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**Toward Integration:**  
State Approaches to Head Start  
Partnering in Quality Rating  
Improvement Systems

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## About the BUILD Initiative

The BUILD Initiative (BUILD) is a national effort that helps advance state work on behalf of young children (prenatal – five), their families, and communities. BUILD partners with early childhood leaders focused on family support and engagement, early learning, health, mental health, and nutrition to create the policies and infrastructure necessary for quality and equity. BUILD supports these leaders by providing consultation, learning opportunities, resources, cross-state peer-to-peer exchanges, and in-state planning and implementation assistance. These efforts help state leaders to increase quality, expand access, and promote equitable outcomes for our youngest children.

### **BUILD:**

- Provides tailored and timely technical assistance to leaders in partner states.
- Facilitates learning communities that share the latest research and promising practices.
- Serves as a knowledge broker by shining a light on promising early childhood systems efforts and highlighting new ideas and successful innovations.
- Supports new and emerging leaders and works to ensure diversity and equity in all aspects of early childhood systems building.
- Informs and influences state and national conversations and policy decisions by highlighting emerging issues, innovative approaches, best practices, and results from the field.

To learn more, visit [The BUILD Initiative](#).

## QRIS 3.0 Tools and Resources

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRISs) are evolving rapidly. Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) leaders are evaluating their systems to identify opportunities for improvement, trying new strategies and, in some cases, creating new models. To contribute to the evolution of QRIS, BUILD is creating resources to address the continuing challenges of financing, QRIS design and implementation, and the need to gain adequate public investment to support QRIS sufficiently to meet its full potential. This publication is part of the series, [QRIS 3.0 Tools and Resources](#).

Child care leaders first designed QRISs in the 1990s, and systems now exist in nearly every state and many U.S. territories. QRIS emerged as a strategy largely in response to the enormous gulf between the minimum level of quality required by states to open and operate a child care program and the recognized level of quality that optimally supports child development and learning.

States implement QRISs for varying purposes (outlined in BUILD's 2015 study, [Quality Rating and Improvement Systems: Stakeholder Theories of Change and Models of Practice Study Report, Expert Panel Reflections and Recommendations](#)). QRISs may provide the framework for child care, Head Start, and state pre-K programs, or to only some of these programs. A QRIS may be voluntary or mandatory. Those that are mandatory can be embedded in child care licensing or connected to publicly funded programs such as child care assistance or state pre-K. A QRIS can be the framework for quality improvement and quality assurance for early care and learning services for children birth to five, or it can unify a state's early care and learning, K-12, and higher education systems to form a comprehensive P-20 education system for children from birth through college. Similarly, a QRIS can be part of a broader strategy for a comprehensive and equitable early childhood system in which all the state's children have access to care and learning accompanied by health/mental health supports, social support, and family engagement, as needed. A QRIS is an early learning strategy that shares responsibility for equitable child outcomes with other early learning strategies as well as with other systems such as health and education, and with communities and families.

Through the series, *QRIS 3.0 Tools and Resources*, BUILD explores several timely, critical issues related to QRIS. We are grateful to the [Alliance for Early Success](#) for its support of this series and its ongoing commitment to support so many early childhood organizations.

## Introduction

In recent years, the United States has seen unprecedented policy focus on and investment in initiatives to improve young children's care and education. At the state level, Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRISs) are working to provide a framework of quality for early care and education settings. QRISs are rapidly evolving from a child care-focused approach to one that is seeking to embrace a multiplicity of early learning programs including Head Start. The Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) included a specific focus on using QRISs for all early learning programs and, more recently, in the issuance of revised performance standards for Head Start, the Office of Head Start made its strongest statement of support yet for integrating Head Start and QRISs.



**Per the revised Head Start Program Performance Standards (released September 2016), a program must participate in its state or local Quality Rating and Improvement System if:**

1. Its state or local QRIS accepts Head Start monitoring data to document quality indicators included in the state's tiered system;
2. Participation would not impact a program's ability to comply with Head Start Performance Standards; and,
3. The program has not provided the Office of Head Start with a compelling reason not to comply with this requirement.

Integrating Head Start and QRISs is key to addressing the growing need for quality Early Care and Education (ECE) settings. Children are in out-of-home care settings more than ever, as their available parents are working due to necessity or choice.<sup>1</sup> The need is exacerbated by the barriers families face in finding quality care; in some instances, what is available or affordable to a family is not of the quality we know can positively impact children. The capacity of the highest quality programs is often limited; thus, parents are forced to select other settings. The barriers are most acute for young children from linguistically, racially, and economically marginalized communities.<sup>2</sup> When child care is of very high quality, the positive effects can endure into the early adult years, particularly for children from the poorest home environments. Yet, children from families with higher risks often have very limited access to quality care. Head Start programs are targeted to children from low-income families. In many communities and states, these programs have access to and knowledge about children and families from low-income, at-risk backgrounds.

An integrated Head Start and QRIS within each state furthers the use of a shared measure of quality for ECE programs yet also is an opportunity to bring the understanding of capacity at quality settings, and access to these settings by the highest risk children, to the forefront of the discussion about addressing the need for quality ECE. Using the common measure of quality across program types, state leaders will be able to analyze data on children served at each quality level, including an analysis of what this information says about those children at greatest risk and their engagement in quality settings. Without integration, state systems are left with siloed information on the quality of the ECE settings across Head Start and child care and run the risk of continuing to attempt to address quality of settings and access by the most at-risk children with strategies that are system- or program-specific, instead of integrated and mutually reinforcing. This brief explores mechanisms to integrate Head Start and QRIS, including critical dimensions of integration from states that have focused on the work.

Head Start and QRISs have complementary missions in that both strive to understand what constitutes high-quality early care and education and support the implementation of this quality in practice. Head Start began in 1965 as a summer program for preschool children from low-income settings in response to a growing understanding of the impact of education on poverty. Now, Head Start programs promote school readiness for children ages birth to five from low-income families by supporting their development in a comprehensive way. Head Start models of service delivery are driven by community need. The models may include programs in centers, schools, child care programs, or family child care homes, and may be full day/full year. Home-based services through home visits with families is one model. The core areas covered by all Head Start programs are early learning, health, and family well-being, with programs partnering with parents as part of the core service delivery. Head Start programs are held to the Head Start Act and Performance Standards, which define standards and minimum requirements for all Head Start services. These serve as a foundation for Head Start's mission to deliver comprehensive, high-quality individualized services supporting the school readiness of children from low-income families. In particular, the Head Start Program Performance

Standards (HSPPS) reflect best practices in ECE while allowing Head Start programs to be flexible in their program approach to reaching goals in all areas and achieving positive child and family outcomes.

State and federal funding for child care focuses on subsidies to support low-income families participating in the workforce by subsidizing their child care costs. Regulations frequently focus on minimum health and safety of these programs. QRIS has worked to address the lack of focus on high-quality learning in child care settings by providing the framework of standards and funding mechanisms to make higher quality care accessible to families. QRIS in each state differs as the approaches have been developed and refined in response to individual context.

However, it is generally accepted that a fully functional QRIS includes the following components:

1. Quality standards for programs and practitioners.
2. Supports and infrastructure to meet such standards.
3. Monitoring and accountability systems to ensure compliance with quality standards.



4. Ongoing financial assistance that is linked to meeting quality standards.
5. Engagement and outreach strategies. As QRISs and state systems have evolved, it has become clear that the standards and support for quality inherent to QRISs need not be limited to child care programs. QRISs are now commonly seen as cross-sector, state-based frameworks to define and support high-quality ECE.

“Communication is critical. Don't underestimate how different the programs/models are even though they are considered part of the same ECE system.”

There are many commonalities across Head Start and QRIS, including overlap in the target populations of children, families, communities, and professionals they seek to impact. Head Start and QRIS align in their approach in that they focus on the delivery of high-quality services to children through systems changes and improvement. Both address the issue of access to this high-quality ECE by children and families, particularly those at greatest risk. Many Head Start programs have moved to a full-day or extended-day approach to serving children and families in order to meet the child care needs of their communities. Also, many high quality child care programs have partnered with Head Start to serve eligible children and families. Often facilities serve children from multiple funding streams. Recent federal policy has acknowledged the overlap between Head Start and QRIS and, through new requirements for participation, underscored the potential benefits of a fully developed approach to integration. [See page 16.](#)

## The key, most commonly understood benefits of Head Start - QRIS integration include:

- Improved funding and supports for programs, potentially at state, regional, and local levels.
- Unified quality definition to support family understanding and selection of quality.
- Increased understanding of the variances in quality across different types of programs linked to a frame for quality supports and moving along a continuum of quality.
- Opportunity to understand the commonalities across program types in pursuing quality improvements and align and use potential supports in a manner that maximizes federal, state, and local investments.

