

## Improving the Quality of Early Learning and Care in Michigan: How a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Will Help

### Early Learning and Care in Michigan

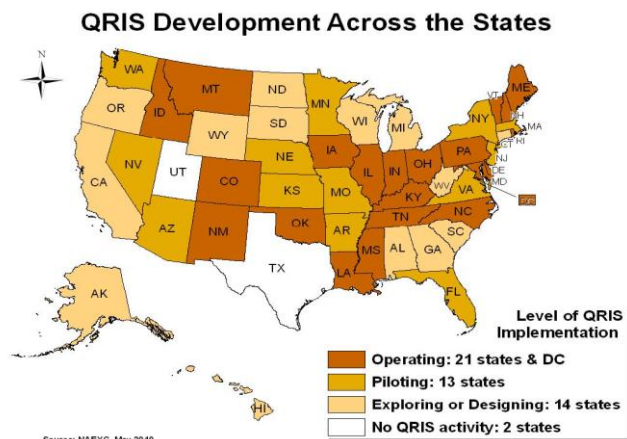
In Michigan, 64% of children under the age of 6 are in the care of someone other than a family member on a regular basis.<sup>i</sup> Research clearly shows that it is the *quality* of this early learning and care that matters most.<sup>ii</sup> The typical child care and/or early learning setting in Michigan is licensed but not accredited (less than 4% of center-based programs are accredited<sup>iii</sup>), so there is currently no widespread objective basis by which to judge the quality of programs. Without this information there is no way to determine where quality gaps exist, effectively target funding and supports to address those gaps, establish incentives for programs to improve, and empower parents to make informed choices about their children's early learning and care.

If Michigan had a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS,) families across the state would have access to information about the quality of preschool programs, child care centers and licensed family and group homes. Parents, policymakers and the general public would know that early learning and care providers were choosing to be assessed against a set of uniform and unbiased standards of quality. Based on their performance on the quality standards, programs would be provided with ratings of their current quality level. Parents looking for child care and early learning programs would be able to choose a provider or program with quality in mind. Public investments in early learning and care could be more effectively targeted to promote and expand quality. The importance of high-quality early learning and care experiences for children from birth to school entry would be promoted by a QRIS.

### How QRIS Works

QRIS standards and rating scales usually define three to five levels of program quality and provide incentives to align with quality levels, thus providing strong motivation for early learning and care providers to participate and move up the scale. For example, programs serving subsidized children in Pennsylvania receive daily rate bonuses, if the program has a rating of two or more stars, with the highest bonus given to four-star programs. Tiered bonuses also apply to educator retention awards for highly qualified directors and staff. In North Carolina, loans to improve facilities are coordinated with the state's QRIS system and converted to grants if programs increase their ratings. Financial incentives may also be used to encourage families to make informed choices about quality. Arkansas, Louisiana, Maine, and Vermont offer tax credits to families that enroll children in high-quality programs.

Acting on the urgent need to improve early education program quality, 21 states and Washington D.C. have established Quality Rating and Improvement Systems, and 27 more states are in some phase of development (see map below ).



### Five Common QRIS Components

1. Standards
2. Monitoring and Accountability
3. Program and Practitioner Support
4. Fiscal Incentives
5. Family and Consumer Engagement

Source: Mitchell, A. 2008

The text box lists the five common QRIS components. The first component, QRIS quality standards, typically addresses staff education and training, the learning environment, curriculum, leadership and management, and family engagement. The QRIS is usually administered by an organization with a strong reputation for quality improvement in early learning and care programs.

### **Lessons Learned from QRIS Implementation**

Evaluations of state QRIS programs can help inform the work in Michigan to design and implement a QRIS. Research shows that a QRIS:

- ★ **Provides reliable indications of quality:** In Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Indiana, Kentucky, and North Carolina, researchers have found that QRIS ratings correlate with independently assessed program quality scores on environmental rating scales (ERS). Programs with high QRIS ratings in Kentucky also tended to have high scores on the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO); in North Carolina, programs with high ratings had lower rates of teacher turnover and higher staff salaries.<sup>iv</sup>
- ★ **Helps improve program quality over time:** Studies examining Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Tennessee have shown that average programs ratings increase over time as more programs receive higher QRIS ratings and move out of low ratings.<sup>v</sup>
- ★ **Increases low-income children's access to quality:** A 2005 Oklahoma study found that 76.5% of subsidized children were enrolled in programs at the top two quality ratings, up from 45.8% when the QRIS began two years earlier. This success is largely due to a state policy that prohibits subsidized children from enrolling in programs with the lowest quality ratings.<sup>vi</sup>

### **Progress in Michigan**

To improve the quality of early learning and care programs in Michigan, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation and the Great Start Early Learning Advisory Council (GS-ELAC)<sup>vii</sup> have worked with the Build Initiative<sup>viii</sup> to secure funding to complete a design for a QRIS in Michigan. A QRIS Design Project Management Committee<sup>ix</sup> has been formed to prepare recommendations by Thanksgiving for a QRIS that will provide:

