

## Quality Rating and Improvement Systems

We know from both current research and day-to-day experience with children that the quality of child care is critical for a child's growth and development. But how do we measure, maintain and reward high-quality programs?

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) are a recent trend as states work to build early care and education infrastructure. In these systems, child care programs are assessed based on a set of criteria and assigned a rating level. Parents can make choices based on this information. The best QRIS initiatives begin by involving knowledgeable, high-quality providers in establishing the criteria and rating levels, and a system for moving up the levels. Sound QRIS initiatives are fully funded and have knowledgeable staff to back them up; incentives to participate; support to make improvements and achieve higher quality levels over time; and rewards for reaching higher levels.

### What Our Members Say

"The incentives and rewards make this worth it. But, the rewards have to cover the increased costs of higher quality. An extra \$10 if the cost to meet the new requirement is \$20, is a problem."

### What Our Members Say

"We're hindering innovation by forcing programs into checkboxes."

Provider buy-in is critical to the success of these initiatives. A "rating" alone will not bring the quality improvement we seek. This is not just about advertising. ECEC members know – and research in the field confirms – parents are primarily concerned with location, price, perception of quality, and interactions with children, and may be less concerned with the number of stars over the door. In time, with incentives and rewards, this market-based approach to competition should take hold. Parents will choose quality, actually *get* quality, and other providers will need to keep up – and with appropriate supports, will be able to improve.

In moving through the QRIS process, there should be multiple pathways for success and achievement. Rigid requirements can be a problem, like a single accreditation model or single evaluation model, or education levels that cannot be obtained because the state lacks the capacity to provide the classes necessary. All of these issues must be considered in the development of a QRIS. ECEC members have been involved in this process in numerous states, helping to determine common ground and appropriate goals.

### Recommendations for Successful Quality Rating and Improvement Systems:

- Funds should be appropriated to fully staff the infrastructure of a QRIS, including technical assistance, staff, assessments, grants, and rewards.
  - Technical assistance should come from trained early childhood professionals, including child care resource and referral agencies.

- Technical assistance should be supportive, not punitive, and should be asset-based. It is teaching, not scoring.
- QRIS should be voluntary and complemented by a consumer education effort.
- QRIS should be funded to support the achievement of higher levels of quality.
  - States should provide grants, awards, and bonuses as incentives for programs to reach higher quality levels.
  - States should use tiered reimbursement – higher levels of reimbursement for higher levels of quality – to assure that the added cost of quality is met and the higher quality level can be maintained.
- When rating levels include different educational requirements for teachers, there must be a realistic timeline for meeting those requirements, and adequate educational opportunities.
- QRIS should be predicated on multiple pathways to achieving higher ratings.
  - States should consider accreditation as one of the possible factors for the highest rating, and consider an initial entry rating with compliance with licensing.
  - The rating system should require a developmentally appropriate curriculum that addresses each domain including cognitive, physical, social and emotional.
  - Programs should receive credit for providing benefits to staff (for instance, paid time off, child care discounts, tuition reimbursement, and health insurance).