In addressing the integration opportunity, we find states have approached the work in different ways and are continually working on enhancing their integration strategies. There is real potential for cross-system and cross-state learning from this integration work. This brief was spurred by an interest in understanding current state efforts to integrate Head Start and QRISs. The goal grew to not only understand integration but to explore and share mechanisms used by states, different models and approaches, and the successes, challenges, and opportunities of integration. This brief is intended for state and local leaders of QRISs and Head Start, national organizations and resources that support QRISs and Head Start, and local Head Start and QRIS programs and support systems.

## Method

Five states with different integration approaches were identified. Several categories of diverse, key informants were targeted for separate interviews in each state: the state QRIS lead, the Head Start Collaboration lead (or designee) or Head Start Association lead, and a Head Start provider with experience in Head Start-QRIS integration. The brief discusses how integration of Head Start and QRIS has occurred, some

of the essential elements for Head Start-QRIS integration, and how shared dimensions of Head Start and QRIS are impacted. The brief explores why Head Start and QRIS integration is meaningful, some emerging issues related to integration, and the role of Head Start-QRIS integration in addressing equity. Detailed case studies for the states that participated in the interview process are included in the appendices of this report as an additional tool to support stakeholders in considering how to apply these strategies in their own context.

## Section I: Understanding Head Start Integration with QRISs

In this section we review how integration of Head Start with QRIS has occurred. A state system that integrates Head Start and QRIS is another step toward a fully cross-sector approach to defining and measuring the quality of ECE settings. Many of the stakeholders interviewed related that Head Start and QRIS should be aligned and integrated because they are both part of ECE in the state, where the desire is for one seamless system of ECE programming.



Consider whether Head Start programs are required to be licensed in your state, as licensing may be the first level of your QRIS. If Head Start is not required to be licensed, the integration strategy must begin with addressing the licensing component.

An integration strategy is an approach, typically tailored to a state's context, developed to support Head Start programs in their effort to be rated on the state QRIS. Head Start programs may actively participate, and are actively participating, in QRIS, even in places where an explicit integration strategy does not exist. The absence of an integration strategy may not determine whether or not Head Start programs participate, yet the implementation of one is frequently the driver that pushes Head Start to nearly full engagement in QRIS. There are three

primary models of integration, with some states using a combination of two or more to achieve their approach. In reviewing these models, it becomes apparent that their existence motivates participation. The models all, at some level, take into consideration the standards and monitoring of quality inherent to Head Start programs, given their federal funding, and use this existing Head Start quality framework as part of determining QRIS participation. The models are:



**The following five states participated in interviews and serve as case studies as part of this resource. States using an integration strategy noted a significant increase in the participation rate for Head Start programs in QRIS.**

	Integration Model	Head Start participation in QRIS
<b>Arkansas</b>	Reciprocity	92%
<b>Illinois</b>	Alternative Pathway	66%*
<b>Montana</b>	Reciprocity	53%*
<b>North Carolina</b>	None, licensing and QRIS mandatory	100%
<b>Oregon</b>	Reciprocity and Alternative Pathway	97%

\* These models launched less than six months before the data collection point. Participation rates may be influenced by timing of reporting and application process in these states.

## Model 1: Alignment

Under this model, states have worked to align across Head Start Program Performance Standards and QRIS standards. Alignment may also occur across HSPPS and licensing standards, depending on the state structure. The alignment typically results in a crosswalk of the standards that is designed to support stakeholders in analyzing where standard concepts are shared, where standards may contradict each other, and where there is duplication. Generally, the act of alignment itself does not result in a QRIS rating for the Head Start programs. Alignment as the approach to integration encourages Head Start programs to participate in QRIS by making it easier for programs to assess themselves against the QRIS standards, based on the alignment of HSPPS and QRIS.

As a result of alignment, states:

- Develop an understanding of where programs may be asked to meet standards that are contradictory and consider potential policy responses to address this conflict.
- Review duplicative standards and determine how this duplication may inform the development and process of monitoring programs.
- Support the process of determining where compliance with HSPPS aligns with standards, or levels, within the QRIS structure.

An example of using alignment to support Head Start-QRIS integration is found in states that have aligned across the HSPPS and QRIS standards and, after this alignment, built some Head Start-specific standards into their QRIS framework. These Head Start-specific standards are responsive to the Head Start program and encourage Head Start participation in QRIS by offering standards that reflect the quality found within Head Start while still functioning as part of the overall QRIS frame. Head Start programs should find it easy to adhere to these QRIS standards.

## Model 2: Reciprocity

Under this model, states give “credit” or reciprocity to Head Start programs for some or all of the QRIS standards. In this case, typically Head Start programs are in compliance with HSPPS and in good standing per their most recent federal review. Reciprocity acknowledges that Head Start programs must meet standards and requirements by virtue of their federal program status and that there is some measure of these standards that can be used to demonstrate achievement of state QRIS standards. The reciprocity Head Start programs are given ties directly to the QRIS rating they receive; the rating a Head Start program receives in the reciprocity model will be driven by the determinations on the number of standards that reciprocity covers and where the standards fall within the QRIS levels.

Reciprocity requires states to:

- Use a process to determine what standards will be covered by reciprocity, possibly a crosswalk product from aligning across Head Start and QRIS standards.
- Determine the Head Start program documentation that will be required to prove compliance with the HSPPS and/or good standing per the program's federal review.
- Consider how reciprocity for a portion of QRIS standards impacts the QRIS monitoring process for Head Start programs.

Oregon uses reciprocity to give credit for many QRIS standards, based on a program's good standing with Head Start. Oregon's integration model is based on a hybrid approach in that the state also instituted an alternative pathway approach for Head Start programs in the areas of QRIS professional requirements and qualifications. Programs in good standing with Head Start meet these QRIS requirements without any further documentation required.

### Model 3: Alternative Pathway

Under the alternative pathway model, Head Start programs are engaged in the QRIS through a structure different from that of a child care program applying for its QRIS rating. The alternative pathway may include assigning an automatic QRIS rating to a Head Start program that documents compliance with HSPPS and good standing per its most recent federal review. States that are using this model have a crosswalk between HSPPS and the state QRIS standards that is used to support the determination of the QRIS level Head Start programs are assigned.

Alternative pathway requires states to:

- Determine if an automatic assignment of a QRIS level to Head Start programs is a good fit with their state: they may want to consider their current approach to pre-K programs and QRIS as part of this decision-making process.
- Gather the information necessary about the Head Start programs in their state, including their quality in comparison to the QRIS framework, in order to support the decision on the most appropriate QRIS level for the Head Start pathway.
- Determine the documentation that will be required of Head Start programs as part of pursuing the alternative pathway and how these programs will be handled as part of the QRIS monitoring process.

Illinois Head Start programs have an alternative pathway to receive a Silver rating on the QRIS, one rating from the top level of Gold. A crosswalk aligning HSPPS and QRIS is maintained as part of this approach; therefore, alignment work is done to support the alternative pathway.

### Achieving Successful Integration

States shared their insights about what makes for successful Head Start-QRIS integration. Several elements were in place across all the states that have successfully brought Head Start into their QRIS.





## Essential: Understanding the Role of Incentives

Incentives are critical for a successful integration of Head Start and QRIS. Incentives may include tiered subsidy reimbursement, quality grants, scholarships, tax credits, or professional stipends. State leaders indicated that providing the Head Start community with incentives is a critical component of successful integration. If there are incentives for programs participating in QRIS, do Head Start programs have access to these incentives? States may struggle with whether or not Head Start should access QRIS-related incentives given these programs are considered to be better funded for the delivery of quality than child care

programs. Incentives are often funded by state implementation of the Child Care and Development Block Grant federal funding, which targets quality in child care. This is another decision states face when using incentives for Head Start programs, potentially including those that are not child care services. States may also struggle with whether they should incentivize Head Start participation in order to encourage and increase Head Start programs in their QRIS. How decisions are made on the issue of incentives is an important piece of this dimension of Head Start-QRIS integration.

