



Rising to the Challenge: Building Effective Systems for Young Children and Families, a BUILD E-Book

Build
INITIATIVE
Strong Foundations For
Our Youngest Children

PREFACE

Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (ELC) is the major federal funding initiative seeking to support states in developing high quality early childhood systems, especially targeted to children with high needs. Launched in 2011 as a joint initiative of the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, there have been three rounds of major grants under the ELC, with 20 states now participating and funding that totals just over \$1 billion.

This federal initiative had particular meaning to the BUILD Initiative and its founders, members of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative. For more than a decade, BUILD has served as a catalyst for change and a national support system for state policy leaders and early childhood systems development. Not only did BUILD's work help shape the federal initiative, but it was also the fulfillment of the founders' most fervent hopes—that states could create detailed blueprints for an early childhood system, with budgets to support significant infrastructure development. BUILD staff, consultants, and many colleagues in the field rose to the challenge and provided extensive support to states as they applied for, and now implement, the federal opportunity.

The Early Learning Challenge supports states in their efforts to align, coordinate, and improve the quality of existing early learning and development programs across the multiple funding streams that support children from their birth through age five. Through the ELC, states focus on foundational elements of a state system: creating high quality, accountable early learning programs through Quality Rating and Improvement Systems; supporting improved child development outcomes through health, family engagement and vigorous use of early learning state standards and assessments; strengthening the early childhood workforce; and measuring progress.

Thirty-five states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico applied for the 2011 round of the Early Learning Challenge grants with nine states initially and then five more selected from this pool for funding. Sixteen states plus the District of Columbia responded to a new 2013 third round of grants; six were selected.

Round 1: California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington

Round 2: Colorado, Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin

Round 3: Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Vermont

Since the launch of the ELC, grantee states have rapidly moved from concept to implementation. Through this E-Book, we share learnings from the initial implementation of the efforts, highlighting experience, trends, and reflections stemming from the significant federal investment in this strategic work. The chapters are authored by experts who have worked in tandem with state leaders to gather information. By documenting the experience of the states, captured through interviews with state leaders, *Rising to the Challenge* provides a source of learning for all fifty states and territories and puts into practice our leadership commitment to continuous learning in the best interests of the children and families to whom we are all dedicated.



Harriet Dichter
General Manager and Editor, *Rising to the Challenge*



Susan G. Hibbard
Executive Director, BUILD Initiative



Chapter
8

Impact of the Early Learning Challenge on State Quality Rating and Improvement Systems

.....

Debi Mathias
2015



Table of Contents

Introduction and History of Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)	1
Highlights of State Innovations and Trends	2
Standards for Programs and Practitioners	6
• States are increasing rigor and a focus on school readiness and positive child outcomes at the upper levels of their standards.....	6
• States are developing, aligning, and integrating program standards across sectors.	7
• States are re-visioning the 'T' in QRIS and incorporating Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).....	8
Support to Meet Standards	9
• States are banking on technical assistance and other elements of the professional developmental system as a primary support for program quality improvement.....	9
• States are embedding credential and degree attainment strategies in the QRIS.....	11
• States are incorporating the growing body of evidence on effective leadership.....	11
Systems Planning, Monitoring, and Accountability	12
• States are tracking and encouraging the participation of cross-sector programs.....	12
• QRIS standards, design and management are being influenced as states seek to rapidly move programs up in quality.	13
• States are focusing policy and supports on building quality early learning for various populations of children at risk.	14
• States are experimenting with new approaches to rating and monitoring.	15
• States are diversifying the number and use of research-based observational tools.....	16
• States are incorporating evaluation and data in the QRIS.....	18
Family Engagement and Outreach	19
• States are using a variety of strategies to enhance families' decision-making information, engage families in evaluating how services are working for them and support families as critical players in the early development of their children.....	19
• States are reaching out to community stakeholders to build public will for the importance of early learning.	20
Financial Supports and Financing	21
• Offering sufficient financing strategies aligned with the goals of the QRIS to improve services and outcomes for children, especially in child care, is proving challenging.....	21
• States are adding financing to support their new, more rigorous standards that focus on school readiness and positive child outcomes but this support is outpacing investment in teacher compensation.	22
• States are wrestling with financing of the system, including financing for sustainability.....	23
Conclusion	24
Appendix: Resources	25
About the Author	25
Author Acknowledgements	25
BUILD Initiative Credits	26

Introduction and History of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems¹

In 2015, 44 states and territories are implementing Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS)—systems for assessing, improving and communicating early care and education quality. In many states, the QRIS is administered by the state agency that oversees child care, which typically is part of the state’s human services infrastructure. However, state education agencies and governors’ offices also design and administer QRIS—especially those developed in more recent years.

QRIS have been in existence for about two decades, during which time, these systems have evolved. The initial focus in the 1990s was on addressing low quality in child care. The theory behind this focus was that providing parents and the public with a transparent and easily understood child care quality rating would increase their capacity to make more informed choices and would give child care providers an incentive to engage in quality improvement activities. For the most part, these systems built on the child care licensing standards. They identified levels of quality, based primarily on the providers’ ability to achieve program standards within a cost-constrained financial environment.