- Easy access to information for families about the quality of early learning and care programs and the relationship between high quality programs and school readiness
- A quality development continuum (QDC) for enrolled, subsidized but unlicensed, child care providers (aide and relative providers)
- A quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for licensed centers and registered family and group homes, including Great Start School Readiness Programs and Head Start Programs
- Data that demonstrate the impact of the QRIS and the QDC on helping to prepare children for school
- Quality improvement supports for early learning and care programs

The QRIS Design Project will have a variety of opportunities for engagement and feed-back. A webpage is being developed for the [www.greatstartforkids.org](http://www.greatstartforkids.org) website and is expected to be completed by the end of July. Questions regarding the information contained in this brief can be sent to [info@ecic4kids.org](mailto:info@ecic4kids.org) in the interim.

### **Our Vision**

Implementing a QRIS will help Michigan take another essential step on the road to assuring that all children in Michigan arrive at kindergarten safe, healthy, eager and prepared for school success. A QRIS will help to assure that children are ready for kindergarten, providers have a clear path to improve quality, and families have information to make the best decisions for their child's early learning and care.

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<sup>i</sup> Kids Count 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> For example, low-income children who experience high-quality early education and care are 40% less likely to be held back a grade, 30% more likely to graduate from high school, and more than twice as likely to attend college. High-quality early education yields an estimated 16% return for every dollar invested. See Reynolds, A.J., Temple, J.A., Robertson, D.L., & Mann, E.A. Age 21 Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Center Program. Institute for Research on Poverty. Discussion Paper No. 1245-02, 2001.; Reynolds, A.J. et al. (2001). Long –Term Effects of an Early Childhood Intervention on Educational Achievement and Juvenile Arrest. *JAMA*, 285(18), 2339-2346.; Barnett, W.S. & Masse, L.N. (2007)). Comparative benefit-cost analysis of the Abecedarian program and policy implications. *Economics of Education Review*, 26, 113-125.; Rolnick, A. and Grunewald, R. (2003). Early childhood development: Economic developed with a high return. Retrieved from [http://www.minneapolisfed.org/publications\\_papers/studies/earlychild/abc-part2.pdf](http://www.minneapolisfed.org/publications_papers/studies/earlychild/abc-part2.pdf).

<sup>iii</sup> NAEYC.

<sup>iv</sup> Barnard, W., Etheridge Smith, W., Fiene, R., & Swanson, K. (2006). Evaluation of Pennsylvania’s Keystone STARS Quality Rating System in Child Care Settings; Noriss, D., & Dunn, L. (2004) Reaching for the Stars: Family Child Care Home Validation Study Final Report; Elicker, J., Clawson Langill, C., Ruprecht, K., & Kwon, K. (2007). Paths to Quality: Child Care Quality Rating System for Indiana – What is the Scientific Basis? *Child Development & Family Studies*, Purdue University; Grisham-Brown, J., Grivil, M., Gao, X., & Missal, K. (2008). KIDS NOW Evaluation. University of Kentucky; Bryant, D., Bernier, K., Maxwell, K., & Peisner-Feinberg, E. (2000). Validating North Carolina’s 5-Star Child Care Licensing System. Retrieved from <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/qrs-impactsqualitycc.html> and [http://www.fpg.unc.edu/smartstart/Reports/Validating\\_Licensing\\_System\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/smartstart/Reports/Validating_Licensing_System_Brochure.pdf).

<sup>v</sup> Ibid; University of Tennessee College of Social Work, Office of Research and Public Service. (2004). Who Care’s for Tennessee’s Children?: A review of Tennessee’s child care evaluation report card program.

<sup>vi</sup> Oklahoma Child care Resources and Referral Association, Inc. (OKCCRRRA). (2005). Oklahoma Child Care and Early Education Portfolio 2005.

<sup>vii</sup> The Great Start Early Learning Advisory Council provides advice that leads to the improvement of the coordination and quality of early learning programs and services for children from birth to school entry. The Council has funding to operate for three years. For more information, [www.greatstartforkids.org/ELAC](http://www.greatstartforkids.org/ELAC).

<sup>viii</sup> The Build Initiative supports state efforts to create comprehensive early childhood systems – coordinated, effective policies that address children's health, mental health and nutrition, early care and education, family support and parenting programs, and services for children with special needs. For more information, [www.buildinitiative.org](http://www.buildinitiative.org).

<sup>ix</sup> The QRIS Design Project Management Committee is responsible for leading the preparation of recommendations regarding a quality development continuum for unlicensed, enrolled child care providers and a quality rating and improvement system for licensing and registered providers. For more information, [www.greatstartforkids.org/QRISDesign](http://www.greatstartforkids.org/QRISDesign).