### Oregon

This example demonstrates that the incentive question does not have to be all or nothing but can be divided up in a way that considers where the federal funding for quality is directed. As part of Oregon's Head Start-QRIS integration, which uses a model combining alignment, reciprocity, and alternative pathway, the decision was made that Head Start programs would not receive program funding incentives. Oregon professionals have access to individual incentives that are available as part of QRIS, and this extends to professionals working in Head Start programs that are engaged in QRIS. Additionally, families who select a Head Start program may access family-based incentives when that program participates in QRIS.



## Essential: Utilizing Both Head Start and State Professional Development Systems

Professional development systems are a core part of support for the tracking and monitoring of professional credentials, training requirements, and other professional development QRIS standards. In addition, professional development systems

support the achievement of standards as they often house the training, technical assistance, and other coaching supports programs need to succeed in their quality efforts. States that have actively worked on the integration of Head Start in QRIS grappled with the following questions about their current professional development system: Are all types of programs participating in this system currently? What types of monitoring and training systems do Head Start programs have in place? Do these intersect with the broader statewide system? Head Start has a professional development system in place for programs, which includes training, technical assistance, and web-based professional development resources. Some of the strongest examples of integration underscore the idea that recognition for the Head Start professional development system and its components is core to integration in QRIS. As part of understanding the professional development system, it is necessary to acknowledge not only that both state and Head Start professional development exist, so does the work to determine how each system can continue to use its own professional development, while functioning as part of a QRIS that gives credit for these resources.

In order to meet training-related QRIS standards, states with successful integration recommend recognizing trainings offered as part of the Head Start system. Not doing so could result in a duplication of efforts. States explain this duplication as an unintended consequence of QRIS-required

### Illinois

Illinois has a tiered reimbursement structure for subsidy administration, as part of its QRIS. Programs that achieve a Silver or Gold as their QRIS Circle of Quality level have access to an add-on to the reimbursement rate for children funded by child care subsidy. This enhanced reimbursement includes Head Start programs in the QRIS at those levels of quality; therefore, Head Start programs with children who are also funded by child care subsidy will be reimbursed at the add-on rate.

trainings that have been pushed out to programs. Head Start programs participating in QRIS have been forced to complete these trainings, even when they have duplicated content of Head Start trainings, in order to secure or maintain their QRIS rating, utilize the existing trainings that Head Start programs access, determine the QRIS trainings to which they align, and avoid duplication of effort by professionals while benefiting from a resource that exists for Head Start programs.

Statewide professional development systems most frequently include a professional registry database or system. As part of working on a strategy for Head Start-QRIS integration, consider the role that this registry system plays in your QRIS. Some states recommend that integration will go smoother if all professionals and programs are engaged in the professional development registry system. When the registry holds both child care and Head Start practitioners, it can provide improved information about the early learning workforce in the state and allow for consistency of effort at the facility level when multiple funding sources are in play. If participation in the registry is required as part of demonstrating QRIS standards and ongoing QRIS monitoring of programs, analyze how robust the professional development registry system is. Is the system equipped to translate across different types of programs and models, or was it built for the child care context alone? This analysis may result in modifications necessary to ensure the registry is able to accurately assess professional qualifications across program types.

### **Montana**

As part of their integration work, Montana leaders are working specifically on how to maximize the professional development opportunities to which different programs have access and to avoid duplication of efforts. Within their reciprocity model, Head Start programs receive credit for 40 QRIS standards, due to their compliance with HSPPS. Reciprocity includes accepting numerous trainings, that are accessed only by Head Start programs, into the overall QRIS framework, thus giving Head Start programs credit for these trainings. The continued work on making best use of professional development systems now extends to considering the other supports to which programs have access and using the supports that best meet a program's needs. For instance, as part of QRIS, programs have access to Pyramid model coaching; Head Start programs also have access to Pyramid model coaching. This coaching work is integrated; Head Start programs continue to receive Pyramid coaching through their system and QRIS Pyramid coaching is pushed out to other programs without this resource.

### **Oregon**

Oregon leaders noted that a professional development registry in which all professionals participate is important to Head Start-QRIS integration. Their own experience with integration necessitated the acknowledgement of the potential limitations or barriers of one registry for all in determining professional qualifications. Issues related to differences in titling of positions and variances in classroom staffing approaches, along with a lack of articulation across child care and Head Start, resulted in Head Start programs that did not appear to meet QRIS basic professional requirements, per the registry system. In reality, these programs met the highest level of professional qualifications in the QRIS. In light of this implementation finding, Oregon determined it best to allow Head Start programs in good standing federally, i.e., they meet all the professional requirements of the Head Start program, to meet the QRIS professional development standards without need of further documentation or use of the professional development registry.



## Essential: Establishing a Strategy for Monitoring That is Inclusive of Head Start Monitoring

Monitoring is a necessity but also an opportunity. Often, monitoring is the last aspect of integration considered, and the potential opportunities for sharing monitoring in which all Head Start programs are already participating does not occur. The federal regulations for Head Start are specifically calling out the opportunity for state leaders to determine how they can make use of existing federal monitoring of Head Start programs to demonstrate adherence to aspects of QRIS. Almost all QRIS leaders noted they do not have enough funding or capacity for the system they need to fully implement their QRIS. In particular, the costs associated with initial rating and ongoing monitoring of programs is one of the largest financial burdens. In considering a strategy for monitoring, the questions include:

- How will you use monitoring results from federal monitoring of programs?
- Will Head Start programs receive all the same monitoring as child care programs?
- Is this duplicative monitoring in some areas for Head Start?
- How will the new approach to Head Start monitoring, as part of the revised HSPPS, impact the type and frequency of monitoring data to which state QRISs will have access? On this last point, as the new approach to federal monitoring of Head Start programs rolls out, it will be a place for continued coordination with QRIS, and modification on the current coordination occurring between QRIS and Head Start.

Head Start-QRIS integration that includes a focus on how to use monitoring is one way in which tapping into the Head Start system releases pressure from the QRIS while still supporting a common measurement of quality for all children in the state. States noted the need to invest time in the decisions related to monitoring and acknowledged that using Head Start monitoring systems does not mean there is no work for the QRIS system. Yet the states pursue this work because a monitoring strategy that allows for products from federally monitored Head Start uses an already existing investment in program quality monitoring. This strategy more successfully reduces the administrative and management burdens that ECE programs face. States that use the federal monitoring results as an alternative pathway for Head Start programs underscore that these programs must remain in good standing per their monitoring results. A poor federal monitoring report, or areas of program deficiency per the federal monitoring, may result in a reduction or removal of their QRIS level.



### Arkansas

Arkansas uses a reciprocity model for Head Start-QRIS integration, giving credit for achieving the QRIS standards. The state determined that HSPPS are more stringent than QRIS standards. In order to achieve this reciprocity within the QRIS, Head Start programs must submit their most recent federal monitoring report and their Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) scores. The benefits of using federal monitoring are twofold for Arkansas. One is that it acknowledges the work these high-quality programs undertook to meet the Head Start model and the monitoring in which they already participate. It also helps to avoid duplicating monitoring. The other is that Head Start programs do not receive monitoring visits by QRIS staff if they demonstrate compliance with federal requirements, thus freeing up these state resources to focus on the monitoring visits and follow-up quality supports needed by other programs.

## Illinois

Illinois uses an alternative pathway model for Head Start-QRIS integration. Head Start programs may enroll in QRIS as presumptively-Silver based entirely on federal monitoring results. There is an application process specific to Head Start programs that addresses this pathway. If a Head Start program seeks to apply for Gold level, the highest level of the QRIS, federal monitoring results are accepted for thirteen of the fifteen QRIS standards. The Head Start program will then be monitored under QRIS for those remaining two standards, in order to determine if it has achieved a Gold rating. The QRIS-specific monitoring is an on-site assessment of classroom quality for the remaining two standards; the assessment is conducted with either CLASS or ERS and it is the program's choice which tool will be used.

