following:

- Score on the Program Administration Scale (PAS) or Business Administration Scale (BAS);
- Financial record keeping system;
- Written contracts with families;

- End-of-the-year financial statements for families;
- Annual budget;
- Business plan for expenses, program improvements, and maintenance;
- Business liability insurance;
- Written program policies (e.g., employee and parent handbooks);
- Outside review or audit of business practices, and consultation with tax preparer;
- Compensation for employees (e.g., salary scale);
- Benefits for employees (often programs must offer a certain number of benefits from a list);
- Job descriptions;
- Policies and procedures for hiring and terminating staff; and
- Quality self-assessment and program improvement plan.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Program quality standards can promote **family engagement**, support families' involvement with their children's learning, and strengthen partnerships with families. Standards often include criteria about regular communication with parents that supports children's learning and development and opportunities for parents to participate in children's activities, parenting education activities, and activities that support social networking or connections.

The content of QRIS standards about family engagement often includes criteria that require programs to:

- Organize a parent advisory board;
- Provide a bulletin board or newsletter;
- Hold conferences and meetings;
- Develop and distribute a parent handbook/written program policies;
- Develop a parent resource center;
- Develop and distribute a parent satisfaction survey;
- Welcome families at all times;
- Maintain a list of community resources and referring parents to resources as needed;
- Complete the Strengthening Families self-assessment and planning tool;
- Develop and implement a written system for sharing daily events; and
- Provide parents with consultation prior to children's enrollment.

IDAHO INCORPORATES *STRENGTHENING FAMILIES* INTO QRIS

Strengthening Families is a parent engagement and child abuse and neglect prevention framework developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy that capitalizes on the unique relationship between child care providers and the parents of the children in their care. Based on recognizing and promoting families' strengths, rather than identifying risk factors, the Strengthening Families framework helps families to develop the five "protective factors" proven to reduce child abuse and neglect and promote optimal child outcomes: social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, parental resilience, and healthy social and emotional development. Facilities participating in the **IdahoSTARS** QRIS earn points toward their composite STAR rating by taking Strengthening Families training and by implementing the framework in their workplace. Thirty IdahoSTARS approved trainers offer a robust schedule of training opportunities: the 8-module, 17-hour basic trainings, seven intermediate level trainings, and five Essential Trainings that are embedded in the QRIS. Implementation is measured by documentation of social and educational events for parents, volunteer opportunities, parent work group activities, a system of emergency support, completion of the Strengthening Families self-assessment, and a corresponding action plan. Additional information is available at <http://idahostars.org/?q=gris>.

STAFF-CHILD RATIOS AND GROUP SIZE

Only a few QRIS have standards that require child care providers to have **staff-child ratios and group sizes** that are lower than those required by licensing. For example, **Kentucky** requires a staff-child ratio of 5:1 and a group size of 10 for infants for the first QRIS level, which is the same as the licensing requirements. At the third QRIS level, the required ratio for infants is 4:1 with a group size of 8.

Variations in the standards that States include often reflect the level of minimum licensing requirements. If licensing standards provide the starting point for the QRIS and already require strong administrative policies or health and safety measures, for example, these categories of standards may not be needed in a QRIS.

CHILD ASSESSMENT

Child assessments include a range of activities, including observations, portfolio development, and appraisal of performance using multiple indicators that measure a child's learning and development. Less than half of the QRIS standards include requirements about conducting child observations and assessments. Often these standards require programs to share assessment results with families or use assessment results to individualize curriculum or improve practice.

The following publications provide additional information for including child assessment in QRIS standards:

- *Moving to Outcomes Approaches to Incorporating Child Assessments into State Early Childhood Quality Rating and Improvement Systems* (2012), by Gail L. Zellman and Lynn A. Karoly, at RAND Corporation, compares strategies for incorporating child assessments into state QRIS and other early childhood quality improvement efforts. This resource is available at http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2012/RAND_OP364.pdf.
- *Understanding and Choosing Assessments and Developmental Screeners for Young Children Ages 3-5: Profiles of Selected Measures, Final Report* (2011), by Tamara Halle, Martha Zaslow, Julia Wessel, Shannon Moodie, and Kristen Darling-Churchill, at Child Trends, provides information about child assessment tools commonly used with young children. This resource is available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/resource/understanding-and-choosing-assessments-and-developmental-screeners-for>.

MINNESOTA QRIS INCLUDES CHILD ASSESSMENT

Parent Aware, the Minnesota QRIS, requires participating centers and family child care providers to conduct regular child assessments. To earn 1 Star, all center lead teachers or lead family child care providers complete at least 2 hours of training on authentic observation practices and observe children regularly and record information at least monthly. For 2 Stars, observation summaries are shared with families. The higher QRIS levels (3 and 4 Stars) are achieved by earning points. A total of 4 points can be earned in child assessment by meeting these standards:

- Conduct assessment using an approved tool with all children at least twice per year in at least the following domains: social-emotional, language and literacy, mathematical thinking and physical development; and all lead teachers/providers complete 8 hours of training on authentic child assessment (2 points); OR,
- Conduct assessment using an approved tool with all children at least once per year in two or more domains, and all lead teachers/providers complete at least 8 hours of training on authentic child assessment (1 point).
- Provide families with child assessment results, and if a child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP), share assessment results with team with family's permission. For a child with a special need who is receiving specialty services (for example, physical or occupational therapy), share assessment results with service providers with family's permission (1 point).
- Use child assessment information to develop lesson plans and individual goals for all children in the program (1 point).

Additional information is available at <http://www.parentawareratings.org/>.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Very few QRIS have standards about **health and safety**. QRIS standards are built on a foundation of licensing and all States have extensive health and safety standards in their licensing regulations for both child care centers and family child care homes. Therefore, many States choose to rely on licensing to assure programs provide health and safe environment for children. In the States that do have these standards, the following are some examples of the criteria that programs must meet:

- Nutrition and physical activity;
- Medical plans for children;
- CPR and first aid training;
- Daily health checks;
- Health and developmental screenings;
- Health and safety training requirements;
- Use of nurse/health consultants; and
- Health and safety self-assessments and checklists.

SOUTH CAROLINA INCORPORATES HEALTH AND NUTRITION STANDARDS IN THE ABC CENTER STANDARDS

The **ABC Quality** Center Standards at all levels now include new nutrition and physical activities standards. ABC Quality has partnered with the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC) for several years to develop these standards as ABC's response to the growing state and national concern about childhood obesity. South Carolina's initiative is entitled ABC Grow Healthy. It is defined by policies and activities that promote children's health and well-being through healthy foods served and assuring that children are physically active. Additional information is available at www.scchildcare.org.

Continuous quality improvement and QRIS standards

Recently, there has been a focus on States using a **continuous quality improvement (CQI)** approach in their QRIS standards. CQI is a continuous cycle of quality improvement focused on improving outcomes for children and families. The child welfare field provides this definition:

Continuous quality improvement is the complete process of identifying, describing, and analyzing strengths and problems and then testing, implementing, learning from, and revising solutions. It relies on an organizational and/or system culture that is proactive and supports continuous learning. Continuous quality improvement is firmly grounded in the overall mission, vision, and values of the agency/system. Perhaps most importantly, it is dependent upon the active inclusion and participation of staff at all levels of the agency/system, children, youth, families, and stakeholders throughout the process (National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement and Casey Family Programs, 2005, p. 1).

In QRIS standards, States have adopted a CQI approach by including indicators that take programs through a process of self-assessment and using data gathered from that assessment to develop quality improvement plans. The quality improvement plans are used at all levels of the QRIS to track progress. **New Mexico** has the following description of CQI in its new FOCUS QRIS standards:

RATIONALE: Continuous Quality Improvement is an on-going process that owners/administrators engage in to provide the best experience for the children and families enrolled in the program/facility and staff who are employed by the program and work at the facility.

DEFINITION: The process includes identifying, describing, and analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the program or area which improvement is needed. Once an area of improvement is identified, a plan with benchmarks, timelines, assigned tasks, and responsibilities is developed. Testing and implementing solutions is the next step. Evaluating the results and revising the plan will help decide what the next steps are – either to continue working on the same identified issue using the revised plan or to continue to improve by identifying another area to begin work. (New Mexico Children, Youth, and Family Department, 2012, p. 31).

LOUISIANA INCLUDES IMPROVEMENT PLANS IN QUALITY START STANDARDS

Louisiana's standards for **Quality Start** include a requirement application for two to five star ratings that centers complete a self-assessment of their program and develop a Center Improvement Plan. The Center Self-Assessment includes a review of Administration Practices, Family & Community Involvement, Program, and Staff Qualifications for the director and Lead Teachers. After completion of the self-assessment, the Center Improvement Plan must be completed. Center Improvement Plans are completed before submitting an Application for Two–Five Star Rating. Centers develop a Quality Start Portfolio that includes not only the Center Self-Assessment but also the documentation for each requirement and the Center Improvement Plan. Additional information about the Improvement Plan is available at http://www.qrsloisiana.org/assets/files/QS_CIPCenterImprovementPlan.pdf.

MAINE USES REFLECTIVE PRACTICE FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

In Step 2 of Maine's **Quality for ME**, the program provides an opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses with input from staff, administrators and families. A written plan for improvement based on the reflective practice is kept in the portfolio and made available for onsite review. At Step 3, the program is evaluated yearly using a self-assessment tool (e.g., Accreditation Guidelines, Head Start Standards, age appropriate environment rating scale, High Scope) and has a written improvement plan based upon findings of a comprehensive self-assessment designed to analyze all aspects of the program. Additional information is available at <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/qualityforme.htm>.

Incorporating Learning and Development Guidelines

Many States have incorporated their learning and development guidelines (also known as “early learning guidelines”) into their QRIS standards. Learning and development guidelines identify outcomes in language, literacy, mathematics, and other academic and developmental domains for young children. There are several ways that States have incorporated learning and development guidelines into the multiple levels of their QRIS standards, for example, by requiring providers to:

- Complete training on implementing the guidelines;
- Use a curriculum that is aligned with the guidelines;
- Use the guidelines for planning activities for children or developing a curriculum;
- Have a copy of the guidelines available for use;
- Align the ELGs with child assessment practices; and
- Implement the guidelines in the classroom.

A recent analysis by the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) found that about half of statewide QRIS refer to the state's Early Learning Guidelines (ELGs), most often in standards that require staff training in how to implement ELGs or the use of a curriculum or learning activities aligned with ELGs. *Practices for Promoting Young Children's Learning in QRIS Standards* (2012), by Sheila Smith, Taylor Robbins, Shannon Stagman, and J. Lee Kreder at NCCP, provides a further examination of the strength of supports for children's early learning in QRIS standards. It is available at http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_1070.pdf.

INDIANA'S STANDARDS INCLUDE EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES

Indiana's **Paths to QUALITY** standards on professional development and curriculum include references to *Foundations to the Indiana Academic Standards for Young Children Age Birth to Five*, the early learning standards for children birth to age five. Training on the Foundations is required at level 2; using a curriculum consistent with the Foundations is required at level 3. Additional information is available at <http://www.doe.in.gov/earlylearning>.

MISSISSIPPI'S EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES IMPLEMENTED IN RATED PROGRAMS

Mississippi's **Child Care Quality Step System** standards on learning environments include references to the *Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines*. In step 3, the director is trained on how to use the early learning guidelines; in step 4, all teaching staff have been trained. At the highest level, step 5, the early learning guidelines are fully implemented in all 3- and 4-year-old classrooms. Additional information is available at <http://earlychildhood.msstate.edu/resources/curriculumforthree/index.php>.

OHIO'S REVISED QRIS FURTHER EMBEDS EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

In October 2013, Ohio implemented a revised **Step Up to Quality (SUTQ)** system with five star levels and four standards categories, each with several indicators. In the original model Ohio progressively embedded the State's early learning guidelines into SUTQ's standards, but the new system has even more rigorous requirements. For example, in the old system at Step One, the program must have a copy of the Early Learning and Development Standards. To earn One Star in the new system, the program must still have copies of the early learning standards, but also engages in a process to identify a written, research-based curriculum aligned with them. For Two Stars the program obtains the curriculum, and at Three Stars the program implements the curriculum. Programs earn points to attain Four and Five Stars by planning intentional and purposeful activities that meet the needs/interests/abilities of the children and/or supporting children's active engagement through opportunities for exploration and learning.

Additional information is available at <http://www.earlychildhoodohio.org/index.php>.

Addressing the Care of Groups of Children

QRIS Standards for Infants/Toddlers, School-age Children, and Children with Special Needs

Many States also address the care of specific groups of children in their QRIS standards, such as school-age children, infants and toddlers, and children with special needs. Many categories of QRIS standards impact each of these specific groups, but as awareness of the unique needs of children continues to grow, QRIS standards provide the opportunity to better address those needs. The following publications

are intended to help States address the care of infants and toddlers, school-age children, and children with special needs in their QRIS:

- *Designing Quality Rating Systems Inclusive of Infants and Toddlers* (n.d.), by the National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative at ZERO TO THREE, offers suggestions for the intentional inclusion of quality indicators for infants and toddlers in State QRIS.
http://main.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/QRS_Design_Elements_for_Infants_and_Toddlers.pdf
- *Using Quality Rating Systems to Promote Quality in Afterschool Programs* (2007), by the Afterschool Investments Project, examines using State QRIS as a strategy to assess afterschool programs and the needs of school-age children. <http://qrisnetwork.org/sites/all/files/resources/gscobb/2011-09-20%2008:25/Report.pdf>
- *Why Program Quality Matters for Early Childhood Inclusion: Recommendations for Professional Development* (2009), by the National Professional Development Center on Inclusion, discusses dimensions of program quality that define high-quality inclusion and how quality can be improved through initiatives such as QRIS.
http://www.nectac.org/~pdfs/meetings/inclusionMtg2009/2507_Proof11_2-27-2009.pdf

INDIANA'S SEPARATE STANDARDS FOR INFANT AND TODDLER CARE

Indiana's Paths to QUALITY is unique among statewide systems in its inclusion of separate indicators for infants and toddlers at each of the levels. Paths to QUALITY criteria are organized around process and structural quality. The criteria on structural quality were developed with evidence-based research and related to child outcomes. The Purdue University evaluation of its pilot suggests the following evidence-based outcomes:

- Infants and toddlers cared for by providers with specialized training in child development or early childhood education were rated higher in social-emotional competence by their parents.
- Lower teacher/child ratios are associated with less distress in toddlers, less apathy and distress in infants, and greater social competence.
- When groups are smaller, teachers provide more stimulating, responsive, warm, and supportive interactions. They also engage in more dialogue with children, spend less time managing children, and devote more time in educational activities.

At level two, specific infant toddler indicators include criteria for the classroom environment, furnishings, materials and toys, teacher child interactions, daily scheduling of napping, outdoor play and safe environment, language development, and activities. Level three includes the following specific infant toddler indicators:

- Infants and toddlers are not expected to function as a large group.
- Infants and toddlers are offered a variety of sensory experiences each day.
- Toddlers are offered opportunities for writing experiences each day.

Additional information is available at <http://www.in.gov/fssa/carefinder/2554.htm>.

NEW MEXICO FOCUSES ON INCLUSION

New Mexico engaged a broad range of stakeholders in its *Quality Child Care for All* recommendations in 2004 and in a follow-up report in 2007. They continue to look for ways to support teachers who care for children with special needs. For example, all classroom and administrative staff and family child care providers at three-star level and higher are required to complete a 6-hour course that is being taught by child care inclusion specialists located at every training and technical assistance center, or an approved equivalent course. An additional course will be developed that builds on the initial 6-hour course. The new course will focus on the New Mexico Guiding Principles for the Inclusion of Every Child. Completion of the course will be required for programs participating in the tiered quality rating and improvement system.

INCORPORATING INCLUSION INTO NEW HAMPSHIRE'S QRIS

New Hampshire was concerned about the number of children with special needs being expelled from and denied admittance to child care programs. Programs cited their lack of expertise in caring for children with special needs and inadequate staffing levels as the primary reasons for these decisions. The result was inadequate child care for parents who participated in the welfare-to-work program. The New Hampshire Child Development Bureau contracted with a private nonprofit agency to provide technical assistance to child care programs with the goals of prevention of expulsion, provision of a service incentive, and creation of more inclusive child care programs. When the **Licensed Plus** QRIS was created, the State saw an opportunity to add another incentive to serve children with special needs. One of the required standards in Licensed Plus is that programs must provide written documentation of an inclusion policy that welcomes children and families of all abilities, makes modifications and reasonable accommodations, and supports staff in professional development. Additional information is available at <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcyf/licensedplus/index.htm>. In the revised QRIS, the emphasis is on embedding individualized instruction to meet the needs of each child into the various standards.

INCLUSIVE PRACTICE IN VIRGINIA

As a means of embedding inclusive practice in both assessment observation and mentoring for programs participating in **Virginia's Star Quality Initiative**, Star Quality raters and mentors receive training for their responsibilities. The Virginia Department of Education's Training and Technical Assistance Centers (T/TAC) are a state-wide resource available to help those working with children with disabilities. The SpecialQuest approach to professional development focuses on inclusion for young children with disabilities and their families. The T/TA Centers then provide support to teachers and classrooms to ensure optimal experiences for children with special needs. Because these trainers coordinate the training that raters and mentors must receive in order to participate in the QRIS, they can reinforce competencies and understanding of inclusive practice for these professionals. In this way, inclusive practice is methodically supported in classrooms and programs participating in the Star Quality Initiative, benefiting all children served. Additional information is available at <http://www.smartbeginnings.org/Home/StarQualityInitiative/AbouttheVSQI.aspx>.

Structure of QRIS Ratings

Rating levels

Determining the number of rating levels in a QRIS often depends on the difference between the criteria in licensing requirements and those in the most rigorous set of standards currently in place (e.g., national accreditation or prekindergarten standards). If the difference is great, then more steps may be needed to allow programs to experience success by making incremental progress toward higher quality. In the development of a QRIS, States must discuss the progression from one level to the next higher level (e.g., the size of the steps between the levels and how long it will take a program to progress from one level to the next).

Most statewide QRIS have a range of two to five levels of standards above licensing requirements. The most common number of levels is five. Information about the number of levels in each of the statewide QRIS is available in the document *QRIS Standards, Levels, and Rating Systems* (2013b), by NCCCQI, at https://occqrisguide.icfwebservices.com/files/QRIS_Levels_Rating.pdf.

PROVIDERS REACH UP TO FOUR LEVELS IN KENTUCKY

The Kentucky **STARS for KIDS NOW Child Care** Quality Rating System has four levels of quality standards. Provider license/certification must be in good standing at all levels. To attain higher levels, providers must meet the requirements of that level and those of previous levels. Kentucky's standards address ratios, curriculum, training, regulatory compliance, personnel (for centers only), and business practices (for FCC only). Accreditation is one of the criteria for the level 4 curriculum standards. Additional information is available at <http://chfs.ky.gov/dcbs/dcc/stars/default.htm>.

LICENSED PLUS STANDARDS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

The QRIS in New Hampshire, **Licensed Plus**, includes two levels above licensing, with two options for achieving the first level (Licensed Plus). Licensed Plus Option 1 requires providers to meet 11 required standards and select an additional 5 standards, for a total requirement of 16 standards. Option 2 is for programs engaged in a national accreditation process but have not yet achieved that accreditation. Documentation of meeting Licensed Plus standards is done through submission of paper documentation. The level above Licensed Plus is Accreditation, which includes the following national accreditation organizations: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), and the Council on Accreditation's (COA) After School Accreditation. Additional information is available at <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcyf/licensedplus/index.htm>. The revised QRIS will continue to be voluntary with licensing as the first level, followed by a level that is preparatory to achieving one of three higher rated levels based on points. The proposed revised system includes 14 required standards plus external evaluations using the Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).

Assigning ratings

States have developed three methods for assigning ratings:

- **Building block approach.** In this approach, all the standards in each level must be met for programs to move to the next level.
- **Point system.** In this approach, every standard is assigned a number of points, with a combined score used to determine the quality rating.
- **Combination or hybrid approach.** In this approach, a combination of the building block approach and the point system determines program ratings. The first levels are building blocks; higher levels are earned through a point system.

Additional information about how the ratings are assigned in each of the statewide QRIS is available in the document, *QRIS Standards, Levels, and Rating Systems* (2013b), by NCCCQI, at https://ocqqrsguide.icfwebsiteservices.com/files/QRIS_Levels_Rating.pdf.

A recent study (Tout, Chien, Rothenberg, and Li, 2014) compared three hypothetical QRIS that use different rating structures – block, points, and hybrid. For each structure, they examined the distribution of programs across ratings levels, linkages of ratings with measures of observed quality, and scores on individual quality categories. Findings indicate that QRIS structure has significant implications for these key QRIS outcomes. The research brief is available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/ecls_brief1.pdf.

The building block approach is the easiest structure for providers and families to understand and for QRIS managers to administer. It also clearly identifies those criteria that the QRIS designers believe to be essential for all programs to meet. The following are some examples of States that have used the building block approach in the development of their QRIS standards.

MARYLAND'S QRIS USES BLOCK APPROACH

Maryland **EXCELS** is a five-level system. To meet the standards for Level 1, programs must be fully licensed, open, and operating for at least 6 months and demonstrate compliance with specific licensing requirements. With each higher level, a program is required to meet increasingly higher quality standards in the following categories: Licensing and Compliance, Staff Qualifications and Professional Development, Accreditation and Rating Scales, Developmentally Appropriate Learning and Practice and Administrative Policies and Practices. Additional information is available at <http://www.marylandexcels.org/>.

OREGON PARTNERS BASE QRIS STANDARDS ON RESEARCH AND INPUT FROM THE FIELD

Oregon's Child Care Division partnered with Western Oregon University's Teaching Research Institute and other key partners to develop **Oregon's QRIS**. The system is based on best practices from targeted research, education awards and other states QRISs. The QRIS was built on Oregon's own licensing regulations, the Oregon Registry, Quality Indicators and Oregon Programs of Quality. The QRIS standards were then refined with input from professionals in the field: child care providers, CCR&R agencies, licensing specialists, health and nutrition specialists, child care union members, Oregon's Professional Development Committee and the Standards Workgroup of Statewide Partners. The resulting structure of standards has five tiers, starting with licensure and uses a building block approach that assures that programs have a strong foundation at each tier before they move to the next tier. Programs use portfolios to document their progress, employing a variety of evidence, including data, documentation, reports, observations, and expert reviews. Four regions across the State are currently piloting the QRIS program standards, supports, and incentives. Additional information is available at <http://www.wou.edu/tri/QRIS/about.html>.

Point systems require clear and explicit marketing so that parents can better recognize the varied strengths that are represented among programs that may all have the same rating. A point system works well as a program improvement strategy. Programs can easily see what is needed to improve in each category and have more options for moving to a higher level. The following are some examples of States that have point systems.

QUALITY RATINGS IN NEW YORK BASED ON POINT CALCULATIONS

Regulated providers receive a One-Star rating in **QualityStarsNY**. Programs or providers that wish to advance up to Five-Stars earn points for meeting standards in each of the four standards categories: learning environment, family engagement, qualifications and experience, and management and leadership. All programs provide supporting documentation to verify program policies, practices, and achievements. At least 10% of the total possible points must be earned in each category to ensure that all rated programs meet a minimum level of quality.

There are a total of 360 possible points associated with the Standards for centers, family/home providers and school-based programs. All sites can earn up to 290 possible points before receiving up to 20 possible points depending on populations of children they serve, and up to 50 points based on the ERS observation scores. A calculation is done of total points earned out of total points possible to determine the final rating level. The ratings are broken down as follows:

- One Star—Regulated provider
- Two Star—10%-39%
- Three Star—40%-59%
- Four Star—60%-84%
- Five Star—85%-100%

Additional information is available at <http://qualitystarsny.org/foundations-standards.php>.

NORTH CAROLINA'S POINT SYSTEM PROVIDES FLEXIBILITY

North Carolina's **Star Rated License** has five sets of standards: a set for family child care homes, a set for centers that serve only preschool-age children, a set for centers that serve only school-age children, a set for centers that serve preschool- and school-age children, and a set for centers located in the provider's residence. Each of these sets of standards has five levels, from one to five stars. All early care and education programs that are licensed receive a rating, including Head Start and prekindergarten. Child care programs receive an onsite evaluation in two categories: education standards and program standards, which include health and safety, physical facility, ratios, administration, parent involvement, activities, and the ERS. Seven points can be earned in each category with an optional quality point, for a total possible 15 points, creating flexibility for programs. The final point total determines the star rating. Additional information is available at http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/parents/pr_sn2_ov_sr.asp.

USING A POINT SYSTEM IN VERMONT'S QRIS

When Vermont's **STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS)** was being developed, the State presented rating systems based on building blocks and points to the early childhood community in a series of focus groups. The consensus was to use points. Blocks were seen as "making us all do the same things" and points "recognize us for our varied strengths and the different ways we operate." A point system is more flexible than a block system and fits the Vermont ethos of independence.

Vermont STARS assigns up to a maximum number of points in five arenas (categories of standards): Regulatory history (3 points), Staff qualifications and training (3 points), Families and community (3 points), Program practices (5 points), and Administration (3 points). Vermont is continually reviewing its system and has changed the Program Practices Arena to be the arena where most points can be achieved. Vermont has also created customized applications based on program type. An example of a customization is that the Family Child Care home provider application notes only program assessment tools pertinent to family child care in the application and the administration arena documentation reflects the home context. CLASS and the YPQA have been added to the menu of approved tools to assess programs. TS Gold is the child assessment tool that must be used in early childhood programs at the 4 point level in the Program Practices arena, although all public Pre-K programs must use this tool at each point level.

Vermont is intentionally preparing programs for a change to STARS that will require third party on-site program assessment (2 points in Program Practices) before the program can attain 3 stars. This would require a formal change in STARS rules. Vermont is preparing the field by providing more training on the ERS and providing an on-site mentoring visit at the two point level in the Program Practices Arena. http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/pdf/cdd/stars/Adopted_STARS_rule_FINAL.pdf.

The number of States using a **combination of blocks and points**, or hybrid model, is growing. In these systems, typically the first two levels are achieved if the provider meets all of the standards for those levels. For the higher levels, providers earn points in the various categories of standards. However, it may be more difficult to evaluate the quality of programs at each level as a point system allows more variability in how programs achieve each level. The following are examples of States using this combination approach.

BLOCKS PLUS POINTS, STANDARDS FOR IOWA'S QRIS

In developing the **Iowa Quality Rating System**, a workgroup developed an initial draft using a block approach. The specific criteria involved were shared widely to gather significant public input. This input indicated that providers overwhelmingly felt that the specific criteria were too restrictive and, for some programs, would be impossible to meet. Based on the public input, the workgroup developed a hybrid system, in which levels one and two are the same for all programs (differentiated for home and centers), and levels three through five are based on points that can be earned in categories of quality indicators. Programs must earn at least one point in each category for levels three through five. This approach was seen as giving an assurance of basic quality requirements being met for all programs, also allowing flexibility for programs that want to achieve higher levels. The QRS was recalibrated in February 2011, and now requires all Level 5 programs to achieve a minimum ERS score of 5.0 in each assessed classroom. Achievement bonuses are awarded based on the capacity and rating level of the program. Additional information is available at <http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/iqrs/>.