Those engaged in early QRIS efforts accepted as a given the overall low level of public and private financing for child care and their ambitions were to improve quality within that context. This led to consideration of standards in key areas such as ratios and group sizes; improvements in health and safety beyond the licensing floor; and improvements in staff qualifications and continuing education. Use of Environment Rating Scales (ERS) was a common approach to determining whether the learning program for the children was appropriate and it also provided steps for improvement.

These early efforts identified various levels of quality as well as an achievable pathway for providers to improve services. The ratings provided information to the public and other early childhood providers to quickly identify child care providers who were offering higher levels of quality. The ratings also provided an indicator of quality that other early childhood sectors—such as Head Start, Early Intervention, and public pre-k—could use to assess potential child care partners. Some initial efforts included additional funding for providers to engage and make progress in quality improvement, as well as funding for infrastructure to market quality levels, provide professional development, including technical assistance, and to monitor and rate programs.

¹ Information in this section is drawn from a forthcoming BUILD paper by Diane Schilder and Iheoma Iruka with Harriet Dichter and Debi Mathias, *Quality Rating and Improvement Stakeholder Theories of Change and Models of Practice*, which will be available on the BUILD website.

A Note on Terminology

In this chapter, we use the terms “early care and education,” “child care,” “early learning” and other similar terms interchangeably, based on those used by the states and key informants. Similarly, we use the terms “provider,” “service provider,” “teacher,” “administrator” and “leader” interchangeably.

The Early Learning Challenge (ELC) was a game-changer. While its goal—closing the achievement gap for children with high needs—was not new, the approach of focusing squarely on systems building and encouraging states to create integrated standards, supports and financing structures for early learning was new. Central to this work was the creation of a system—with largely voluntary program participation—to include all publicly-funded early learning and development service providers, regardless of auspice or funding stream, in a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS, more generally known as QRIS). Because it was a competition, states were challenged to put their best foot forward, try new ideas and establish ambitious goals. Nine states were selected as Round I winners (California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island and Washington), five states as Round II winners (Colorado, Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon and Wisconsin) and six states as Round III winners (Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Vermont). Although each has met with multiple political, financial and structural constraints related to QRIS and, at times, has struggled to reach proposed targets, the overall result has been extremely positive.

This chapter discusses the impact of what many consider to be the centerpiece of the ELC: the requirement that states establish a tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), and describes benefits, early lessons, opportunities and future QRIS challenges.²

The diagram on the next page shows the standard components of a QRIS. These components, which provide the structure for this chapter, are intended to improve outcomes for children, families and communities. The ELC includes a strong focus on systems building and the QRIS is a central part of that focus.

² The Appendix provides additional resources, including links to the *QRIS Compendium*, which provides a state by state overview. The *Compendium* also offers information specific to the ELC states, which may be accessed [here](#).



The information in this chapter was obtained through interviews with state leaders throughout 2014.

In addition, websites, reports, the *QRIS Compendium* and other published information about the states were consulted as part of the information gathering process.

Highlights of State Innovations and Trends

Below are nine of the many noteworthy ways in which states have met the ELC challenge. Following this list of trends and innovations is a state-based chart.

1. Promoting School Readiness: States are increasing rigor and a focus on school readiness and positive child outcomes at the upper levels of their standards. Many states have addressed the teaching context by:

- Adding standards for planning and/or preparation for supporting children's learning.
- Altering staff evaluation.
- Improving staff benefits.

2. Continuous Quality Improvement: States are envisioning the 'T' in QRIS and incorporating Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) by:

- Embedding CQI plans as a required element of the
- QRIS at all levels—sometimes in all areas and in other states limited to specific areas.
- Supporting CQI through technical assistance and coaching focused on CQI.
- Developing CQI for the QRIS system with providers, advocates and implementation partners providing routine feedback on indicators and opportunities for improvement.

3. Bringing Together Child Care, Head Start

Pre-K: States are refining, establishing and tracking the participation of cross-sector programs to understand how the cross-sector framework is working. They are:

- Focusing on increasing participation of market-based child care programs in QRIS by enacting or proposing policy to require market-based child care participation or by making the first-tier equivalent to state child care licensing; and/or by making or planning to make participation in the QRIS a funding requirement for CCDF child care assistance.
- Seeking to engage state-funded pre-k, Head Start, and/or nationally accredited centers in their QRIS.
- Focusing on building the infrastructure and administrative capacity to slowly grow participation in all settings.
- Making regulation-exempt family providers a QRIS target.

4. Reaching Children with High Needs.

States are ensuring policy and supports are focused on building quality early learning for various populations of children at risk including children with disabilities, dual language learners and low-income children, among others.

Approaches include:

- Embedding standards for accepting children with disabilities at all levels of the QRIS, not just at the higher levels.
- Creating “badges” or “awards of excellence” in areas such as Inclusion of children with special needs, linguistically- and culturally-appropriate practice.

- Developing standards for cultural and linguistic diversity with indicators in multiple areas, i.e. curriculum, environment and interactions, and family partnership and engagement.
- Requiring programs taking public funding through child care assistance or state pre-k to participate in the QRIS and/or reducing co-pays in child care assistance for families selecting a higher level QRIS program.
- Using early childhood “navigators” to assist low-income families select higher quality programs.
- Leveraging data analysis and data measurement to identify and increase participation of low-income families in higher level QRIS programs, and to bring programs into the QRIS.