## Section II: Opportunities to Lead Change

States shared the following benefits and opportunities gained from having Head Start integrated into the QRIS:

### 1. Integration advances the state's purpose for a QRIS.

State visions and purposes for implementing a QRIS share the common goal of improving the quality of ECE delivered to young children throughout their states. In all states, many children who are at greatest risk are served by Head Start programs. A common definition and measure of quality is key to ensuring the quality of services accessed by all children; QRIS has the potential to be this shared framework of quality irrespective of funder or program model. States further this QRIS position in their ECE systems by advancing the move to a cross-system approach, one that integrates entities such as Head Start, pre-K, and child care. It is in the best interest of states and QRIS to have Head Start, and all programs, as part of the QRIS. Supporting integration and working through the details of integration advances an approach in which quality is recognized and understood across funding streams and program models, assuring quality services to children across programs.

The state system benefits from this shared recognition and understanding of quality, as do the programs participating, including Head Start. Families are supported by consumer education on quality and an understanding of how to interpret QRIS ratings, that extends to all of the potential programs they may access. State leaders noted that in order to see these benefits and realize the broader purpose of the QRIS, it must encompass and be a fair measure of quality for a diversity of programs. Further, state leaders have recognized that the QRIS as the

measurement of quality for their state is made more valid by having all programs seen as part of, and measured with, the one tool for the ECE system. It is worth the investment for states to work on integration strategies for Head Start and QRIS.



Ensure that those knowledgeable in Head Start are involved in the conversation, leading from the beginning.

Arkansas leaders discussed the benefits of integration, noting that being seen as a single ECE system is mutually beneficial, for both QRISs and Head Start. They spoke of strong collaboration and all stakeholders working together to support Head Start as part of the ECE community in the state. This approach, and the integrated system, is beneficial to Head Start and ECE overall, particularly when they consider how they are seeking to increase the state legislature's understanding of the impact of quality. In these conversations, they are speaking to the quality across all program types because of an integrated Head Start-QRIS approach. Head Start benefits from this messaging with the Arkansas state legislature.

As is the case with preschool and child care programs, Montana noted that Head Start programs are on a continuum of quality implementation across the state; QRIS provides supports along with a framework, accessible to all programs, that measures progress.



## 2. Head Start brings unique strengths that can help strengthen the QRIS.

Head Start stakeholders and Head Start program staff bring expertise and knowledge of quality improvement systems that is beneficial to states re-envisioning and revising. Not tapping in to this experience and expertise is a missed opportunity for states working on Head Start-QRIS integration. The first step in building a mutually beneficial relationship between the two entities is to consider the ways Head Start is part of leading QRIS efforts. At the state level, if Head Start leaders do not have a role in guiding or leading the QRIS, they cannot offer their wisdom on quality programming and measurement, help to ensure the QRIS is meaningful as a measure of Head Start, or advise on the supports that are built as part of QRISs to meet program needs. Additionally, if Head Start leaders don't participate as stakeholders in the structure and processes guiding the QRIS, there will be no opportunity to explore how to leverage Head Start resources as part of QRIS implementation. Head Start benefits from a QRIS that is representative of the Head Start experience, knowledge, and diversity, as it strengthens the quality frame and measurement.

In particular, Head Start has the potential to help states re-invent their QRISs, many of which will be the second or third iterations. For many states, this work involves revising the standards and raising the level of rigor within the standards. The Head Start system has a deep understanding of the role, potential, and challenges of adhering to and measuring standards. It strives for quality programming, an experience which can be shared broadly with working groups revising the QRIS.

Also, Head Start has the potential to be a model for the content of QRIS standards or offer examples of standards content for discussion and modification, as appropriate, to the diverse programs participating in the QRIS. State leaders in Arkansas shared that they have used Head Start content on family engagement and health to address these areas within the QRIS. While not all HSPPS are transferrable to a QRIS framework, these standards and other aspects of Head Start, such as school readiness goals, child development outcomes framework, and the parent, family, and community engagement principles, are seen as examples of standard rigor. The standards and components of implementing Head Start qualify it as an example of what high quality can be in serving children and families. The collaborative nature of this work is clear; provider stakeholders interviewed through this process lamented that



Head Start monitoring should be more frequent than once every three years. In fact, they referenced QRIS annual monitoring as being more in line with their hopes for support in continuous quality improvement. Thus, demonstrating that no one system has all the answers or the perfect approach, a cross-sector approach to QRISs and its leadership will benefit Head Start, as well as all programs participating in the QRIS.

## 3. Head Start is a crucial partner for addressing equity in the QRIS.

In discussions with stakeholders, we sought reflection on how their QRIS work addresses equity. We specifically wanted to explore how Head Start fits in to their QRIS equity work. Stakeholders all said that Head Start should be their core partner in equity work. Frequently, stakeholders shared they have not focused strategies on addressing equity, as their work up to this point has been on building and implementing the QRIS and its structure. Research has demonstrated that developing an early childhood system that strives to meet the needs of all children requires explicit attention to a number of current gaps that exist – by income, race/ethnicity, language, and culture – both in child outcomes and opportunities, and system capacity and response. QRIS leaders, including cross-system leaders such as Head Start leaders, must focus their equity work on how these gaps exist in their states, how they understand them, what efforts may be underway to remediate the gaps, or which efforts may exacerbate them. This work is about the ECE system as a whole, and benefits all children, with QRIS as one piece of the puzzle.

States noted that equity needs to be their focus as they understand ongoing implementation and what refinements are necessary as they look toward a full-scale retooling and revision of their QRIS dimensions. Select strategies that state leaders may want to explore include:

- Using data on both children in the state and access to consider program and quality/capacity of staff to serve those children and families.
- Considering enhanced rates or reimbursement for serving at-risk or target populations.
- Analyzing how the services that exist are being delivered to children and how these compare to what the most at-risk children need to change outcomes/succeed.
- Reviewing mechanisms to structure the state system to allow for a matching of services to children and need.

A QRIS presents a real opportunity for states' Head Start stakeholders and programs to lead in work on issues of equity. Head Start programs and national leadership have a long history of working to address equity. Head Start's history and approach include work to promote equity in ECE across diverse populations of children and families. For example, Head Start requires programs to complete an annual community assessment, including cultural and linguistic needs of their area and an analysis of their program reach; program services include working to address and support progress on socio-economic, education/training, and work force needs of parents and families; and targeted grants for underserved populations including American Indian, Alaskan Native, and migrant and seasonal workers.<sup>5</sup> Head Start has the national, state, and local leadership with the capacity, background, and experience to lead on QRIS's role in equity work.

Arkansas leaders shared their strong feeling that Head Start is part of the solution with regard to equity due to whom they serve, and the program target population being driven by income. The state has found Head Start has had more minority leaders than the other sectors in ECE. With training and support to attract and retain diverse professionals, child care still, more often than not, is comprised of a less diverse group of leaders. Head Start can contribute leadership on equity. Arkansas' work in this area has already included adding more rigor to the standards and additional levels to the QRIS frame. This work has created a greater emphasis on equity. In surveying programs, the Head Start Collaboration Director has identified the need and desire for racial equity training as part of its QRIS.

“Don't underestimate the magnitude of the work. It's essential to recognize that different parts of the field use different terminology, have different strategies, and have different program cultures and ways of doing business.”

As Arkansas leaders indicated, Head Start is in a unique position to support not just the rigor of standards, but also how equity issues are addressed throughout QRIS. Head Start has the knowledge and opportunity to be part of this work, whether a state is at a point of revising its QRIS or not. An effort to examine standards from an equity perspective is a valuable exercise outside of QRIS revision as it can inform implementation strategies in an ongoing manner. It is a process for reflection and real analysis of the values held by the state and how these translate into written standards for measuring and continually improving quality of early care and education. Oregon stakeholders shared that partnering on the integration of Head Start and QRIS has proven valuable for forcing reflection on the equity of the professional qualifications within the QRIS.

For instance, Montana leaders noted that both family engagement and equity are strong points for Head Start. When Montana leaders reflected on the role of equity in the work of QRIS, they thought of vulnerable populations, and rural and urban programs – and Head Start can demonstrate experience with and knowledge of all these populations in their state. QRIS leaders can learn from Head Start's efforts in these areas; thus, they will participate in this work.