LOUISIANA'S QUALITY START IS A HYBRID MODEL

Quality Start, the Louisiana QRIS, uses both a building block and point approach to assign quality ratings. All programs that participate in the QRIS must meet the basic requirements for a Star One and Star Two rating in four component areas of standards: administrative practices, family and community involvement, program, and staff qualifications. In addition to these basic requirements, programs applying for Star Three must have an additional 3 to 5 points; programs applying for Star Four must achieve 6 to 9 points; and programs applying for Star Five must achieve 10 or 11 points. Points are earned in two areas of standards: staff qualification and program (for reduction in staff-child ratios, introduction of group size, use of early learning guidelines, social-emotional screening of children, plan for continuity of care, and the ERS score). One additional quality point may be earned in administrative practices or family and community involvement. Additional information is available at http://www.qrslouisiana.org/gs_model.html.

Use of program quality assessment tools

Most of the States with a QRIS that require a classroom assessment to evaluate program quality currently use the ERS developed by the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill:

- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised
- Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised
- School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS)
- Family Child Care Rating Scale³

³ The ERS for family child care homes was revised in 2007. Some States still refer to the older version, i.e., the Family Day Care Rating Scale.

It is important to distinguish these scales, which are used to assess the overall classroom and teaching environment, from other assessment tools that are designed to assess the specific progress of children in the classroom. Additional information about the ERS is available on the FPG Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Web site at <http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/>.

The way ERS assessments and scores are used within QRIS varies among the States that require assessments. For example,

- ERS scores are used to determine rating levels;
- Programs can earn points for ERS scores, which contribute to the overall rating; or
- Programs are assessed with ERS, but do not tie particular scores to the ratings.

The following are examples of States that use other program assessment tools for measuring quality:

- **Oklahoma** recognizes the Child and Caregiver Interaction Scale, the Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale, the Early Learning and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO), the Program Administration Scale (PAS), and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).
- **Massachusetts** requires assessments with the CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) or Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale to measure teacher-child relationships, and the PAS for administration. Assessment with the Business Administration Scale (BAS) is required for FCC providers. Massachusetts also uses the Environment Rating Scales and the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Self-Assessment. After School/Out of School Time programs also use the APT-O/APT-Q.
- **Michigan** uses the Program Quality Assessment®, developed by the HighScope Educational Research Foundation, to confirm quality levels for programs at the higher levels.
- **Mississippi** uses scores from the ERS to determine rating levels.
- In **Rhode Island**, CLASS scores are collected from a random sample of 33 percent of preschool classrooms. Scores were not used in the rating process during the first year of implementation.
- In **Washington**, each assessed facility/family home child care must score at least a 2 on Instructional Support in the CLASS, a 3.5 on Emotional Support and Classroom Organization/Emotional and Behavioral Support in the CLASS and a 3.5 on the ERS to achieve a Level 3 to 5 rating. Facilities that do not meet these minimum thresholds will receive a Level 2 rating.

Information about the program assessment tools used by States that are implementing a statewide QRIS model is available in *Use of ERS and Other Program Assessment Tools in QRIS* (NCCCQI, 2013c) at https://ocqrsguide.icfwebservices.com/files/QRIS_Program_Assess.pdf.

The following publications provide information about the use of program quality assessment tools:

- *Best Practices for Conducting Program Observations as Part of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems* (2011), by Bridget Hamre and Kelly Maxwell, highlights issues and recommendations for conducting program observations as part of a QRIS.
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/program_observation.pdf
- *Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings: A Compendium of Measures* (2010), by Tamara Halle, Jessica Vick Whittaker, and Rachel Anderson, from Child Trends, provides profiles of several tools that can be used to assess the quality of child care.
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/complete_compendium_full.pdf
- *Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools, 2nd Edition* (2009), by Nicole Yohalem and Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom, Forum for Youth Investment, provides an overview of tools developed to measure quality in youth programs.
<http://www.forumfyi.org/content/measuring-youth-program-quality-guide-assessment-tools-2nd-edition>

EMPHASIS ON SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCALE OF ERS IN LOUISIANA

In **Quality Start**, the Louisiana QRIS, child care centers can receive one to four points based on the social-emotional subscale score of the ERS. There are minimum scores for both individual classrooms and the average score for all classrooms. To receive the maximum five points, centers must receive an average score of 5.0 on the overall ERS, with no one classroom scoring lower than 4.0. Four or five points are earned if the program completes a screening with all children (0-5 yrs.) for social-emotional development within 45 calendar days of enrollment and annually thereafter. Programs must hold a conference with parents to review the results and provide a list of community resources. Louisiana also created a mental health consultation program that is linked to participation in Quality Start. Participating centers receive consultation (one full day every other week for a 6-month period) from licensed mental health providers with training in infant mental health. Evaluation data using the CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) instrument indicates that the consultation is producing results. Additional information is available at <http://www.qrslouisiana.com/>.

USE OF CLASS IN VIRGINIA'S QRIS PILOT

Virginia's Star Quality Initiative has five Star levels that incorporate and build on the Commonwealth's licensing standards, Board of Education requirements, and Head Start Performance Standards. The four performance standards categories—education, qualifications, and training; interactions; structure; and environment and instruction—have indicators that must be achieved for each Star level. For standard 2, interactions, programs will be assessed through direct observations of classrooms using the CLASS framework for Children's Learning Opportunities developed by the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning at the University of Virginia. Because research shows strong correlation between the quality of interactions and child outcomes in academic development, in addition to social, emotional, and motivational development, this standard will be given the greatest weight in determining a program rating. Additional information is available at <http://www.smartbeginnings.org/Home/StarQualityInitiative/AbouttheVSQI.aspx>.

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QRIS RESOURCE GUIDE: SECTION 5 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND MONITORING

When a State decides to pursue a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), it is important to engage providers, partners, and other stakeholders in a strategic process to determine appropriate policies and procedures for accountability and monitoring. This section addresses the areas of documenting compliance with the standards and criteria, determining the rating levels, deciding how frequently they will be determined, choosing which assessment tools to use, monitoring the rating, and facing a possible loss or reduction of a rating level.

- [Documenting Compliance](#)
- [Determining the Rating Level](#)
- [Monitoring the Rating](#)

Documenting Compliance

Documenting compliance criteria

The compliance criteria for each standard define what a program must do to achieve a particular level, to move to the next level, or to earn points in a specific category. Documentation for meeting QRIS standards can be in the form of a checklist, a self-report or self-assessment, presentation of materials, and an observation or assessment. It is very important that each criterion and forms of acceptable documentation are clearly defined. Interviews and conversations with providers and interested stakeholders during the design phase will help identify requirements and processes that are not clear or sufficiently defined.

Idaho, New Hampshire, New York and Pennsylvania are among the States that include checklists, listing sources of evidence, on their Web sites.

- **IdahoSTARS** QRIS STAR Rating Verification for Family and Group Homes includes an example of the checklist an IdahoSTARS Assessor will use to verify a STAR Rating:
http://idahostars.org/sites/default/files/documents/qriskris_star_rating_verification_home_group.pdf
- **New Hampshire** Licensed Plus Quality Rating System Option 1 Standards includes a column that specifies the type of documentation that is required to verify compliance with the standard:
<http://www.dhhs.state.nh.us/dcyf/licensedplus/documents/option1standards.pdf>
- **New York's** QRIS standards include a documentation checklist next to each standard. New York has developed an on-line Resource Guide that provides details about the documentation requirement and includes samples of acceptable documents. Upon clicking on the standard, additional information on that standard becomes available, including clarifications, key documents and links to additional reading. The Resource Guide is available at <http://qualitystarsny.org/standardsguide.php>.
- **Pennsylvania** has provider worksheets for each STAR Level. The worksheets are organized in three columns: the standard, pre-designation notes (completed by the program) and designation notes (completed by STARS staff). They serve not only as a way to identify the sources of evidence necessary to comply with the standards, but also as a roadmap to prepare for STAR Level designation. The STAR 1, 2, 3 and 4 Worksheets are available on the PAKeys website, at <http://www.pakeys.org/pages/starsDocs.aspx>. Separate worksheets are available for school-age care programs.

Many States have glossaries, or definition pages, to more fully define and explain the criteria. They also have companion pieces, such as an application manual (**Maine**) or a program guide (**Delaware**) that help the providers and other interested individuals better understand the QRIS. See the “Standards and Criteria” section of this guide for additional information.

As QRIS evolve in a State, documentation requirements may change or need clarification. Any changes need to be communicated to all stakeholders. As participation in the QRIS increases, the capacity of the documentation and assessment system must increase accordingly. The goal remains to make accurate verification and timely rating decisions.

OKLAHOMA RESPONDS TO UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES IN ITS QRIS

Oklahoma’s **Reaching for the Stars** QRIS policy and procedures are specific and detailed so that staff and providers understand the process. This is essential because of the significant financial consequences of star status on tiered reimbursement rates. Because it is difficult to evaluate a program when it first opens, the QRIS policy initially stated that a program could not apply for a higher star level until it had a full license, generally after 6 months of operation. This imposed a hardship on new programs as well as on existing child care centers, particularly if there was a change of ownership. Under new ownership, the tiered rates dropped dramatically, jeopardizing the continued quality of the center. As a result, the policy was changed to allow new programs with an initial permit to participate. Additional information is available at <http://www.okdhs.org/programsandservices/cc/stars/>.

Demonstrating compliance

Some States permit multiple methods to demonstrate compliance with QRIS standards. One area where States frequently accept equivalencies is educational qualifications and attainment.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO MEETING REQUIREMENTS IN LOUISIANA

In the Louisiana QRIS, Quality Start, there are four alternatives for Directors to meet the requirement for 3 semester hours in administration training at the 2 Star level: (1) Louisiana Administrator Certificate, (2) National Administrator Credential, (3) 3 years of experience in administration, or (4) combination of 1 year of experience in administration and 4 years of teaching young children in an early childhood program. Louisiana’s Quality Start standards are available at <http://www.qrsloisiana.org/assets/files/QS-Model-Aug-2013.pdf>.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO MEETING REQUIREMENTS IN IOWA

In the **Iowa Quality Rating System**, a center director can meet a professional development standard by having a current National Administrator Credential, an Aim4Excellence credential, or a license as a Pre-Kindergarten principal issued by the Board of Educational Examiners. Iowa also accepts different criteria at the Level 1–Licensing Level: full license OR a provisional license with no action to revoke or deny OR operates under the authority of an accredited school district or nonpublic school. Additional information is available at <http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/iqrs/>.

National accreditation is another standard that is often used as an equivalent measure in a QRIS. States that incorporate national accreditation systems into their QRIS generally do so as equivalent to, or required for, higher levels of quality. Most States accept more than one national accreditation and typically base this decision on a comparison of the accreditation standards with their QRIS requirements. Several States have developed online crosswalks that are used to compare several sets of standards (e.g. State standards, accreditation, and Head Start Performance Standards). The National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement provides an online National Program Standards Crosswalk Tool that is designed to help States that are developing and aligning program standards for licensing, quality rating and improvement systems, and/or prekindergarten programs, to search and compare the content of several sets of national standards. The Crosswalk Tool is accessible at <https://occqrisguide.icfwebservices.com/index.cfm?do=crosswalk>.

States may decide to include standards in addition to national accreditation if they feel that standards are not sufficiently incorporated in the accreditation system or monitored with enough frequency. An example of this is the requirement for program assessments, such as the Environment Rating Scales. Information about the use of accreditation and the accreditation organizations accepted by each statewide QRIS is available in *Accreditation Accepted for QRIS* at https://occqrisguide.icfwebservices.com/files/QRIS_Accred_Accepted.pdf.

Most QRIS include a range of choices to demonstrate compliance in the areas of staffing standards, such as accepting different types of professional development activities, as well as various ways to meet the compensation and benefits standards. The family involvement standards component is another area where choice is the norm; most States permit QRIS participants to identify a range of acceptable parent activities and supports.

When States are considering multiple ways to demonstrate compliance, they can consider such questions as:

- If there is another way to document compliance, is it equivalent to the competencies required in the QRIS?
- Do providers have access to programs and supports that will help them demonstrate compliance? If not, does the State have the capacity to make them available?
- If providers can seek validation from an outside group, association, or system to document compliance, does the outside entity have the capacity to meet the provider requests in a timely manner?
- Are there financial implications for the state or the provider involved with alternate pathways?

Use of existing systems to document compliance

Ideally, if a State has an integrated, comprehensive early and school-age care and education system, documentation from various components of the system could be shared to verify compliance with QRIS standards. Sources could include licensing data, a professional development registry, the Head Start Program Review Instrument for Systems Monitoring data system, accreditation monitoring data, or prekindergarten program monitoring data. The **Maine** QRIS was designed to maximize data from licensing and Maine Roads to Quality, the State's professional development system.

ONLINE APPLICATION SIMPLIFIES PROCESS IN MAINE

For its QRIS, **Quality for ME**, Maine created an online application process, which is linked to the State's automated professional development registry. Providers begin the application process by entering their six-digit, unique child care license number. This number enables access to the system and automatically triggers the Maine Roads to Quality (MRTQ) Professional Development Registry records for the site. Providers verify or update these records, and go on to respond to queries that request the additional information required to determine their quality level. The MRTQ Registry provides accreditation and Head Start data, which are also used to help determine a quality level. Upon completion of the application, the system triggers a report that includes a brief overview of what quality level the provider is likely to receive based on the information entered. It also tells the applicant what is missing as well as what it would need to do to move to the next step in the QRIS. This report is then sent to Department of Health and Human Services staff to verify licensing compliance data and provide any other necessary approvals. Filling out the application is meant to be an educational experience for providers. The online system allows the user to hold the cursor over words which bring up popup boxes with definitions and other helpful information, including examples of policies and practices that meet the QRIS standards (e.g., model parent handbook or classroom planning tool). Additional information is available at <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/qualityforme.htm>.

DELAWARE ALTERNATIVE PATHWAY AVOIDS DUPLICATION OF DOCUMENTATION

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited programs, once accepted into **Delaware Stars**, must provide a copy of their accreditation and complete the Delaware Stars Orientation specific to NAEYC programs. Once complete, NAEYC programs are designated Star Level 5 and may keep their Star Level by maintaining their accreditation and submitting copies of their annual NAEYC reports to Delaware Stars. NAEYC programs are assigned a Technical Assistant (TA) and are required to submit an annual report to Stars. Head Start and Early Childhood Assistance Programs (ECAP), once accepted into Delaware Stars, must provide a copy of their most recent monitoring report and complete the Delaware Stars Orientation specific to Head Start/ECAP programs. Once complete, programs are designated Star Level 4 and may keep their Star Level by maintaining good standing with Head Start and ECAP monitoring standards and by submitting copies of their annual monitoring reports to Delaware Stars. Programs may choose to maintain at Star Level 4 or move up to a Star Level 5. To achieve Star Level 5, programs must request an ERS assessment and meet the minimum required classroom scores for that level. Programs are eligible for technical assistance when actively working on achieving Star Level 5. The 2012 Program Guide is available at <http://www.delawarestars.udel.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-Program-GuideR.pdf>.

As States develop new or expanded data systems, a challenge and an opportunity exist in cross-sector and cross-system utilities. The **Pennsylvania** Enterprise to Link Information for Children Across Networks (PELICAN) is one example of a sophisticated, integrated child and early learning system. This system draws data from subsidy, licensing, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, the Pennsylvania Keys to Quality QRIS, and other Pennsylvania early learning programs into one integrated data system. Automation offers exciting opportunities to create user-friendly systems that not only draw data from multiple sources, but also use these data to help inform consumers.

Evaluation Readiness

Several States have found it helpful to have programs prepare for their QRIS evaluation by completing rating readiness tools. **Washington** describes this process as follows

(http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/elac-qrisc/docs/EA_operating_guidelines.pdf):

As part of evaluation preparation, facilities will work with their local lead agency staff to complete a Rating Readiness Tool. The tool is a checklist created by the [University of Washington] that helps facilities and the evaluation team plan for a successful, efficient on-site evaluation visit. The tool collects facility information for the evaluation team including:

- Site map, classroom schedules, and other relevant facility details
- Confirmation that facility has collected consent from all families
- Location of documentation and files for Data Collector review
- Which Quality Standard components the facility plans to demonstrate during the on-site evaluation visits

The following are some additional examples of ways in which States help programs determine their readiness to be rated.

- **Pennsylvania** created a voluntary self-assessment survey tool to help programs determine their readiness to benefit from TA. Information on technical assistance through Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality is available at http://www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Programs_Tech.
- **Minnesota** includes a checklist on their website that can be used as a readiness tool and a program improvement plan. The checklist is accessible at <http://parentawaratings.org/files/PA%20Quality%20Checklist%20CCC.pdf>

Some States use Level 2 as an assessment of rating readiness, especially when Level 1 is licensing. Level 2 standards can serve as an assessment of whether a program is meeting slightly higher standards than licensing. Most of these standards do not require onsite verification (this might include, for example, a personnel policy manual, parent manual, or staff qualifications). These States typically do not use a formal observation tool for rating purposes before Level 3. Programs receive more intensive coaching at levels 3 and higher, once they have demonstrated the ability to meet the basics.

In **Pennsylvania**, monitoring compliance for the lower levels, Start with STARS and STAR 1, is a paperwork process; whereas STARS 2 through 4 require an annual onsite review of standards compliance by Pennsylvania Keys to Quality Program regional staff.

Frequency of compliance monitoring

Frequency of monitoring is often determined through examination of several factors:

- Available financial resources
- Availability of staff with appropriate skills, knowledge, and time to perform functions
- Determinations related to validity and integrity of data collection
- Connections to other systems and their monitoring and compliance processes

Most States conduct monitoring of compliance with standards for their QRIS on an annual basis. Others monitor more frequently. **Oklahoma** monitors programs for licensing three times per year and, if any QRIS violations are observed, they are documented. Overall QRIS compliance is reviewed annually, whereas the environment rating scales (ERS) assessments are conducted only once every 3 years.

TENNESSEE'S USE OF UNANNOUNCED MONITORING VISITS (UAV)

Unannounced visits are conducted annually because Tennessee recognizes that a program can change quickly. All licensed agencies must receive one announced visit and a minimum of four unannounced visits each year. The number of UAVs each agency receives is determined by its "star rating." The UAV schedule for agencies operating year round is as follows:

- New agencies and agencies eligible for 0 stars = six UAVs/licensing year
- Agencies eligible for one star = five UAVs/licensing year
- Agencies eligible for two or three stars = four UAVs/licensing year

Additional information is available at <http://www.tennessee.gov/humanserv/adfam/ccrr.html>

The method and frequency of monitoring may vary by standard. Some standards, such as current staff qualifications, may only need to be verified one time as long as the staff and their qualifications remain unchanged. Other standards, such as professional development requirements for ongoing training, need to be checked annually. This can be accomplished through a paperwork process or verification through training organizations or data imported from registries. Other standards, such as implementing curriculum or posting lesson plans, may require onsite observation. Monitoring or verification may also be triggered under certain circumstances, such as staff changes, particularly as it relates to the director, or serious licensing violations.

Determining the Rating Level

Authorities that determine the rating

Identifying the entity(ies) with capacity to effectively administer a QRIS over time is a central issue to consider in the design phase. Most statewide QRIS are administered by a State agency in partnership with private sector entities. The QRIS administrator typically performs several basic functions, including:

1. Initially assessing program quality and assigning a QRIS level;
2. Monitoring compliance to ensure system integrity;
3. Conducting classroom assessments (using the ERS, CLASS, or another instrument);
4. Providing training and technical assistance; and
5. Managing system planning, engagement, and outreach (e.g., data collection and analysis, Web design and upkeep, marketing development and public information dissemination, etc.).

In most cases, each of these functions is the responsibility of different staff members, many of whom may be with contracted agencies or privately funded partners. Several States use State agency employees for functions 1 and 2 (assigning the initial rating and monitoring compliance) and contract with outside entities for functions 3 and 4 (conducting classroom assessments and providing training and technical assistance). However, these staffing patterns vary and are often influenced by available funding and current staffing needs and resources. For validity of the system, it is important to separate the functions of conducting assessments and providing technical assistance. In other words, technical assistance providers should not also be responsible for assessing programs.

Licensing staff in **North Carolina, Oklahoma** and **Tennessee** monitor QRIS criteria, and a separate team of assessors conduct the ERS. In **Oklahoma**, the ERS assessors are contracted through the University of Oklahoma's Center for Early Childhood Professional Development.

Arizona's Quality First QRIS is administered by First Things First (a governmental agency funded with tobacco tax). Participation in Quality First begins with an initial assessment, during which a Quality First assessor visits the program to observe classrooms and interview teachers.

All programs enrolled in Quality First receive a coach, who visits the program on a regular basis and supports programs with technical assistance. The coach reviews scores from program assessments and helps the program create a plan for improvement. Additional information is available at <http://qualityfirstaz.com/providers/>.

Washington's Department of Early Learning partners with the University of Washington (UW) to administer Early Achievers QRIS (<http://www.del.wa.gov/care/qrisc/>). The University is the lead agency for evaluation, assessment and rating assignment. Data Collectors from UW conduct facility on-site evaluation visits. The University is also responsible for the development of the Early Achievers Coach Framework. Washington designates several roles responsible for monitoring and supporting providers in their QRIS:

- Regional Coordinator: Approves or denies a program's request to be rated;
- Community Liaison: A member of the University of Washington (UW) evaluation team, the Community Liaison supports the facility and the data collectors to have a successful visit;
- Coach: Also with UW, the Coach participates in ongoing professional development and consultation with the program;
- TA Specialist: With the local lead agency, the TA Specialist works with the program to develop a work plan and timeline; and
- Data Collector: With UW, the Data Collector collects data through observations, interviews and reviews of records and documentation. The Data Collector also administers the CLASS and ERS.

The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation's publication titled *Defining and Measuring Quality: An In-Depth Study of Five Child Care Quality Rating and Improvement Systems* (2011) details the number, caseload and qualifications of QRIS raters and assessors in five Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (**Miami-Dade County, Illinois, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee**). The publication is available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/cc/childcare_quality/five_childcare/five_childcare.pdf.

In many States, CCR&R agencies play a key role in QRIS administration and often coordinate QRIS training and technical assistance. Institutions of higher education are also important partners and frequently assume responsibility for classroom assessment as well as help with data collection. Public-private partnerships, such as early and school-age care and education advisory committees, are often charged with planning, engagement, and outreach functions. In short, QRIS implementation is often a team effort.

State experience suggests that the decision to use State licensing or other staff to assign ratings, and outside entities, such as CCR&R agencies, institutions of higher education, Cooperative Extension, and others, to assist with training and technical assistance, is often a strategic way to build on and expand current investments and maximize all available early and school-age care and education dollars.

SHARED MANAGEMENT APPROACH IN VIRGINIA'S QRIS PILOT

Virginia's Star Quality Initiative (VSQI) is a public-private partnership between the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) and the Office of Early Child Development (OECD), a division of the Virginia Department of Social Services. The administrative partnership of these two entities is referred to as "the Hub", while each partner maintains clear responsibilities. The Office of Early Childhood Development's responsibilities include:

1. Facilitate selection and training of raters
2. Set criteria and training standards for mentors
3. Review applications for each participating program
4. Conduct documentation reviews for Standards 1, 3, and Transition Practices
5. Maintain the QRIS online database
6. Provide technical assistance to regional and local coordinators, raters, mentors and participating providers
7. Conduct strategic decision-making and planning for the initiative
8. Manage proposals and monitor contract implementation/compliance

The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation's responsibilities include:

1. Maintain the quality and integrity of the standard and rating process:
 - a. Oversee the inter-rater reliability process
 - b. Review Program Rating Summary Reports
 - c. Award star ratings
 - d. Manage the appeal process
2. Provide resources to help regional and local coalitions implement QRIS
3. Provide technical assistance to regional and local coordinators, raters, mentors and participating providers
4. Share responsibility with VDSS/OECD for strategic decision-making for the initiative

Additional information is available at

<http://www.smartbeginnings.org/Home/StarQualityInitiative/ForEarlyChildhoodProfessionals.aspx>.

Licensing and QRIS

In most States, licensing is an integral part of the QRIS, serving as the foundation other standards build on. Frequently, the QRIS is monitored by the licensing agency alone, or in partnership with other agency staff or a private entity. Using licensors who are already funded to make periodic visits to programs

makes good fiscal sense. Strategically linking QRIS to licensing could provide an opportunity to increase the number of licensing staff, reduce caseloads, and broaden their role. For example, **Oklahoma** added 27 licensing staff when they became responsible for monitoring QRIS compliance. However, an assessment must be made to determine if the licensing system can adequately support this new responsibility. If a licensing program is unable to adequately monitor child care or their sole focus is on enforcement, they will face greater challenges in monitoring a QRIS. If licensing managers are included early in the QRIS planning process, they may have valuable contributions to this discussion.

If licensing staff are not required to have any background in early or school-age care and education, it will be more difficult for them to provide the encouragement and support providers need to participate in a QRIS. *Trends in Child Care Center Licensing Regulations and Policies for 2011* (NCCCQI, 2013) notes 34 States where licensing staff provide technical assistance or consultation to help licensees move beyond minimum licensing standards. Most States (38) require staff to have at least a bachelor's degree to work as a licensing specialist; however, only 16 States reported that the content or major of the required degree or coursework must be in early childhood education, child development, or a related topic. Twenty-two (22) States require experience working in a setting with children. Although 25 States require licensing line staff to complete training each year, only 13 mandate additional training in early childhood education.

Rating Frequency

States have policies and procedures for renewing rating levels, and several States also set a time limit on how long a provider can be at one rating level. During renewal, providers generally can earn higher or lower ratings, based on the standards they meet, or they can keep their current rating levels.

When discussing QRIS ratings, it is important to differentiate between two separate, but interrelated, functions: assigning a rating and conducting a classroom or home assessment. Most States use classroom or home assessments, such as the ERS, as one—but not the only—tool to assess compliance with QRIS criteria in an area of learning environments. These two functions can occur on the same cycle, such as annually, or they can occur at different points in time. On average, States assign ratings and conduct classroom assessments annually.