5. Revisiting Rating and Monitoring. States are re-visiting rating and monitoring and experimenting with various new approaches. They are:

- Introducing technology to make rating and monitoring more efficient.
- Limiting or removing on-site verification prior to the assignment of ratings and experimenting with other strategies (portfolio reviews by teams, random site visits, etc.).
- Introducing curriculum implementation and fidelity monitoring.
- Building robust data transfers between QRIS, licensing, and subsidy to assist with rating and monitoring.
- Leveraging licensing monitors as part of the rating and monitoring process.

6. Trying New Tools. States are diversifying the number and use of research-based observational tools and revising the frequency of administration of tools and the aspects to be maintained. Approaches include:

- Using both the ERS and the CLASS to inform ratings and experimenting with when and how they are used (i.e. removing Personal Care Routine from the ERS, using these tools for quality improvement and not rating purposes).
- Developing new research-based observation tools.
- Administering tools anywhere from annually to every three years.

7. Engaging Families. States are using a variety of strategies to enhance families’ decision-making information, engage families in evaluating how services

are working for them and support families as critical players in the early development of their children. Strategies include:

- Holding family focus groups to inform engagement strategies and providing routine family feedback sessions and surveys.
- Reaching out to families through mass and social media, community information distribution, and marketing materials.
- Providing information in multiple languages.
- Supporting provider outreach to families with suites of branding materials and templates for customization by providers.

8. Implementing Financing Strategies. States are trying financing strategies aligned with the goals of the QRIS to improve services and outcomes for children. States are:

- Establishing multiple financial rewards and incentives (i.e. combining awards, tiered reimbursement and targeted grants).
- Establishing financial incentives to serve infants and toddlers and provide increased funding to help address the higher cost of serving this population.
- Using cost modeling to calibrate the necessary financial supports at each level of the QRIS and adjusting financing strategies in response.
- Supporting discounted access to supplies and equipment or providing awards to supply purchasing aligned to their quality improvement plans.
- Requiring QRIS participation (and sometimes at certain levels) to access more favorably funded programs, particularly pre-k.
- Using tiered reimbursement as a routine financing approach.

9. Focus and Funding for Teaching and Learning.

States are adding financing to support their new, more rigorous standards that focus on school readiness and positive child outcomes but this support is outpacing investment in teacher compensation. States are:

- Providing resources for programs to purchase curriculum and assessment tools, and improving technical assistance to support provider implementation of curriculum and assessment.
- Financing acquisition of early childhood credentials and degrees.
- Providing bonuses for acquisition of early childhood credential and degrees.

Below is a chart showing states that have engaged in the nine trends and innovations listed above:

STATE EXAMPLES	CA	CO	DE	GA	IL	KY	MA	MD	MI	MN	NC	NM	OH	OR	PA	RI	VT	WA	WI
1. Promoting School Readiness. States are increasing rigor and a focus on school readiness and positive child outcomes at the upper levels of their standards. Many states addressed the teaching context by:																			
Adding standards for planning and/or preparation time		✓	✓				✓					✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
Altering staff evaluation		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Improving staff benefits		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
2. Embedding Continuous Quality Improvement. States are re-visioning the “I” in QRIS and incorporating Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).																			
		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	
3. Bringing Together Child Care, Head Start and Pre-K. States are refining, establishing and tracking the participation of cross-sector programs to understand how the cross-sector framework is working. States are:																			
Increasing participation of market-based child care programs in QRIS.		✓					✓	✓			✓		✓			✓		✓	✓
Engaging state-funded pre-k, Head Start, and/or nationally accredited centers in their QRIS			✓					✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓				
Building the infrastructure and administrative capacity to slowly grow participation in all settings	✓							✓				✓							
Targeting regulation-exempt family providers									✓										
4. Reaching Children with High Needs. States are ensuring policy and supports focus on building quality early learning for various populations of children at risk. State efforts are:																			
Focusing on children with disabilities, others on English language learners and several focusing on reaching low-income children			✓		✓		✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	
5. Revisiting Rating. States are experimenting with approaches to rating.																			
				✓			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓					✓	
6. Trying New Tools. States are diversifying the number and use of research-based observational tools and revising the frequency aspects to be maintained.																			
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

STATE EXAMPLES	CA	CO	DE	GA	IL	KY	MA	MD	MI	MN	NC	NM	OH	OR	PA	RI	VT	WA	WI
7. Engaging Families. States are enhancing families' decision-making information, engaging families in evaluation how services are working for them and supporting families as critical players in the early development of their children by:																			
Reaching out to families through media, community information distribution, using marketing materials and online and social media tools	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓					✓			✓	
Providing information in multiple language to assist non-English speaking families		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
8. Implementing Financing Strategies. States are trying financing strategies aligned with the goals of QRIS to improve services and outcomes for children by:																			
Establishing multiple financial rewards and incentives			✓												✓			✓	
Creating new financial incentives to serve infants and toddlers			✓								✓					✓			
Supporting discounted access to supplies and equipment or providing targeted awards			✓	✓				✓		✓					✓		✓		
Implementing tiered reimbursement as a dominant financing strategy incentive in 13 of the ELC states.		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓
9. Focus and Funding for Teaching and Learning. States are adding financing to support their new, more rigorous standards that focus on school readiness and positive child outcomes. This support is outpacing investment in teacher compensation and it includes:																			
Financing curriculum and assessment implementation			✓					✓		✓									
Providing bonuses for credentials				✓				✓						✓	✓				✓



