

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS)



In Brief

A Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) provides a real opportunity to make significant, long-lasting changes in the quality of our nation's child care. As of mid-2011, 25 states have implemented a state-wide QRIS and many more are in the planning stages.

What is QRIS?

A QRIS is a systems-building method used by states to IMPROVE, ASSESS and COMMUNICATE the level of quality in all types of child care settings. It builds an infrastructure that supports a clear path to higher quality care. In general, states use QRIS to pay higher subsidy rates to providers meeting higher quality standards and to help parents identify higher quality care. While the concept of QRIS is consistent among states, the details in each state QRIS system differ greatly.

State QRIS initiatives

State QRIS initiatives offer a quality-accountability structure that is transparent for parents, which means that both providers and parents know how the program or provider fares compared to state standards. Each system contains standards, assessment, financial and other supports, and relies on accurate data reporting. A QRIS incorporates five major elements:

- **Research-based standards** build on various standards *already* being used in the state, such as child care licensing, accreditation initiatives, Head Start Performance Standards and state early learning guidelines. QRISs generally include standards for learning environments, professional development and involvement of parents.

- **Assessment/Accountability and Monitoring Measures** recognize where programs are in relation to progressive levels of quality in state standards. More "stars" mean higher levels of quality. The criteria in each category must be "assessable." QRIS monitors use tools like environment rating scales and accreditation criteria to assess quality.
- **Program and Practitioner Outreach and Supports** help programs meet and maintain the quality standards. The support infrastructure for training, technical assistance and mentoring is built from existing state resources.
- **Financing Incentives and Compensation** encourage programs and providers/educators to pursue higher levels of quality. Incentives include grants, scholarships, tiered reimbursement for child care subsidy, tax credits and wage supplements.
- **Parent and Consumer Engagement** includes strategies for communicating QRIS to parents and programs.

QRIS initiatives date back to the late 1990s when Oklahoma, North Carolina and Colorado implemented systems. Since that time, at least 22 additional states have developed systems and much has been learned about them. The 25 states are Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont and Wisconsin. All but two states are now exploring, designing or piloting statewide QRIS.

QRIS brings together quality improvement strategies that were previously unconnected providing an infrastructure that was lacking before now. It provides an opportunity for real improvement to the quality of child care through a comprehensive, coordinated approach that brings together diverse education efforts and funding streams.

NACCRRRA Recommendations:

As states explore, design, implement or modify their quality rating and improvement systems NACCRRRA recommends:

1. State-wide QRIS should incorporate all five basic elements in a QRIS.
2. QRIS should be built on a foundation of strong licensing regulations and oversight.
 - Comprehensive background checks (requiring a state and federal fingerprint check and a check of the sex offender and child abuse registries).
 - Minimum training requirements (40 hours of initial training and 24 hours of annual training).
 - Quarterly inspections.
 - Basic health & safety standards.
 - License all child care providers paid to care for unrelated children on a regular basis (as a business).
3. The levels of QRIS should be based on research about high-quality child care.
4. The process of designing, developing and implementing a QRIS should be collaborative and reflect best practices about program design. States should use an integrated, strategic approach to design and implement QRIS, which

includes leveraging technology for real-time data sharing between QRIS partners.

5. State and local CCR&Rs should be included in the planning and implementation of a QRIS. States should include CCR&Rs in the following roles:

- Participating in QRIS planning and design.
- Recruiting and enrolling child care programs in the QRIS.
- Providing on-site technical assistance to help programs move up the QRIS levels.
- Administering quality improvement funds.
- Providing career counseling and training to help child care providers attain higher levels of professional development needed to increase QRIS levels.
- Providing consumer education to parents and providers about the QRIS.
- Managing or participating in QRIS marketing campaigns.
- Collecting and sharing real-time data among QRIS partners. This ensures parents have the most up-to-date information as they search for child care, provides a seamless system for providers, and manages reporting that informs policy and process engineering.

For more information about NACCRRRA's analysis of state QRIS systems, see <http://www.naccrra.org/publications/naccrra-publications/comparison-qr-is-dod-quality-standards-2009.php>.