- In **Delaware**, a program accepted for enrollment has one year to complete the steps required to achieve a Star Level 2 or the program will be terminated and must reapply for enrollment in Delaware Stars. After a program achieves Star Level 2, they must re-verify for their current Star Level every three years if maintaining or actively working to achieve a higher Star Level.
- **Illinois** requires renewal every 3 years, including reassessment on ERS, BAS, PAS, or CLASS. Rated programs must provide an annual report including licensing compliance, staffing requirements, etc. to maintain the rating.
- **North Carolina** assigns ratings every 3 years and monitors annually for maintenance of ratings. A reassessment of the rating may also be conducted before the 3-year time period if the annual monitoring identified certain indicators, e.g., high staff turnover, a new director, or serious licensing violations. A program may also request a rating reassessment once a year if it anticipates its rating will improve.
- In **Ohio**, providers must renew their ratings on an annual basis. At that time they can apply for higher ratings if they meet the standards, maintain their current ratings, or reduce their ratings if standards for higher ratings are no longer met. A rating will expire if a provider does not apply to have its rating renewed. Prior to the rating expiration date, providers receive written notification and instructions for renewing their ratings.
- In **Oklahoma**, the license and star status are non-expiring, based on documented compliance at monitoring visits that occur at least three times per year. Providers can be at the One Star Plus level as long as they are working toward an education component needed to achieve higher standards and move to the Star Two level.

- **Maine** assigns ratings every 3 years but only requires classroom assessment in sites that are selected to participate in the QRIS evaluation.
- In **Delaware**, a program accepted for enrollment has one year to complete the steps required to achieve a Star Level 2 or the program will be terminated and must reapply for enrollment in Delaware Stars. After a program achieves Star Level 2, they must re-verify for their current Star Level every three years if maintaining or actively working to achieve a higher Star Level.
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- In **Ohio**, providers must renew their ratings on an annual basis. At that time they can apply for higher ratings if they meet the standards, maintain their current ratings, or reduce their ratings if standards for higher ratings are no longer met. A rating will expire if a provider does not apply to have its rating renewed. Prior to the rating expiration date, providers receive written notification and instructions for renewing their ratings.
- In **Oklahoma**, the license and star status are non-expiring, based on documented compliance at monitoring visits that occur at least three times per year. Providers can be at the One Star Plus level as long as they are working toward an education component needed to achieve higher standards and move to the Star Two level.
- **Maine** assigns ratings every 3 years but only requires classroom assessment in sites that are selected to participate in the QRIS evaluation.
- Providers in **Rhode Island** agree to participate in BrightStars for a 3-year period. At the end of that period, providers choose to continue and be reassessed or terminate participation without penalty. If a provider chooses to terminate participation during the 3-year period, the provider will not be allowed to participate again for 24 months from the time of termination. To maintain their rating, providers submit annual reports to BrightStars and may request an adjustment to their rating once a year.
- Ratings in **Vermont** are valid for 3 years if the annual report documents maintaining the standards for this rating. If a provider is unable to maintain the standards of its current star level, no action is taken until the provider submits the annual report. Providers request points based on the standards they can demonstrate in the report. Participating providers renew their certificate for the number of points they can verify (may be higher, same, or lower than previously earned points). Reminders to submit the annual report are automatically sent to participating programs and must be returned in order to maintain participation and star level.

Decisions regarding how often QRIS ratings are assigned, as well as how frequently classroom assessments are conducted, will be influenced by available resources. Conducting reliable, valid classroom assessments can have a significant financial impact. In addition to the time it takes to actually conduct an assessment, write up the results, and travel among multiple sites, time and funding must be made available to ensure that raters receive appropriate training and that inter-rater reliability is assessed on a regular basis. Additional information is provided under the question, "What assessment tools will be used? How will they be used?"

Use of assessment tools

As noted earlier, QRIS compliance is typically based on a number of factors, only some of which are determined by a classroom assessment.

Most of the States that require a classroom assessment to evaluate program quality currently use the ERS developed by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. These scales include:

- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R)
- Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R)
- School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS)
- Family Child Care Rating Scale (FCCRS).¹

Each one of the scales has seven areas of evaluation: physical environment, basic care, curriculum, interaction, schedule and program structure, and parent and staff education. *Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings: A Compendium of Measures* (Halle, Vick Whittaker, & Anderson, 2010) provides detailed information on program assessment measures including the purpose of the measure, intended ages and settings, administration of the measure, reliability and validity. This document is available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/complete_compendium_full.pdf.

Some States are also using more focused assessment tools that measure interactions, classroom practice, and administrative practices in addition to or in lieu of measures of global quality:

- **Oklahoma** recognizes the Child and Caregiver Interaction Scale, the Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale, the Early Learning and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO), the Program Administration Scale (PAS), and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).
- In **Ohio**, self-assessments are required, but programs can use an ERS, the Early Learning and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO), or other assessment tool, and scores are not tied to ratings.
- **Mississippi** uses scores from the ERS to determine rating levels.
- In **Rhode Island**, CLASS scores are collected from a random sample of 33 percent of preschool classrooms. Scores were not used in the rating process during the first year of implementation.
- **Massachusetts** is also among the States that require assessments with the PAS for administration. Assessment with the Business Administration Scale (BAS) is required for FCC providers

In some cases, classroom assessments are required and the scores are used to help determine ratings. Other States have made the assessment optional—as one way to accumulate QRIS points—or require it for programs seeking higher star levels only. Some States require programs to be assessed with ERS but do not tie particular scores to the ratings. Information about the program assessment tools used by States that are implementing a statewide QRIS model is available in *Use of ERS and Other Program Assessment Tools in QRIS* (NCCCQI, 2013) at https://occqrisguide.icfwebservices.com/files/QRIS_Program_Assess.pdf.

Some QRIS evaluators have raised concerns about the range of tools used to measure classroom quality as well as how these tools are implemented. The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation's (OPRE) brief, *Issues for the Next Decade of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems* (Tout, Zaslow, Halle, & Forry, 2009), cautions that even when States use the same tool, such as ITERS-R/ECERS-R/FCCRS/SACERS, significant variations can occur based on how the tool is applied. Indeed, State QRIS standards and compliance practices vary widely. Table 5.4 in the *Compendium of Quality Rating*

¹ The ERS for family child care homes was revised in 2007. Some States still refer to the older version, i.e., the Family Day Care Rating Scale (FCDRS).

Systems and Evaluation (Halle, Vick Whittaker, & Anderson, 2010) lists the percentages of classrooms assessed by State with the most common approach being 33% with at least one of each age group. Some States average the scores for all assessed classrooms; others base ratings on the lowest score. In addition, States that use ERS assessments to actually assign scores do not use the same quality threshold. As more States adopt a QRIS as a way to improve the quality of early care and education, it will become important to address some of these inconsistencies. OPRE's issue brief is available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/resource/issues-for-the-next-decade-of-quality-rating-and-improvement-systems>.

NORTH CAROLINA PARTNERS WITH OTHER STATES TO DEVELOP NEW PROGRAM LEVEL MEASURE FOR QRIS

As a part of their Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTT-ELC) proposal, North Carolina proposed to develop a valid and reliable program level measure to evaluate the continuum of early childhood quality. Rather than assessing at the classroom level, the focus will be on the children's experience in the various settings (centers, homes, schools) at the program level and will use multiple sources and types of evidence. Conceptually, the tool will be looking at the child's experience in relation to environmental factors, relationship factors and the interaction between the teacher and the child. The goal is to create a program "portrait" that can serve as the foundation of a plan of continuous quality improvement. Other states that are participating in the development of this tool include Delaware, Kentucky and Illinois.

In determining what percentage of classrooms to assess using a classroom quality measurement tool, States have had to balance financial resources with the validity of the assessment. The authors of the classroom measurement tools can advise on the minimum number of classrooms to assess so that the resulting average is an accurate measure of the overall quality of the program. The OPRE publication *Best Practices for Conducting Program Observations a Part of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems*, available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/resource/best-practices-for-conducting-program-observations-as-part-of-quality>, recommends observing at least one classroom in each age range and observing 50 percent of the classrooms in each program (Hamre & Maxwell, 2011). The authors add that "weighing the costs, it is not recommended that QRIS observe every classroom in programs if the purpose is solely to determine the program's rating. However, it is clear that observing every classroom may be useful for other purposes such as providing technical assistance." (p. 9)

Leveraging existing resources

A key step in QRIS design is to examine the current early and school-age care and education landscape and infrastructure to determine how to integrate various functions or subsystems. It is important to identify where there are services already in place that might be expanded or included in the QRIS structure. In most States, there are a host of resources that can be accessed.

- **North Carolina, Tennessee, and Oklahoma**, among others, use State licensing staff to gather and validate the information needed to assign a rating.
- **Ohio's** Step Up to Quality program includes dedicated staff in each licensing field office whose sole responsibility is QRIS administration.
- In **Colorado**, CCR&R staff, who are private sector employees that receive both public and private funding, conduct ratings.
- In **Illinois**, assessments are conducted by staff at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership; scores are sent to Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA), the QRIS application contractor, to be combined with other criteria where the rating is generated. It is also important to ensure that the assessor conducting the assessments have the appropriate background, credentials, and training related to the age group for each assessment scale.

For example, the ITERS-R assessor should have knowledge of infants and toddlers. Likewise, the SACERS assessor would be knowledgeable about the care and education of school-age children.

- In staffing a QRIS, it is important to avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived, that may arise if the same staff play multiple roles. In **Pennsylvania**, different QRIS staff perform three distinct roles.
 - ◆ The STARS Manager or Specialist serves in a supportive role and helps the provider understand the QRIS and its requirements.
 - ◆ The STARS Designator, an analysis expert, is responsible for reviewing all sources of evidence for each rating component and assigning the rating.
 - ◆ The ERS Assessor is part of a separate team that receives extensive training and maintains high inter-rater reliability.

All three of these staff are employed by the Pennsylvania Keys to Quality Offices. The first two positions are part of the Regional Keys that are located throughout the state and the ERS Assessors are employees of the PA Keys located in Harrisburg.

ALASKA LEVERAGES RESOURCES TO SUPPORT QRIS

It is often difficult to create state staff positions needed to administer a QRIS. Alaska overcame this barrier by partnering with *thread*, their CCR&R, which was able to house the position within the CCR&R structure.

It is also possible to use existing databases and automated systems to help support QRIS functions. In most cases, however, significant modifications, or entirely new systems, will be needed. **Pennsylvania's** information management system, called PELICAN, integrates data from all early learning subsystems in the State. (See box, below for details.) Arizona and Georgia have also opted to build their own robust and user-friendly data systems. Additionally, several independent contractors have developed new, customizable Web-based data management systems that could augment, or replace, existing State automation.

INTEGRATED DATA SYSTEMS IN SUPPORT OF A QRIS: PENNSYLVANIA'S PELICAN

PELICAN is an integrated child and early learning system that automates administration and data collection for the statewide QRIS, **Keystone STARS**, as well as many of the following additional functions: administration of the subsidized child care program; child care provider inspection and certification (licensing); administration and data collection for the State's prekindergarten program; and data collection and analytics to support a longitudinal database and tracking system for children in Pennsylvania early learning programs. Users of PELICAN include public and private administrators, early childhood program teachers, directors and staff (including those in prekindergarten and the state funded Head Start programs); school districts that provide prekindergarten; parents; and others. Additional information is available in a report by the National Council of State Legislatures at <http://www.ncsl.org/portals/1/documents/Educ/PAEarlyChild-Stedron.pdf> and on the PA Key website at <http://www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=PELICAN>

ARIZONA'S ROBUST AND USER-FRIENDLY QRIS DATA SYSTEM

Arizona opted to build its own data system, which includes comprehensive information on programs, classrooms, children, staff, registration and licensing status, and assessments. Coaches enter data and upload evidence into the system, and directors update data on their programs. Users of the system have the ability to analyze data and quickly pull reports. The system was developed using an agile methodology, which allows developers to make changes quickly in response to users' needs.

PROGRAMS IN FRESNO COUNTY, CA, UPLOAD EVIDENCE INTO QRIS DATABASE

In California, the Fresno County QRIS (**Fresno County Early Stars**) uses Mosaic as their QRIS database. Early Stars programs upload required information into the STARS database, such as lead teacher and director transcripts, copies of degrees and/or permits, and professional development certificates. Early Stars Administrators review and verify all the program data in the STARS database. A rating is generated based upon this information as well as information that is verified during an onsite visit.

EXISTING AND NEW RESOURCES FILL GAPS IN OKLAHOMA'S QRIS

When Oklahoma launched its **Reaching for the Stars** program in 1998, licensing staff were given the responsibility of both promoting the program with providers and providing ongoing monitoring. Twenty-seven new licensing specialists, a 25 percent increase in staff, were added to reduce caseloads and allow time for this new responsibility. Stars Outreach Specialists and Consultation and Technical Support Specialists were later added to supplement the consultation being provided by licensing staff. Child Care and Development Fund-funded partners were asked to make supporting QRIS participation a priority within their service delivery. For example, the Center for Early Childhood Professional Development offered workshops on program assessment and the four ERS scales. It initiated a Director's Leadership Academy which addressed QRIS criteria, such as policies and procedures, staff development, and staff evaluation. The Scholars for Excellence in Child Care program provides advisors and scholarships to providers participating in the Stars program; child care providers must be employed in a OneStar plus or above child care facility to participate. The REWARD Oklahoma wage supplement program was created after programs were having difficulty recruiting and retaining the master teachers required in the Stars criteria. Additional information is available at <http://www.okdhs.org/programsandservices/cc/stars/>.

Monitoring the Rating

Failure to meet the QRIS standards

The policies and procedures for monitoring the ratings should be clearly articulated to all involved. As providers submit documentation, and QRIS staff conduct interviews, observations, and assessments, it is important that all acceptable "sources of evidence" are consistently defined and interpreted. Whether a State implements a building block approach, a point approach, or a combination of the two, it must have a sound monitoring process in place.

Just as it is important for early and school-age care and education programs to be aware of any benefits for achieving a level, they also need to understand what they must do to maintain a designated level and the consequences for noncompliance. The policy should specify when a reduction of status becomes effective, what the process is to restore a level, and if there are any appeal rights. States have developed administrative policies for situations when a program no longer meets one or more of the standards in its current designation level. The process to be followed for noncompliance should be clearly written and communicated to programs.

Many States include a program improvement plan as part of the QRIS process. Typically based on a provider's self-assessment, observation, or rating, this plan identifies strengths and weaknesses and suggests ways to make improvements. Many QRIS use the results of an assessment tool, like the ERS, as a starting point for developing this plan.

Maryland requires a program improvement plan for programs that are seeking a Check Level 3 rating and have any ERS subscale scores below 4.0 on the program's self-assessment, and for Check Level 4 and 5, a program improvement plan is required for any outside ERS assessment with a subscale score of 4.5 or 5.0, respectively. Programs may use a variety of additional tools or assessments to create the improvement plan, such as the accreditation self-study or validation results, school-readiness goals and objectives for their jurisdiction, and program-specific goals and objectives for continuous quality improvement.

States might also consider how a facility's licensing status affects their rating. For example, if a facility is not in compliance with licensing standards, the rating might be reduced, suspended or removed. Several States have developed procedures detailing this process.

Washington has extensive procedures on the effects of licensing status on QRIS participation, both at registration and during participation. For example, if a facility is operating under a probationary license, they have six months to regain full licensure. During this time, they may continue to work with a coach or TA Specialist, but they cannot be evaluated for rating. If the full license is not reinstated within six months, their participation in Early Achievers will be terminated. State Pre-kindergarten (ECEAP) will be required to participate in Early Achievers by 2015 per HB 1723. Washington is currently considering how Early Achievers ratings and assessment data can be used to supplement required monitoring of ECEAP sites/contractors.

Appeals process for programs

Providers may wish to challenge both an assessment score as well as the overall rating assigned to their program. As States gain experience in implementation of QRIS, many are developing guidelines to follow if a program disagrees with its quality rating, although not all have a formal appeals process. Clear communication and training to help providers better understand the rating process may help to reduce the number of appeals.

In *Stair Steps to Quality: A Guide for States and Communities Developing Quality Rating Systems for Early Care and Education*, Anne Mitchell (2005) makes the following statement about implications of accountability policies:

"A key accountability issue in a quality rating system (QRS) [sic] is the accuracy of quality ratings. A well-designed and implemented accountability system, bolstered by clear communication about the structure and operation of the QRS, should minimize disagreements. A concern that has been raised about rating systems, especially those connected with licensing is whether rating the quality of programs will result in challenges to ratings and an increase in requests for hearings. Anticipating that some programs may not agree with the rating they receive, an appeals process should be designed in advance. Administrators of statewide QRS report that although quality ratings do change, there are relatively few challenges and little or no increase in hearing requests" (p. 36).

Stair Steps to Quality is available at

http://www.earlychildhoodfinance.org/downloads/2005/MitchStairSteps_2005.pdf.

TENNESSEE'S APPEALS PROCESS

Tennessee tries to anticipate situations that may lead to an appeal by making post-assessment calls to all providers participating in the Report Card and **Star-Quality Program**. These calls, which are handled by CCR&R Specialists, help to keep the number of disagreements low. Following each call, a provider receives a copy of the assessor's notes and a Profile Sheet that summarizes all of its scores. If there is an issue with the assessment piece, the provider has 20 business days to file an appeal. The Level 1 appeal is handled by the local unit, which works with the CCR&R staff. The Level 2 appeal is conducted by contract staff. If a provider completes both levels of the appeals process and still has an issue, it may then request an administrative hearing. Additional information is available at <http://www.tennessee.gov/humanserv/adfam/ccrcsq.html>.

MAINE'S PROCESS FOR HANDLING APPEALS

In Maine's **Quality for ME** QRIS, programs that do not agree with the accuracy of the Department of Health and Human Services' rating may appeal a decision by requesting an informal review by the Early Childhood Division. If a provider is not satisfied with the result of this informal review, it may request an administrative hearing. The following policy is in place for this purpose:

"A provider must request an informal review and obtain a decision before requesting an administrative hearing. If the provider is dissatisfied with the informal review decision, he or she may write the Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services to request a hearing provided he/she does so within thirty (30) calendar days of the date of the Director's report on the Department's action. Subsequent appeal proceedings will be limited only to those issues raised during the informal review. The Office of Administrative Hearings shall notify the provider in writing of the date, time and place of the hearing, and shall designate a presiding officer. Providers will be given at least twenty (20) calendar days advance notice of the hearing date. The hearing shall be held in conformity with the Maine Administrative Procedures Act, 5 M.R.S.A. §8001 et seq. and the Administrative Hearings Regulations."

Additional information is available at www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/qualityforme.htm.

The guidelines developed by each State vary. In **Colorado**, a program may initiate a Technical Review of its Qualistar rating within 30 calendar days of receiving its Qualistar Rating Consultation. It may also initiate a Dispute Resolution Process within the same time period. In **North Carolina**, programs can appeal the evaluation of staff qualifications to the Education Unit and ERS assessments first to the assessors at UNC-Greensboro and then to the Office of Administrative Hearings. In **Oklahoma**, if a program's star level is reduced, it can appeal or propose an alternative settlement but cannot re-apply for 6 months if the reduction is due to noncompliance. **Wisconsin's** YoungStar Policy Guide stipulates that the "local YoungStar office discuss the rating with the provider before it is published on the YoungStar Public Search website." In an effort to minimize the number of reconsiderations, YoungStar has established "clear documentation and justification of the rationale for a program's rating." Additional information can be accessed at http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/policy_guide.pdf. Most of the guides, workbooks, and toolkits referenced in Section 6: Incentives and Support include information on the appeals process.

In **Arkansas**, upon receipt of the request for appeal, the Better Beginnings coordinator will conduct an internal review to ensure that the appropriate processes were followed and determine the validity of the original decision. The Better Beginnings coordinator will review the findings with the division director and will transmit the findings of the internal review to the facility within 30 days of the receipt of the request to appeal. If the outcome of the internal review is unsatisfactory to the facility, it has 10 days to ask for further review by the Better Beginnings Appeal Review Committee. Additional information is available in the Better Beginnings Rule Book at http://www.arbetterbeginnings.com/sites/default/files/pdf_files/ProvidersandTeachers-Providers-Centers-BetterBeginningsRuleBook.pdf.

VERMONT'S GRIEVANCE PROCESS

Applicants or program participants have the right to appeal rejection of their application materials or other adverse decision related to the **STARS program**, such as the suspension or revocation of a STARS certificate in connection with enforcement of licensing regulations, subsidy regulations or these standards.

Appeals must be in writing and received by the DCF Commissioner within 30 days of the date of rejection or other adverse decision. If the appeal is from a school-operated pre-kindergarten program, the Commissioner of the Department of Education shall join the Commissioner of the Department for Children and Families in deciding the appeal.

The applicant or grievant shall have the opportunity to present the appeal to a STARS grievance committee. The committee shall be appointed by the Commissioner(s), consist of at least three members including one from the regulated provider community, and provide the Commissioner(s) with a recommendation. The Commissioner(s) shall make a final decision on the grievance and provide the grievant with a written decision. The grievant may appeal the final decision of the Commissioner(s) to the Human Services Board within thirty days of the date of the final decision.

Financial incentives shall not be paid while an appeal is pending. If a successful final appeal results in a determination that a STARS program participant is due a financial incentive or maintenance payment, DCF will award payment in full within 60 days

Additional information is available in Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS) Standards (January 2010), at http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/pdf/cdd/stars/Adopted_STARS_rule_FINAL.pdf.

Reduction or loss of rating levels

As States are integrating services across systems and aligning program standards in the QRIS, the reduction or loss of rating levels can have a significant financial impact on programs. Examples include:

- Lack of or reduced access to free or low-cost training opportunities (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood® Project scholarships, training vouchers, Child Development Associate courses, credentialing programs, etc.).
- Reduction or loss of financial rewards or bonuses for attaining and maintaining higher levels within the QRIS. These awards can be directed to the program or to individual staff within the program.
- Reduced tiered reimbursement payments for subsidized child care.
- Limited access to supportive services, such as technical assistance, consultation, and ERS assessments.
- Inability to market the program at a higher level. This may reduce a program's ability to remain competitive with other programs and may affect parents' decisions regarding placement of their children in care.

Communication of a reduction or loss of a rating level

Any partnering agency or service within the State system that advertises rating levels to the public needs to be notified of rating changes so that parents have access to the most current information. This includes both increases and decreases in levels. Local CCR&Rs commonly maintain and distribute rating information to parents, and their listings must be accurate. If the licensing or subsidy agency is not the same agency that administers the QRIS, each of these agencies will need separate notification. When tiered reimbursement payments are involved, the subsidy agency must be notified as well as the Education Department if prekindergarten programs are rated, or if eligibility for funding depends on a specific quality rating.

Early and school-age care and education providers should be advised not to market themselves incorrectly. Some States supply participating programs with materials, such as banners, window clings, and posters, to use to market their QRIS to parents. If these materials advertise a level that is no longer applicable, they should be changed accordingly.

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QRIS RESOURCE GUIDE: SECTION 6 PROVIDER INCENTIVES AND SUPPORT

An essential element of a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) is the support offered to child care providers to assist them in understanding and meeting the standards and quality criteria. States may already have support services in place that can be linked to the QRIS, or they may need to invest in new services, or both. This section addresses various types of support services, such as professional development opportunities and targeted technical assistance approaches, as well as financial incentives for programs and individual staff.

- [Providing Program and Practitioner Outreach and Support](#)
- [Offering Financial Incentives](#)

Providing Program and Practitioner Outreach and Support

Recruiting programs

In most States, participation in a QRIS is voluntary so outreach activities are used to promote QRIS goals and benefits and encourage programs to participate. Recruitment of early and school-age care and education programs into the QRIS can be done through a targeted approach or a general marketing campaign. The goal of marketing is to reach all eligible programs by distributing information through existing communication systems. A targeted approach engages selected tactics to recruit a subset of providers, e.g., center-based preschools. One example of a targeted approach is when the organization that will be administering the QRIS sends information directly to providers. An even more direct approach is to invite providers to meetings or workshops where the QRIS is explained and programs are invited to enroll.

States may promote participation by using a range of marketing efforts to publicize the benefits to providers:

- Developing promotional materials that are distributed through licensing and subsidy staff, child care resources and referral (CCR&R) agencies, trainers, college faculty, Child and Adult Care Food Program staff, United Way agencies, professional organizations, and others.
- Posting QRIS information, frequently asked questions, and resource materials on a QRIS Web site, as well as on Web sites hosted by other organizations (for a listing of States that share QRIS information on their Web sites, see the NCCCQI's (2013) document about consumer education at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/consumer-education-about-child-care-options>).
- Sponsoring orientation sessions or Webinars for potential QRIS participants and the early childhood community at large.
- Conducting orientation sessions for other organizations that have contact with early and school-age care and education programs in the community.
- Designating specific QRIS outreach staff to encourage participation and provide technical assistance.
- Conducting a provider or consumer survey, or both, to determine familiarity with the QRIS; the survey can provide baseline information and offer an opportunity to send targeted information to those who are not currently familiar with QRIS.

In some States, the agency responsible for administering the QRIS assigns specific outreach and recruitment activities to staff. **Oklahoma** has Outreach Specialists and Consultation and Technical Support Specialists who encourage programs to participate and assist them with applications; **Pennsylvania** has STARS Managers or Specialists who take on this responsibility for their specific geographic region.

GEORGIA'S DEPT. OF EARLY CARE AND LEARNING (DECAL) USED COHORT MODEL IN RECRUITMENT TO QUALITY RATED

Recognizing that their early care and education system was composed of many subsystems, Georgia created a technical assistance cohort model to help the various subsystems as they moved through the **Quality Rated** process. In their recruitment process, they grouped child care programs by cohorts, e.g., franchise systems, corporate chains, faith-based, Head Start, family child care associations, Montessori programs, etc. A dedicated staff person was assigned to each cohort to facilitate their progress in Quality Rated. For example, the staff facilitator arranged for the directors and teachers to meet with the Professional Development Registry staff and have an onsite review of the program's staff credentials. Cohort participants benefited from targeted technical assistance, system level support for quality reform, professional networks to support continuous quality improvement and ongoing professional growth. The staff facilitators' work with the corporations often resulted in changes in the corporation's policies. The approach was "how do we help your system with our system?"

SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN FOR PARENTS AND PROVIDERS IN LOUISIANA

Louisiana launched a multifaceted social marketing campaign aimed at boosting child care center participation in **Quality Start**, the State's QRIS, as well as a package of School Readiness Tax Credits (SRTC) linked to Quality Start. Louisiana State University conducted a statewide survey of parents and child care providers to determine their familiarity with Quality Start and the SRTC. Researchers sent targeted information to providers that were unaware of the new supports. The State also partnered with Tulane University and Keating Magee, a marketing firm, to develop a detailed social marketing plan aimed at ensuring that parents and providers are not only familiar with Quality Start and the SRTC, but also understand what is required to participate and can take advantage of these benefits. Additional information is available at <http://www.qrsloisiana.com/>.

