

A count for quality: Child care center directors on rating and improvement systems ^[1]

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Source: CLASP

Format: Report

Publication Date: 1 Mar 2012

AVAILABILITY

Report in pdf ^[2]

Excerpts from the introduction:

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS)-a strategy to improve families' access to high-quality child care-assess the quality of child care programs, offer incentives and assistance to programs to improve their ratings, and give information to parents about the quality of child care. These systems are operating in a growing number of states-22 states had statewide QRIS and four additional states had QRIS in one or more of their communities as of 2010.

The development and implementation of QRIS is also a central component of the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge-a federally funded competitive grant program that encourages states to strengthen their early learning systems-which will likely spur additional states to establish new or expand existing QRIS. Under QRIS, child care programs receive progressively higher ratings as they meet progressively higher quality standards. States vary significantly in their approaches to QRIS, including in the number of quality levels they have, the standards they set for achieving higher quality ratings, and the extent to which they provide financial and other supports to help programs improve. In most states, child care programs participate on a voluntary basis, although a few states require all regulated programs to participate. Despite these variations in their QRIS, states share a common objective of encouraging better child care options so that more families have access to high-quality child care that will support their children's learning and development.

Given that QRIS are used in a growing number of states and communities, it is helpful to examine the range of approaches these states and communities are taking in designing and implementing QRIS. It is also important to examine the opportunities and barriers for QRIS in achieving the goals of improving the quality of childcare and increasing access to high-quality child care for families, particularly for the most vulnerable families. QRIS can be a tool for improving the quality of care accessed by low-income families who cannot afford high-quality care on their own. To gain more insight into different strategies for shaping and implementing QRIS, the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) interviewed 48 child care center directors from nine states about their experiences with QRIS. The directors offered valuable perspectives on what is working in their QRIS and how the systems could be improved.

Overall, the child care center directors thought that QRIS offered a roadmap for strengthening the quality of care and an opportunity for lifting up the child care profession and child care system. One director from Iowa described QRIS as systems that "took all the factors that define high-quality and put them together." Another director from Iowa said that QRIS keep centers "in a constant evaluation mode," to ensure they are providing good services to children. A director from Oklahoma discussed the ways in which moving up levels on QRIS gave a sense of progress: "...you can see where you've been, what you're at now, and where you're going." Even though the directors were aware of the challenges and shortcomings of their states' QRIS in practice, they saw the promise offered by QRIS and were hopeful about their potential for having a positive impact over time on the quality of children's early learning experiences.

Related link: Rating system for child care, early learning shows promise ^[3]

Region: United States ^[4]

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