Standards for Programs and Practitioners

The ELC focus on school readiness and child outcomes and all early learning programs (e.g., child care, Head Start, pre-k, etc.) led to changes within state approaches to their QRIS standards. Within a QRIS, the expectations for performance are found in the standards. Three trends in QRIS standards are notable: first, a movement towards deepening standards to better address the expectation of the ELC that QRIS adopt a school readiness–child outcome framework; second, creative work to have standards that would be viable beyond the child care settings and into Head Start and pre-k; and third, an effort to incorporate the work of Continuous Quality Improvement into the standards of QRIS.

By way of background, there are 3 sets of QRIS standards that are typically incorporated into a QRIS. The first applies to children’s learning (e.g., early learning standards) the second to practitioners (qualifications, career ladders/lattices, core competencies, etc.) and the third to programs, including those across early learning sectors such as child care, Head Start, Early Intervention and pre-k. The ELC provided states with opportunities to explore how these three sets of standards could be integrated to improve early learning for all children and address issues of rigor to support improved school readiness for children with high needs. At the same time, as the ELC asked states to move beyond child care and bring in other early learning partners, “cross sector” standards alignment became a critical strategy to help achieve this goal. This knotty work of aligning and cross-walking the variety of program standards, including Head Start, state pre-k, charter schools, Early Intervention, licensing and quality standards such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation, into a QRIS framework is important to systems building.

The ELC states faced hard decisions about how to balance the need for revisions with provider fatigue. Changes might be desirable due to a variety of factors, ranging from a new theory of action (i.e. QRIS focus on school readiness) to provider, family and stakeholder input as states implemented. As states changed standards, they identified clear communication, along with sufficient professional development and information dissemination, as key to the successful implementation of changes in standards.



States are increasing rigor and a focus on school readiness and positive child outcomes at the upper levels of their standards.

States that began QRIS as a mechanism to improve the quality of child care held varying expectations about the rigor of their standard—often based on the status of the state’s licensing regulations. With the ELC’s focus on improving school readiness for children with high needs, states began reviewing and revising the upper levels of the QRIS program standards, relying on emerging research and promising practice. Some struggled to decide which program standards—which could comprise curriculum, developmental screening, assessment, classroom climate and teacher-child interactions—and which practitioner/director standards—which could encompass qualifications, skills, competencies, benefits, planning and reflection time, and staff evaluation and support—to include.³ States are linking standards more closely to the research base and looking for the link to child outcomes or other stated outcomes of the QRIS. States also are evaluating the improvement in school readiness as they seek to demonstrate improved child outcomes at the upper level of the quality continuum.

³ The standards for curriculum, assessment and developmental screening in ELC states are gathered in the *QRIS Compendium*, available [here](#).

State Examples

- Many ELC states provided more support for the teaching context by adding standards for planning and/or preparation time (**Colorado, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin**), staff evaluation (**Colorado, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin**), and staff benefits (**Colorado, Delaware, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Oregon, Vermont, Wisconsin**). As a more specific example, **Maryland** has criteria for planning activities based on curriculum, needs and interests of the children, as well as the children's developmental needs.
- Understanding how important continuity of care and staff retention is to improving program quality, **Delaware** added a standard to focus on retention by awarding points to programs implementing strategies to retain staff.
- **Massachusetts** included standards that work to improve the context for teaching, such as ongoing mentoring that includes demonstration of best practices. Programs can demonstrate systematic opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective teaching practices through the use of peer groups and coaches/mentors. Programs have an incentive to reward each educator who takes the next step up the career ladder.
- **Washington** created high standards for its top-tier programs. While early learning programs receiving pre-k and Head Start funding have an accelerated pathway for compliance, they must meet all standards (including those measured by the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) and CLASS™ assessments).

” A major challenge of the ELC was to move beyond child care in the conceptualization of the QRIS standards as cross sector.

States are developing, aligning, and integrating program standards across sectors.

The ELC challenged states to revise and craft statewide program standards that could work in a variety of early learning settings and funding stream requirements, creating a framework that unifies all of early learning. Standards are at the core of this service integration, defining what high quality means and what is expected of service providers. By creating common program standards for all types of early

learning programs through the QRIS, states can build a framework for aligning funding, accountability and service delivery. ELC states are using standards as a way to expand QRIS for relevance to all types of early learning programs. However, states approached this task in very different ways.