Orientation sessions and materials for programs

All QRIS offer an orientation to assist providers in understanding what is expected and how to participate. **Kentucky** has STARS Quality Coordinators who provide STARS overviews and technical assistance in completing the process and **Ohio** offers a "Step Up to Quality 101" training session where providers learn about the requirements and benefits. **Pennsylvania** believed that this initial orientation was so critical to a provider's QRIS success that it developed standardized materials and instituted a requirement that a director must complete the STARS Orientation to enroll in Keystone STARS. To ensure that providers had the information needed to participate, **Arkansas** held a series of Better Beginning Regional Clinics with a variety of subject matter specialists available onsite to provide consultation.

Several States have program or policy guides that provide the reader with detailed information about the QRIS. Some topics are universally included in these guides, while other topics only appear in a few States' guides. Examples of topics include:

- Detailed information about the initial and renewal application process

- Information about adverse or punitive actions that can/will result from failing to meet licensing or other requirements
- Information about what programs are eligible to participate in the QRIS
- A list of the standards for the QRIS included in the document
- A definitions list, glossary, and/or acronyms list
- Information about financial incentives and other program supports including professional development and Technical Assistance
- Information about the roles, responsibilities, and/or authority of the entities involved (i.e., the different agencies and partners)
- Information about the process for a provider to appeal a rating
- In-depth information about program assessment tools, such as Environment Rating Scales or CLASS
- Detailed information about the evidence required to demonstrate each standard
- General information about what a QRIS is
- Information about the data system or Web interface used in the QRIS
- Information about how a program can leave the QRIS
- In-depth information about either the research specifically behind the States' QRIS or about how the State is going about evaluating the QRIS's efficacy

Additional information and links to State program guides and web sites is available in *Quality Rating and Improvement System Program Guides* (2015), by NCCCQI, at https://ocqrsguide.icfwebservices.com/files/QRIS_Program_Guides.pdf.

ILLINOIS QUALITY COUNTS QRS AND EXCELERATE ILLINOIS ORIENTATIONS

Family child care providers, licensed and licensed exempt, interested in finding out more about the Illinois **Quality Counts Quality Rating System (QRS)** can participate in a free QRS Orientation offered by their local Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency or online. The Orientation covers eligibility requirements, application process, and supports and resources available. Potential applicants must attend this session prior to submitting an application. Training on assessment scales is also required prior to application. Training on the Environment Rating Scales is required prior to application at any Star Level. Business Administration Scale (BAS) training is required if applying for Star Level 3 or 4. Both trainings are offered by the local CCR&R agency at a cost of \$15 per 3- to 4-hour session. Additional information is available at <http://www.ilqualitycounts.com/qrs/training-for-providers>.

Prior to application to **ExceleRate Illinois**, licensed child care centers need to complete the free 2 hour ExceleRate Illinois Orientation in addition to other training depending on the Circle of Quality they have chosen to prepare for and achieve. The orientation covers ExceleRate Illinois cross sectors standards, eligibility requirements, application process, and supports and resources available. All licensed centers are recognized at the Licensed Circle of Quality, the System's foundational level of quality. The Bronze Circle of Quality focuses on training around quality practices. The Silver and Gold Circles of Quality focus on continuous quality improvement and assessment of quality. Additional information is available at <http://www.excelerateillinois.com>

In addition to orientation and other customized training to inform and support QRIS applicants, many States also provide online manuals, resource guides, or toolkits. These resources help to ensure that participants understand the requirements and expectations of the QRIS program, are aware of the supports and rewards that are available, and have access to tools that can help the programs attain, maintain, and improve their quality ratings.

IDAHOSTARS WORKBOOKS SUPPORT APPLICATION PROCESS

IdahoSTARS provides workbooks for both family child care and centers. The workbooks detail each step of the application and award process, contain forms, and list resources needed to attain and maintain a quality rating. The workbooks are available online and can be downloaded as PDFs at <http://idahostars.org/?q=workbook>.

OHIO STEP UP TO QUALITY GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS

In October 2013, Ohio implemented a revised **Step Up to Quality (SUTQ)** system. There are several guidance documents available for providers participating in SUTQ:

- Guidance Document Part One – Introduction
 - ◆ Includes basic information about SUTQ, including the goals and history of SUTQ.
- Guidance Document Part Two – Understanding Implementation
 - ◆ Includes eligibility requirements for participation in SUTQ, the procedure for submitting a registration, and the process of determining if a program will be awarded a star rating.
- Guidance Document Part Three – Standards for Programs
 - ◆ Provides an in-depth review and explanation of the standards for center-based programs.
- Guidance Document Part Three – Standards for Type A Family Child Care Homes
 - ◆ Provides an in-depth review and explanation of the Standards for Type A Family Child Care Homes.
- Program Standards Resource Guide
 - ◆ Contains lists of commonly used tools, instruments and resources to assist learning and development programs in meeting the SUTQ Program Standards.
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The Guidance Documents are available at http://www.earlychildhoodohio.org/sutq_guidance_faq.php.

ARKANSAS TOOLKIT SUPPORTS PROVIDER'S SUCCESS

On the Arkansas **Better Beginnings'** user-friendly Web site, providers can access four resources after choosing between Family Child Care Home, Center, and School-Age: Checklists, Application, Toolkit, Better Beginnings Guide, and Rule Book. The checklists serve as a self-assessment tool for a provider to determine if they can meet criteria at different levels. The toolkit helps providers gather and structure necessary information and document their program's progress throughout the certification process and beyond. Included are:

- Administrative tools such as budgets, parent handbooks and agreements, parent surveys, professional development plans, performance appraisals, salary scales, and a strategic planning template;
- Arkansas' professional development resources;
- Child health and development resources;
- ERS Subscale Self-Evaluation Form; and
- Learning environment resources such as children's portfolio documentation, curriculum plans and daily schedules.

When Better Beginnings was first launched, a series of clinics were held throughout the state where providers could receive an orientation and have their questions answered. The Web site is at <http://www.arbetterbeginnings.com/providers-teachers/providers>.

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE CREATES SIMPLE GUIDE

To assist with the QRIS application process a 2-page guide with the step-by-step process, examples of assessment tools, and illustrative graphics were developed and posted on the Web site along with other resources. Additional information is available at http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs1/qr/20110525_qris_assessment_guide.pdf.

In addition, Massachusetts also offers support to providers new to the QRIS with the following supports:

- Orientation sessions in the five regional offices following Licensing Renewal meetings;
- Trainings on QRIS with Educator/Provider support grantees;
- Trainings on all of the measurement tools required for the QRIS;
- A Program Quality Specialist in each regional office who is able to provide technical assistance via phone, email, or site visits; and
- Monthly technical assistance webinars to field coaches and mentors.

MISSISSIPPI PROVIDER WORKBOOK: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO QRIS

The Mississippi Department of Human Services' (MDHS) Division of Early Childhood Care and Development contracted with the Mississippi State University Early Childhood Institute to develop easy-to-read manuals for meeting the Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System standards. The Institute publishes manuals for licensed centers and school-based programs. The workbooks include overviews of the rating system's standards, criteria and documentation checklists for each rating level, enrollment forms, and many templates and forms to help providers meet and document the quality improvement requirements. MDHS sponsors publication of print editions for all programs that enroll in the rating system; online editions are available at no charge. The forms include staff professional development plans, a director/coordinator self-assessment, a staff evaluation, a program mentor record, a classroom learning centers plan, a weekly lesson plan, and a Transition-to-Kindergarten Plan. The complete workbooks are available at <http://earlychildhood.msstate.edu/programs/qualitystars/earnyourstars/index.php>.

Outreach and support services

In conjunction with recruitment and outreach to programs, QRIS staff typically offer assistance to providers with the application process. Although general information about how to apply for QRIS can be covered in the orientation sessions and guidance documents mentioned above, programs often need individual support to answer specific questions about expectations and their involvement. Several states have developed user-friendly, on-line applications that can reduce the amount of TA that is needed.

Supports, such as training, mentoring, and technical assistance, are often made available to QRIS applicants as well as those seeking to achieve and maintain higher levels of quality. All States currently have professional development systems that organize training opportunities for early and school-age care and education providers, including specific certifications or credentials for infant and toddler care, school-age care, and care for children with special needs. These systems recognize practitioners' achievements and create quality parameters for available training. States can use these systems to help programs meet higher professional development standards and progress toward higher QRIS ratings. Examples of State outreach and support activities are listed below.

- **North Carolina** has worked to ensure that every community college in the State offers early childhood coursework that meets the credentials specified in its QRIS. It also has a statewide articulation agreement to support the transfer of credits and degrees from one higher education institution to another.
- **Pennsylvania** created a program improvement system aligned with its QRIS by redesigning its professional development system to integrate program technical assistance.
- To assist providers in meeting the QRIS standards, **Delaware** is in the process of redesigning its professional development system to include stronger quality assurance processes in the development and delivery of training events, along with a scope and sequence of its topics.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY DEVELOP A KEY QRIS ELEMENT

System planners in Miami-Dade County, Florida, created the Quality Counts Career Center (QCCC) to raise the educational level and stability of staff prior to rolling out their QRIS. QCCC administers scholarships for formal education, supplementing the State's Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood® Project funds; coordinates the WAGE\$ incentive program; provides mobile Career Advisors to assist staff in QRIS programs to engage successfully in formal education; and maintains an online community training calendar. The professional development efforts are supported by a local registry that also serves as a documentation repository for the staff qualifications component of the rating system. Additional information is available at <http://www.QCcareers.org>.

INTEGRATING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INTO THE QRIS IN MONTANA

Montana has long supported professional development with an early and school-age care and education practitioner registry, and specific educational certificates and support for attaining them, including scholarships and several forms of merit pay. In the **Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program**, management for all professional development services will be located in one entity, the Montana Early Childhood Project (ECP), making it a one-stop shop for practitioners. All professional development is tied to the early childhood knowledge base, and financial support rewards certificates and college-level coursework. These included the Practitioner Registry Achievement and Renewal Awards, as well as Professional Development Incentive Awards and scholarships for CDA Assessment, and accreditation through NAEYC or NAFCC. Additional information is available at <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/bestbeginnings/bestbeginningsstarstoquality.shtml> and <http://www.mtecp.org/>.

Relationship-based professional development (RBPD) opportunities, such as technical assistance, consultation, mentoring, and coaching, are important supports to a program and can be strategically linked to QRIS participation. These supports can be designed to help programs meet specific standards in QRIS areas, such as learning environment or accreditation; working with specific age groups; or integrating children with special needs. RBPD services can be delivered through community-based organizations, such as CCR&Rs and professional development organizations; higher education institutions; or contracts with private consultants. A number of recent studies have indicated the value of technical assistance in helping programs understand what quality is and how to achieve it. This type of support is most effective when targeted and specialized, and can therefore potentially be costly. It is important to clearly link these supports to areas of identified need and program improvement plans. In addition, the qualifications and supports for technical assistance providers are also directly linked to successful results. States have begun to test out new, more cost-effective approaches to QRIS technical assistance that focus on strengthening the capacity of participating programs to sustain gains and remain focused on continuous quality improvement. States that have linked RBPD opportunities to QRIS include the following:

- To help its programs attain higher star ratings, **North Carolina** has aligned all of the technical assistance and support initiatives provided by the Smart Start Early Childhood initiative or by the CCR&R agencies with the QRIS standards.
- Providers that enroll in **Indiana's** Paths to QUALITY QRIS are eligible to participate in specialized coaching relationships with their local CCR&R agency and through the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children. Through a technical assistance process, the coach helps the provider work to achieve Levels 2 and 3. Once at a Level 4 a coach from the Indiana Accreditation Project

assists providers in achieving accreditation and Level 4. Providers also have the option of choosing self-guided study.

- Programs participating in **Maine's** QRIS have access to targeted assistance from a variety of sources including the Head Start Quality Initiative, Maine Roads to Quality, and the Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies.
- **Georgia** created a TA 'cohort' approach that assigned a single coach to a network of centers or homes. Cohort participants included multi-site child care chains and franchises as well as networks with a similar philosophy such as Montessori. The goal was to reach out to the mid-level managers in these organizations and strengthen their capacity to provide on-going support after the time-limited state TA ended. The cohorts were also assigned to a single licensing, Pre-K and subsidy coordinator to facilitate these relationships as well

COMPREHENSIVE, STATEWIDE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES SUPPORT ARKANSAS PROVIDERS

Arkansas always had a rich offering of early childhood coursework for child care providers, but with the launch of **Better Beginnings**, training was aligned with the QRIS criteria to support providers in attaining higher star levels. Some of the more innovative training that is available includes:

- Orientation training for directors and family child care providers, and pre-employment training for people that are new to the field of child care.
- Certificate programs for administrators, caregivers, and child care specialists based on ages of children served.
- A 30 hour course providing an introduction to the AR Early Childhood Education Framework that includes curriculum development, planning activities, assessment and evaluation and portfolio development. There is also a 12 hour course on the Infant Toddler Framework.
- Two 30 hour courses that focus on language and literacy development and on math and science strategies in working with young children.
- A 45 hour course addressing strategies and activities to ensure healthy social emotional development in programs for children ages 3-5 years.
- Welcome the Children training and technical assistance to assist early childhood professionals to better understand diversity, appreciate cultural differences and similarities, learn strategies to support English Language Learners, and promote inclusion.

QRIS technical assistance staff in Philadelphia have been able to work in a much more cost-effective manner by linking support to the on-line, automated pathway to QRIS. Instead of traveling out to a site, sitting next to a director, and reviewing hand-written documents, TA staff can work on the phone using downloadable templates available on the Web site. Time spent on TA activities that relate to paperwork processes like forms and handbooks has been drastically reduced, freeing up staff to focus on tasks that require on-site observation and relationship-building such as supporting new teaching practices.

Aligning services with the rating standards

As QRIS and professional development systems evolve, it is important to ensure that there is an alignment of services. The **Pennsylvania** QRIS includes strong requirements for providers in the areas of staff qualifications and ongoing professional development. These requirements focus on attainment of certificates, credentials, and degrees. When the QRIS was launched, the State quickly aligned its delivery of professional development to support providers in accessing required coursework, shifting from noncredit, workshop-type training to coursework that either was credit-bearing or could articulate to credit.

States can also focus financial assistance for professional development on QRIS participants through reduced or free coursework, scholarship assistance, and other incentives. Quite a few States target the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood □ Project initiative toward staff who work in programs that participate in QRIS. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood □ Project and similar scholarship programs help these staff pay the costs of tuition, books, and travel, and also provide a compensation incentive.

Creating new services to help programs meet standards

When developing a QRIS, it is important to conduct an assessment of existing support services. This inventory, examined against the requirements in the standards, can provide the State with critical information regarding existing capacity to support the system. There may be services that exist in some geographic areas and not others. Some areas of a State may have more resources readily available that can be integrated into the QRIS. Other areas will not have this capacity and may need assistance in building it.

An example would be a QRIS that requires a program director to obtain a Director's Credential. In addition to ensuring that the required credentialing courses or training are available, consideration must be given to when the courses are offered and how they are accessed. It may be difficult for child care providers to attend evening training sessions when they are still caring for children until early evening. It is also challenging for providers in rural areas to access workshops or courses when they have to drive long distances to reach a course location. Distance education coursework and delivery in real time or on demand can ease some of these access issues. This is not the solution for all, of course, as some individuals do not learn as well with this approach, or may not have the technology or skills to access these systems.

MASSACHUSETTS DEVELOPS ONLINE COURSES IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

The Department of Early Education and Care (DEEC) developed an online fundamentals course on QRIS in multiple languages (English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Chinese, Khmer, and Portuguese) for providers. This course is designed to introduce early education and out-of-school-time educators to the **Massachusetts QRIS** so that they become familiar with and participate in QRIS. The first 2-hour course module introduces the QRIS and explores the current science of brain development. The next four modules introduce the five categories of the QRIS standards and the tools that measure process and structural quality indicators. The final module covers how to apply this knowledge to an early education or out-of-school-time program to identify areas for program improvement. More than 1,500 educators have accessed the course since its launch. In addition to the fundamentals course, DEEC has begun to develop QRIS Technical Assistance Courses. The modules will provide in-depth knowledge in and strategies for QRIS content areas and standards, be easily accessible to professionals currently working in the field, and be translated into Spanish.

States are challenged to develop new and creative ways to deliver training and education. What worked in the past may not work in a new system with heightened requirements. As more is expected of programs participating in the QRIS, more can also be expected of the organizations supporting them. To address this concern, several States have developed trainer and training approval systems. Others have created performance standards for training organizations, which are based on QRIS participation and improvement among their clients.

PA ESTABLISHES ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES FOR THEIR TA SYSTEM

In 2008 – 2009 Pennsylvania developed the STARS Technical Assistance Accountability Plan (STARS-TAAP) to support consistency and quality in technical assistance across the commonwealth. The system consists of the following key performance areas:

- *Qualifications, Professional Development and Professionalism* includes requirements of technical assistance consultants to ensure consultants are highly qualified and continue to stay current on trends, research and issues in the field.
- *Reporting Obligations* to include timely, accurate submission of reports, timely follow-up and completion of referrals, records management and targets.
- *Measurable Impact on Provider* establishes the expectation that technical assistance will have some influence on the measurable improvement of a program. Change affected may be in knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviors in the target population resulting in improvement in specific standards, STAR level change and “stickiness” of the improvement.

More information on this project can be found at

<http://www.ocdelresearch.org/Research%20Briefs/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

As a State gains more experience with QRIS, it may find that it needs to realign or create new training, technical assistance, or outreach services. It is important to collect data on how the QRIS system is working: data that can indicate how long it takes a typical provider to move from one level to another and the most significant barriers to progress. It is possible that by adding a new orientation session, or by requiring training on the use of the environment rating scales (ERS), some of these barriers can be eliminated or reduced. A State may also find that strengthening provider support groups, creating networks of directors, adding accreditation support services, or encouraging Shared Service Alliances are worthwhile investments in the path toward quality.

BUSINESS PRACTICES COURSEWORK DEVELOPED IN MASSACHUSETTS

In 2012, DEEC began to develop a Business Planning Course for early educators to help them implement sound business practices that will result in higher scores on the PAS, BAS, and APT and to achieve a higher QRIS level. This course can be taken on line and in a classroom format and will be available in multiple languages (Spanish, Portuguese, and English).

Existing infrastructure to provide outreach and support

It is an efficient strategy to examine the infrastructure that already exists for outreach and support and, where possible, work toward strengthening it. Integrating QRIS outreach and support services into the existing structures in licensing, subsidy, CCR&R, and professional development systems can be less confusing for providers and more sustainable in the long term.

Using this infrastructure to send a comprehensive, consistent message regarding the benefits of QRIS and the details of implementation is important to increasing provider interest and participation. If a QRIS appears complicated and confusing, providers may become frustrated and discouraged and either drop out or not participate at all. States have found that clarity and simplicity are key principals for QRIS implementation. At the same time, States engaged in QRIS have learned that it is often necessary to change policies and procedures, either as a response to process evaluation or experience or as a pathway to alignment with other early learning initiatives. Thus, change may be inevitable. However, as changes are made to accommodate the QRIS, it is important to clearly communicate to the provider

community the revisions, the steps involved, and the rationale. Creating and regularly updating a roadmap, manual, or toolkit for navigating the QRIS process is a helpful tool.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH CAROLINA: A FOUNDATION OF QRIS

For more than 15 years, the North Carolina Institute for Child Development Professionals (formerly the North Carolina Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development) has worked to develop a statewide professional development system. The system is grounded in research that links child outcomes to the professional development of teachers and directors. North Carolina's professional development system works to ensure the accessibility, availability, and affordability of the education offerings as well as applicability to the work of early care and education programs. All 58 of the State's community colleges offer an Early Childhood Associate degree program with articulation agreements to many of its 4-year colleges and universities. Financial support for professional development is available through T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project scholarships, which were first developed in North Carolina. Salary supplements are available through a WAGE\$ program based on level of education achieved. The Institute's latest effort is the Early Childhood Certification, a professional certification system. The investments that North Carolina made in its professional development system became the foundation of its QRIS and help support the higher staff qualification requirements in the QRIS.

Information about North Carolina's Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development, the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Project scholarships and WAGE\$ supplements is available at <http://ncicdp.org/>.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN PENNSYLVANIA: A CROSS-SECTOR PERSPECTIVE

Ideally, professional development and technical assistance should be part of a larger cross-sector early education effort that helps to link child care, Head Start, Early Intervention, State prekindergarten, and all other early learning programs in the State. In Pennsylvania, the early childhood Core Body of Knowledge (CBK) was originally written by a cross-sector group but focused on child care. Later, this cross-sector group helped to expand the CBK to address all modalities and align it with the cross-sector Early Learning Guidelines. Additionally, this group developed Core Competencies for Technical Assistance Consultants and Core Competencies for Professional Development Instructors. All tools can be used for 100 percent of Pennsylvania's early learning programs. In addition, the Pennsylvania Quality Assurance System (PQAS) for professional development has been developed to certify all individuals and organizations that provide professional development and technical assistance within the context of Keystone STARS, and has incorporated the CBK and Core Competencies into its system. Pennsylvania is currently working on enlarging the use of the PQAS system to apply to the rest of its early learning programs as well. A cross-sector group now meets regularly. Leaders from Nurse-Family Partnership, Pennsylvania's Children's Trust Fund, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, Early Intervention, Head Start, and Keystone STARS jointly explore and work on common understandings, common job specifications, ethics, and effective practices, such as how to deliver professional development to a diverse early childhood audience. Additional information is available at http://www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Programs_STARS_PD.

Program improvement plans

Many States include a program improvement plan as part of the QRIS process. Most improvement plans use self-assessments, observations, or ratings to identify strengths and weaknesses, and suggest ways to make improvements. Many QRIS use the results of an assessment tool, like the ERS, as a starting point for developing this plan.

- In **Pennsylvania**, written program improvement plans are developed by the early and school-age care and education provider in the following situations:
 - ◆ STAR 2—if a self-assessment results in an ERS subscale score below 3.0.
 - ◆ STAR 3—if an ERS subscale score falls below 3.5.
 - ◆ STAR 4—an ERS subscale score falls below 4.25.

The provider can request support from the Regional Key and STARS technical assistance to assist in the development and implementation of this plan.

- In **Delaware**, all providers that participate in QRIS are required to prepare and implement a quality improvement plan (QIP). Technical assistance in preparing a QIP is offered during mandatory group orientation, where summary checklists, worksheets, and workplans are available for reference.
- In **Virginia**, the 2-year QRIS rating cycle includes access to a State-approved Star Quality mentor once a rating is assigned. The mentor works with the participating program to help design and implement a quality improvement plan.

A program improvement plan, guided by QRIS requirements and assessment tools, can serve multiple purposes. In addition to providing a roadmap for a program seeking to attain a higher quality level, it can help ensure that technical assistance is targeted and effective. It can also help the program gather data on provider needs and resources. As resources become more limited and States are increasingly asked to justify their programs and expenditures, program improvement plans can be a helpful accountability tool, both for the individual programs and the system as a whole. Data from ERS reports and other assessments can be used to target appropriate services, i.e., professional development and technical

assistance; gauge the effectiveness of a particular technical assistance intervention; and help develop cost and budget projections for overall system improvement.

COMMUNITY COALITIONS SUPPORT VA STAR QUALITY INITIATIVE (VSQI)

The **Virginia Star Quality Initiative**, a partnership of the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation and the Virginia Department of Social Services, Office of Early Childhood Development, works through local organizations to implement and support program rating and improvement. Once an early care and education program is rated, the program receives a detailed rating summary report and a trained mentor to facilitate improvements. Local early childhood organizations work with the state administrative hub through eight QRIS regions to coordinate the rating process and quality improvement supports. Before implementing the initiative, communities are asked to identify local resources to inform, train, and mentor VSQI participants. The coalitions train early childhood professionals to be mentors or raters. Programs are assessed every two years by trained and experienced Star Quality Raters, who are regularly monitored for consistency and reliability. On-site assessments and documentation reviews are conducted every two years to determine which star level a program will receive. This also establishes consistency in quality measurement among programs, giving improved information and accountability for programs and families. Programs are also coached by Star Quality Mentors as they progress and improve their quality of care for Virginia's children. In Virginia, a Star Quality Mentor is the person assigned to provide on-site technical assistance to a child care program who has received a VSQI rating. The Star Quality Mentor assists child care programs in developing a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) that is tied to the VSQI standards and coaches programs in an effort to achieve quality improvement goals. All mentors must be approved by the state administrative hub. Additional information is available at <http://www.smartbeginnings.org/Home/StarQualityInitiative/ForEarlyChildhoodProfessionals.aspx>.

PENNSYLVANIA'S APPROACH: "RESPONSIVE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE" VS. "EVERYONE GETS A COACH"

Keystone STARS, Pennsylvania's QRIS, does not assign a technical assistance specialist to every program that participates. Instead, technical assistance is "responsive," meaning that programs may request technical assistance to help them first participate in STARS or to increase their star level. STARS Technical Assistance is an intensive, one-on-one service available to facilities that have been awarded a STAR level and have enrolled in or completed the Keystone STARS Core Professional Development Series. STARS TA is coordinated by the Regional Keys to Quality programs and provided by consultants who have the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to help guide programs in the Keystone STARS content areas of Staff Qualifications and Professional Development, Leadership and Management, Early Learning (and School Age) Program, Partnerships with Family and Community. The facility will develop an action plan with their STARS TA consultant. Facility practitioners are expected to be actively involved in taking the steps necessary to meet the goals of their action plan. With their STARS TA Consultant, the facility will establish a timeline to complete their action plan. Action plans are generally completed in 6 months or less. Additional information on PA's Technical Assistance is available at http://www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Programs_Tech.

Targeting program improvement and financial assistance

Revisiting the goals and intended outcomes for a QRIS is helpful when making difficult decisions about who can or cannot access program improvement and financial assistance. If, for example, a State is committed to increasing the quality of care in low-income neighborhoods, it may focus assistance to providers offering subsidized child care services, making participation with the subsidy program a

requirement for access to services or grants within the QRIS. Or, it may base the size of a quality grant on the percentage of low-income children served by the provider.

If a goal is to encourage programs that participate in the QRIS to serve children with special needs or those in the child welfare system or some other priority population, providers serving this population may be afforded additional benefits in the QRIS. States that are concerned about raising the bar on quality may choose to target technical assistance to programs at the lowest quality levels. States concerned about provider turnover may want to target help toward providers that are most likely to remain in business and are focused on continuous quality improvement. States concerned about alignment with or transition to public school may limit their technical assistance services to providers in poor performing school districts that are most likely to attain high quality standards.

WASHINGTON STATE TARGETS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE VERSUS COACHING IN THEIR EARLY ACHIEVERS TQRIS

To better deploy resources, Washington States decided to focus their 25 technical assistance specialists on the **Early Achiever** programs that are working to meet Level 2 standards and devote the work of the 10 coaches on the Level 3-5 Early Achiever programs. A realigned CCR&R system allowed them to do this through a streamlining of services that meet a uniform standard of quality. All technical assistance activities from outreach through Rating Readiness are tracked in the ETO (Efforts to Outcomes) system. ETO allows users to review how resources are being deployed across the state and allows for an analysis that can lead to program changes to maximize effectiveness and efficiency in the TA framework. Additional information is available at <http://wa.childcareaware.org/providers/early-achievers>.

