

A Statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System:

The Case for New York



About Early Care & Learning Council

The Early Care & Learning Council is a statewide nonprofit organization that works to increase the quality, affordability, and capacity of the early care and learning field. Established in 1975, the council provides training and technical assistance, data management, and advocacy services. Services and programs of the Council are provided to, and in partnership with, the network of local Child Care Resource & Referral programs across New York State.

About the Author

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By Jessica Klos Shapiro

In the short-term, providing children with high quality early care and learning opportunities allows working parents to be more productive at work and absent less often. In the long-term, early care and learning programs notably improve student performance; reduce the need for spending on special education, remediation, and grade-retention; and increase high school graduation rates.¹

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a high quality early care and learning program should provide “a safe, nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of young children while responding to the needs of families.”²

For nearly 15 years, states around the nation have been using Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) to elevate the level of quality provided in early care and learning settings.

A QRIS is used to assess, evaluate and communicate the level of quality in early childhood programs. QRIS takes a systems approach and uniformly addresses multiple aspects of early care and education. QRIS can include a broad range of early care and learning programs and funding streams.³ High quality early care and learning involves safe, developmentally appropriate environments and activities for children, knowledgeable and skilled caregivers and teachers, and engagement with families. New York has a system in place to measure all of these things; however, it is currently being implemented on a limited basis.

QUALITYstarsNY is New York State’s QRIS. This five-star rating system has approximately 450 programs participating in seven communities in the state. Due to funding restrictions, these are the only programs that are eligible to participate at this time. New York State’s nearly 20,000 child care centers and family child care homes and over 450 school districts participating in Universal Pre-Kindergarten illustrate that the current take-up of QUALITYstarsNY equates to a fraction of early care and learning programs able to participate.^{4,5}

Long Term benefits of early care and education:

- ✓ Improved student performance
- ✓ Reduce need for special education
- ✓ Reduce need for remediation
- ✓ Reduction in grade retention
- ✓ Increases high school graduation rates

In New York State in 2012, nearly 900,000 children under the age of six were in need of early care and learning settings. Without a QRIS in place, we are unsure of the quality of a program beyond basic licensing and programmatic guidelines it must follow. A fully implemented QRIS will help to ensure both the long- and short-term success of the children and families in New York State.

This policy brief explains how other states successfully fund their QRIS systems and why New York State needs to move to full implementation of QUALITYstarsNY.

A National Perspective

Currently, over 30 states have some form of QRIS system, either statewide or in a limited geographic area, most often separated by county. They range from three to five rating levels, with each state setting out the guidelines for how to achieve, maintain, and improve at each level of quality. Some systems have been fully implemented for many years, while others are only in the pilot phase.

QRIS are funded in a variety of ways, including using federal, state and private funding streams.

Due to varying degrees of development of current systems and the necessity to have a fully operational QRIS in order to uniformly measure quality, QRIS was a central component of the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge, the recent federally-funded competitive grant program that encouraged states to strengthen their early learning systems. In many cases, the Early Learning Challenge incentivized states to expand an existing QRIS or to explore the establishment of a system if one was not already in place. New York State was eligible for \$100 million dollars in the federal Challenge. Unfortunately, the lack of investment in quality in our state has left not only children and families, but also the government itself at a disadvantage, as evidenced by our 23rd place finish in the competition.

An example of a successful application and a subsequent expansion is Early Achievers, Washington's QRIS. Washington received \$60 million as a result of winning the Early Learning Challenge Grant in the first round in December 2011. The state was funded along with eight other states. With this additional funding, the program will be able to serve the entire state within one year.⁶ Wisconsin was one of five states to receive a grant in the second round of funding announced in December 2012. They received \$22.7 million, which will be spent on improving their QRIS, YoungStar. This will be done by using coordinated services in order to better serve vulnerable populations.⁷ YoungStar has been in place since 2010.⁸

The following table illustrates a sampling of existing QRIS according to the launch date of the program, the participation requirement for licensed child care programs, and information on how the system is funded. Additional states' QRIS were also studied.

A Sample of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems Nationwide

State	Full program in place since	Funding Source			Participation requirement for licensed programs	Service area
		Federal	State	Private		
Colorado*	2000		✓		Voluntary	Statewide
Delaware**	2009	✓	✓	✓	Voluntary	Statewide
Florida	First program in 2002		✓	✓	Voluntary	8 of 67 Counties
Maine	2008	✓	✓		Partially. Programs receiving CCDF*** subsidies are required to participate.	Statewide
New York	Pilot 2010	✓		✓	Voluntary	Limited
North Carolina	1999		✓		Mandatory	Statewide
Oklahoma	1998		✓		Mandatory	Statewide
Pennsylvania	2003	✓	✓		Voluntary	Statewide
Tennessee	2001		✓		Partially. The program Report Card is mandatory	Statewide

Information obtained from QRIS National Learning Network State Profiles⁹ and the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge.¹⁰

*State won a grant in the second round of the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge.