State Examples

- **Minnesota** and **Michigan** each allow their state pre-k, Head Start, or nationally accredited programs to be part of the QRIS. These programs automatically qualify for the highest level of the QRIS and do not need to be fully rated based on QRIS standards (e.g., classroom assessment is not required). Taking this approach reduces administrative costs and builds on the early learning monitoring and accountability systems that currently exist but assumes that the standards and measurements are equivalent.
- **Washington** developed a reciprocity strategy with Head Start and state pre-k. Both enter at level 3 (of 5 levels) and are evaluated with Environment Rating Scales (ERS) and CLASS™. If the ERS and CLASS™ thresholds are not met, the program rates at level 2. Further, due to legislative mandate, the state pre-k program must participate in the QRIS and earn a specified rating.
- **North Carolina** had all programs already in its QRIS. North Carolina worked over time to raise the floor so early learning programs serving publicly-funded children must achieve a high level in the QRIS. ELC funding supports targeted outreach, education and technical assistance to move programs up in the system. The focus is paying off—85% of all programs participating in the state QRIS are at Star 3 or above as of 2013. This approach provides many lessons for states challenged by low regulatory requirements and private, market-based child care centers.
- **California** took a unique, locally-driven approach to QRIS and crafted a statewide framework focusing on a relatively small set of standards with flexibility at the local level. To facilitate cross-sector participation, the statewide QRIS rates seven elements for centers and five for homes, and created a pathway for continuous quality improvement. The quality improvement pathway is not rated. Overall, the California approach is testing the viability of standards as a framework for accountability and finance rather than a single pathway to quality. Many national thought leaders are



eager to identify a few powerful standards that would serve as the overall framework and then allow local variability in other areas. If CA is successful, many states may consider simplifying their systems.

States are re-visioning the ‘I’ in QRIS and incorporating Continuous Quality Improvement.

Ten of the ELC states have a standard related to creating an annual Continuous Quality Improvement plan (CQI, also known as Quality Improvement Plan [QIP]). States use this standard to link accountability and improvement. CQI plans serve as an annual reporting vehicle, even though a quality level designation may take place only every two or three years. The plans inspire moving beyond a “check the box” mentality. Typically the CQI standards encourage input and engagement from families, staff and boards. While details vary by state, this standard seeks to interject an internal culture change in the program to own and strategically manage ongoing program improvement.⁴

States have also begun to extend the concept of the CQI standards to QRIS implementing partners such as child care resource and referral, higher education, professional development providers, technical assistance observational assessors, and state agency staff.

At all levels, the identification, collection, use and analysis of relevant data are essential to the CQI process. In addition to data, other key ingredients for successful improvement

processes include: instituting cycles of feedback; establishing benchmarks; tracking progress; modifying approaches; and accounting for research and promising practices aligned with the vision, mission and theory of change.

State Examples

- **Colorado** requires a Continuous Quality Improvement plan that is updated annually, shared with staff, families, and stakeholders, and has documented goals, timelines, and outcomes. The plans are created on-line, and data is pulled from the individual plans to show areas across the state that need systemic improvement – regionally or statewide.
- **Georgia, Illinois and Massachusetts** support the use and implementation of the Strengthening Families Checklist to inform CQI.
- **Georgia** places a significant focus on inclusion. At the state level, there is now an Inclusion Coordinator position. At the program level, additional technical assistance and coaching is available for those at 3 stars, who can be publicly rated as inclusive, leading to “3-star with an I.”
- **Illinois** created two QRIS Awards of Excellence for preschool teaching and learning and infant/toddler services, both of which are supported with regional communities of practice to support CQI focusing on quality of instruction.
- **Maryland** uses the same tools for both rating and CQI, as well as optional tools to support CQI. The

⁴ The standards for Continuous Quality Improvement in ELC states are gathered in the *QRIS Compendium*, available [here](#).

state uses cut scores from its ERS and CLASS™ to drive CQI. When these assessments are completed, a Program Improvement Plan is required at the top levels of the QRIS to address any item scoring lower than the required cut score. In addition, the [Program Administration Scale \(PAS\)](#) and [Business Administration Scale for Family Child Care \(BAS\)](#) are offered as a support. A completion badge is awarded for this quality improvement effort but no cut scores are required.

- In **Massachusetts**, the CQI is required in certain areas, including measurement tools, professional development, policies and practices, business plan, staff evaluation and family evaluation. Massachusetts is using QRIS Program Quality Improvement grants to engage educators in program planning for quality improvements and making direct program improvements. The work began with a pilot that combined a CQI plan with technical assistance. Participants may also purchase durable goods to improve learning environments. To facilitate these purchases, programs use an online portal, which enhances accountability and transparency and eliminates the burden of paying up front for the purchases, a requirement which was felt to be a significant barrier for providers.
- At the program level, **Minnesota** requires programs to develop a Quality Improvement Plan as they prepare for their rating and again once they receive their rating. The state then awards grants for programs to meet their goal. At the system level, Minnesota has an Indicator Review Process, giving programs, advocates, administrators and others an opportunity to give feedback on the indicators.
- In **New Mexico**, observational tools are part of a menu a program may choose from to determine next steps in its action plan as part of the Continuous Quality Improvement plan. The observational tools, however, are not required as part of rating.
- **Oregon** is focusing more on quality improvement and less on the rating. The QRIS is dependent on the Self-Assessment and Quality Improvement Plan developed by programs.
- **Pennsylvania** created a virtual guide for program directors containing information both about how to engage in a CQI process and required professional learning experiences.
- In **Rhode Island**, the QIP impacts all levels of

the QRIS. At levels 2-5, programs must submit a Program Self-Assessment. At level 5, the assessment must include observation findings and three other sources of evidence, such as monitoring reports, child assessment information, and board surveys.

