

Quality Matters: Building a Quality Rating and Improvement System for Connecticut

What is a Quality Rating System?

The National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC) defines a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) as “a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education programs. QRIS can be an effective strategy for aligning components of the early care and education system for increased accountability in improving quality of care.”

Those charged with making recommendations for a statewide QRIS hope to create a system that will improve the well-being of all children in Connecticut, and achieve high quality across all areas within early care and education programs. The QRIS will be designed for all center settings including those that are regulated, those that are exempt from regulation and those that are operated by public schools; and for all regulated home-based child care settings, commonly called family child care homes.

The proposed framework for the rating system has five levels, or building blocks. At this stage in development, Work Group Members are in the process of defining the 5 levels of quality. The current framework is still a work-in-process and is open to input from all.

Who is charged with making recommendations for a QRIS in Connecticut?

Members of a public-private QRIS Work Group supported by the Governor’s Early Childhood Research & Policy Council were invited to come together and generate recommendations on the core components of a QRIS in the Connecticut context. The 26 members of the Work Group were selected to represent the diverse stakeholders and community members that will potentially participate in and benefit from a QRIS in Connecticut. Those in the working group represent a cross section of agencies, organizations and programs in early childhood care and education including those who work in the child care field, state agency staff, resource and referral staff, parents, program administrators and providers and many others. A complete list of Work Group members can be found at www.ctearlychildhood.org.

MORE INFO

www.ctearlychildhood.org

LOOKING AHEAD

- **June – October**
Monthly meetings of the QRIS Working Group and Guiding Committee
- **August - September**
A series of Community Forums to update the public on current recommendations and gather feedback
- **September 2008**
QRIS Working Group makes recommendations to Early Childhood Research & Policy Council
- **October 2008**
Early Childhood Research & Policy Council makes recommendations to Early Childhood Education Cabinet
- **December 2008**
Early Childhood Education Cabinet makes final recommendations to Legislature

The QRIS plan will be reviewed by a host of different members of the early childhood community prior to its submission to the Governor in December.

Why would programs and providers want to participate in a QRIS?

The purpose of the Quality Rating and Improvement System is to support the provision of higher quality early childhood education and care to Connecticut's children. This system will recognize the hard work and accomplishments of all providers and programs at each level of rating. It will also offer supports and incentives to programs to promote higher levels of quality. In addition, parents will be able to use this system to help select programs that meet the specific needs for their family, as well as to locate programs that provide quality care.

The QRIS Plan will include recommenda-

tions for helping individual programs recognize their program strengths, identifying areas in need of improvement and providing supports to help programs realize their goals. The recommendations and guidelines for the QRIS plan take into account that a system of this capacity and scope requires a large amount of resources to be instituted with fidelity and to have successful outcomes for children.

There is a recognized need to minimize the amount of time providers spend on licensing and accreditation paperwork, as well as minimizing the duplication of efforts and materials submitted by pro-

grams and providers. The QRIS plan will look to streamline these processes and create a more efficient and comprehensive procedure for applying for and maintaining quality ratings. The plan will identify where the existing licensing and accreditation systems will align within the QRIS. It is not the intent of those charged with this work to create an additional burden on programs. Rather, the plan will look to simplifying reporting systems and increasing supports and incentives available to programs.

About the Early Childhood Cabinet

Established in law in 2005, the Early Childhood Cabinet was charged with advising on school readiness issues, evaluating current school readiness programs, and assisting in developing budget scenarios for early childhood education programs.

In 2007, that legislative mandate was expanded to include development of an Accountability Plan, a Quality Improvement Plan, a Preschool Facilities Plan, an Early Care and Education Workforce Plan, and a study of student progress from preschool through the third grade.

Progress:

In its first year of organization, the Cabinet published "*Ready by 5, and Fine by 9: Connecticut's Early Childhood Investment Framework*." That report provides 50 action steps and 10 top priorities for investment in children, ages birth to nine, and in their families.

In late 2006, the Cabinet's partner entity -- the Governor's Early Childhood Research and Policy Council -- prepared the state's first ever Early Childhood Investment Plan, Part I.

In 2007, the Cabinet established a public-private partnership with the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund to co-invest in communities and parents. Also in 2007, the Office of the Early Childhood Education Cabinet was established, and the Cabinet received \$4 million in state funds to support its work.

In 2008, the Cabinet added a Birth to Three framework, a Kindergarten to Grade Three framework, and has recently adopted recommendations for preschool expansion. Also in 2008, the Cabinet co-hosted -- with Governor M. Jodi Rell and the National Governors Association -- the Governor's Early Childhood Summit: Investing in the First Thousand Days.

In 2008, the National Governors Association selected Connecticut to send a state team to the National Symposium on the Science of Early Childhood Development and awarded \$10,000 for further work to strengthen the Early Childhood Education Cabinet.

On The Record

"The science of early childhood is completely clear about the need for parents to choose high quality programs for their young children and for the state and providers to ensure that high quality programs are available. The inclusion of quality standards in the Early Childhood Education Cabinet's required Accountability Plan is immensely important."

*~ Janice M. Gruendel, Ph.D.,
Governor's Senior Policy
Advisor, Children & Youth,
Co-Chair of the Connecticut
Early Childhood Education
Cabinet*

