



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.

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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.

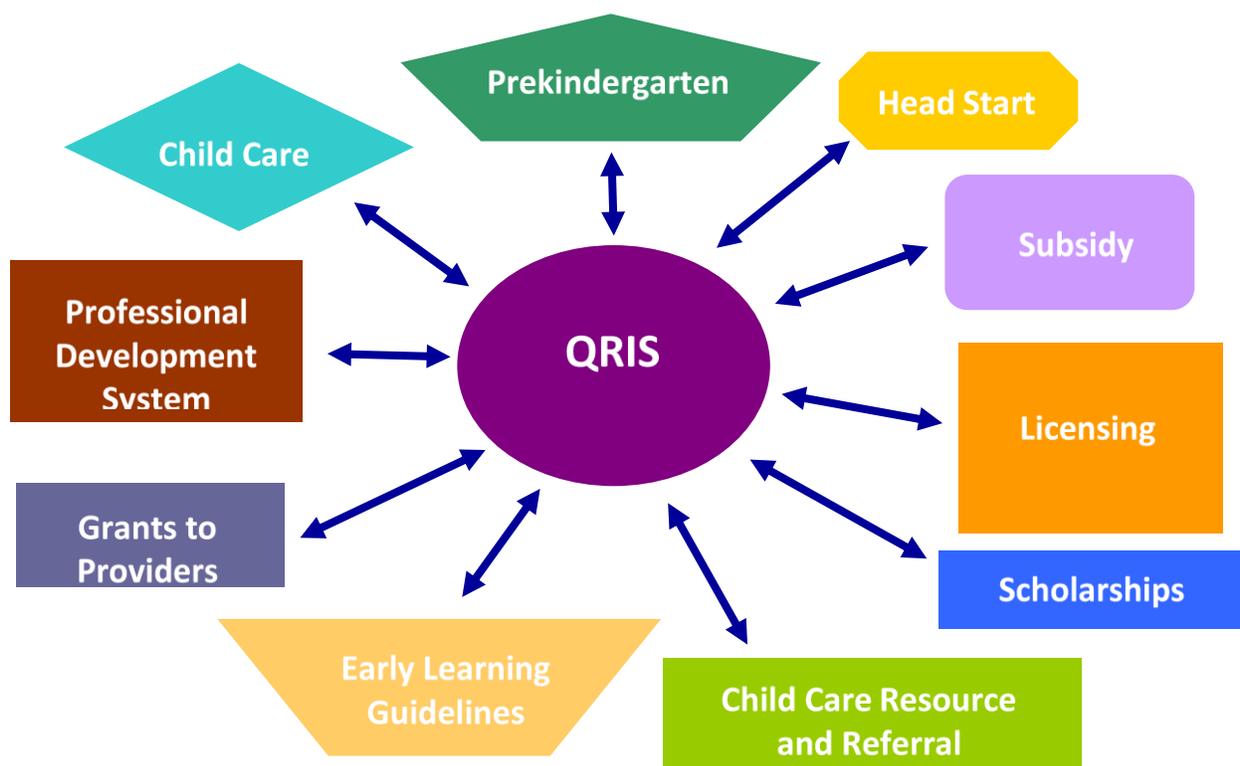
Many States develop a QRIS vision and goals with an initial focus on early care and education programs. Later, some States begin developing QRIS standards for school-age programs. At that point, a review of the vision and goals with school-age stakeholders may help ensure that the expanded scope of the 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://qrisguide.acf.hhs.gov/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.state.nj.us/education/ece/njcyc/plan/201415.pdf>.

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.excelebrateillinoisproviders.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-qr/s/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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