- **Washington** and **Michigan** provide consultation and technical assistance focused on improvement, using data and tools at the early stages to drive the program improvement process. Once a facility goes through the rating process, a coach is provided. Programs create data-based CQI plans. Every provider participates in coaching but it is flexible and driven by the Quality Improvement Plan. It is the responsibility of the coach to prioritize TA areas in partnership with the program.

Support to Meet Standards

States are crafting a variety of supports to assist programs in implementing QRIS standards, and developing strategies to track the efficacy and expense of these supports. Technical assistance and professional development are taking center stage in many ELC states. States that are seeking to improve child outcomes are placing additional emphasis on adequate support and improvement at all levels of systems building. They are also supporting QRIS implementation partners, such as technical assistance providers, and state oversight staff. Finally, some states are innovating by building leadership development into the QRIS, in keeping with the evidence on the impact of leadership.

States are banking on technical assistance and other elements of the professional developmental system as a primary support for program quality improvement.⁵

ELC states invested heavily in QRIS technical assistance, both to help programs participate in the QRIS and to assist them in improving quality. States see technical assistance as building institutional capacity for quality over time. ELC states are using many forms of technical assistance such as communities of practice, job-embedded coaching, and mentoring. As states move further into implementation and as programs progress to higher levels of quality, likewise states are increasing the emphasis on teaching and learning within their technical assistance supports.

States are offering specialized technical assistance support. For example, a contracted agency or specialist might be used for programs just entering the QRIS,

⁵ See also Randi B. Wolfe, Ph.D., "Trends and Innovations in Early Childhood Education Workforce Development" in *Rising to the Challenge: Building Effective Systems for Young Children and Families*, a BUILD E-Book (2015).



providing basic resources and assisting a program in the continuous quality improvement process. Deeper content specific technical assistance (i.e. health and safety, early childhood mental health, business, infant-toddler, school age, teaching practice, observational assessment and teacher interactions) is handled by other, more specialized professionals. Technical assistance is being developed in areas such as facilitating the change process, establishing and implementing CQI plans, facilitating communities of practice and other learning communities.

Protocols for readiness for technical assistance, as well as types of technical assistance and prioritization for technical assistance, are also undergoing reevaluation. States are wrestling with questions about differences in approach based on provider type and current level of quality, and prioritization of these support services. Prioritization may include providers in low-income areas (both rural and urban), those serving higher percentages of children at risk or other unique populations. States have also been considering performance metrics and accountability for technical assistance and crafting protocols and processes to articulate and measure success.

Finally, policies addressing the qualifications and competencies of technical assistance specialists are being crafted and clarified.⁶

State Examples

- **Delaware** offers two types of technical assistance—generalist technical assistance is provided to all programs and specialty technical assistance is provided upon request. Programs receive generalist technical assistance once per month. Those programs located in higher need neighborhoods and serving

higher need children have access to more intensive, weekly technical assistance. Ongoing professional development and problem solving is provided to assist the technical assistance providers to improve practice and impact.

- **Maryland** provides 24/7 technical support through its online coaching and professional development system. **Oregon** is leveraging technology, as well, with video technical assistance available through the [Learning and Development](#) YouTube videos.
- **Maryland** has clarified the roles of the different types of technical assistance providers, e.g., child care resource and referral staff, state Quality Assurance Specialists, and Program Coordinators at the QRIS online system level. Maryland held institutes with these groups to identify roles and delve deeper into the standards to support program change and improvement.
- **Michigan** works with 10 regional partners. The state's technical assistance is focused on the 3 main rating areas of self-assessment, classroom observation, and quality improvement. Michigan also offers a CQI approach to more specialized consultation, focusing on health, social/emotional development, and family engagement.
- **Pennsylvania** established the Keystone STARS Technical Assistance Accountability Plan (STARS-TAAP) Benchmarks to clearly articulate expectations, enhance accountability for results and evaluate processes and protocols.
- A number of states, including **Pennsylvania** and **Delaware**, have family child care projects that incorporate technical assistance. In Delaware, a Family Child Care Ambassador role was created and filled by high-performing family child care providers to help recruit family child care providers and to support their ongoing participation in the QRIS. In Pennsylvania, family child care providers at higher levels of quality are given a stipend to support other family providers at the beginning of the quality continuum. In turn, these family child care providers are supported by a technical assistance professional with expertise in high-quality home-based services.
- Many states are either considering or have implemented readiness surveys as a prerequisite to receiving technical assistance, with initial technical assistance focused on supporting providers in learning the system and how to engage in the QRIS. In

⁶ For further information on the ELC states, please see the *QRIS Compendium*, available [here](#).