**State won a grant in the first round of the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge.

***The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is the primary Federal program specifically devoted to child care services and quality. It enables low-income parents and parents receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to work or to participate in the educational or training programs they need in order to work. Funds may also be used to serve children in protective services. In addition, a portion of CCDF funds must be used to enhance child care quality and availability.¹¹



State and federal funding are the most common sources used to finance QRIS. Since the first system was developed in 1998, states have experimented with using a combination of Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Title I funds from the federal government as well as their own state child care funds and private grants to fund their QRIS. Delaware uses funding from the United Way to supplement state and federal funds.¹²

The incentives and quality improvement grants that go along with a QRIS are also funded through a variety of avenues. For example, Maine and Oklahoma both use their income tax system to improve quality by allowing centers and family child care homes to receive tax credits for part of the expenses incurred as a result of improving quality.¹³ Child care directors also raise private funds to help pay the costs of staff education and training, as well as supplement the limited scholarship funding available.¹⁴ These efforts allow for programs to reach the next level of quality.

A QRIS can be used as a benchmark to open doors for further program improvement. For example, Pennsylvania and North Carolina require child care centers to achieve certain QRIS ratings to qualify for funding to offer state Prekindergarten classes.¹⁵ This is an incentive beyond the funds included in the system.

In Maine, programs that receive subsidy funds are required to participate in their QRIS. This method of reaching low-income families with quality programs is a way to ensure that the most vulnerable children are engaged in nurturing and stimulating early care and learning programs. Children exposed to a poor-quality environment are less likely to be prepared for school demands and more likely to have their socio-emotional development derailed.¹⁶ In contrast, it has been found that children that spend time in high-quality child care settings have lasting gains from their experience.¹⁷

Any community (e.g. city, county) with funding can purchase Missouri's QRIS for implementation.¹⁸ Florida has eight different county-based QRIS operating within its 67 counties.¹⁹ The first system in Florida began in 2002 and the state has yet to implement a statewide system.

Both Oklahoma and North Carolina have mandated participation in their QRIS for



licensed programs. A mandatory system requires a considerable investment and commitment to help providers be successful, so that programs are not enrolled without making progress toward quality.²⁰

There are advantages and disadvantages to each type of implementation and there must be consideration given to those that would best unify and standardize the 58 very diverse social services districts within the state.

QUALITYstarsNY

In New York State, early childhood professionals are working to fully implement the QUALITYstarsNY five-star rating system. In Fiscal Year 2010-2011, the state invested American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding from the federal government and leveraged private funding that allowed for a field test of the program at 200 locations in 13 communities across the state. The initial investments supported development and design of QUALITYstarsNY as well as the field test. Limited federal funding is available through the Early Childhood Advisory Council to continue to plan for full implementation.

93% of applicants who were not selected for the 2012-2014 implementation of QUALITYstarsNY said that they would apply again.

The State Education Department is currently providing a \$4 million dollar investment in QUALITYstarsNY via New York's State success in the second round of Race to the Top in 2010.²¹ Spread over three years, these resources are targeting early learning programs (center, family-based and UPK classrooms) located in communities with Persistently Low Achieving Schools (PLAs). The initial program sites that participated in the field test have been invited to participate in this round of implementation.

QUALITYstarsNY has reached a select number of programs within nine of the state's 10 economic development regions. The field test and subsequent round of programs in PLA school districts has laid the groundwork for successful implementation. According to program applicant surveys conducted by the Early Care & Learning Council, 108 applicants reported that their program was not selected to participate in the 2012-2014 implementation of QUALITYstarsNY. Approximately 93% of them reported that they would apply again if given the opportunity.

While significant work has been done to create and test the system, it is now time to take it to the next level and invest state funding into the system as other states have done. The Office of Children and Family Services has contributed Quality Scholars professional development scholarship dollars in the past, but this funding is money that comes from the federal government and is only passed through the state. Without the investment of additional state funds, QUALITYstarsNY will continue to struggle to grow to a fully

operational, statewide program. It is important to remember that an investment will also help the local communities. Every \$1 invested in the early learning sector generates an additional 86 cents in the local economy.²²

Recommendation

New York State should invest in full implementation of QUALITYstarsNY. An investment from the State would allow for continued support to those programs already involved, as well as assistance for quality improvement strategies as early childhood professionals implement this essential QRIS statewide. An investment from New York State will ensure that the state will be eligible for future federal funding and will leverage private support to bolster the system.