## Conclusion

Head Start and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems may use different terminology and have some separate systems, but they speak the same language in relation to their commitment to the delivery of quality early care and education. It is incumbent upon programs, particularly those focused on the delivery of high-quality services to our most at-risk children and families, to be coordinated and integrated in their approach. Conflicting, complex, or hard to access and understand messages about resources, quality, and types of programs only further burden families of young children, placing the responsibility of selecting the program that is the highest quality and the best match for their needs squarely on their backs. Components such as QRIS parent awareness and education and Head Start parent and community outreach, recruitment, and engagement focus on making information about programs, quality, and access/enrollment more readily available to and easily interpreted by all families. Integrating Head Start and QRIS for a shared measure of quality supports families in their role as consumers, making parental choice of high-quality settings, that also meet their needs, easier to achieve. Further, a shared measure of quality supports the professionals, programs, communities, and state systems in marshaling their resources and efforts in support of quality programming. Integration raises a common bar for all and fosters a deeper understanding of, and commitment to, the work necessary to deliver quality.



## ACTION TOOL: ECE Systems Considerations

As states consider what integration approach to use, or how to modify their current integration approach, there are several factors of their overall ECE system that are useful to consider. State leaders shared successes and challenges of their approach to Head Start-QRIS integration, some of which specifically related back to the state structure or other systemic issues. The ultimate goal of integration is to increase the number of Head Start programs in QRIS. Therefore, we must consider how integration may address structural or systemic issues within particular states.

**Reflect on the following questions, analyzing whether or not you need to plan for these elements of your state context:**

1. Are Head Start programs required to be licensed? If licensing is the first level of the QRIS and Head Start programs are not licensed currently, their participation involves two steps. First, Head Start programs must go through state licensing. Only after they are licensed can they pursue a QRIS rating. Alternatively, states might re-conceptualize licensing as the first level of the QRIS and consider alternatives to licensing. This strategy can prove useful for school based pre-K programs as well.
2. Are Head Start programs part of the professional development system in the state? How are they utilizing the professional development system; are they accessing trainings, for instance, or tracking their professionals in the registry? As part of participating in the QRIS, do Head Start programs need to use these aspects of the professional development system? It is important as part of integration to acknowledge and consider how current trainings Head Start programs access factor in to the training requirements.
3. How are school-district-based early childhood programs integrated into the QRIS? There may also be school-based Head Start programs for which the integration approach needs to account.
4. Are there any elements of participating in existing state systems that will impact a Head Start program's ability to meet HSPPS?



## ACTION TOOL: Structural Dimensions of Head Start and QRIS

Several structural dimensions exist as part of implementing QRIS. We reviewed these structural dimensions from the perspective of understanding how they may play a role in, or advance, Head Start-QRIS integration. Through this review, we found that Head Start has the capacity to be part of, and possibly have a stake in the delivery of, the structural dimensions of QRISs. In fact, these systems have many commonalities in how they are structured and their focus areas for implementing quality ECE services. There is great potential for how Head Start could be more fully integrated into the structural dimensions of QRISs. **The seven dimensions that influence QRIS implementation are:**

1. Governance.
2. Funding.
3. Quality standards for programs and practitioners.
4. Supports and infrastructure to meet quality standards.
5. Monitoring and accountability.
6. Financing quality standards.
7. Engagement and outreach.

Herein, we pose some questions to push thought on what structural integration could look like and its potential, and we share state-based examples of how this is currently occurring in the Case Studies. Review the chart and think about each dimension. What are the ways you might be able to carry out some of these strategies to further your Head Start-QRIS integration efforts?

Dimension	Questions to consider in strategic approach
<b>1. Governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is Head Start represented in the decision-making for the design and implementation of the QRIS? If so, how?</li> <li>• What is Head Start’s role in governance of the QRIS? In what ways could this role be expanded in order to ensure Head Start expertise is represented?</li> </ul>
<b>2. Funding and Financing Quality Supports*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the funding sources for the QRIS, specifically, management of QRIS, QRIS incentives, payment for rating and accountability?</li> <li>• What is Head Start’s role in funding the QRIS? Does Head Start contribute resources to the management or any part of the QRIS?</li> <li>• In thinking about the QRIS funding for programs, what is available to programs? Is there any difference by program type? What is the rationale behind the variance?</li> <li>• If there are efforts to get resources to programs to improve the costs per child through strategies such as tiered reimbursement or large grants, does Head Start participate? If yes, why and if no, why not?</li> </ul>

\*This dimension is a combination of dimensions 2 and 6, referenced above.

Dimension	Questions to consider in strategic approach
<b>3. Quality standards for programs and practitioners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a crosswalk of standards? What is the purpose of the crosswalk?</li> <li>• Are there shared standards? How is this approached? If not, why not?</li> </ul>
<b>4. Supports to meet quality standards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the supports (professional development, scholarships, coaching, technical assistance, curriculum purchasing, etc.) that the QRIS offers to participating Head Start programs? Are these supports the same or different depending on program type?</li> <li>• Is there any integration of supports for programs and practitioners? How are they shared or leveraged (e.g., the Head Start-specific supports, potentially leveraging of these Head Start supports)?</li> </ul>
<b>5. Monitoring and accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the approach to monitoring and accountability (rating) in the QRIS? Is this approach the same or different depending on program type?</li> <li>• How is monitoring from the Head Start system leveraged or shared?</li> <li>• How is rating accomplished for the Head Start programs versus other programs?</li> <li>• How does the QRIS reconcile the multi-site grantee approach of Head Start monitoring with the traditional facility specific approach in the QRIS?</li> </ul>
<b>6. Engagement and outreach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the engagement and outreach strategy for educating and involving providers in the QRIS? How does this apply to Head Start?</li> <li>• What is the engagement and outreach strategy for bringing families greater awareness of the QRIS? What is Head Start's role?</li> <li>• What is the engagement and outreach strategy for working with those who influence public policy and what is Head Start's role?</li> <li>• For other individuals of influence?</li> </ul>

## Federal Government's Promotion of Cross-sector QRISs

The U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services have promoted policy shifts and made specific changes to language governing program implementation to promote coordination and engagement with QRIS. For example, the Administration for Children and Families, through the revised Head Start Program Performance Standards (2016), the federal government's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant competitions (2012-2016), and Preschool Development Grant (PDG) competitions (2014) included language that encouraged coordination with QRISs.

### **Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant:**

The RTT-ELC competition aimed to improve the quality of early learning and development for children with high need. ELC grants were awarded to states with plans to improve early learning and development programs in five key reform areas. One area focuses on cross-sector QRISs that include pre-K, Head Start, and child care programs. The grant specifically asked states to “define high-quality, accountable programs by creating a common Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) that is used across the state to evaluate and improve program performance and to inform families about program quality.”<sup>6</sup>

**Preschool Development Grant (PDG):** The PDG competition invited states to apply for funding for development or expansion of pre-K. The PDG guidelines referenced QRIS. First, states were asked to ensure “the quality of existing early learning programs that receive state funding, including State Preschool Programs, as evidenced by policies and program data that demonstrate the state’s commitment to the components of a High-Quality Preschool Program; compliance with Program Standards; and support for program monitoring and improvement, which may be accomplished through the use of a TQRIS.” Second, states were asked to “implement a system for monitoring and supporting continuous improvement ... to ensure that each Subgrantee is providing High-Quality Preschool Programs which may be accomplished through the use of leveraging a TQRIS.”<sup>7</sup>

**Head Start Program Performance Standards:** The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) revised the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) to strengthen and improve the quality of Head Start programs. The streamlined Standards were the first comprehensive revision of the HSPPS since they were originally published in 1975.

The revised HSPPS, released on September 2016, have established expectations regarding Head Start participation in QRIS. The regulations state a Head Start or Early Head Start program “must participate in its state or local Quality Rating and Improvement System if:

- (i) Its state or local QRIS accepts Head Start monitoring data to document quality indicators included in the state’s tiered system;
- (ii) Participation would not impact a program’s ability to comply with Head Start Performance Standards; and,
- (iii) The program has not provided the Office of Head Start with a compelling reason not to comply with this requirement.”<sup>8</sup>



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Workman, S. and Ullrich, R. Quality 101: Identifying the Core Components of a High-Quality Early Childhood Program (2017)

<sup>2</sup> Loeb, S., & Bassok, D. (2007). Early childhood and the achievement gap. In H.F. Ladd & E.B. Fiske (Eds.), *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy* (pp. 517-534). Routledge Press.