Washington, the initial work focuses on readiness for rating and understanding CQI and the QRIS itself. Washington used a pilot to make a commitment to this “readiness” level within the QRIS with technical assistance providers preparing programs for their first rating. **Pennsylvania** has implemented a readiness assessment for technical assistance.

- **Washington** is piloting the [LENA](#) recording device. This device measures the amount of adult-initiated versus child-initiated language as well as interactional turns. The practitioner considers the information with the technical assistance as part of improving practice.
- In **Washington**, all technical assistance providers use and are trained on a coaching framework that focuses on cultural competence, parallel process, and adult resiliency. A virtual platform—the Coaching Companion—is available for coaches to share videos and participate in Communities of Practice as they hone their skills and share best practices. The idea is to strategically use the investments to develop online resources that can be modified down the road at lower cost. Washington has also hired bilingual and bicultural staff and translated and adapted tools and concepts to meet the needs of its multi-cultural provider community.

States are embedding credential and degree attainment strategies in the QRIS.

States are working to improve opportunities for those in the QRIS to gain early childhood degrees and to decrease reliance on non-credit training. As discussed more extensively in the chapter on the workforce⁷, there is considerably less focus on compensation for those who are advancing their education and skills.

State Examples

- **Colorado** has integrated its Professional Development registry within the QRIS system to facilitate the integration of credentialing strategies into the QRIS.
- **Pennsylvania** annually increased the percent of credit-bearing professional development that is available as part of its strategy to increase credentialing and degrees. Pennsylvania also implemented the [Rising STARS Tuition Assistance Program](#), which covers tuition costs for early- childhood education degrees, or for early-childhood education courses that will help to move the professional up on the state’s career lattice.

States are incorporating the growing body of evidence around effective leadership.

Developing and supporting leaders is a critical part of supporting and sustaining improvements. An instructional leader who can work with the program team to create a culture of reflective practice in a continuous quality improvement cycle will have the best chance of attaining higher quality services and consistently improving teaching and learning. A variety of promising approaches are being used, including ongoing communities of practice, leadership credentials, and technical assistants who work collaboratively as partners with program leaders to implement and sustain improvement.

State Examples

- **Colorado, Delaware, Minnesota and Pennsylvania** incorporated Director Credentials or leadership professional development within their QRIS. Some of these states made this a requirement while others added points in this area. Their shared goal is to strengthen the business and/or the educational leadership skills and qualifications of these leaders.
- **Delaware’s** leadership initiative focuses on established and emerging leaders who are participating in the QRIS. Using the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership program, Aim4Excellence, which focuses on instructional and management leadership, Delaware provides a blended learning model with local communities of practice to support course completion and enhance learning. Delaware achieved higher education articulation for participants, and is participating in the McCormick Center’s national evaluation.
- Several states incorporated tools to measure leadership and management practices, as well as strategies to improve leadership. [The Program Administration Scale \(PAS\)](#) and/or the [Business Administration Scale \(BAS\) for Family Child Care \(BAS\)](#) are embedded in QRIS standards, assessment protocols, or provider supports in the following ELC states: **California, Illinois, Ohio, Massachusetts, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.**



⁷ Randi B. Wolfe, Ph.D., “Trends and Innovations in Early Childhood Education Workforce Development” in *Rising to the Challenge: Building Effective Systems for Young Children and Families*, a BUILD E-Book (2015).

Systems Planning, Monitoring and Accountability

Six trends and innovations grew out of the work of the ELC states in the areas of planning, monitoring and accountability. First, the inclusion of additional sectors in the QRIS, such as Head Start or pre-k, presented challenges as well as opportunities. Second, as part of the “challenge” of the ELC, states were asked to rapidly help programs move up in quality so that more at-risk children could have access to higher quality. These movement requirements led to rapid changes in policy and practice within the QRIS. Third, as a result of the ELC focus on children at risk, states strategically considered policy levers, approaches and incentives to support high-quality learning environments in distressed areas. Fourth, states are experimenting with new approaches to rating and monitoring. Fifth, states are diversifying the number and use of research-based observational tools in the QRIS. And, finally, states are using required validation studies to make course corrections as well as generating additional research and data approaches to strengthen their work.

States are tracking and encouraging the participation of cross-sector programs.

The ELC challenged states to craft an integrated QRIS system embracing all funding streams and providing a unified approach to defining and supporting quality. It did so to address funding and program standard fragmentation. For example, multiple federal, state and local early learning funding streams currently co-exist, each with its own requirements, standards, expectations, policies and procedures. Examples are shown below.

Examples of Cross-Sector Funding Streams and Programs

Child Care

Child Care and Adult Food Program (CCAFP)

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)

Head Start/Early Head Start

State-Funded Pre-K

Section 619 of part B and C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), also known as Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education

”

As a result of the ELC focus on children at risk, states strategically considered levers in policies, approaches and incentives to support high-quality learning environments in distressed areas.

Often a single provider seeks to leverage these various programs and funding streams. This funding approach is inefficient and counter-productive for families, service providers, and the early learning system. At the provider level, early childhood programs seeking to offer affordable, quality, full-day, year-round early learning opportunities must navigate a complex maze of policies, procedures and funding streams. At the system-planning level, for example, data are often gathered based on program standards (e.g., states count the number of children receiving Head Start or pre-k funding as well as licensed child care capacity) but it is difficult to combine these numbers to accurately reflect the size and scope of early learning services. This hinders effective planning and service delivery.