Quality early care and learning is the foundation for the future for children, parents, employers, teachers and tax payers. QUALITYstarsNY is the mechanism to attain quality in New York State's early care and learning system.

¹ Cohen, R. (2006). *Early care and education as an economic development strategy: Taking a supply chain approach*. Retrieved from Ohio Early Care & Education Campaign website: http://www.groundworkohio.org/resources/policybrief_pdf/ECE%20as%20an%20Economic%20Development%20Strategy.pdf

² Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (September 2012) *Quality: What it Is and Why it Matters in Early Childhood Education*. Retrieved online on December 28, 2012 from: http://www.scaany.org/documents/quality_earlyed_scaapolicybrief_sept2012.pdf

³ National Association for the Education of Young Children (2010, July). The NAEYC quality rating and improvement (gris) toolkit. Retrieved from NAEYC website: <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/policy/state/QRSToolkit2010.pdf>

⁴ Child Care Aware of America (June 2012). Child Care in America: 2012 State Fact Sheets. Retrieved online on November 26, 2012 from http://www.naccrra.org/sites/default/files/default_site_pages/2012/cca_sf_finaljuly12.pdf

⁵ New York State Education Department. Universal Prekindergarten Directory. 2012-2013. Retrieved online on November 26, 2012: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/upk/upkdirectory.html>

⁶ Washington State Department of Early Learning. 2012. *Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge*. Retrieved online on November 26, 2012 from: <http://www.del.wa.gov/government/racetotop/Default.aspx>

⁷ Wisconsin Head Start Association (December 6, 2012,). *Wisconsin wins \$22.7M early learning grant*. Retrieved online on December 12, 2012 from <http://whsaonline.org/wisconsin-wins-early-learning-grant/>

⁸ National Association for the Education of Young Children. (January 2012). *States with Quality Rating and Improvement Systems*. Retrieved online on November 12, 2012 from: <http://www.naeyc.org/policy/StateQRIS>

⁹ Child Trends (April 2010). State Profiles. Retrieved online on December 12, 2012 from: http://www.qrisnetwork.org/state-qris-resources?tid_1=82&tid=All

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education (2011). Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge. Retrieved online on November 16, 2012 from: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/index.html>

¹¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Child Care Development Fund. Retrieved online on December 28, 2012 from <http://www.hhs.gov/recovery/programs/acf/childcare.html>

¹² Child Trends, op. cit.

¹³ Stoney, L., & Mitchell, A. (November 20, 2007). Using tax credits to promote high quality early care and education services. Retrieved from online on December 4, 2012 from:

[http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Partnership for Americas Economic Success/paes_tax_credits.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Partnership_for_Americas_Economic_Success/paes_tax_credits.pdf)

¹⁴ Karen Schulman, Hannah Matthews, Helen Blank and Danielle Ewen (2012) . *A Count For Quality: Child Care Center Directors On Rating and Improvement Systems*. Washington, DC: The National Women’s Law Center and CLASP.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ American Academy of Pediatrics (2005). Policy statement quality early education and child care from birth to kindergarten committee on early childhood, adoption, and dependent care. *Pediatrics*, 115(1), 187-191.

¹⁷ Barnett, W. S. (1995). Long-term effects of early childhood programs on cognitive and school outcomes. *The Future of Children*, 5, 25-50.

¹⁸ Child Trends, op. cit.

¹⁹ Administration for Children and Families (2012). Quality rating & improvement system resources guide: Florida. Retrieved from online on December 4, 2012 from:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/qr/ris/resource/wwwroot/index.cfm?do=qrstateinfo&stateID=58>

²⁰ Schulman et al., op. cit.

²¹ U.S. Department of Education (August 24, 2010). *Nine States and the District of Columbia Win Second Round Race to the Top Grants*. Retrieved online on December 6, 2012 from: <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/nine-states-and-district-columbia-win-second-round-race-top-grants>

²² America’s Edge. (February 2012) *Boosting New York’s Economy: Short- and Long-Term Economic Gains through Quality Early Learning*. Retrieved online on December 28, 2012 from:

<http://americasedge.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/NY-AE-Early-Ed-Quality-Report.pdf>