<sup>3</sup> Head Start Program Performance Standards, [www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/policy](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/policy)

<sup>4</sup> Mitchell, A.W. (2005). Stair steps to quality: A guide for states and communities developing quality rating systems for early care and education. Retrieved from [www.earlychildhoodfinance.org/downloads/2005/MitchStairSteps\\_2005.pdf](http://www.earlychildhoodfinance.org/downloads/2005/MitchStairSteps_2005.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Johnson-Staub, C. (2017) Equity Starts Early Addressing Racial Inequities in Child Care and Early Education Policy. CLASP, [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org)

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<sup>6</sup> US Department of Human Services Office of the Administration for Children and Families (January 25, 2017). Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/early-learning/race-to-the-top>

<sup>7</sup> US Departments of Education and Health and Human Services (2014). Applications for New Awards; Preschool Development Grants—Development Grants; Notice. Retrieved from <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-08-18/pdf/2014-19426.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> HSPPS, <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/part-1302-program-operations>

# Appendices

## Case Study: Montana

<p><b>Purpose of QRIS</b></p>	<p>Montana’s Quality Rating and Improvement System, <b>STARS</b>, increases the quality of programs for children and families, and provides support and professional development to those programs that choose to participate.</p>
<p><b>Inception of QRIS, timeline of revisions, if applicable</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Began in 2007.</li> <li>• 2016-17 involved alignment and crosswalk work groups, with a focus on integration of Head Start into the QRIS.</li> <li>• The current model is very new. The Head Start standards went into effect July 2017. The new standards were a modification, e.g., there was some simplification of requirements for Head Start programs. Head Start STARS to Quality standards have been in effect since July 1, 2017</li> </ul>
<p><b>Head Start QRIS Integration Model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Alignment</li> <li>✓ Reciprocity</li> <li>✓ Alternative Pathways</li> </ul>	<p><b>Montana uses an alignment approach with some reciprocity.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Alignment:</b> Completed a crosswalk of the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) with the QRIS standards. Some standards specific to Head Start were developed based on the crosswalk alignment process.</li> <li>• <b>Reciprocity:</b> There are over 40 QRIS standards which are waived for Head Start programs due to meeting the HSPPS. The state does not approach reciprocity, automatically accepting trainings or activities, without a demonstration of their content.</li> </ul>

### Dimensions of Head Start-QRIS Integration

Dimension	Details on state approach
<p><b>1. Governance</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Head Start Collaboration Office and other Head Start stakeholders participated in the planning process to address Head Start integration.</li> <li>• Head Start is not involved in the governance of the QRIS. It is a partner, and is represented at the state level, but is not involved in decision making. The Head Start Collaboration Office is located within the Early Childhood Services Bureau, where QRIS is managed.</li> </ul>

## Dimensions of Head Start-QRIS Integration (Continued)

Dimension	Details on state approach
<p><b>2. Funding</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The funding sources for QRIS are Montana general fund revenue and CCDF. Head Start does not participate in funding the QRIS.</li> <li>Seventy-five percent of the QRIS funding goes directly to providers. Provider supports include incentives and increased percentage of subsidy reimbursement. Head Start participating in QRIS access the same benefits as other programs. There is a difference by program type: incentives and subsidy reimbursement vary based on the size of the program and their level within the STARS framework.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Quality standards for programs and practitioners</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Montana has a crosswalk of QRIS and Head Start standards. The purpose of the crosswalk is to recognize the value of the trainings and criteria that Head Start programs already meet and to avoid duplication of time and money if standards have been met in another way.</li> <li>A workgroup was convened to review the crosswalk with the STARS management team, and to make joint recommendations. This process was part of preparing for the revised federal Head Start standards and increasing Head Start involvement in QRIS.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Supports to meet quality standards</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Head Start programs participating in QRIS have access to the same supports as any other program. Supports include scholarships, coaching, and technical assistance consultants who help with the online and onsite application. There are no differences in the program type for those kinds of supports. Everyone is able to apply for/receive them.</li> <li>Head Start programs can attend any of the trainings available as part of the QRIS supports. Free long-distance and classroom learning opportunities are available.</li> <li>There has been some work to integrate across QRIS and Head Start, specifically in relation to the Pyramid Model. Pyramid Model coaching, available to all STARS programs through the QRIS, is integrated with Head Start program coaching. The goal is to work with programs to integrate across different resources and use the supports that best meet programmatic needs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Monitoring and accountability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All programs participating in QRIS have the same rating process, monitoring, and accountability. Head Start and all programs in QRIS meet assessment criteria, including using the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) tools and the program administration scales (PAS). Assessors work with individual programs to make sure the timing is both applicable to and convenient for the programs.</li> </ul>

## Dimensions of Head Start-QRIS Integration (Continued)

Dimension	Details on state approach
<p><b>6. Engagement and outreach</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provider engagement and outreach occurs through the Child Care Resource and Referral network across the state, as well as at the state level. There are STARS specialists at the Early Childhood Services Bureau and approximately 20 consultants and coaches who work directly with the programs. Engagement and outreach is available both through a coaching consortium within the state and the STARS consultants who provide TA and support in working through the QRIS framework. Head Start programs are reached through these forms of engagement and outreach, along with all other programs.</li> <li>• The Head Start Collaboration Director works closely with the STARS team and does outreach out to Head Start and communicates back to QRIS on behalf of these programs.</li> <li>• Family awareness and education includes outreach in the form of lawn signs as well as plaques or posters in providers' windows. There is also a website providing consumer/family information. QRIS leaders feel Head Start is better at outreach aimed at raising family awareness. The QRIS learns from Head Start about how to reach families and provide consumer education. QRIS-provided outreach is supplemented by Head Start family outreach and education.</li> <li>• For engaging public policy and other stakeholders, Montana Advocates for Children (MAC), an early childhood lobbying group, provides information and outreach to legislators and policymakers. Head Start is active in advocacy. MAC is comprised of five organizations, of which Head Start is one. The organizations have worked together to provide outreach and information to policymakers.</li> </ul>

### What elements are essential to successful Head Start-QRIS integration? What does the state count as most critical to successful integration of Head Start in QRIS?

- Ensure continued conversation and ongoing open dialogue across QRIS and Head Start about what is and isn't working.
- Implement outreach, possibly a survey approach, after the integration approach has been in place for at least a year. Learn from providers and stakeholders directly about what is and isn't working.
- Remain flexible and responsive to see that the integration approach is not an endpoint, but rather that Head Start integration is an ongoing, fluid process.
- Facilitate the integration through shared elements, previously in place in the state, such as the professional development registry in Montana that was already used across program types.

## Measuring Impact of Head Start-QRIS Integration

Montana has 36 grants that include EHS, Head Start, EHS-CCP, and AIAN grants, with capacity to serve over 5,000 children. There are a couple variables impacting Head Start-QRIS participation numbers:

- A majority of AIAN grants will not pursue licensure in the state system, which is a required part of QRIS. Given that QRIS is not mandatory for programs, the state does not include these programs in Head Start-QRIS participation tracking.
- Site participation numbers vary from program/grant participation numbers, as some programs will have partial participation. For instance, a program may have both EHS and Head Start grants but only have the EHS grant classrooms involved in QRIS.

After pulling AIAN programs, there are nine EHS/Head Start programs currently participating and eight programs not involved in QRIS. At the program/grantee level, participation is at 53 percent. Of the licensed child care programs in the state, 25 percent are participating in STARS to Quality.