Decisions regarding practitioner outreach and support are often based on financial resources. Some helpful steps toward identifying resource needs include projecting costs, examining the feasibility of redirecting current quality initiatives, and testing different financial scenarios to determine what is feasible. The Cost Estimation Model (CEM) is a Web-based tool designed to help States determine what it will cost to implement the QRIS. The CEM can be used to estimate costs at early or full-scale implementation, as well as at any point in between, by simply varying the participation rates. It can also be used to estimate costs by varying the elements included in the QRIS.

The Provider Cost of Quality Calculator (PCQC) is another tool that can help to determine if there is a gap between the cost of providing quality services and the revenue sources available to support an early care and education service provider. Knowing the size of the gap at different quality levels for various provider types can inform the design of financial support and incentive packages. Both of these tools are available by contacting OCCQualityCenter@icfi.com.

Participating programs that do not receive child care subsidy reimbursement

If the goals of the QRIS include participation by providers outside the subsidized child care system, it will be important to identify incentives that are meaningful to that provider population. (See the “Initial Design Process” section for additional information.) Some States have created special tracks or pathways for programs, such as Head Start, prekindergarten programs, and accredited programs, in recognition of the additional standards these programs meet. Another strategy used by States to ensure broad participation is to tie receipt of financial incentives, including quality improvement grants, to the QRIS. In some States, child care programs rated at certain levels have greater opportunities to participate in the State prekindergarten program. Access to professional development resources, such as onsite technical assistance, mental health consultation, or scholarships, can be targeted to those providers committed to improving their QRIS level.

Offering Financial Incentives

Financial support

Financial incentives are monetary awards within a QRIS which are generally intended to help support the costs of improving program quality and/or of maintaining program quality. Awards can be structured to encourage programs to participate in a QRIS, to serve low-income children, or to improve classroom or practitioner quality. Awards can help parents access higher quality programs, encourage educators to seek higher qualifications, and support educator compensation commensurate with qualifications.

In most early and school-age care and education programs, the primary revenue source is tuition and fees, or subsidy in lieu of tuition. Because consumers are very price sensitive, and subsidy reimbursement rates are limited, this revenue source frequently fails to cover the cost of delivering high-quality services. Raising the reimbursement rate via a tiered reimbursement strategy is often an insufficient approach unless it is coupled with a strategy that boosts enrollment, e.g., through the use of contracts or guaranteed slots for higher star-rated programs.

Given a recession economy, coupled with the challenges of tiered reimbursement and full tuition collection, third party funding is often essential, especially for programs that serve low- and moderate-income families. Strong programs typically access and layer multiple funding streams, including child care subsidies, Head Start and prekindergarten funding, foundation grants, parent fees, and other public and private resources. In theory, QRIS quality supports could be one of several sources of third-party funding that help fill the gap between the cost of implementing and maintaining a quality program and the fees that parents pay.

QRIS offers a unique framework for providing a wide range of financial incentives. Indeed, experience suggests that best results come from a combination, or menu, of strategies. Some of the financial incentives States use to encourage participation in QRIS are discussed in more detail below. There are several common types of incentives: quality improvement grants, quality achievement awards, wage and retention awards, scholarships, grants and loans, refundable tax credits and tiered subsidy bonuses. Financial incentives can be designed to support quality improvement and quality maintenance. In most cases, the QRIS financial support offered by States is structured as a **supply-side intervention** and awarded directly to a particular program or practitioner. Examples include grants for program improvement, technical assistance to programs, professional development scholarships, and wage supplements for personnel. However, QRIS support can also be a **demand-side intervention** aimed at changing consumer behavior. Examples of this approach include financial incentives for consumers to choose higher quality, such as refundable tax credits, and user-friendly Web sites that make it easy for parents to identify better quality programs. A strong financing strategy will likely include both supply- and demand-side interventions.

As noted earlier, it is important to think strategically about the relationship between financial awards/incentives and the cost of delivering services at each quality level in a QRIS. The Provider Cost of Quality Calculator (PCQC) can help to establish or re-calibrate the value of awards based on projected costs. Recent experience with the PCQC suggests that in many cases, States are inadvertently rewarding providers for remaining at lower star levels because award levels are more than adequate for entry but fail to rise to the level needed to attain or maintain quality at the highest levels. Using the PCQC, States can re-adjust rates to address this concern.

Austin, Whitebrook, Connors, and Darrah analyzed how a sample of QRIS provided incentives and supported wages and benefits for staff in their *Policy Report 2011, Staff Preparation, Reward, and Support: Are Quality Rating and Improvement Systems Addressing All of the Key Ingredients Necessary for Change?* (2011). The report includes an analysis of both quality rating and improvement system supports for professional development and quality rating rubrics related to staff formal education, compensation and benefits, and adult work environments in center-based programs. The report is

available at http://www.irlle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/CSCCEQRISPolicyBrief_2011.pdf.

MAINE QRIS INCLUDES MULTIPLE PROVIDER INCENTIVES

Providers that participate in Maine's **Quality for ME QRIS** have access to targeted technical assistance from a range of organizations, resource materials, and publicity. Additionally, they may receive the following financial incentives:

- Priority access to scholarships for income-eligible staff who wish to pursue early childhood education degrees
- A reimbursement differential for each child whose care is subsidized by the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child and Family Services: °Ten percent quality differential for programs that have reached Step 4 in the QRIS
- Five percent progress differential for programs that have reached Step 3
- Two percent quality differential for programs that have reached Step 2
- Double child care State income tax credit for parents whose child is enrolled in a program at the Step 4 level
- A Child Care Investment Tax Credit for expenses made to improve quality for programs that pay State taxes and have a QIP

Additional information about Maine's incentive program is available at http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/qrs_application_manual.pdf.

MULTIPLE FINANCIAL AWARDS LINKED TO PENNSYLVANIA'S QRIS

Pennsylvania's **Keystone STARS** offers an array of financial incentives to participating child care programs that serve a subsidized population of no less than 10%. These financial incentives are as follows:

- Annual STARS Merit Awards are for programs at STAR 2–4 levels. At the STAR 2 level, awards are available to programs three times, or up to five times with a CQI plan and demonstrated progress. Awards are ongoing for STAR 3 and 4 programs. For Family Child Care Homes, these awards range from \$1000 at a STAR 2 to \$2000 at a STAR 4. For Group Homes, these amounts are \$1575 to \$3225. Center Merit Awards are based on STAR Level and size of program. Awards can range from \$1500 for a small center at STAR 2 to \$49,250 for very large center (serving at least 181 children) at STAR 4.
- Education and Retention Awards (ERA) are annual awards for highly qualified staff who have been employed onsite at least 12 consecutive months prior to the date of the ERA request. To be eligible, Directors must earn less than \$45,000 per year and teaching staff less than \$35,000 per year. The information below is for full-time staff (working at least 35 hours per week). Amounts are pro-rated for less than 35 hours:
 - ◆ Directors with a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education can obtain an ERA of \$3090 at STAR 2 to \$4120 at STAR 4
 - ◆ Staff with a BA in Early Childhood Education can earn \$2320 at STAR 2 to \$3090 at STAR 4.
 - ◆ Staff with an AA in Early Childhood Education can earn \$1545 at STAR 2 to \$2060 at STAR 4
 - ◆ Staff with a CDA qualify for award amounts ranging from \$600 at STAR 2 to \$800 at STAR 4.
- The STARS subsidy bonus is applicable to family and group homes and centers at the STAR 1 level or higher. The subsidy add-on daily rate for different STAR levels include the following:
 - ◆ STAR 1 - \$0.35 for full-time, and \$0.15 for part-time
 - ◆ STAR 2—\$0.95 for full-time, and \$0.45 for part-time
 - ◆ STAR 3—\$2.80 for full-time and \$1.05 for part-time
 - ◆ STAR 4—\$5.00 for full-time and \$1.35 for part-time
- Rising STARS Support Grants. All active STAR 1 child care certified early care providers who are actively working on a Continuous Quality Improvement plan that includes moving up to a STAR 2 in a reasonable amount of time are eligible. Providers may not receive more than two previous support grants and STARS Head Start, PA Pre-K Counts and private licensed nursery schools are excluded. Centers and groups can be eligible for up to \$5000; family child care up to \$2000.
- Rising STARS Tuition Assistance Program pays 95% of tuition costs for eligible college coursework taken by early learning professionals, with a maximum benefit of \$4500 per individual each fiscal year. To be eligible the individual must be employed for at least a year at a Keystone STARS facility, have a base wage of less than \$20 per hour, working in the early learning program at least 20 hours per week, be a resident of PA and taking courses from an accredited PA institution of higher education or an accredited distance learning institution. Once enrolled, the individual must agree to remain employed at the STARS facility for at least two months for each credit paid by the program and maintain an overall grade point average of 3.0 or higher.

Additional information on these grants and awards for Fiscal Year 2013=2014 is available at http://www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Programs_STARS_Grants

WASHINGTON'S FINANCIAL INCENTIVES AND SUPPORTS

Washington has a package of supports and financial resources for **Early Achievers** participants at all Levels. Facilities that register at Level 2 are eligible to receive a 2% subsidy increase for participating in Early Achievers and achieving a Level 3—5 within 30 months. Level 2 facilities are also provided with no cost training. Quality Improvement awards are provided annually for level 3—5 facilities in order to ensure that quality improvement efforts can be maintained over time and scholarships are targeted to participants at Level 3—5. More information can be found at <http://www.del.wa.gov/care/gris/participants.aspx>.

TIERED SUBSIDY REIMBURSEMENT

Tiered subsidy reimbursement is a commonly used QRIS financial incentive in which programs with higher quality ratings receive higher child care subsidy reimbursement rates or bonuses. The rate differential typically ranges from 5 to 20 percent higher than the base rate but can be much higher in some States, especially for infant and toddler care.

QUALITY GRANTS, BONUSES, AND MERIT AWARDS

Quality grants, bonuses, or merit awards are incentives awarded directly to a child care center or family child care home based on participation in QRIS or attainment of a specific QRIS level. Quality grants, bonuses, or merit awards are typically not linked to the child care subsidy reimbursement system, although in some cases States will require the program to be willing to accept subsidized children or make larger awards available to programs based on the percentage of low-income children they serve. However, the strategy is often focused on programs serving all children, not just low-income children.

The amount of an improvement grant varies among states from approximately \$250 to \$5,000. In most states, the improvement grant is by application, varies with program need, and may be time-limited. In both **Pennsylvania** and **Ohio**, the grants vary by a combination of setting, enrollment size and quality level, and their use must be related to a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP.)

Further discussion of incentives can be found in *Financial Incentives in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems: Approaches and Effects* (Mitchell, 2012), which is available at <http://grisnetwork.org/sites/all/files/resources/gscobb/2012-05-24%2015%3A13/Approaches%20to%20Financial%20Incentives%20in%20QRIS.pdf>. The document, *QRIS Financial Incentives* (NCCCQI, 2014) which includes several State examples of incentives used for QRIS, is available at https://occqrisguide.icfwebservices.com/files/QRIS_Financial_Incentives.pdf.

AWARDS, GRANTS AND TIERED REIMBURSEMENT IN DELAWARE STARS

Delaware Stars for Early Success Quality Improvement Grants, as well as Tiered Reimbursement to participating early childhood education programs.

Grants provide funding support to programs actively working toward the next Star Level. Grants are available based on annual funding allocations. A program may receive a grant once at each Star Level (2, 3, and 4). It must be clear on the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and in the grant request that the program is working toward the next Star Level Designation. Evidence must include regularly meeting with the Technical Assistant (TA), progress towards completion of standards, and progress in preparing for a Practice or Verification ERS. Grants must be used for materials and/or professional development to meet the standards in the Quality Improvement Plan. They should be utilized for materials and equipment that will increase the quality of care for children and actively engage them in activities. Grant amounts vary by program type and size. Grants for centers range from \$1500 to \$3000, for school-age only programs from \$500 - \$1000 and for family child care from \$500 - \$1000. Changes are anticipated for 2014.

Tiered reimbursement is available to programs at Star Levels 3, 4 and 5. Programs at Star Level 3 receive an additional state supplemental reimbursement that reflects a total reimbursement of 80% of the market rate, Star Level 4 at 90% and Star Level 5 at 100% of the market rate. Changes are anticipated for 2014.

Additional information is available at <http://www.delawarestars.udel.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/GrantsAwardsProcedures8.12.2013.pdf>

Early Childhood programs participating in Delaware Stars have additional new supports through the Early Learning Challenge:

- CORE Awards (Compensation, Retention and Education Awards) are available to individuals working in Star 3, 4 & 5 programs as they move up the career lattice, remain at their current program and/or are recruited to other programs participating in Stars.
- Developmental screening and child formative assessment is offered to Stars programs, including free training, technical assistance, materials and online reporting. In 2014, additional supports for curriculum are being incorporated into this strategy.
- Early Learning Leadership Initiative (ELLI) is working with individuals in leadership positions or potential leaders, in Stars programs, and providing them with free professional development in leadership, a nine-credit series developed by the McCormick Early Childhood Center, Aim4Excellence Credential.
- Infrastructure grants for technological and capital improvements related to their quality improvement goals through Stars.

KENTUCKY QRIS INCENTIVES INCLUDE GRANTS AND SUBSIDY BONUS

Providers that participate in **Kentucky's** STARS for KIDS NOW QRIS are eligible for several incentive awards.

- The STARS Initial Achievement Award is granted once a licensed/certified program attains a Star level and varies by level and number of children served from \$100 to \$5000. It is also granted one time as each subsequent higher star level is achieved. If a program achieves a Level 3 the first time they are rated, they will receive payment for Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3.
- An Annual Achievement Award is granted to licensed/certified programs that maintain their STARS Level 3 or 4 statuses and varies by level and number of children served from \$250 to \$2500.
- The Quality Incentive Award is available to STARS Level 2–4 licensed and certified programs serving children participating in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). It is based on the percentage of subsidized children served, level, and age of children.
- The Annual Enhancement Award is paid to STAR level 4 licensed centers that pay at least 50 percent of the cost of a single health insurance plan for each employee or to certified family child care homes that achieve an average score above 5.5 on the environment assessment.

Additional information is available at <http://chfs.ky.gov/dcbs/dcc/stars/starsproviderinfo.htm>

A VARIETY OF FINANCIAL SUPPORTS IN MARYLAND'S QRIS

Statewide participation in the new Maryland QRIS, EXCELS, was launched in July 2013. With the redesign of the program there was also redesign of the awards, bonuses and incentives. They include the following:

- Program Bonuses – awarded to participating programs based on the Check Level rating and assigned capacity of the facility. These bonuses range from \$50 to \$1000 for family child care and from \$50 to \$4500 for centers.
- Credential Bonuses – full amount bonuses available to staff in participating programs. Staff bonuses are based on the Credential Level, and range from \$200 to \$500 at Levels 2, 3 and 4 and from \$600 to \$1000 for Staff Levels 4 Plus, 5 and 6. The bonuses at the lower levels (2 – 4) are one time only, while the bonuses at the higher levels (4 plus – 6) are annual. There are also bonuses for the Administrator Credential, with Level 1 amount of \$400, and a one-time only award, and Levels 2, 3, and 4 can receive \$750, \$1000 and \$1500 respectively on an annual basis.
- Incentives, Grants and Supports – participating programs and their staff have access to quality improvement incentives, grants and supports including but not limited to:
 - ◆ Accreditation Fund Support
 - ◆ Curriculum Fund
 - ◆ Child Care Quality Incentive Grants
 - ◆ Training Vouchers and Reimbursement
 - ◆ Child Care Career and Professional Development Fund
 - ◆ Increased Subsidy Reimbursement Rates by Check Levels (Levels 3, 4 and 5)
 - ◆ Infant Toddler Expansion Grants

Additional information on Maryland EXCELS and their financial supports can be found at www.marylandexcels.org

WAGE SUPPLEMENTS

Wage or compensation supplements, some of which are linked to QRIS, are available in almost 20 States. These awards are generally intended to reward individuals for the credentials and qualifications they have achieved and help programs retain qualified staff. States that offer wage supplements include the following:

- **Louisiana** offers QRIS wage and retention awards via the state income tax system, structured as refundable tax credits that are received when the practitioner files his or her tax return. Child care teachers and directors are eligible for a refundable tax credit if they work for at least six months in a program participating in Quality Start at any level. This credit intentionally does not vary by Star level and includes Level 1 so as to support retention and continuity, rather than drive higher qualified staff to higher rated programs. The annual amount is based on education levels and ranges from \$1,500 to \$3,000.
- **Maryland** offers Achievement Bonuses for teachers that maintain 1 year of continuous employment in a center that participates in the QRIS and complete continuing training and professional development activities. A one-time bonus at Credential Levels 2, 3, 4 and Administrator Level 1 and yearly bonuses for Credential Levels 4+, 5, 6 and Administrator Levels 2, 3 and 4, is paid directly to the participating individual. One half of the bonus is paid initially and the remainder is paid upon completion of all requirements the following year. Bonuses range from \$200 to \$1,000.

- In the **North Carolina** WAGE\$ program, salary supplements are tied to the educational level of the individual, the position the individual holds in their program, and the “tier” level chosen by each participating Smart Start Partnership, at the county level. Partnerships choose which of three tiers of financial supports they are able to provide. Teachers receive supplements in 6-month increments after maintaining 6 months of continuous employment in a licensed center or family child care home. Supplements range from \$200 to \$6,250 and are paid directly to the participating individual.

Descriptions of other State compensation initiatives are included in Appendix A of a report entitled *Early Care and Education Compensation and Policy Options for Louisiana* (Stoney, 2013) and is available at <http://www.brightstartla.org/assets/files/Early%20Care%20&%20Education%20Compensation%20and%20Policy%20Recommendations.pdf>

SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarships and financial support to help staff pay for college courses and related expenses are another type of financial incentive States use to encourage participation in QRIS. Quite a few States have elected to replicate the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood □ Project scholarship initiative, and some link this benefit to QRIS participation. In Arizona, for example, T.E.A.C.H. scholarships are limited to early care and education providers that are employed in regulated centers or family child care homes that participate in the Quality First! QRIS pilot program.

OKLAHOMA CREATED THE SCHOLARS FOR EXCELLENCE IN CHILD CARE INITIATIVE

Oklahoma has created its own scholarship program, the Scholars for Excellence in Child Care Initiative, to help early and school-age care and education providers continue their education and meet **Reaching for the Stars** QRIS criteria. To qualify for the Scholars for Excellence initiative, providers must work in One-Star Plus or above child care facilities that are licensed and care for subsidized children, i.e., at least 10 percent of children in care must receive subsidies. Through this program, a scholar coordinator is placed at each community college to recruit, advise, and support students as they are often entering the higher education system for the first time. Central office and community college coordinators assist providers with career counseling and obtaining financial assistance including Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) funded scholarships for Child Development Associate or Certified Childcare Professional credential assessments, career tech, or community college coursework. Scholarship funds can be used to pay for tuition, fees, limited release time, and books. Scholar coordinators make at least two onsite technical assistance visits with the provider each semester to provide classroom assistance or career advisement. Additional information is available at <http://www.okhighered.org/scholars/>.

LOANS

Some States have crafted loan programs that assist child care programs in improving their quality as well as increasing capacity. **North Carolina** worked with its statewide Community Development Financial Institution, Self-Help, to offer financing for a wide range of purposes including minor renovations to existing buildings (whether leased or owned), working capital, bridge loans, equipment purchases, and startup expenses. In a direct link to the QRIS, the loan fund has a special provision to activate a Disaster Relief Child Care Loan program if counties are declared Federal disaster areas by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Applications are accepted up to 1 year after the date of the disaster. If during the loan period the participating provider raises its QRIS quality level, its loan can get a partial conversion to a grant. Additional information about loan programs is available at <http://www.self-help.org/business-and-nonprofit-loans/loan-products-1/ccrf>.

TAX CREDITS

All of the financial incentives described above are supported by funds appropriated by the State. Most tap Federal CCDF dollars, and a few allocate State general funds or draw in other resources. A handful of States have begun to tap State general fund dollars to support QRIS incentives by using the tax system. Louisiana has the most extensive tax-based incentive system for participation in QRIS, including refundable credits for families, providers, teachers, and investors.

LOUISIANA LINKS REFUNDABLE TAX CREDITS TO QRIS

In 2007, Louisiana passed legislation that created an innovative early care and education financing strategy, School Readiness Tax Credits (SRTC), designed to support the State's new QRIS, **Quality Start**. Enhanced tax credits are available to families that enroll children in Quality Start centers; proprietary and nonprofit child care providers that participate in Quality Start; child care teachers and directors that work in Quality Start centers; and businesses that support child care providers or CCR&R agencies. An important strength of the SRTC is that most of the tax credits, including those available to teachers and early care and education programs, are refundable. A refundable tax credit is available to taxpayers even if it is greater than their tax liability or if they owe no taxes at all. This means that eligible child care teachers who earn low wages (and therefore pay little or no tax) receive a wage subsidy each year in the form of a tax refund. In addition, nonprofit child care centers may receive what is essentially an annual grant, in the form of a tax refund, based on their star level and the number of eligible children they serve. Additional information is available at <http://www.qrsloisiana.org/tax-credits>.

Financing and administering QRIS incentives via the tax system is a new, and unique, approach that has both strengths and weaknesses. Tax-based financial incentives are often used to promote economic development and may help garner support for QRIS from a broader group of policymakers and business leaders. A tax-based approach can also be a more stable source of funding because, in most States, an annual appropriation is not required. However, to be effective, tax credits require a deeper level of engagement and understanding among child care providers and consumers. And, to benefit lower-income providers and consumers that most need help, the credits must be refundable.

Several other States are experimenting with tax-based financial incentives for QRIS. **Maine** has an innovative child care investment tax credit, **Oregon** and **Colorado** have a child care contributions tax credit, and several States including **Florida** and **Oklahoma**, have tax credits for proprietary child care providers that meet higher quality standards. Additional information about linking tax benefits to QRIS can be found in *Tax Credits for Early Care and Education: Funding Strategy in a New Economy* (Blank & Stoney, 2011). The report is available at www.earlychildhoodfinance.org/downloads/2011/OpEx_IssueBrief_Tax_Final1.pdf.

The effect of tiered reimbursement on prices charged to nonsubsidized families

Although there are many benefits to establishing tiered child care reimbursement rates, this strategy can have the unintended consequence of driving up the price of care for nonsubsidized families or actually discouraging some child care programs from participating in the QRIS. As noted earlier, tiered reimbursement is typically structured as a percentage or dollar add-on to the public child care subsidy reimbursement rate. The percentage add-on typically ranges from 5 to 20 percent with higher rates awarded to programs at higher levels in the QRIS or those serving special populations, such as infants and toddlers.

Child care subsidy reimbursement rates are based on fees charged to nonsubsidized families. Fees are often set in relation to the pressures of the local market – what are other providers charging? And what

can families afford? When this market pressure is added to the cost of complying with higher QRIS standards, the result may be that programs decide that they cannot afford to pursue higher quality.

One way to avoid this problem is to structure the tiered reimbursement allocation as a bonus rather than a per-child rate increase. Quite a few States have taken this approach, including **Kentucky** and **Pennsylvania**. When the rate add-on is structured as a bonus, participating programs receive a lump sum allocation that is determined by their quality level and the number of subsidized children they serve. This approach does not require a rate increase and, therefore, does not require a price increase to fees paid by parents. The Urban Institutes' document, *Essential but Often Ignored: Child Care Providers in the Subsidy System* (Adams & Snyder, 2003) includes an analysis of the financial implications of tiered reimbursement structured as a rate increase or a bonus. A graphic that illustrates payments providers would receive under three different rate policy approaches is available at http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310613_OP63.pdf.

The value of a tiered bonus is related to the value of the basic subsidy rates. If the subsidy rate ceilings are high compared to average tuition fees in the market, those subsidy rates may be sufficient to cover the cost of programs at the lower levels of quality. In that case, the tiered bonus may only need to be offered at the higher levels of the QRIS. This also serves to support higher quality programs serving low-income children. Alternatively, if a state has low subsidy rate ceilings, then tiered bonuses have to be quite large to be effective and offered at all levels of the QRIS.

The unintended consequences of tiered reimbursement can also be mitigated by offering programs that participate in QRIS a range of financial incentives. This is important because for a program to offer higher quality to subsidized children, it must maintain higher quality for all children.

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES: GENERAL AND TARGETED SUPPORT IN NORTH CAROLINA'S QRIS

North Carolina has taken a two-pronged approach to incentives to help early and school-age care and education programs improve their quality to achieve higher ratings in the Star Rated License. First, the State expanded its tiered subsidy reimbursement program to correspond to the rating system. As reimbursement rates have increased over time and funds have been insufficient to fully implement rate increases, the 3–5 star rates were often the only rates increased. The second part of this approach is targeted supports, those that specifically offset the increased costs that providers encounter when increasing their quality. These include one-time improvement grants, scholarships for higher education requirements, and wage supplements and health insurance reimbursements to help with staff retention. These financial supports are intended to focus the State's limited resources on the improvements that are the most costly, thereby helping early care programs to avoid fee increases and minimizing the financial impact to middle-income parents. Additional information is available at http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/parents/pr_sn2_ov_sr.asp.

Projecting the cost of providing financial incentives

A companion to this Resource Guide is the QRIS **Cost Estimation Model** (CEM), which is based on a cost modeling tool developed by Anne Mitchell of the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance. The CEM is designed to help administrators determine the costs of implementing all the elements of a QRIS for their State, as well as explore the financial implications of various phase-in and scale-up options.

The QRIS CEM takes into account the costs of each of the following elements:

- Quality Assessment
- Professional Development

- Technical Assistance
- Financial Incentives
- Communication for Public Awareness
- Facility Improvements
- System Evaluation
- Data System

The QRIS CEM is designed to be used with this Resource Guide. The CEM can be used to estimate the cost per year of phasing in a QRIS, the cost of certain elements, or the overall cost of a fully implemented QRIS. Information about how to access the CEM is available by contacting OCCQualityCenter@icfi.com.

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QRIS RESOURCE GUIDE: SECTION 7 DATA COLLECTION AND EVALUATION

Data collection and evaluation are often an afterthought when developing a new quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). Because the driving force is the urgent need for change, the emphasis is usually on the design of standards and the implementation of the rating process and provider supports. Typically, by the time that thought is given to data collection and evaluation, there is a shortage of resources because most have been committed to implementation. It is often only when implementation issues arise and/or there is a need to document the success of the new system that data collection and evaluation become critical to the QRIS. At that point, much of the opportunity is lost to collect baseline data and maximize the use of data in existing data collection systems. Then data collection and evaluation become much more expensive. This section poses questions to consider early in the process of design which may help to plan for data collection and also result in an improved evaluation process, as well as a more successful design and implementation process. Discussions on the use of data in planning and implementation are included in the “Initial Design Process” and “Approaches to Implementation” sections of this Guide.

