Early Childhood Quality and Systems Development

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Build
Strong Foundations For Our Youngest Children
Goals for Today:

• Explore what early childhood (EC) quality is, and how states are pursuing it

• Focus on QRIS as a key lever for quality improvement and systems change

• Think together about challenges and key policy questions for legislators
The BUILD Initiative

- Supports state leaders in building early childhood systems that span ECE, health, mental health, family support and special needs
- Funds 10 states directly and dozens more through our publications, TA, conferences and partnerships
- Sponsor of the QRIS National Learning Network (www.QRISNetwork.org)
State Early Childhood Development System

**Early Learning**
- Early care and education opportunities in nurturing environments where children can learn what they need to succeed in school and life.

**Health, Mental Health and Nutrition**
- Comprehensive health services that meet children’s vision, hearing, nutrition, behavioral, and oral health as well as medical health needs.
- Early identification, assessment and appropriate services for children with special health care needs, disabilities, or developmental delays

**Family Support**
- Economic and parenting supports to ensure children have nurturing and stable relationships with caring adults.

**Special Needs/ Early Intervention**
Core Functions of a Comprehensive Early Childhood System

Define and Coordinate Leadership

Recruit and Engage Stakeholders

Finance Strategically

Ensure Accountability

Create and Support Improvement Strategies

Early Learning and Development

Outcome: Thriving Children and Families

Health

Family Leadership and Support

Enhance and Align Standards
School Readiness Gap

Figure 2. Academic Abilities of Entering Kindergarteners by Family Income

Source: NCES
The Challenge

• Inequitable access to quality
• Uneven program quality
• Fragmented EC system
  ➢ Multiple infrastructures, standards and monitoring
  ➢ Inadequate funding
  ➢ Hard for families to navigate
Principal Elements of Quality

- Highly skilled providers
- Age-appropriate curricula and stimulating materials in a safe physical setting
- A language-rich environment
- Warm, responsive interactions
- High and consistent levels of child participation
- Small class sizes; high adult-to-child ratios

-Center on the Developing Child
Harvard University
Voluntary ratings and QI investments
Meaningful PD and support for providers
Accountability and transparency
Informed parents and consumers
Child care, Pre-K, Head Start, Family CC
Aligned funding to improve and sustain quality
Elements of QRIS

• Program and teacher standards
• Monitoring/quality assurance
• Financial incentives
• Quality improvement supports
• Parent/consumer education

Mathematica/Child Trends: Compendium, April 2010
Quality Improvement Supports

• Financial incentives
• Coaching and mentoring
• Environmental quality training & supports
• Meaningful professional development

Mathematica/Child Trends: *Compendium*, April 2010
QRIS and Systems Change

- Old thinking: QRIS as stand-alone quality initiative for “child care”

- New thinking: framework for a coordinated, accountable ECE system
A Standards-Based ECE System Design

Quality Standards for Programs and Practitioners

Engagement & Outreach (Selling the Vision) for Programs, Practitioners, & Consumers

Support/Infrastructure to Meet Standards
- Programs: Technical Assistance & Support
- Practitioners: Professional Development

Quality Early Care & Education System

Monitoring & Accountability for Programs & Practitioners

Financing Linked to Standards For programs, practitioners & consumers
- (CCDF, Head Start, scholarships, foundations, tax credits, parent fees, etc.)

(Stoney & Mitchell)
QRIS Can Serve

- As a **Yardstick**: enables public and private funders to assess the effectiveness of their investments in ECE programs
- As a **QI Driver**: shows states where gaps in quality exist and what types of resources are needed to improve quality
- As a **Policy Tool**: to align different ECE standards and the funding and professional development systems that support them

(adapted from Mitchell, 2005)
QRIS Opens Doors to...

• More money for PD and QI support as demand for help increases
• Making better use of existing dollars
• Aligning PD, early learning standards and even higher ed policies to QRIS
• Accountability drives public support for EC investment
• Alignment with K-12 system
Aligning System Components

- Scholarships
- Standards
- Infant/Toddler Support
- CC Subsidy
- Pre-K
- Pro Dev/QI
- Grants
- Licensing
What We’ve Seen So Far

• Overall quality has gone up
• Progress on system alignment
• Implementation challenges: training, personnel, cost of delivery
• Measurement limitations: cost, reliability
• Gradual shift from “R” to “I”
Key Questions for Legislators

• Is your state using QRIS as a systems change strategy, or simply as a tool for quality improvement?
• Who is at the QRIS leadership table? What values are driving the process?
• Cultural competence is often a weak spot. Do you know how well your EC system is serving diverse populations?
• Local capacity to implement is key to success. Do you have enough well-trained people? High-functioning organizations?
Key Questions for Legislators

• Do you have adequate QI resources? If not, do your expectations match your money?
• Does your evaluation strategy fit your goals for QRIS?
• Empowering parents as consumers – changing the market – takes time and money. How will you build and sustain support for the long-term shift to quality?
Make the most of the assets you have
QRIS National Learning Network

For more information, visit

www.qrisnetwork.org

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