## Case Study: Arkansas

<p><b>Purpose of QRIS</b></p>	<p>The goal of <b>Better Beginnings</b>, Arkansas’s Quality Rating and Improvement System, is to improve the quality of early childhood education and programs in Arkansas. While the focus is on child care, the system includes infant-toddler, pre-K, school age; center-based and family child care; and Head Start, as part of licensed child care.</p>
<p><b>Inception of QRIS, timeline of revisions, if applicable</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have initial plans to begin a QRIS revision.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Head Start QRIS Integration Model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Alignment</li> <li>✓ Reciprocity</li> <li>✓ Alternative Pathways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reciprocity:</b> Head Start programs submit results of their federal monitoring (that occurs every three years) and their CLASS scores in order to establish their Better Beginnings level.</li> <li>• Head Start quality standards met or, in most cases, were higher than Arkansas’s initial QRIS standards. Therefore, Head Start programs in compliance with Head Start Program Performance Standards were granted the highest QRIS rating automatically.</li> </ul>

### Dimensions of Head Start-QRIS Integration

Dimension	Details on state approach
<p><b>1. Governance</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arkansas’s state Early Learning Council is the advisory body for the QRIS. Head Start is actively represented on this advisory body and, therefore, is coordinating and collaborating with all the other stakeholders on the governance of QRIS.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Funding</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The funding sources for QRIS are state-based revenue, including Child Care Development Fund and state pre-K funding. Head Start does not participate in funding the QRIS directly.</li> <li>• Programs participating in the QRIS, with the exception of Head Start, access improved rates through a tiered reimbursement structure. QRIS participation is a requirement for programs receiving child care subsidy and state pre-K. If Head Start programs provide an extended day of care for the child, they are able to access the tiered reimbursement for those hours of the day.</li> </ul>

## Dimensions of Head Start-QRIS Integration (Continued)

Dimension	Details on state approach
<p><b>3. Quality standards for programs and practitioners</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head Start informed some of the QRIS standards, specifically on family engagement and health. Overall there are not shared standards across Head Start and QRIS because Head Start standards are more rigorous than the state QRIS.</li> <li>• Arkansas has not completed a crosswalk of the QRIS and Head Start standards because the Head Start standards are at a higher level than the QRIS. A crosswalk was completed for Head Start and the state Early Learning Standards.</li> <li>• It was this understanding of Head Start standards being more rigorous than the state QRIS that translates to Head Start programs with successful federal reviews meeting the QRIS standards.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Supports to meet quality standards</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is technical assistance, coaching, and professional development specifically for the QRIS programs on the child care side. This mirrors what Head Start is able to provide as well.</li> <li>• Head Start programs participating in the QRIS have access to the professional development trainings and the coaching and mentoring that is available through the QRIS. Head Start does have access to its own system of technical assistance, training, and coaching. In some areas, Head Start is more resourced for these types of supports and the state is encouraging Head Start programs to use their own resources first before tapping the state resources, which have to reach all of child care and pre-K, too.</li> <li>• The state is exploring how the Head Start resources, such as its strong work on expulsion and suspension, can be leveraged to support all programs, with the understanding that the program supports specific to Head Start cannot be shared with child care programs. As Head Start programs have their own coaches, they are not accessing this part of the state QRIS and, therefore, allow this state resource to be more fully allocated to other programs.</li> <li>• All programs have access to the professional development registry. Head Start programs noted use of this registry and that it supports their effort to demonstrate staff training, as required by federal monitoring.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Monitoring and accountability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For Head Start programs, the Head Start monitoring report and their CLASS data serve as validation of the reciprocity with QRIS. Due to the higher standards of Head Start, these programs that demonstrate reciprocity come in at the highest level - three - on the QRIS scale.</li> <li>• Other non-Head Start programs have a site visit done as part of their rating and ongoing monitoring. At level two, the program is assessed using an Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) and supported through coaching.</li> </ul>

## Dimensions of Head Start-QRIS Integration (Continued)

Dimension	Details on state approach
<p><b>6. Engagement and outreach</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arkansas has engaged with a communications firm to support both provider and family outreach for over 15 years. The approach includes engagement and outreach targeted at providers and families. For both audiences, there is a focused website, different training and resource information, access to regular newsletters, and update to the sites. Outreach includes ads, media, and TV. Head Start has been part of the education and engagement.</li> <li>Head Start programs support family awareness and education about QRIS by including it in parent materials. The programs also market the program by including information about their QRIS rating.</li> <li>Much of the engagement of public policy and other stakeholders occurs through the longstanding partnership with the state child advocacy group. This group has a coalition focused on early childhood and support messaging. Head Start is an active participant in the overall child advocacy community.</li> </ul>

### What elements are essential to successful Head Start-QRIS integration? What does the state count as most critical to successful integration of Head Start in QRIS?

Arkansas has acknowledged what Head Start brings to ECE work: its experience, resources, monitoring, and programmatic expectations. In acknowledging and using this to inform how Head Start would be integrated into its QRIS, Arkansas determined that Head Start monitoring results and CLASS data should be used as part of assigning Head Start programs a QRIS level. Head Start programs said that it is easy to participate in their QRIS. This may be a direct result of the stakeholders who built the QRIS working actively to make use of Head Start resources and respect Head Start as part of the larger ECE system.

### Measuring Impact of Head Start QRIS Integration

There are 213 Head Start centers in Arkansas and they array as follows with the QRIS:

Total Centers	Not participating	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
213 Head Start Centers	17 centers, 8%	16 centers, 7.15%	2 centers, .95%	178 centers, 84%

State pre-K programs are required to be part of the QRIS. Therefore, their participation is higher, at nearly 100 percent.

## Case Study: Illinois

<p><b>Purpose of QRIS</b></p>	<p>Illinois’ Quality Rating and Improvement System, <b>ExceleRate Illinois</b>, ensures quality programming for all children, in all settings. Additionally, the system supports providers in receiving the training and credentials that equate with quality. ExceleRate is committed to leveling the playing field, across sectors and different types of programs, and to communicating to the community and public about the quality of child care. The system focuses on a site-based level of quality (rather than organizational level), as that is the level at which parents make their decision about child care.</p>
<p><b>Inception of QRIS, timeline of revisions, if applicable</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Began in 2013.</li> <li>• Initial work to integrate Head Start included a pilot of the QRIS with Head Start programs. After generating data from the pilot, the decision was made to use an alternative pathways approach with a presumptive level for Head Start programs. This pathway approach rolled out in 2017.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Head Start QRIS Integration Model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Alignment</li> <li>✓ Reciprocity</li> <li>✓ Alternative Pathways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Alternative Pathway:</b> Illinois’ alternative pathway approach began with alignment, via the completion of a crosswalk of the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) with the QRIS standards.</li> <li>• Head Start programs in good standing based on their federal review come into the QRIS at a Silver level (the second highest level, the highest being Gold). Head Start programs have to submit their federal review documentation as part of their streamlined application process. If these programs want a Gold rating, they have to go through the Classroom Assessment piece, which addresses two standards that are not covered in their presumptive Silver.</li> </ul>

### Dimensions of Head Start-QRIS Integration

Dimension	Details on state approach
<p><b>1. Governance</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Head Start State Collaboration Office participates as a member of the Inter-Agency Team of state agency administrators, which governs the implementation of QRIS.</li> <li>• Head Start is represented on the Illinois Early Learning Council and all of its committees.</li> <li>• Head Start was represented by grantees, the Collaboration Office, and the Illinois Head State Association during the design of the QRIS.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Funding</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The funding sources for QRIS are state-based revenue and CCDF. Head Start does not participate in funding the QRIS.</li> <li>• Illinois has tiered reimbursement for child care centers and family child care (FCC) homes. These payments are tied to child care subsidy funds. Head Start programs are able to access the tiered reimbursement system after they apply to be a collaboration program with child care subsidy.</li> </ul>

## Dimensions of Head Start-QRIS Integration (Continued)

Dimension	Details on state approach
<b>3. Quality standards for programs and practitioners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Illinois has a crosswalk of QRIS and Head Start standards, the purpose of which is to streamline Head Start’s participation in QRIS. Illinois maintains one set of standards for its QRIS and recognizes multiple forms of evidence as pathways to QRIS validation for different programs, e.g., state preschool and Head Start.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Supports to meet quality standards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Head Start programs participating in the QRIS have access to the quality improvement specialist role, as other child care programs do. Child care programs and Head Starts operating as child care centers or family child care homes have access to technical assistance, training, and coaching funded by child care quality dollars.</li> <li>Incentives available to child care programs for professional development or quality improvement resources have been available to Head Start as well.</li> </ul>
<b>5. Monitoring and accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Head Start programs may enroll in the QRIS as presumptive Silver, based entirely on their federal monitoring results. Child care centers and homes may use their evidence of achieving one of several recognized national accreditations to meet a majority of the QRIS standards, in a fashion similar to Head Start’s alternative pathway.</li> <li>All programs participating in the QRIS are reassessed every three years. Programs are also required to submit an annual report as part of ExceleRate, with specific information required to remain eligible for the QRIS.</li> </ul>
<b>6. Engagement and outreach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provider education on the QRIS occurs through the Child Care Resource and Referral system. In addition, the Head Start State Collaboration Office provides support for outreach and recruitment. This was especially important when the Head Start-specific monitoring protocols were developed and piloted. The Head Start State Collaboration Office is part of the Inter-Agency Team of state administrators who oversee the QRIS. The team is responsible for communicating and coordinating with individual Head Start programs, the Illinois Head Start Association, and the National Head Start Association.</li> <li>Family awareness and education is supported with a public website where all QRIS ratings are available. Programs have access to a variety of marketing tools, press releases, and other materials that promote the QRIS with families.</li> <li>For engaging public policy and other stakeholders, both the Illinois Head Start Association and the National Head Start Association have well-developed mechanisms for communication with elected officials and government policymakers. The Early Learning Council and the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development also work to educate stakeholders on the QRIS.</li> </ul>