- [Collecting Data](#)
- [Evaluating Outcomes](#)

Collecting Data

Using data collection systems to help plan, design, implement, and evaluate the QRIS

All States have data systems that contain information on early and school-age care and education programs. Some of the sources of data that may be helpful in a QRIS include licensing; registries of license-exempt providers; subsidy administration; practitioner and training/trainer registries; child care resource and referral (CCR&R) databases; technical assistance tracking systems; program profiles; classroom assessments; economic impact research studies; and Head Start, prekindergarten, and other education systems. An initial step in planning for a QRIS is to compile a list and description of existing state/territory data systems, including where they are located, how to access them, who has access to them, what information is collected in them, and how they interface with other data systems.

DATA RESOURCES ANALYSIS FOR DECISION MAKING

Completing an inventory of the available data at the beginning of the planning and design stages is a helpful first step. The information gathered during this process can then be used to guide decisions during the implementation phase. For example, data from the licensing system or Head Start Program Information Reports may help the QRIS design team determine, at least initially, which types of programs (centers, homes, prekindergarten, Head Start) to include in the QRIS and which and how many programs may be able to achieve the standards. Data from workforce studies or professional development registries can provide a needs assessment for scholarships and the accessibility of educational offerings. This information will help estimate participation rates and predict the resources necessary to support projected participation. Looking at these data elements may reveal existing information that can help document compliance with proposed standards. Reviewing an inventory of existing data can also help determine whether it is best to begin with a pilot and, if so, which programs to include.

Child care subsidy data can also be helpful. For example, examining these data may lead to the conclusion that tiered subsidy reimbursement will not be sufficient as a support of higher program quality for a number of reasons. For example, if only 20% of the enrollment of a typical program are children who receive a child care subsidy, that may not be sufficient to support the cost of higher quality for the program as a whole. The balance of the cost must be passed on in tuition fees to other families. Or the enrollment may fluctuate enough that programs cannot rely on tiered subsidy reimbursement to maintain quality. Therefore, examining subsidy data may be a good indicator of the potential impact of tiered subsidy reimbursement, pointing out the need to explore additional provider incentives.

DATA FOR QRIS MANAGEMENT

Using existing data systems can help make QRIS implementation more cost efficient and ensure consistency in data across systems. Adding reporting capacity or data elements or aligning data elements to an existing data system, such as licensing or a professional development registry, can be much less expensive than creating a new data collection and processing system specifically for a QRIS. This may or may not be possible depending upon who administers the QRIS and what data systems can be tapped for the information. For example, if the existing data system is in a State agency and the QRIS will be operated outside of the State government structure, it may not be possible to use the State data system. Even when data exist in several separate systems, it may be cost-effective and ensure consistency if data can be transferred from one system to another, rather than entering all data anew for each child care program that wants to participate. For example, one QRIS requirement for participation might be a license in good standing or a license with no serious violations. It would be critical to have continuing, current information on the status of a license to produce reliable ratings. Similarly, if programs that participate in the QRIS are also rated or assessed by other entities, such as national accrediting organizations or the Head Start monitoring system, using data from those systems can make participation easier, more cost-effective, and more reliable. Linking to data in professional development registries or credentialing and certification systems is another cost-effective way to verify staff qualifications, ensure consistency, and eliminate duplicative work in the rating process.

In summary, an accurate inventory of existing data systems, their accessibility, accuracy, and reliability is helpful in determining QRIS system design. A good introduction to data elements, collection, management and governance is found in the slides and videos of a series of data webinars presented by INQUIRE (Quality Initiatives Research and Evaluation Consortium) in Spring 2013. A link to those materials can be found the list of references at the end of this section (Child Trends, 2013). An overview of the use of data to monitor and evaluate QRIS in five states may be helpful in thinking about the broad perspective of using data (Caronongan et al., 2011).

States are increasingly relying on comprehensive data systems that they either purchase or develop to help with the administration of their QRIS. This section of the QRIS Resource Guide focuses on identifying the data that is needed and whether it can be collected from existing systems or if new data collection mechanisms need to be developed.

INDIANA QRIS DATA SYSTEMS ARE INTERACTIVE

The Indiana **Paths to QUALITY** program uses a live, interactive database that draws facility and practitioner information from the State regulatory system. Mentors from the CCR&R agencies and Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children help develop facility quality improvement plans, which are submitted, along with contact notes, into this Web-based system. Paths to QUALITY raters may also enter their data directly. The database was developed through a contract with TCC Software Solutions and includes their subsidy and licensing data. Additional information is available at <http://www.in.gov/fssa/2554.htm>

TENNESSEE QRIS DATA COLLECTION SYSTEM PROVIDES MONTHLY GEOGRAPHIC DATA

Tennessee uses the State Regulated Adult & Child Care System (RACCS) to maintain QRIS data. The system includes the provider's **Star-Quality Child Care Program** rating and Child Care Report Card System component scores by program year. Users can request provider QRIS information for the entire State or by specific geographic region. The data system automatically generates monthly reports on ratings by provider type and county. The RACCS system also includes various provider-specific program data, updated annually, that can be queried by accreditation, curriculum, enrollment, environment, fees, meals, proPaths to QUALITY gram, rates, rate policy, schedule, staff, and transportation. Additional information is available at <http://www.tennessee.gov/humanserv/adfam/ccrcsq.html>.

THE VI USES DATA TO INFORM THE DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARDS IN THEIR QRIS

The Virgin Islands launched its pilot of their QRIS, **Virgin Islands Steps to Quality (VIS2Q)** in the summer of 2013. In their development of their QRIS, they looked back to local studies and data for inclusion in the standards, as well as how they graded some of the indicators to better fit the VI context and support continuous quality improvement by helping programs view movement throughout the QRIS as something attainable. The literacy standards were influenced by the kindergarten entry data collected by the VI Department of Education, as this was an area where children were scoring most poorly. They also included a standard for Dual Language Learners as they know they have increasing numbers of children for whom English is not their first language. In the area of Professional Development, they graded the steps with full knowledge of where most of their teachers would be when their programs entered the QRIS, based on data from a workforce study conducted for the Department of Human Services. Data were also used to inform the indicators in the Learning Environments Standard, based on a pilot study of quality in VI ECE settings conducted in 2009. This data helped inform cut-off scores for both the ERS and CLASS assessment tools.

Collecting and using new and existing data to assign ratings

Looking closely at each QRIS standard and determining how compliance will be verified, what data for documentation will be needed, who will review the data, and where it will be stored are essential steps in QRIS planning. New data may be needed to assign a rating or to guide follow-up activities, such as development of an improvement plan. For example, QRIS standards may require that all teaching staff receive training in a State's early learning guidelines for a certain rating level. If completion of the training is collected in the professional development registry, it may be possible to import information from that system for the rating process. If the information is not currently collected, it may be necessary to develop a process for collecting that data, such as requiring program staff to document their training by submitting a successful-completion certificate, requiring rating assessors to enter information into a new QRIS database, or asking early learning guidelines trainers to input their class lists into the professional development registry. A thorough review of the rating assessment and monitoring process is needed to identify data needed to document compliance with QRIS standards.

MAINE QRIS SYSTEM LINKS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Quality for ME, the QRIS in Maine, is a partnership of the State's professional development project, called Maine Roads to Quality. The Quality for ME automated system includes shared data linkages that populate forms with data from the professional development registry, the State licensing database, and National Association of Child Care Resources & Referral Agencies software. These automated data links minimize the amount of data entry required of an applicant; because an applicant must confirm the information, the process results in more accurate data across these State systems. Maine is developing an automated technical assistance tracking system that will be linked to the professional development registry and will enable individual providers to note on their transcript that they are receiving technical assistance on particular topics. Additional information is available at <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/qualityforme.htm>.

TENNESSEE'S ASSESSMENT DATA SYSTEM ALSO SUPPORTS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The University of Tennessee Social Work Office of Research and Public Service (SWORPS) created an automated system to maintain statewide data on early childhood program assessments. When SWORPS receives the completed observation score sheets from Department of Human Services' assessors, the assessment data are entered into the Star-Quality Child Care Program database along with supplemental data (teacher and classroom/family child care home characteristics). The system generates a provider profile sheet that contains assessment information, including item, subscale, and observation scores) and an overall program assessment score. The system also generates a "Strengths Page" for the provider that details the indicators that the assessor scored positively. The provider receives a copy of the profile sheet, the Strengths Page, and the assessor's notes. Copies of these documents are also mailed to the relevant licensing unit for completion of Report Card scoring and entry into RACCS. A duplicate copy of the assessment results are mailed to the relevant CCR&R site. The Stars database generates monthly, quarterly, yearly, and ad hoc reports, and analyzes the data in a multitude of ways. Additional information is available at <http://www.tennessee.gov/humanserv/adfam/ccrcsq.html>.

Collecting and using new and existing data to manage the provider support system

Data systems are a valuable resource for staff who manage the QRIS provider support system. Two types of data may be useful to them: (1) data on supports for *individuals* working in the early and school-age care and education programs, and (2) data on supports for the *programs* that seek a QRIS rating.

Data on supports for individuals working in the programs are helpful in projecting and managing the cost for scholarships for staff education and any type of retention incentives, such as wage supplements. These data can also help determine the effectiveness of various supports. Is the education level of the staff across the State going up? Are there any geographic areas not using scholarships? If not, why? Answering these questions requires data that is specific to QRIS participation. If, for example, a State currently has a scholarship program that is available to all early and school-age care and education providers, knowing which of these staff work in programs that participate in the QRIS is crucial. These data, coupled with broader data on staff qualifications, can help identify trends and inform decisions regarding the capacity of practitioners to meet QRIS standards and how to best support continuous improvement.

Collecting data on technical assistance and other supports for programs is usually a more complex process than collecting data on individuals working in the programs. Often programs that participate in a QRIS have access to various technical assistance, consultative and coaching supports. These supports might be available to a broad group of programs, including those that do not participate in the QRIS. Thus, it will be important to create data systems that identify which supports and how much of each is received by each program participating in the QRIS. It is important to think carefully about what data about program supports needs to be collected, including data on new supports that may be created and accessible only to programs participating in the QRIS.

The QRIS planning team should think carefully about how program support information will be used. Will the data identify participating programs that access supports and how often? Will it be used to determine the correlation between supports accessed and improvements in program ratings? Will it be used to manage the cost of such supports or to monitor the effectiveness of support service providers? Being clear about the projected use of data will help to define what is collected and how.

Collecting data on financial supports for programs that participate in QRIS, such as grants, bonus payments, tiered reimbursement, loans, or tax benefits, can help project and manage budgets. Again, it may be very useful to correlate data with the maintenance or improvement of a rating. This will help to identify which supports are most critical.

In many States, the QRIS becomes an organizing framework for a wide range of program and practitioner supports designed to promote quality improvement. States have moved from providing technical assistance and financial supports that are believed to improve child care quality to using the QRIS to track whether these supports are actually associated with changes in quality.

AUTOMATION HELPS MIAMI MANAGE THE QRIS

Early childhood leaders in Miami, Florida, report that their Web-Based Early Learning System (WELS) makes the **Quality Counts** QRIS stronger because the system offers real-time feedback on participation, classroom profiles and assessments, professional development, technical assistance, coaching and mentoring, and other essential data for a wide range of purposes. Data are available in the aggregate, as well as for a particular program. This information makes it possible for planners to have the data they need and, at the same time, for program managers to receive alerts when one of the centers they are working with is not making timely progress. Additional information on the Quality Counts Portal is available at <https://miamiqualitycounts.org/>. Additional information about WELS is available at http://www.welsfoundation.org/about_wels.html.

NEVADA'S INTEGRATED DATA SYSTEM

Nevada's **Silver State Stars** has adopted an integrated Q-Star data system which allows the following QRIS teams to communicate and track progress: 1) the administration and quality rating team which manages the project and assigns star ratings; 2) the assessment team; 3) the coaching team which uses the system to track their activities and build quality improvement plans based on the assessments conducted; and 4) the research and evaluation team which will use the data gathered by the system to analyze the efficacy of services delivered and quality improvement over time. The Q-Star system links to an ERS Data System for mobile assessment used to conduct Environment Rating Scales assessments and EasyFolio which serves as a portal for program applicants to manage their application process. The Q-Star system was developed for Nevada by the Branagh Information Group (BIG).

NORTH CAROLINA QRIS DATA COLLECTION GUIDES EVIDENCE-BASED ADJUSTMENTS

The North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education has for many years collected data to monitor the **Star Rated License** system process and used these data to guide revisions in the system. Early on, results from environment rating scale (ERS) assessments showed significantly lower scores on the Infant Toddler ERS than on other classroom assessments. To address this concern, the State developed a short-term technical assistance project focused on providing child care health consultants to programs and a long-term technical assistance project that involved adding infant and toddler specialists to the CCR&R agencies. School-age specialists and behavioral specialists were also added to the CCR&R agencies to help with program improvements. Orientation of providers to the ERS was added to the system as well. Similarly, when data indicated that the licensing compliance standard in the QRIS was not linked to statistically significant differences in quality, this rating standard was eliminated from the QRIS. Additional information is available at http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/parents/pr_sn2_ov_sr.asp.

GEORGIA BUILT THEIR OWN DATA SYSTEM TO MANAGE QRIS

Georgia has a comprehensive online data system to manage all of the QRIS process from a child care program's application to the QRIS, **Quality Rated**, to data collection and analysis including program information; training and technical assistance from registration to tracking; portfolio submission including a continuous quality improvement (CQI) plan; incentives management; resources for families, programs, and technical assistance and training professionals; reports and data; and communication. The system captures all information on a child care program and allows the program to track their progress through the process from application to rating. The development of the system was guided by Georgia's work with their researcher, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, who helped them develop a logic model, develop a validation and evaluation plan for their QRIS, create a data dictionary and create reports. The system is used by Quality Rated staff, technical assistance and training staff, CCR&R agencies, programs enrolled in Quality Rated, incentive partners, the research team, and most importantly, by families seeking child care and resources.

MICHIGAN'S ONLINE PLATFORM

STARS is Michigan's **Great Start to Quality** QRIS on-line platform, developed by Mosaic, Inc. Licensed and registered programs and providers interact with the platform to complete their Self-Assessment Survey, upload evidence documents, develop a Quality Improvement Plan, and access Resources. Administrative users validate Self-Assessment Surveys and complete observations, log technical assistance efforts, and perform monitoring functions. STARS also offers administrative users reporting capabilities such as, 'at-a-glance' summary information, click-button reports and export reports. Housing all functions on one platform supports Great Start to Quality to streamline each component of the QRIS. Additional information is available at www.greatstarttoquality.org.

PENNSYLVANIA USES INTEGRATED DATA SYSTEMS IN SUPPORT OF A QRIS

Pennsylvania Enterprise to Link Information for Children Across Networks (PELICAN) is an integrated child and early learning information management system. In addition to automating and centralizing many of the functions required to administer the subsidized child care program (Child Care Works), it expanded to automate the inspection and certification (licensing) process of child care providers, the administrative processes and data collection efforts for the PA Pre-K Counts and Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality (**Keystone STARS**) initiatives, and the data collection and analytics to support the Early Learning Network (ELN), which is a longitudinal database and tracking system for children in Pennsylvania early learning programs. PELICAN users include Child Care Information Service agencies, County Assistance Offices, Regional Keys (the administrators of the Keystone STARS program), PA Pre-K Counts grantees, as well as teachers and administrators for Head Start State supplemental programs, school districts that provide prekindergarten, providers of child care, and others. Families are also able to screen themselves for potential eligibility for child care subsidies, search for providers, and apply for services online. This initiative allows the Office of Child Development and Early Learning and the Regional Keys to track providers, manage STARS, identify resources that were deployed at a program, and manage STARS grant information in the Keystone STARS rating system. A next phase of development will focus on how to integrate the existing trainer and training registry, the Pennsylvania Quality Assurance System, into PELICAN and make it accessible from the PA Key Web site. An overview of the ELN is available at <http://www.ncsl.org/portals/1/documents/Educ/PAEarlyChild-Stedron.pdf>.

Identifying additional data needs

The exploration of what data might be needed is best done early in the process and with a broad view to future needs. In the planning and design phase, considering how to validate the standards has become increasingly important to states. Assessing the impact of key interventions to assist programs in improving quality is critical to project management. Within the rating process, it is becoming critical to coordinate assessment of the rating across sectors, i.e., child care, prekindergarten, Head Start, in a way that reduces the duplication of multiple assessment processes. In preparation for evaluation, consider the benchmarks that are being set and how to document their achievement, including coordination of standards using data from other from other assessment processes such as accreditation, Head Start performance standards and prekindergarten standards assessment.

Evaluating Outcomes

Evaluation purpose

A QRIS that begins with a clear statement of intended outcomes and a way to evaluate the achievement of those outcomes, will be more likely to meet everyone's expectations of accountability. A QRIS built on a strong logic model will create a guiding framework for evaluation efforts. According to Tout, Zaslow, Halle, & Forry (2009), such a logic model will establish "realistic expectations for the program, identify resource or service needs, and articulate outcomes of QRS activities" (p. 7). In their study, *Issues for the Next Decade of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems*, the authors include an explanation and graphic of what a logic model is and how it can help in creating a QRIS: resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and long-term impacts. Having a well-developed logic model is an excellent method of communicating with all stakeholders about the structure of the QRIS activities and how they connect to the final expected outcome. The "Initial Design" section of the QRIS Resource Guide includes information about Massachusetts' logic model.

Tout and colleagues also identify four purposes for measuring the quality of early childhood settings:

1. Identify potential areas for improvement in individual programs.
2. Measure impact of investments in terms of change in quality over time in individual programs and across a geographic area.
3. Increase information about what produces quality.
4. Rate the quality of program to inform parents' choice of care.

The authors suggest that an identified purpose can inform “what data are collected, how data are collected, and how results are communicated” (p. 7). Also included is a matrix to help with decisions about data collection based on the four purposes listed above. They address who collects the data and who receives or uses the data, as well as selection of measures, training for data collection, implementation of data collection, and emerging issues (p. 8 ff).

Consider some of the following questions in designing an evaluation plan:

1. When and how often will the pilot or statewide QRIS be evaluated?
2. What specifically will be evaluated (e.g., validity of the standards, effectiveness of supports in helping programs meet standards, progress of programs in moving up in the levels of ratings)?
3. Who will design the evaluation and who will implement it?
4. How will the results of the evaluation be used? Who will receive the results of the evaluation?

Two helpful resources when planning for an evaluation of a QRIS are *The Child Care Quality Rating System (QRS) Assessment: Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations* (Child Trends & Mathematica Policy Research, 2010) and *The Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Evaluation Toolkit* (Lugo-Gil et al., 2011).

Timing and frequency of the pilot or statewide QRIS evaluation

Evaluation can be much more effective if it is considered as a part of the QRIS planning and design and implementation processes. Experienced evaluators can help review research on effective program quality, which in turn can guide the development of QRIS standards. Evaluators can also assist with creating a logic model for the QRIS, which can determine what to evaluate based on desired outcomes and long-term impact. Evaluators can advise on the design of standards, pointing out those that will be possible to assess and evaluate and those that will be difficult or not possible to measure. Based on the standards chosen, they can advise on baseline data to be collected before implementation of a QRIS and how to most effectively collect valid data that will track changes over time from the baseline. They can also help in planning for evaluation based on prospective use: validating standards, assessing the implementation process, measuring changes in program quality, and measuring child outcomes. Evaluators can also advise on the needed frequency of evaluation. All of these decisions connect directly to data collection. **The greatest cost savings and the best chance for a well-executed evaluation are realized when an evaluation plan is created as a part of the QRIS design process.** Although there may not be adequate resources to invest in a comprehensive, academically rigorous evaluation, it is important to at least capture and use existing data as much as possible from the outset. If this is not done, it may not be possible to capture the data retrospectively.

RHODE ISLAND QRIS EVALUATION: A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP FOCUSED ON INFORMED REVISION

A broadly representative community-based group developed the draft standards and quality criteria for **BrightStars** over several years. Researchers from the Frank Porter Graham (FPG) Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina, who were selected for their depth and breadth of expertise and experience in evaluating program quality, conducted a pilot and random sample evaluation. The evaluation was conducted as a partnership between FPG and the Rhode Island community agency, Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, that manages BrightStars. This partnership facilitated training for BrightStars staff to collect data in a valid and reliable manner. The draft center framework included 62 criteria across 28 standards. The evaluation in the pilot revealed that using all 62 criteria resulted in small quality distinctions and many programs had no stars or only one star. A review of the standards ensured that each criterion (1) was not already in State licensing, (2) had an actual outcome, and (3) adequately measured the differences in quality. This review pared the number of criteria down to 22, which were then grouped into nine standards. The final frameworks are an effective scaffold for quality improvement; differences between the levels are meaningful but achievable. The evaluation not only improved the BrightStars standards and measurement tool, it also provided a baseline measure of program quality in a random sample of centers, homes, and afterschool programs in Rhode Island, which will be useful for tracking progress in the future. It has also been helpful to have expert evaluators give the Steering Committee specific advice and recommendations to improve the framework. Additional information is available at <http://www.brightstars.org/>.

MASSACHUSETTS REVISES STANDARDS

Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care has been working throughout 2013 to evaluate the **MA QRIS**. This work has been done in collaboration with the UMass Donahue Institute, the EEC Board, the EEC Program Quality Unit, and a QRIS Working Group comprised of representatives from the field. Several policy changes and minor revisions to the standards will be implemented in 2014.

Determining what to evaluate

To date, most State QRIS evaluations have focused on validating the standards and tracking the progress of programs in improving their rating level. The Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grants direct states to validate their QRIS. In addition to guidance provided in the grant application, there are a number of resources that are available to help with planning for validation: *the QRIS Evaluation Toolkit* (Lugo-Gil et.al., 2011), *Validation of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems for Early Care and Education and School-Age Care Validation* (Zellman & Fiene, 2012) and *Key Elements of a QRIS Validation Plan: Guidance and Planning Template for a QRIS validation plan* (Tout & Starr, 2013).

More recently, States have begun to use evaluation to help assess the effectiveness of technical assistance, financial supports, and other incentives designed to help participating programs meet QRIS standards as well as the effectiveness of the rating process. Researchers are providing additional tools and direction to support this effort. Implementation science and its application to early childhood program interventions is one of those promising tools. Any State that is considering assessing the effectiveness of the supports they provide to programs to help them meet the QRIS standards, should also assess the effectiveness of their implementation of those supports. A series of research briefs on applying implementation science in early care and education is available to help with this work. (Downer & Yazejian, 2013; Paulsell, Austin, and Lokteff, 2013; Wasik, Mattered, Lloyd, and Boller, 2013). In another resource, Paulsell, Tout, and Maxwell (2013) offer guidance on the application of implementation science

specifically to Quality Rating and Improvement Systems with a list of research questions to ask at each stage of implementation for the components of a QRIS. They offer specific applications of the core implementation components to QRIS development and implementation. They provide a description of an ideal QRIS that is supported by the concepts of implementation science. "...QRIS is not a static system.... Rather, an ideal QRIS assumes that knowledge will continue to be gathered...to make system changes that promote continuous improvement" (p. 288). They encourage the creation of a QRIS implementation team and offer a step-by-step guide to the work of such a team to improve QRIS.

ARKANSAS VALIDATES STANDARDS

Arkansas developed their QRIS standards over several years affording them the opportunity to have a group of researchers compare the standards to what research says about these measures, i.e., validated their standards and offering the opportunity to make adjustments. Recommendations from the researchers were as follows.

1. Reduce Redundancy—Exclude content areas in the Strengthening Families component that are already measured with the PAS and ERS assessments.
2. Use Measures as Written and Tested—Do not exclude items from the PAS assessment since this reduces its validity and reliability.
3. Designate teacher-child ratios above the minimum in licensing. This standard is present in other state rating systems and other systems such as accreditation and Head Start.
4. Incorporate process measures because they are stronger predictors of child outcomes and collect evidence of them through independent observation.
5. Address lower levels of quality in the QRIS—Level 1 should be designated “getting ready” and the minimum ERS score to designate quality should be revisited.
6. Address higher levels of quality—Develop levels of quality beyond the current highest level to encourage programs to improve to level that promotes optimal child development.
7. Include child screening as a measure—It will lead to better child outcomes and early intervention is more effective.

INDIANA REVIEWS STANDARDS

Purdue University has been evaluating the **Paths to QUALITY (PTQ)** to determine if the program is effective: does it increase the quality of participating programs and are children in the higher level program learning more or developing optimally? In the first phase of their study they examined the validity of the quality indicators and concluded that the 10 main indicators are significantly associated with established measures of child care quality, have significant support from the child development and early education literature, and are recognized and endorsed as best practices by national early care and education organizations in their policies and position statements. There is significant evidence that the indicators support children's development, learning, or well-being. The validation study report is available at <http://www.in.gov/fssa/files/PurdueValidityReport2007.pdf>.

Having established the validity of the standards, the evaluation then assessed PTQ's impact on child care following implementation. The overall goals of the evaluation research were to validate the quality rating system and describe the experiences of child care providers, parents, and children with the program as it was implemented. The evaluation questions addressed by the Purdue research team were:

- When providers attain higher PTQ levels, does this result in higher quality care for children?
- Are child care providers entering the PTQ system?
- What are the incentives and the challenges for providers?
- Are providers using available training/technical assistance (T/TA) resources?
- Are providers advancing to higher PTQ levels?
- Are parents aware of PTQ?
- Will PTQ affect their parents' child care decisions?
- Are children and families at all education and income levels gaining access to child care at the highest PTQ levels?
- Are children in higher PTQ levels developing more optimally than children in lower PTQ levels?

The researchers found that the PTQ rating system measures meaningful differences in child care quality and children from all income levels were gaining access to higher quality care within PTQ. Provider participation levels were high—more than 2100 providers were enrolled at the time of the study, including 82% of licensed child care centers and 52% of licensed family child care homes. However, public surveys and interviews with PTQ parents revealed that parent awareness of PTQ was low. Those parents that were aware of the system received the information from their child care providers. Additional findings and details about the study are available at <http://www.in.gov/fssa/files/PurdueValidityReport2007.pdf>, http://www.cfs.purdue.edu/cff/documents/project_reports/PTQ_TechReport2_Meas.pdf, and http://www.cfs.purdue.edu/cff/documents/project_reports/PTQFinalReportRev11012.pdf.

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Emerging evaluation questions for consideration

In their research study, Tout, Zaslow, Halle, and Forry (2009) discuss the issues that some States are addressing as QRIS evaluation moves to new research questions:

- Who is participating?
- Who is improving and what resources are used for improvement?
- Do parents know and use QRIS to choose care?

These evaluations are also examining child outcomes, which require a carefully designed strategy to address child attrition and focus on change in a program's development over time. Other issues to address in the evaluations are the challenges of assessing quality with children in a wide range of ages, cultures, languages, and abilities in various types of program settings. This group of researchers has also suggested the usefulness of creating a logic model of the QRIS, which can help in creating a plan of evaluation.

QRIS research and evaluation has evolved from the early studies designed to determine if the quality ratings differentiated scores on quality measures and tracked improvement and implementation to state specific studies that included child outcomes and the assessment of parents' understanding of the ratings. (Tout, 2013) Tout asserts that the "next generation of QRIS will rely more heavily on data and evidence to shape design, implementation, ongoing management, and integration of QRIS with other systemic efforts to support young children and families" (p.72), and that the use of collaborative research going beyond individual states to cross-state and national efforts will be even more helpful in identifying "effective QRIS strategies and linkages" (p. 76). An example of the collaborative approach between state QRIS administrators and university researchers is described in Elicker et al.'s study on Indiana's QRIS (2013).

Section 10 of the *Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluation* (2010) provides information on QRIS evaluations. Eighteen of the 26 QRIS reported some type of evaluation had been or was being conducted on the QRIS. Nine reported an ongoing evaluation and nine reported periodic evaluations. Seven reported that their evaluations examined issues regarding the implementation of the system. Seven included validation of the quality ratings. Four included links between the QRIS and child outcomes in their research. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/resource/compendium-of-quality-rating-systems-and-evaluations>.

MAINE EVALUATION LOOKS AT QRIS STANDARDS AND SUPPORTS

- **Quality for ME**, the QRIS in Maine, is engaged in an evaluation effort built into the system and based on random site visits. The focus is on ensuring that the Quality for ME standards, levels, and implementation strategies accurately measure significant differences in quality. The study uses ERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale, School-Age Environment Rating Scale, and Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale) to evaluate the quality of early learning in the classroom or home. Additional information is available at <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/qualityforme.htm>.

MINNESOTA PARENT AWARE VALIDATION AND EVALUATION STRATEGIES

Child Trends, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization is conducting the **Parent Aware** Evaluation from 2012-2016 with funding from Parent Aware for School Readiness (PASR) and Greater Twin Cities United Way.

To address the research question about effectiveness of the quality indicators and structure of the Parent Aware Rating Tool in differentiating quality, a validation study is being conducted. The study will:

- Collect data from participating early care and education programs to test whether the interactions between children and their teachers/caregivers and the learning environments of programs are distinct at the four quality levels in Parent Aware.

To address the research question about linkages between children's development and the Parent Aware quality levels, the validation study will:

- Collect and analyze data from children and families in rated programs. Programs will be selected to participate that represent the range of center-based and family child care settings rated in both the Parent Aware full rating process and the Accelerated Pathways to Rating (APR). Children will complete direct assessments of their school readiness skills in the fall and spring in the year before Kindergarten. Teachers and parents will also complete assessments of children's skills and provide information about their background and family characteristics. Rigorous analytic models will be conducted to identify whether and how the rating levels, process (the full rating compared to the APR process) and select quality indicators relate to children's gains.

Results from both components of the Parent Aware validation study will be available in 2015-2016 after a sufficient number of programs have enrolled in Parent Aware and implementation of Parent Aware has stabilized statewide. Additional evaluation questions focus on understanding how implementation of Parent Aware is proceeding, how quality is improving over time, and how Parent Aware is contributing to Minnesota's early care and education.

NORTH CAROLINA EVALUATION VALIDATES RATING SYSTEM

When North Carolina first developed the **Star Rated License** in 1997, it wanted to ensure that the State's evaluations were actually using measures that would differentiate between levels of quality. A team from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill collected extensive data on randomly selected child care centers. "We concluded from these results that the 5-star licensing system does accurately reflect the overall quality of a child care center. Parents can be assured that there are meaningful program differences among centers that have a 3-star, 4-star, or 5-star rating...." Additional information is available at <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/resources/validating-north-carolinas-5-star-child-care-licensing-system>.

At two different times since the ratings began, an analysis of ERS scores and teacher education level has been completed by the North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project at the University of North Carolina–Greensboro. The results show that classrooms with a teacher with an associate's degree or higher scored significantly higher on the rating scale than classrooms with a non-degreed teacher. This conclusion supports the staff qualification standards of the QRIS. (Cassidy, Hestenes, Hegde, Mims, & Hestenes, 2005).

Selecting an evaluator

The QRIS in most States is administered by a State agency; however, classroom assessments (such as ERS or CLASS) for the rating system and evaluations of the QRIS are often conducted by external early childhood experts such as those at universities. In some cases, the same group of researchers has done multiple studies in an ongoing series of evaluation research. Choosing an evaluator is an issue that States must address within the restrictions of their resources and the State bidding and contractual requirements. Other considerations that also influence the choice of evaluator should be incorporated in the request for proposal, including:

- **Qualifications and experience**—States look for evaluation teams with qualifications that match the task, i.e., early childhood and research qualifications and experience with delivering this particular type of research. They also look for evaluators who have experience completing the research within contract requirements.
- **Credibility**—Potential evaluators should be highly credible to the primary target audience. This is one of the reasons that many States use their own State universities, even though those universities may bring in national or out-of-State experts to partner on selected portions of the evaluation.
- **Stability**—If plans call for conducting a series of evaluations, an organization's longevity in the field and probability of continuing in the work will be important traits in an evaluator.

Using and sharing the results of the evaluation

Many evaluation studies serve dual purposes: (1) to provide evidence-based insights into the design or implementation process, and (2) to inform funders and policymakers of the impact of the QRIS on child care programs and child outcomes.

Researchers at a meeting of the Child Care Policy Research Consortium (2008) identified some additional issues and questions to consider:

- **Evaluation design and measurement options:**
 - ◆ How do we best convey to stakeholders the implications of selecting a given design and the limitations on the kinds of causal statements that can be made about QRIS and its relationship to quality and outcomes?

- ◆ When and what types of evaluation should occur as part of the pilot and as part of statewide scale up and rollout?
- ◆ What are the benefits and costs of focusing on process and outputs early on and delaying evaluation of quality and child outcomes? What is the right design for ongoing data collection and evaluation of mature and longstanding QRIS?
- ◆ Researchers and experts can play important and helpful roles in development of a State's QRIS. How is third-party objectivity at the evaluation stage maintained? What are the potential tradeoffs of not keeping the evaluation team separate from QRIS development?
- Measuring child outcomes in QRIS evaluations:
 - ◆ What child outcomes are expected as a result of QRIS? How realistic are our expectations?
 - ◆ What design options should be considered for examining child outcomes?
 - ◆ Timing—At what point in system development should child outcomes be assessed?
 - ◆ Strategy—Should child outcomes be assessed in cohorts, or should children be tracked over time?
 - ◆ Outcomes—What can be learned from a point-in-time assessment compared with an examination of change over time (for example, fall to spring changes)?
 - ◆ Type of outcome measure—What measures are feasible, reliable, and valid, such as direct child assessments, teacher-caregiver ratings, and authentic assessment tools?
 - ◆ Age of child—Should child assessments include children of all ages or focus on 4- and 5-year-old children?
 - ◆ What are the options for assessing children in culturally and linguistically diverse communities and children with special needs?
- Evaluating QRIS as a market- or system-level intervention compared with a program evaluation:
 - ◆ Sampling issues—For how many providers must data be gathered to understand market impacts?
 - ◆ How can impacts on wages and prices in an entire market area be analyzed?
 - ◆ What aspects of parent knowledge, attitudes, and behavior must be understood? How should parents be sampled, in the general community or through providers?
 - ◆ How can we differentiate impact of QRIS from other factors affecting early and school-age care market? (Child Care Policy Research Consortium. 2008, April, 23–24).
- In addition to the above questions suggested by researchers, other aspects need to be considered:
 - ◆ When considering measurement of child outcomes, further attention should be paid to dosage—how long should a child be in a participating program before being included in a sample? What if the program's rating had changed over the time the child was in the program?
 - ◆ How do evaluations of the QRIS as a whole relate to evaluations of specific types of programs that participate in the QRIS, such as Head Start and Educare? This aspect addresses the issue of evaluating QRIS as a system compared with evaluating specific program models. Many types of program models participate in a QRIS.
- Acknowledging QRIS as a system is a reminder of the need to evaluate QRIS as a system alignment strategy, including the following measures:
 - ◆ Increasing participation in QRIS across various subsystems, such as child care, Head Start, prekindergarten, and early intervention
 - ◆ Increasing participation in shared planning across various subsystems by using QRIS data and benchmarks
 - ◆ Developing common data definitions and shared data
 - ◆ Increasing percentage of funding from multiple sources linked to QRIS participation
 - ◆ Reducing paperwork by sharing and coordinating fiscal and program monitoring

- ◆ Simplifying fiscal management by sharing and coordinating fiscal and program monitoring

In summary, evaluation is usually prompted by following needs:

- Is the QRIS model valid, and does it differentiate quality?
- Does the rating and monitoring process of QRIS work well?
- Do the program and practitioner supports result in improved quality?
- Are the various parts and subsystems of the early and school-age care world working to support the QRIS and benefiting from the QRIS? Are the parts of the system in alignment?
- Is the QRIS increasing the quality of care available to all parents?

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This webinar begins with an introduction to the data tools developed by INQUIRE. The tools include a comprehensive data matrix, a data dictionary, and examples of linking data with key policy questions. Each tool is described briefly with information about how it is useful to states. Next the webinar provides an in-depth description of each tool as well as state participants who can provide examples of the "real world" application of the tools.

<http://www.researchconnections.org/content/childcare/federal/inquire.html>
 - ◆ Child Trends. (2013, May 16). *Data management webinar: Best practices for producing high quality data*. Early Childhood Data: Building a Strong Foundation Webinar Series.

This webinar will provide an overview of best practices in data management. These practices promote data integrity and ensure that high quality data are available for reporting, monitoring and evaluation.

<http://www.researchconnections.org/content/childcare/federal/inquire.html>
 - ◆ Child Trends. (2013, May 6). *Data management webinar: Developing a data governance structure*. Early Childhood Data: Building a Strong Foundation Webinar Series.

This webinar reviews essential data governance structures that can be put in place to support the development of data sharing and linking.

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QRIS RESOURCE GUIDE: SECTION 8 COST PROJECTIONS AND FINANCING

Because financing for the QRIS and its various elements is critical for long-term success, initial projections and sustainability review are important parts of planning. This section addresses the issues of projecting costs based on a proposed or revised QRIS model, identifying existing resources that can be realigned to support the QRIS, and securing additional sources of funding.

Funding is a significant factor in the successful implementation of quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) and often drives the approach taken to piloting, scaling up, and crafting program and practitioner supports. Costs of QRIS vary widely, depending on the scope and scale of the programs included, the measures and frequency of rating and monitoring, and the types of program and practitioner resources utilized to support improvement.

A strategic approach to the financing and sustainability of QRIS will ensure that resources are sufficient to meet goals, and that public and private funds are maximized and leveraged effectively to support the improvement of quality over time. Clearly defining the goals of the QRIS and determining its scope, both in the short and long term, is a fundamental first step in determining costs and identifying and securing needed resources. By thinking broadly and creatively about how to effectively utilize available funding, including maximizing and leveraging varied funding sources, States will go a long way toward ensuring the sustainability of their QRIS and the programs that participate.

The information in this section is organized into six steps for developing a strategic financing plan.

- [Step One: Deciding What Needs to Be Financed](#)
- [Step Two: Projecting the Costs](#)
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Step One: Deciding What Needs to Be Financed

Considering the phases of QRIS development and implementation is helpful in thinking through funding. Some phases are time-limited while others are on-going. The following QRIS elements should be considered for funding:

- **Planning and Design:** Strategic planning and data collection to establish the initial system
- **Standards:** Research and development initially and revision at later points in time
- **Approaches to Implementation:** Pilot or phased-in approaches
- **Accountability and Monitoring:** Assessments, rating assignments, and on-going monitoring
- **Provider Support and Sustainability:** Short- and long-term program and practitioner supports, including one-time costs for attaining standards as well as on-going support for sustaining quality levels.

- **Data Collection and Evaluation:** Information technology system design, and data collection, analyses, and dissemination
- **Public Awareness:** Parent, provider, and stakeholder awareness, communication, and outreach

Step Two: Projecting the Costs

Elements to include in a cost projection

Projecting the cost of QRIS can be challenging. Projections should include estimates for planning, launching, and maintaining the initiative, as well as anticipating its growth. Projecting participation levels and utilization of support services can be particularly challenging. Data from States with longer experience operating a QRIS can be useful.

To help estimate the costs of the QRIS, the Web-based Cost Estimation Model (CEM) is a tool that addresses the essential elements of a QRIS:

1. Provider support, including professional development and technical assistance for program improvement
2. Financial incentives for programs, early and school-age care and education practitioners and consumers
3. Quality assurance, administration of the system with monitoring onsite assessments and document reviews
4. Communication and outreach
5. Data systems
6. Evaluation

The CEM can be customized to address the components of each State or locale's QRIS and can be used in several ways. The user can project the cost of a fully implemented QRIS with high participation rates, or they can change specific elements to see how different elements impact overall cost. The tool can also be used to estimate the cost of a QRIS pilot or field test by including only those elements that will be piloted and adjusting the participation rate variables to a specific number of programs. By costing out the separate elements of a QRIS, States can adjust future spending based on the effectiveness of each element. Information about how to access the CEM tool is available at <https://cemocc.icfwebservices.com/>.

The tool requires the user to establish certain assumptions, e.g., projected participation rates. Documenting these basic assumptions will help when revisiting cost projections and tracking actual expenditures. Developing simple logic models that show the basis for the key assumptions that have major cost implications may be helpful. States may want to consider the level of resources needed to ensure that the program can successfully meet expectations. In *Child-Care Quality Rating and Improvement Systems in Five Pioneer States Implementation Issues and Lessons Learned*, Zellman and Perlman (2008) note:

It is important to design the QRIS so that available funds are used in the most effective way. This requires analysis of the costs of the various components, such as ratings and coaching. If, for example, the cost of ratings is so high that it compromises other QRIS activities, it may be necessary to rethink what is being measured or find other sources of support to fund them. It is critical that sufficient incentives are available to improve quality. While early rating system ideas

in some states relied on the motivation of programs to improve, it has become increasingly apparent that improvement cannot occur without incentives and support. Providers accept risks in participating in rating systems. Those risks must be attached to real benefits. An underfunded system risks failure. (p. 55)

Other States' projected costs

The States that have been the most successful in projecting accurate costs are those with existing data systems and information resources. These can be used to project key factors such as participation rates and initial levels of quality. Systems that may provide useful data for projecting costs and participation levels include licensing databases that capture the level of compliance with regulations and professional development registries that collect staff qualifications and annual training attendance. (Information about mapping the early care and education workforce is available in the “Initial Design Process” section.) The wide range of participation levels across States is reflected in the *The Child Care Quality Rating System (QRS) Assessment: Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluation* on page 17 (Child Trends & Mathematica Policy Research, 2010).

A related approach is to project the cost to the provider of meeting criteria at each QRIS level. Doing so can illuminate the cost of improving quality – the one-time cost of moving to the next level – as well as the ongoing cost to maintain quality at a specific quality level. The Provider Cost of Quality Calculator (PCQC) is a Web-based tool that calculates the cost of quality—based on site-level provider data and estimates—to help state policymakers understand the costs associated with delivering high-quality early care and education. The tool can demonstrate whether there is a gap between the cost of providing quality services and the revenue sources available to support a program. Knowing the size of the gap at different quality levels for various provider types can inform the design of financial support and incentive packages. This analysis provides additional information to calculate needed funding for incentives such as tiered reimbursement, bonuses, quality achievement awards or quality improvement grants. The PCQC is accessible through the Office of Child Care Technical Assistance Network (CCTAN) website, at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/quality-improvement>. Additional resources on the PCQC are also available on the CCTAN website, including two issue briefs that provide examples of how specific cost drivers impact a provider's net revenue.

OREGON USES PROVIDER COST OF QUALITY CALCULATOR (PCQC) IN DESIGN OF QRIS

Oregon was one of three states selected to pilot the PCQC. They used the calculator to create scenarios and review them with various stakeholders. The process provided several key points of learning including a focus on “the few and the powerful” in terms of standards and other specific standards because of the projected fiscal impact. As a result, Oregon decided not to include Caring for our Children group size and ratio standards because of the fiscal impact. Oregon also realized the significant cost to programs to provide staff benefits as well as the fiscal value of programs participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Programs (CACFP). Oregon now plans to include the PCQC as a tool in child care administration classes.

Once cost projections are made and decisions are reached on the most important elements for which funding is available, States should develop a budget. In general, States do not maintain a separate budget for QRIS because expenditures are often embedded in the overall early care and education system, such as the child care licensing or subsidy program, professional development and technical assistance systems, child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agencies, and other services and supports. Although a review of expenditure levels in other States' QRIS provides a good starting point, each State's QRIS has different criteria and incentives. Comparisons may also lead to incorrect assumptions due to varying availability of existing resources, such as licensing and access to training or

technical assistance. Therefore, using the CEM to capture the State's unique QRIS structure and existing resources, along with the PCQC to estimate provider costs, may be a better approach to cost projections.

Minimizing the impact on the cost of care

A primary goal of the QRIS is to improve the quality of child care and other early learning and school-age programs. Assuming that higher quality has higher cost, concern has been raised that a QRIS would increase the overall cost of providing services and thus the prices charged to families. Because most child care revenues come from parent fees, child care markets are extremely price sensitive. A program's financial viability and sustainability is determined by three factors, sometimes called the 'iron triangle': revenue sufficient to cover expenses, enrollment as close to 100% as possible, and effective collection of all tuition and fees. If participation in a QRIS significantly increases costs, many providers may be unable to cover those costs solely by raising their prices.

States typically try to minimize the impact of a QRIS on the fees charged to consumers through subsidizing the increased cost of quality in two ways. They may support or offset costs of improvement tied to specific QRIS criteria, e.g., scholarships for staff to get the education required for higher standards. A second way is to cover ongoing costs of maintaining quality through financial awards such as tiered reimbursement bonuses for providers that participate in a QRIS, e.g., higher State reimbursement rates based on QRIS levels. Tiered reimbursement strategies are designed to help increase access to higher quality child care for low-income families. However, unless tiered reimbursement is structured as a "bonus" and not linked to market price, it can have the unintended consequence of driving up the price charged to nonsubsidized families and limiting participation in the QRIS, especially among providers that serve children of all income levels. This could potentially limit choices for low-income families if tiered reimbursement is the only financial incentive for a QRIS. Tiered reimbursement is likely to be more effective if it is one of several financial incentives available to providers. It is possible to structure financial incentives so that they are available to providers that serve families at all income levels but also offer special incentives for providers that serve subsidized children. (See the "Provider Incentives and Support" section for additional information and examples of financial incentives that States have developed.)

GEORGIA USES PROVIDER COST OF QUALITY CALCULATOR (PCQC) TO INFORM THEIR PLAN FOR TIERED REIMBURSEMENT

The PCQC is an online tool used to determine the financial impact to child care programs when they increase their quality as measured in a QRIS. Georgia used the calculator with a large selection of child care programs, including the large multi-site programs, who furnished financial data and participated in a large state level meeting to review the results of the PCQC work. They recommended that the state implement modest tiered reimbursement percentages that could be sustained over time and would not dramatically reduce the number of children who could receive subsidies. Their recommendations were implemented on July 1, 2013 for Quality Rated programs, with programs receiving up to a 10% bonus for the highest level, three stars. The programs reported that they felt included, informed, and instrumental in the decision-making process which led to a smooth implementation of tiered reimbursement and fostered trusting relationships between the programs and the state. Georgia plans to use the PCQC in the future as a part of the 40 hour director's training and for owners prior to them becoming licensed. Directors of three-star programs will be trained on the tool so that they can use it to mentor directors in one-star programs.

To date, research data on the relationship between QRIS and the price charged by participating providers are not available. Many factors make it difficult to correlate QRIS participation and price data, including external factors such as minimum wage increases, the supply of providers in a rate area, and local employment conditions. Nonetheless, it may be helpful for States to track price and rate changes over time, recognizing that the cost of care, market prices, and subsidy reimbursement rates are three related but distinct issues.

Step Three: Identifying Funding and Resources That May Already Be Available or Aligned With the QRIS

Many States that have implemented a QRIS have been able to align their existing quality improvement strategies with the QRIS and build on the professional development, technical assistance, quality improvement, and monitoring systems that were already in place. QRIS can become an organizing framework for focusing multiple strategies toward an accountability structure that could include all early care and education services.

Using the QRIS as a tool for alignment and system reform requires careful planning. (See the “Initial Design Process” section for additional information.) Reaching the long-term goal of system reform is likely to occur over time as opportunities arise to restructure program administration and funding. Also, aligning resources and programs, such as licensing and CCR&R, may require changes in regulations or contracts, actions that cannot be immediately implemented.

The first step is to identify all existing resources and activities, such as professional development, technical assistance, monitoring, data collection/tracking, communication, etc., that currently support functions or activities included in the QRIS. This review should include resources for infant/toddler, school-age, and special needs care that may indirectly support the overall system and may also help identify gaps in resources. Resources may exist in several different state agencies. Many States have been intentional in making the changes needed to link these existing resources and activities to QRIS. While this step can sometimes be implemented via Memoranda of Understanding or other agreements, in some cases this step may require revised job descriptions or administrative structures, legislation, new regulations, amendments to rate or contract policy, new or revised responsibilities with contractors, etc.

QUALITYSTARSNY: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALIGNMENT OF CURRENT RESOURCES

In 2010, the NYS Early Childhood Advisory Council commissioned a short-term project to identify current resources (state and federal) to support early care and education, through outreach to parents, technical assistance to programs and professional development for staff. The intent was to paint a picture at a point in time of resources that might be aligned with NY’s QRIS, **QUALITYstarsNY**. Appropriate websites for state agencies and programs were reviewed, and interviews were conducted with 30 individuals. In addition to providing information about resources, the interviews were an opportunity to increase visibility of the QRIS among a key constituency, state agency leaders and their contractors, and a chance to further engage them in the larger initiative of the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) and specifically its quality improvement work. Additional information on this project, including a copy of the survey and results, can be found at

http://www.ccf.ny.gov/ECAC/WG/Quality/Resources/QSNY_FundingAlign.pdf.

In addition, there are efficiencies that can be realized by linking with other resources. Creating online applications and importing data from a professional development registry and from a licensing database reduces the time it takes staff to collect information and assess the provider’s compliance with criteria. (See the Accountability and Monitoring section for additional information.) Some States accept monitoring and/or onsite assessments completed by other systems, e.g., using CLASS scores from Head Start classrooms, etc. This has implications for financing in that efficiencies can reduce the scope of what needs to be financed.

As part of an analysis of resources, there may be existing programs and activities that can be eliminated or that may become redundant once the QRIS is in place. Funding for eliminated items can then be redirected to support the QRIS, although this action may necessitate significant involvement of key stakeholders and administrators to garner needed support and commitment to use funding in new ways.

QRIS offers States the opportunity to ensure that funding currently allocated to early and school-age care and education quality improvement is spent wisely. If used as a systematic framework for financing and measuring quality, QRIS offers many opportunities to maximize existing resources and promote accountability for results.

NORTH CAROLINA BUSINESS REDESIGN AND FUNDING REALIGNMENT

The absence of a designated allocation for a QRIS forced the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education to redesign existing functions in order to implement its QRIS as a **Star Rated License**, an expansion of its existing licensing system. Existing systems and processes—licensing monitoring, staff qualification checks, automation, and the Web site—were reviewed to determine how to expand or revise them to include the onsite evaluation of child care programs. Automation helped licensing staff to manage monitoring of the expanded regulations for ratings. Agency staff who were managing the voluntary credentialing process and trainer approval process were redirected to the new streamlined staff qualifications assessments. North Carolina found that it was more effective to integrate the QRIS into the existing licensing process than create new positions or units that worked on the rating system only. Using redirected quality funds, the State contracted with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to complete the environment rating scale (ERS) assessments to ensure the objectivity of the assessments. Cost savings were realized by performing complete rating assessments, including the ERS, once every 3 years, unless a program fails its annual monitoring of rating maintenance. Additional cost savings were achieved by putting some limitations on the ERS assessments—only one-third of classrooms and programs that could meet the other three Star standards were assessed. Additional information is available at http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr_sn2_ov_sr.asp

Step Four: Exploring Potential Sources of Funding to Fill the Gaps

Once funding needs are identified, States should seek new or unobligated funding sources that could be tapped to support the QRIS. American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) funds were used in several States to move their QRIS effort forward. The 4-year design phase of **New York's** QRIS was accomplished with private foundation support and the volunteer efforts of hundreds of individuals. The field test of QUALITYstarsNY, which began in July 2009, was supported by funds from the ARRA and several private foundations. Implementation is being funded with federal funds via the State Early Childhood Advisory Council and Race to the Top (K-12).

The most common source of funding for QRIS is the Federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), with all but one State relying on this revenue source. Other possible sources include Federal funds from:

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- Social Security Block Grant
- Head Start
- Title IVB Child and Family Services
- Part B and Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- U.S. Department of Education grants such as Early Learning Challenge
- State general funds and dedicated State funding from tobacco settlement funds, so-called 'sin' taxes or lotteries
- Local government revenues
- Private sources, including business and philanthropic contributions

States may also be able to tap workforce development dollars or funds designed for special populations and initiatives (e.g., Native Americans, rural providers) to fund specific outreach to underserved communities or to expand the scope of programs included. Federal education funding is becoming more inclusive of early care and education and systems building initiatives such as a QRIS; examples may be found on the U.S. Department of Education's Early Learning Website (<http://www.ed.gov/early-learning>) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Early Childhood Development Website (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd>).

FUNDING SUPPORT FOR NEW YORK'S FIELD TEST

The field test was largely supported by funds made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. In 2010, the State Education Department (SED) committed the use of \$4 million of its Race to the Top funding to support **QUALITYstarsNY**. SED prioritized implementation in high-needs school districts containing Persistently Lowest Achieving Schools. The Early Childhood Advisory Council provides funding support towards the implementation of **QUALITYstarsNY** and provides implementation oversight. The State Office of Children and Family Services awards up to \$500,000 annually to support the professional development activities of **QUALITYstarsNY** participants. Each site creates a Quality Improvement Plan that outlines improvement activities. All funding requests are approved and monitored by the participating site's Quality Improvement Specialist.

Before exploring charitable and business support, the State may need to identify a partner that can solicit and receive private funding for this purpose. State governments often do not have mechanisms in place to receive private funding. Also, funders have their own applicant guidelines to, in part, allow them to address tax issues related to charitable giving.