## **What elements are essential to successful Head Start-QRIS integration? What does the state count as most critical to successful integration of Head Start in QRIS?**

- Consider how to give Head Start programs credit for everything that is required of them as federal programs.
- Have everyone at the table and keep communication lines open.
- Be open to continual adjustments to the programs, such as simplifying the application process, to support streamlined participation.
- Due to the cross-system nature of the work in Illinois, it was important that fairness was involved in determining how to establish presumptive levels. Therefore, a pilot approach was an essential piece of gathering the data to determine an appropriate presumptive level in the QRIS.
- The fact that federal requirements now cover QRIS participation for Head Start programs.
- Provide better facilitation of the national Technical Assistance centers at the federal level and more explicit guidance and requirements at the federal level in order to ensure state programs experience integration of Head Start, child care, and QRIS.

### **Measuring Impact of Head Start QRIS Integration**

As of October 2017, there were 478 Head Start sites in QRIS, which is 66 percent of the eligible Head Start programs in Illinois. Comparatively, 44 percent of the child care programs eligible to participate (e.g., licensed) are participating in QRIS. One-hundred percent of the school-based state preschool programs (Preschool for All) are participating in the QRIS.

## Case Study: Oregon

<p><b>Purpose of QRIS</b></p>	<p>Oregon’s Quality Rating and Improvement System, <b>Spark</b>, supports and incentivizes continuous quality improvements for care and education programs and its workforce. The QRIS partners with families and communities to highlight the importance of early learning experiences and to connect families and quality learning programs. Investments and resources are prioritized to increase access to quality care for children, families, and communities furthest from opportunity.</p>
<p><b>Inception of QRIS, timeline of revisions, if applicable</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Began in 2013.</li> <li>• 2016 revised Head Start integration approach to address demonstration of professional competencies in the classroom.</li> <li>• Major revision began early 2017, the results of which will roll out in summer 2018.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Head Start QRIS Integration Model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Alignment</li> <li>✓ Reciprocity</li> <li>✓ Alternative Pathways</li> </ul>	<p><b>Oregon has used all three approaches in Head Start integration and continues to blend the models.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Alignment:</b> Completed a crosswalk of the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) with the QRIS standards.</li> <li>• <b>Reciprocity:</b> Head Start programs in good standing (demonstrated through their federal reviews) are given credit for meeting all of the HSPPS, as part of their QRIS application.</li> <li>• <b>Alternative Pathway:</b> Head Start programs in good standing based on their federal review are credited with meeting the personnel/professional development requirements of the QRIS and are not required to input this information into the professional development registry system, as other programs must in their QRIS application process.</li> </ul>

### Dimensions of Head Start-QRIS Integration

Dimension	Details on state approach
<p><b>1. Governance</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oregon Head Start Association participated in the crosswalk process. Head Start is represented on the QRIS state implementation team. The Head Start collaboration director is on the state’s Early Learning Council, which is the Early Learning Division’s governing body, the division out of which the QRIS is administered.</li> </ul>

## Dimensions of Head Start-QRIS Integration (Continued)

Dimension	Details on state approach
<p><b>2. Funding</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The funding source for QRIS is state-based revenue. Head Start does not participate in funding the QRIS.</li> <li>• Given that some programs receive specific financial support for quality, such as the federal funding for Head Start, the state determined that the small amount of money available for QRIS should be reserved for programs that do not have access to other resources to support quality improvement. Head Start programs do not access the program-based incentives, as part of QRIS participation.</li> <li>• Other incentives are available to Head Start due to QRIS participation, including tiered reimbursement and reduced co-pays for families that receive childcare subsidy and access care in a QRIS-rated program.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Quality standards for programs and practitioners</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oregon has a crosswalk of QRIS and Head Start standards, the purpose of which is to streamline Head Start's participation in QRIS.</li> <li>• Through the process of the crosswalk and alignment, it was determined which HSPPS correlated to the comparable QRIS standard. Being in good standing with Head Start translates to meeting QRIS standards.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Supports to meet quality standards</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head Start programs participating in the QRIS have access to the quality improvement specialist role, as other programs do, though there are staff with expertise in Head Start at Oregon's QRIS administrating agency.</li> <li>• Head Start programs are able to attend any of the statewide trainings made available to early learning programs.</li> <li>• Head Start staff (teachers and providers) are able to access the system of individual financial incentives if their program participates in QRIS and staff members individually participate in the professional development registry system.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Monitoring and accountability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current QRIS monitoring and accountability is made up of items that are linked to a program's licensing status, thus apply to all programs in QRIS. As part of the revision (2018), the development of the monitoring for QRIS in addition to this licensing-based items is underway. Committees are guiding the revision process and include both Head Start program staff and Early Learning Division staff with Head Start expertise.</li> <li>• Head Start monitoring reports serve as the basis for demonstrating that Head Start programs are meeting the Performance Standards that are reciprocal to QRIS standards. Also, CLASS scores from federal monitoring are taken as part of the rating process of Head Start. Additionally, Head Start programs participate in a streamlined portfolio process as part of their QRIS rating. Other programs must complete the full portfolio process.</li> </ul>

## Dimensions of Head Start-QRIS Integration (Continued)

Dimension	Details on state approach
<b>6. Engagement and outreach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provider education on the QRIS occurs through the Child Care Resource and Referral system. As Head Start programs are not as connected to this system, outreach and education for Head Start came out through the Early Learning Division, Head Start collaborations, state licensing specialists, and the Oregon Head Start Association.</li><li>• Family awareness and education has not been as much of a focus of the QRIS up to this point. It is a priority of the revision process and Head Start is an active participant in developing the strategy. Head Start providers shared their belief that Head Start should play a role in developing the strategies to engage families in understanding quality and QRIS.</li><li>• To engage public policy and other stakeholders, the state works directly with the Early Learning Council and the Division Director works with the legislature and Governor's Office to share the importance and potential of the QRIS as a quality improvement framework.</li></ul>

### What elements are essential to successful Head Start-QRIS integration? What does the state count as most critical to successful integration of Head Start in QRIS?

- Ensure Head Start is an active participant in the QRIS planning and implementation.
- Recognize that different parts of the field use different terminology, have different strategies, and have different program cultures and ways of doing business. As part of acknowledging these variances, allow for necessary modifications within the system to facilitate programs participating (e.g., include Head Start staff titles alongside titles common to child care programs).
- Cross train and educate other systems on Head Start in order to ensure they are able to carry out their role with Head Start accurately (e.g., licensing staff need education on how Head Start is different from child care).
- When a Head Start program struggles to achieve a high QRIS rating, especially in the beginning of your integration process, explore the reasons why. This exploration may uncover an issue with navigating the system, not the actual program quality.
- Analyze whether programs are being asked to provide the same documentation twice, as part of QRIS and their federal monitoring.

### Measuring Impact of Head Start QRIS Integration

Due to the linkage of the QRIS to licensing, the initial number of Head Starts eligible to participate in QRIS was low. It is necessary for all programs to be licensed to participate in QRIS but fewer than 25 percent of the Head Start programs were at the outset. As of March 2017, there were 227 Head Start sites in the state, with 220 of these in QRIS (a 97 percent participation rate). Child care and typical pre-K programs do not have a 97 percent rate of engagement so, by percentage, Head Start has a greater level of engagement.



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