MINNESOTA LEVERAGES PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDING

In addition to public funding from Minnesota's Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Grant and federal Child Care Development Funds, the evaluation for **Parent Aware**, Minnesota's QRIS, is funded by Parent Aware for School Readiness, a business-leader-led private nonprofit and the Greater Twin Cities United Way. In addition to funding the evaluation, both entities fund other significant Parent Aware efforts. Parent Aware for School Readiness markets ratings to parents and providers statewide. Greater Twin Cities United Way also supports the Accreditation Facilitation Project which is supporting 350 child care centers in the nine-county metro area in becoming both accredited and Parent Aware rated.

Step Five: Preparing a Strategy for Securing the Needed Funding

Key ingredients to this planning process include a long-range goal, a plan for incremental steps toward reaching the goal, and a lot of flexibility. Obtaining funding is often about seizing opportunities and does not always follow a logical plan. It may be possible, for example, to make great strides in linking the QRIS to one particular funding stream, such as child care subsidy. But it may take much longer to access dollars from another source, such as the State-funded prekindergarten or Head Start program in which many decisions are locally controlled. Or, it may be possible to secure financial incentives for a particular group of providers early on, and then work to extend these supports to all participants. (See the "Approaches to Implementation" section for information on the use of a phased-in approach when full funding is not available.) Regardless of the timeline, it is helpful to have a roadmap of potential resources and a strategy for securing them, so that opportunities are identified as they arise. (Also see the "Public Awareness" section for information about building support among other stakeholders.)

TAX CREDIT ENCOURAGES BUSINESS CONTRIBUTIONS IN LOUISIANA

In addition to giving tax credits to families, teachers, and directors, the Louisiana School Readiness Tax Credit provides an incentive for businesses to make contributions to child care. Businesses that construct, renovate, or expand a child care center, purchase equipment for a center, maintain or operate a center, or subsidize child care for their employees can receive a tax credit, the amount of which is based on the star rating of the center. Businesses may also receive a tax credit for donations made to CCR&R agencies that provide technical assistance for programs that improve their **Quality Start** QRIS star status. Additional information is available at <http://www.qrslouisiana.org/businesses>.

LEVERAGING THE SUPPORT OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN VIRGINIA

A pilot site in Virginia's **Star Quality Initiative**, Smart Beginnings South Hampton Roads, leveraged financial support from the private sector. Although the State funded trainings for local "raters" and "mentors," South Hampton Roads leaders were responsible for accessing additional funds to support the local system. The Hampton Roads Community Foundation provided more than \$1 million over a 2-year period for implementation in child care centers in the region. The Batten Educational Achievement Fund of the Hampton Roads Community Foundation supported teacher scholarships and education for staff in participating centers. To leverage additional funding, Smart Beginnings South Hampton Roads encouraged businesses to participate in an "Adopt a Center" program, where their contributions paid for one program's participation in the QRIS.

The Finance Project has developed a series of tools and resources to assist States in both identifying and sustaining funding. In the resource *Thinking Broadly: Financing Strategies for Comprehensive Child and Family Initiatives* (Hayes 2002), the author identifies five strategies that can help State or local leaders think broadly and strategically when developing financing strategies for long-term QRIS funding:

1. **Make Better Use of Existing Resources**—Coordinate existing resources that support quality improvement for early and school-age care and education programs. This helps build an efficient service delivery strategy that reduces administrative costs.
2. **Maximize Federal and State Revenue**—Track and draw down the full range of available funds that can support a QRIS. This includes using a mix of Federal, State, local, and private dollars to fully leverage available funding.
3. **Create More Flexibility in Existing Categorical Funding Streams**—Consider strategies to pool or align uses of categorical funding streams. Develop memorandums of understanding or other mechanisms to facilitate blending and braiding of funding streams while ensuring fiscal integrity (and audit requirements) of each funding stream.
4. **Build Public-Private Partnerships**—Partner with a range of stakeholders in the governance and funding of a QRIS. Engage private funders in leveraging Federal or State dollars or for targeted investments in specific elements of the QRIS or for implementation in selected communities.
5. **Create New Dedicated Revenue Streams**—Engage stakeholders and develop long-range plans to create new revenue through ballot initiatives, special fees, or taxes. Dedicate this new revenue to the sustainability of the QRIS.

The document can be found at <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/ThinkingBroadly.pdf>

A topical learning table sponsored by the Office of Child Care's National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement included four webinars and many resource materials on the topic of Financing QRIS. Presentations by Anne Mitchell and Louise Stoney of the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance and Debi Mathias of the BUILD National Learning Network as well as multiple resources for each webinar can be viewed at <http://qrisnetwork.org/FinancingQRIS>.

Step Six: Analyzing Costs and Expenditures Annually

Tracking expenditure levels over time

As participation in the QRIS grows and providers are able to move to higher levels, ongoing tracking and analysis of administrative expenditures is needed to ensure the best utilization of fiscal resources. Creating itemized budgets with expenditures by QRIS element and analyzing expenditures over time may yield significant information to support future budget planning. A good place to begin is with the underlying assumptions that were used to create the budget, e.g., participation rates, utilization of incentives. Were those assumptions valid? Analyzing monthly expenditures over time can also offer insights such as if program costs increased following an expansion of outreach efforts. This analysis can assist in determining if the expense of that program element, e.g., consumer awareness, is justified. Are there other elements that yield more impact for less money? In an environment of limited resources, it is essential to steer investments to the most productive initiatives. A thorough knowledge of the financial performance of the program will also be helpful when persuading policymakers to continue to support the initiative.

Sustaining funding levels

Sustained funding is necessary to ensure continued success of the program. The CEM can again be used to project administrative costs over the next several years and allow time to build support for increased resources.

Leaders may also want to engage early care and education service providers in sustainability planning, including an exploration of business models and strategies to attain greater economies of scale. Many early and school-age care programs operate on weak business platforms and are led by individuals with limited skills in fiscal management and, all too often, no time to focus on the business side of their work. Many early care and education programs rely on multiple funding streams, some of a short-term nature, as well as parent fees. Effectively managing the Iron Triangle, especially staying fully enrolled in a recession economy, is challenging but often essential to sustainability. For more information, a document called *The Iron Triangle: A Simple Formula for Financial Policy in ECE Programs* is available at http://www.earlychildhoodfinance.org/downloads/2010/IronTriangle_10.2010.pdf. Given the mixed delivery system of programs that may be involved in the QRIS, including publicly funded and private (for-profit and nonprofit) organizations, providing guidance and support for the business practices of program leaders as well as helping them learn more about ways they can forge shared services is essential to ensuring a good "return on the investment" in QRIS. Many States and programs are accessing a new platform, ECE Shared Resources, an initiative to improve quality, share learning and reduce costs among providers through the sharing of practical tools, available at <http://national.ecesharedresources.net/index>.

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QRIS RESOURCE GUIDE: SECTION 9 CONSUMER EDUCATION

Assisting parents in understanding, choosing, and evaluating early and school-age care and education programs is one of the primary reasons States create a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). For a system to be successful, however, messages should be designed for various audiences to promote its value to a wide range of stakeholders. This section addresses a variety of strategies for reaching parents, consumers, and providers, as well as building support among policymakers, State and community leaders, and funders.

In *Stair Steps to Quality*, Mitchell (2005) notes:

“Not everyone will see the inherent benefits of QRS. Some may oppose QRS due to ideological concerns, which frequently include the belief that child care minimizes the role of parents. A strategy employed by supporters of QRS is listening to concerns, seeking common ground based on what is good for children, and responding with facts that explain why the QRS is being developed. Research on program quality is often part of the explanation, along with affirmation that parents are children’s first teachers and that many children are in out-of home programs because their parents work” (p. 18).

Reaching Parents and Consumers

QRIS provide a framework for educating parents about the importance of quality in early care and education. Providers may be more likely to participate in QRIS when parents begin to value the rating process and ask about the QRIS rating when choosing child care.

Factors influencing parent choice

A body of evidence suggests that the quality of early care and education services across the Nation often falls below “good” on Environment Rating Scale assessments, with an alarming number of programs rated as “inadequate” and potentially harmful to children’s development. However, 96 percent of parents believe that all child care providers offer learning opportunities for children, and 78 percent believe that all providers are trained in child development before working with children (National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, 2009). Parents are often unaware of or do not understand the factors that indicate quality, and they are not familiar with their State’s licensing requirements. Others may be unwilling to acknowledge that their child is not receiving high-quality care. In addition, low literacy levels and limited English proficiency may also be barriers to accessing information. The Center for Law and Social Policy has several reports on meeting the needs of young children of immigrants and families with limited English proficiency. Additional information is available at <http://www.clasp.org/issues/child-care-and-early-education/topics/cultural-competency>.

In a November 2008 poll, parents identified safety, a learning environment with trained teachers, and cost as the three most important factors when choosing child care (National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, 2009). Earlier studies reflect that parents care about health and safety, how children get along with each other and with adults, opportunities for learning, the personality of the staff, and the program philosophy (Mitchell, 2005). Although it is important to educate parents on research-based quality criteria, using terms that reflect what parents in specific States understand and value will make the QRIS more meaningful to them.

A February 2011 brief entitled *Understanding Parents' Child Care Decision-Making: A Foundation for Child Care Policy Making*, provides a graphic to illustrate a complex decision-making process shaped by parent and child characteristics, parent values, beliefs, and preferences, community and employment characteristics as well as a set of opportunities, constraints and barriers (Weber, 2011). The report also notes that "Parental employment and family and child well-being outcomes flow from the decision-making process, but child care decisions are seldom one-time occurrences. For example, parents change jobs, or employers change work schedules. Children outgrow arrangements, or parents decide that arrangements are not good for children. Changes in child care subsidy policies or relatively small changes in earnings can make a family ineligible or reduce the benefit amount" (p. 7). Child care decisions must often be made quickly, making ready access to information even more important. The full brief is available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/resource/understanding-parents-child-care-decision-making-a-foundation-for-child>.

MINNESOTA STUDIES PARENT CHOICES

Parent Aware for School Readiness (PASR) sponsors a Parent Aware Ratings campaign including radio, online, TV and neighborhood ads that drive consumers to parentawareratings.org. A 2013 random sample survey of Minnesota parents of 0-5 year olds found that:

- 61 percent of parents who recall the ads say the ads "made them stop and think about the need to have pre-kindergarten children in stimulating learning environments"
- 72 percent of parents who can recall the ads agreed that "all parents should be asking questions about a child care provider's Parent Aware Rating"
- 78 percent of Minnesota parents of young children who recall the ads say that if all other things are equal, they would choose a rated provider over an unrated one, while only 4 percent would choose an unrated provider.

More information is available at <http://www.pasrmn.org/>

ARIZONA PARENT SURVEY

The *Arizona Child Care Demand Study* (2012) is a large-scale, survey-based research project, designed to find out when and why Arizona parents use child care; how they make child care decisions; and what they think about the quality, cost and accessibility of early care and education programs in their communities.

First Things First commissioned a team of researchers from the University of Arizona, Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University to conduct detailed interviews of more than 1,300 parents from across the state, asking them about the early care and education arrangements they have made, or wish they could make, for their kids. The full study is available at <http://www.aztf.gov/WhoWeAre/Board/Documents/FTF-ChildCareReport.pdf>. Additional information is available at <http://qualityfirstaz.gov/parents-and-families/quality-first/>.

In addition, new work being done by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation using behavioral economics is underway to learn how insights and tools from behavioral science can be used to communicate the value of quality child care. Using behavioral science, researchers are working to identify what factors shape parents' decisions, as well as what interferes with decision making, and hope to use the information to inform effective outreach and communication strategies to increase the number of parents seeking quality child care, as indicated by quality rating and improvement systems.

Educating the public and parents about the rating system

Most QRIS award easily recognizable symbols, such as stars, to programs to indicate the levels of quality. Most people understand a rating system with stars because of its use with the hotel and restaurant industries, e.g., five-star hotel. An early and school-age care and education program's voluntary participation in the system should be viewed as a commitment to quality improvement. Parents need to understand that even ratings at the lower levels mean that the program has exceeded minimum requirements. Although the name given to a rating system cannot fully convey its purpose, the marketing campaign will be more relevant and compelling if the name is easily understood. Examples of names given to State QRIS are available in the NCCCQI (2013) document *QRIS Definition and Statewide Systems* at https://occqrisguide.icfwebservices.com/files/QRIS_Definition.pdf.

Of the seven states that identified funding dedicated to QRIS outreach and marketing in the *Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations* survey (Child Trends & Mathematica Policy Research, 2010), **Indiana** reported that they spent \$100,000 per year on marketing while others reported spending a percentage of their QRIS budget (**Pennsylvania** < 0.5 percent, **New Mexico** < 1 percent, **Vermont** 1 percent, **Ohio** 2 percent, **Iowa** less than 5 percent, **Minnesota** 10 percent).

Easy and widespread access to information on ratings is essential. States typically send providers that participate in QRIS a certificate that indicates the quality level they have attained; providers may choose whether to display this document. Some States include the rating on the license even if the QRIS is not part of the license itself (rated license) as a way to increase its visibility. An example of a rated license is available on **North Carolina's** Web site at http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/parents/pr_sn2_sl.asp.

The following list summarizes some strategies that States have used to increase initial awareness among consumers:

- **Public service announcements or paid advertisements**—People with public relations expertise can help craft the best message and identify the best stations and times of day to reach the intended audience. The use of non-written materials, such as television and radio announcements, can be especially helpful for families with low literacy levels and limited English proficiency. Tennessee succeeded in getting TV stations in the State's four major media markets to run a weekly feature announcing the results of programs that were rated. Media outlets in Ohio including Time Warner agreed to run a Step Up to Quality public service announcement free of charge.
- **Brochures and posters**—Materials about the importance of choosing quality care for children and how the rating can help with that choice can be shared at libraries, pediatrician's offices, employment offices, social service and health agencies, places of worship, and other locations where parents go. Many hospitals provide a packet of information to parents after the birth of their child, and they could include information on child care and QRIS. It is important that these materials provide a simple, compelling message.
- **Billboards**—Although expensive, billboards can be a very successful way to reach both families and the public at large to remind them of the State's commitment to early education. In metro areas, bus placards are also a highly visible approach.
- **Service providers**—Providers that could share information include child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agencies, the State child care licensing agency, the agency that authorizes child care subsidy or other benefit programs, home visitors, early intervention resource managers, and pediatricians. When possible, educating these messengers will help them feel comfortable with the message and support it.
- **Electronically distributed news releases**—State agencies often have access to a network of State newspapers. News releases should include contact people with the local licensing or CCR&R agency that can provide community statistics or recommend people to interview. Providers can be given a template that they can submit to the local newspaper with announcements about their ratings. A county

newspaper in Kentucky published the ratings of child care providers and the number of children served by each provider.

- **Magazines**—Periodicals read by parents can feature articles on choosing child care. A Denver magazine featured a front-page article on Colorado’s Qualistar Early Learning ratings, causing calls to Qualistar to increase from 300 to 15,000 calls that month.
- **Web site listings**—Listings on Web sites can prominently display the QRIS level of providers to help parents identify quality child care. Web bloggers, especially those connected to Web sites frequented by parents, can be key messengers for similar information.
- **Videos**—Many States have developed videos that describe their QRIS or what to look for in quality child care. These are typically posted on Web sites, are available on social media sites such as YouTube or Facebook, or are shared in a variety of settings including provider trainings and other public events.
- **Social Media**—Facebook, Twitter, texting, and smart phone apps are growing mechanisms for communicating to a wide audience, and they are increasingly the preferred method of communication among young parents. Many CCR&Rs and some State agencies have Facebook pages and Twitter pages, and several States are developing smart phone apps for child care searches. Child Care Aware of America has an app called Child Care Finder where parents can search for child care in their area. These can be used to share rating information as well.

DELAWARE FAMILY FRIENDLY WEB SITE AND STAKEHOLDER E-NEWS

Delaware’s created a new family-friendly website, address below. This website includes a wealth of information for parents on topics including the Delaware Stars program, why quality matters, early brain development, and early learning at home. As part of the effort to drive families to the website as well as Facebook and Twitter, the Office of Early Learning recently ran a promotion through a contest that invited the public to visit the website, like their Facebook page, and follow them on Twitter. A simple sign-up entered participants in a weekly random drawing for a family fun pack, where they could win gift cards to movies, bowling, activity centers or museums, with multiple winners in each county. In just the first 5 weeks, more than 150 people entered and more than 40 family fun packs were awarded. In one month, traffic to the website more than doubled—with 5000 unique visitors during the campaign. In addition, the Office of Early Learning publishes a monthly electronic newsletter for a variety of audiences including providers and parents. Content includes the names of programs awarded 3, 4, or 5 stars, updates on Delaware’s early childhood work, practice tips using the Delaware Early Learning Foundations (state early learning guidelines), profiles of local leaders in ECE, and summaries of recent policy and research trends. Early Childhood programs participating in Delaware Stars receive marketing materials to help them communicate with the families they serve and those they hope to serve in the future and the Office of Early Learning has created a promotional guide for them along with an ever-green calendar with activities to spur understanding and support for Stars that families can engage in the program.

<http://www.greatstartsdelaware.com/index.html>

KENTUCKY HAS AN APP FOR THAT

Kentucky has two (2) portals available for assistance in locating STARS rated programs.

- The Division of Child Care’s Kentucky Integrated Child Care System (“KICCS” Portal) helps parents find STARS-Rated Centers in their area searching by county or find their child’s current center’s STARS rated at <https://ssoexternal.chfs.ky.gov/adfs/ls/?wa=wsignin1.0&wtrealm=http%3a%2f%2fssointernal.chfs.ky.gov%2fadfs%2fservices%2ftrust&wctx=d372f0a2-8152-444a-a81d-3b95b1c01e69&wct=2015-02-20T17%3a55%3a58Z&rp-realm=https://kog.chfs.ky.gov%2fhome%2f>.
- *Kids Matter* is a smart phone app for finding child care in Kentucky. Users are able to search for a subsidy eligibility specialist or a child care program, and the app includes a child care checklist, an “ask the experts” feature, and links to additional resources.

MARYLAND QRIS MARKETING VIDEO

Maryland developed a marketing video for a variety of audiences - early childhood and school-age programs, families choosing child care or early education for their children and for community/public awareness. The video was released six weeks ahead of the QRIS opening for statewide participation to draw attention to the initiative and the importance of high quality programs for children. The video was distributed to their agency’s public relations office where it will be featured on their Facebook page and Twitter feed. Partners were asked to add it to their websites and distribute it further to their associations, resource and referral networks, other state agencies, and partners.

<http://marylandexcels.org/output/media.php?id=238651&type=Movie>

FAMILY BROCHURE AND WEB SITE

QUALITYstarsNY has a dedicated website that contains information on all aspects of the project including the program standards and quality improvement strategies.

A general program brochure was created in 2011 to provide information on the QRIS. In 2013, a family brochure was developed to relay information about QUALITYstarsNY, tips on choosing a high-quality program, and ways to work with teachers to enhance a child’s experience in the classroom. Brochures are disseminated to partner agencies and participating programs. A Web site also is in development that will provide additional resources to families, including those who have children with special needs. More information can be found at <http://qualitystarsny.org/parents-home.php>.

NORTH CAROLINA'S MARKETING TO MULTIPLE AUDIENCES

North Carolina felt that the success of its Star Rated License system would be evidenced by high participation rates resulting from the providers' sense of ownership of the system and consumer demand. The State created a low-cost, high-impact marketing campaign with the following activities:

- Used the Web site to keep providers and parents informed.
- Developed a Web-based tool that allows parents to search for child care by rating and provides them with detailed program information. http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr_sn2_ov_sr.asp
- Distributed thousands of posters, in English and Spanish, with attractive pictures and simple statements, such as "Is your child care as great as your child?—Demand the stars."
- Distributed materials on the rated license, including business cards and postcards with the Web address; distribution was through local partners, e.g., Smart Start partnerships, CCR&R agencies, health departments, departments of social services, libraries, human resource offices of businesses, offices of obstetricians and pediatricians.
- Participated in partner-sponsored Star meetings for providers to give them an opportunity to learn about QRIS and begin the application process.
- Gave providers press release templates along with their Star license to make it easy for them to send information to their local newspapers. Arranged for local partners, on an ongoing basis for the first year, to host local media events when a group of programs in their area received their star ratings.
- Arranged for the Governor to visit the first program to receive 15 out of 15 points, and provided additional press coverage for this accomplishment.
- Distributed monthly letters to legislators that listed programs in their area that had earned the Star license and a template for sending a congratulatory letter to the program.

BRIGHTSTARS RHODE ISLAND TWITTER FEED

Rhode Island's **BrightStars** QRIS uses Twitter to share information with a variety of audiences. Followers of the feed can get information about grant opportunities for child care providers, family friendly community events, professional development opportunities, recalls, and names of programs that have joined BrightStars. To see or follow the Twitter feed, go to <https://twitter.com/BrightStarsRI>

WISCONSIN'S YOUNGSTAR MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Wisconsin's media campaign for its **YoungStar** QRIS included a press release, billboards, and radio spots aimed at parents with young children. In addition, full city buses were covered with the content from the billboards. <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/media.htm>

Determining the best time to launch an awareness campaign aimed at families deserves thoughtful consideration. Early in the program, it is important to build an understanding of the QRIS and encourage parents to seek providers with a higher rating. As a note of caution, parents may become frustrated and concerned for their child's well-being if they cannot find providers with higher ratings. This disappointment may be lessened if a measure of accessibility is set, e.g., a percentage of programs participating or

participation levels by county, before launching a marketing campaign. **Rhode Island** decided to delay the launch of its parent outreach campaign until 20 percent of the licensed centers in the State participated in the initiative.

OKLAHOMA'S PUBLIC AWARENESS STRATEGIES

Oklahoma delayed the launch of its **Reaching for the Stars** public awareness campaign for parents until most counties had a program above the One-Star level. To inform parents, the State used television and radio public service announcements, advertisements before movies in theatres, brochures and posters in many public places, and billboards. When child care providers attained a higher level, they were given a certificate, window decal, and newspaper article template to submit to their local newspaper. Some licensing staff loaned them yard signs and banners to proclaim their achievement. Providers' Star status is clearly displayed when a parent uses the on-line Child Care Locator to obtain a list of licensed facilities at <http://www.okdhs.org/programsandservices/cc/prnts/docs/cclupdates.htm>. For providers, all staff received a lapel pin reflecting their program's star status, and they were recognized at early childhood State conferences.

Incentives for parents to choose higher rated providers

Experience from other fields suggests that financial incentives can help change consumer behavior. Several States are experimenting with this approach and creating consumer-based incentives linked to QRIS. Several years ago **Maine** doubled the State dependent care tax credit for parents who used an early childhood program that was at Step 4 of the State's Quality for ME initiative. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this financial incentive increased the number of parents who inquired about quality, which subsequently increased the number of providers participating in accreditation facilitation projects and career development in early and school-age care and education. In 2007, the **Louisiana** legislature passed a package of School Readiness Tax Credits (SRTC) linked to Quality Start, the Louisiana QRIS. The package, which took effect on January 1, 2008, includes a refundable State dependent care tax credit for families with children younger than age 6. The value of the credit increases based on the star rating of the center the child attends. Additional information about Louisiana's tax credits is available in the "Provider Incentives and Support" section. Several States that received Race to the Top—ELC funding have proposed a reduced co-payment for families that choose providers at higher quality levels.

Providing information about the ratings to parents and the public on an ongoing basis

The challenge of every marketing campaign is that customers generally do not pay attention to information unless it is something that is meaningful to them at the time. Promotional and educational efforts, therefore, must be ongoing or repeated periodically. Parents with a child already in child care should be encouraged to ask about their program's QRIS level. The cultural and linguistic diversity of families requires that information be available in many languages and formats.

In addition to the strategies listed previously, most States post QRIS ratings on the Internet. QRIS Web sites can be a very effective way to disseminate information to consumers, funders, and providers; however, the Web sites need to be easily accessed, attractively designed, easy to navigate, and kept up-to-date with the most current information. States can provide information in multiple languages over the Internet, which is a growing source of information for all families. In some States, parents can choose to sort and view programs based on their QRIS level.

The following are examples of States that have information on their QRIS Web sites specifically for parents:

- **Arizona:** <http://www.qualityfirstaz.com/parents-and-families/>;
- **Colorado:** <http://www.qualistar.org/family-resources.html>;
- **Kentucky:** <http://chfs.ky.gov/dcbs/dcc/stars/starsparentinfo.htm>;
- **Minnesota:** <http://parentawareratings.org/parent-resources>;
- **Nevada:** <https://sites.google.com/site/nvsilverstatestars/home/parents-families>;
- **New Mexico:** https://www.newmexicokids.org/content/parents_and_families/;
- **New York:** <http://qualitystarsny.org/parents-home.php>;
- **Pennsylvania:** http://www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Programs_STARS_Families;
- **Rhode Island:** <http://www.brightstars.org/parents/>;
- **Vermont:** <http://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/stars/>;
- **Washington:** <http://www.del.wa.gov/care/qrif/families.aspx>; and
- **Wisconsin:** <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/parents.htm>.

CCR&R agencies can be encouraged to include QRIS information in their referral database and distribute QRIS information to parents.

COLORADO HELPS PARENTS USE QRIS RATINGS TO CHOOSE A PROGRAM

Colorado's **Qualistar** Early Learning Web site allows parents to view Qualistar-rated early childhood programs' Early Learning Report, a summary that describes how the program scored in each of the five quality components of the Qualistar rating as well as the overall star rating. The five components include learning environment, family partnerships, training and education, adult to child ratios and group size, and accreditation. A parent resource, "Working Your Way Through the Child Care Maze" provides information about choosing quality child care and more details on understanding the Quality Rating and Improvement System and the components listed above. More information on Qualistar can be found at <http://www.qualistar.org/the-qualistar-rating.html>. Denver parents that are seeking a preschool program for their 4-year old can search for providers by star level and location and read a program description at <http://www.dpp.org/>.

LOUISIANA PARENT BROCHURE

Louisiana has a brochure geared toward parents that explains its **Quality Start** ratings program. It includes information on why programs participate, what the ratings mean, and why to choose a Quality Start center. A copy of the brochure can be found here: <http://www.qrsloisiana.org/assets/files/Parents%20Brochure.pdf>.

NEW MEXICO'S WEB PAGE HELPFUL TO PARENTS

At the New Mexico Kids Web site, a brief summary of **Look for the STARS** describes the quality standards, and a Parent's Guide to Selecting Quality Child Care includes additional information on Look for the STARS. A listing of child care providers includes the STAR status. The Web site also has links to other important information for parents including child care assistance, health resources and recalls of children's products. The Web site can be viewed at <http://newmexicokids.org/>.

Several public and private agencies, such as the State licensing and child care subsidy agencies, CCR&R agencies, and community service providers, may have a role to play in ensuring that parents

have up-to-date information on QRIS. It is helpful for States to have a mechanism that various partner agencies can use to communicate their approaches to information sharing.

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