To address these concerns, the ELC states are using multiple strategies—legislative, regulatory, programmatic and financial—to achieve the goal of aligned quality through the QRIS and improved capacity for planning. Within this approach, the QRIS remains voluntary although states are starting to make participation mandatory for programs that take public funding.

State Examples

- States focused on growing the number of market-based child care programs participating in the QRIS. One approach is exemplified by **Colorado, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Rhode Island**, all of which enacted or proposed policy to require market-based child care participation in the QRIS by making the first tier equivalent to state child care facility licensing. Another approach is demonstrated by **Ohio, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Washington and Wisconsin**, which made or are planning to make participation in the QRIS a funding requirement for CCDF child care assistance. This approach assumes that these publicly funded programs will influence the sector as a whole. When a preponderance of early-childhood programs are focused on quality, and participate in QRIS, then this becomes the norm, resulting in families, funders, and policy makers viewing QRIS participation and quality levels as important benchmarks.
- A few states sought to engage state-funded pre-k, Head Start, and/or nationally accredited centers in their QRIS. **Minnesota** targeted pre-k, Head Start and nationally accredited centers by using streamlined

QRIS eligibility and a unique set of scholarships that awarded subsidy money to all eligible children/families in target communities for use in QRIS-participating programs. **Delaware, Michigan, North Carolina** and **Ohio** all linked QRIS participation to state pre-k or Head Start funding. For example, Michigan's Great Start Readiness Program, the state-funded 4 year-old pre-k program, requires program participation in Great Start to Quality (QRIS) and programs must maintain a high rating to be eligible.



Equity and institutional racism are important yet challenging issues for states to address.

with its philanthropic community targeting resources, aimed at increasing participation of family child care. Support came in the form of direct financial incentives, child care resource and referral staff support, radio and internet advertisements and recognition events. In Oregon, the local child care resource and referral agencies work closely with the Oregon Early Learning Hubs, which provide overall administrative support for QRIS, and share metrics and target populations.

- While some states, such as **Delaware** and **Rhode Island**, set out to target early learning programs funded by Title I, participation among this group of providers is still quite low in these states, and states found it difficult to incentivize participation.
- **California, Maryland, and New Mexico** established modest participation targets across all sectors and focused their work on building the infrastructure and systems needed to support a statewide QRIS. None of these states has indicated intentions to target a specific service sector; rather, the goal is to build the administrative capacity to slowly grow participation in all settings. This practice paid off in Maryland, where participation targets exceeded expectations. Maryland used a deliberate provider recruitment strategy, providing regular updates at community meetings, mailings to providers, and a statewide newsletter. QRIS specialists participated in local and regional conferences to help providers use the online system for Maryland's QRIS. Maryland reports that these face-to-face opportunities generated the greatest number of QRIS participants.
- Regulation-exempt family providers are a target in **Michigan**, which has sought to build cohorts of unlicensed providers in high-need areas with specialized consultation in order to move the programs into licensed status as a beginning quality step or improve the quality of regulation-exempt providers.
- States are using a variety of communication strategies to gain participation in the QRIS. In **Michigan** and **Minnesota**, intensive communications research was conducted that led to new materials and a new approach, including a website, an online child care data base, billboards, and radio advertisements. Minnesota,

QRIS standards, design and management are being influenced as states seek to rapidly move programs up in quality.

All ELC states set targets to increase the number and percentage of early learning and development programs, especially those serving young children with high needs, in the top tiers of their QRIS as part of the effort to enroll more children in higher quality programs. As part of their initial applications, states were required to set targets for movement up the QRIS. The federal government requires regular reporting on progress. This focus on movement, as well as tracking, had a big impact in the ELC states, including on the state-by-state approach to QRIS standards, QRIS design and QRIS implementation management.

State Examples

- **Delaware** made changes in financing the QRIS, improving the resources for higher levels of the QRIS, as well as creating new financial infant-toddler programs, to assure sufficient financial resources for providers to move to the higher standards.
- **Georgia** engaged in rigorous tracking of programs, and created a timeline for analysis and redesign to look at progress and determine next steps, while being mindful of the expectations for accelerated program movement up the QRIS tiers.



- Michigan's public school pre-k and Head Start programs have an accelerated pathway to rating, and can apply for a high rating at any time, consistent with the state's efforts to demonstrate progress and achieve cross-sector participation, its stated target.
- In Minnesota, state-level targets drove the development of region-level targets. The progress toward these targets is tracked on a quarterly basis so that participation rates by geographic area may be analyzed.

States are focusing policy and supports on building quality early learning for various populations of children at risk.

States are working to increase the number and percentage of high-need children in the programs in the top tiers of states' QRIS. Many different strategies are in play, ranging from a more intentional focus on welcoming and supporting all children within the standards of the QRIS to building more intentional connections with other systems such as health, family support, child welfare, housing and transportation. States are also using data-driven strategies to focus on enrollment of children with high needs in the QRIS.

State Examples

- In **Illinois**, once a program has achieved the highest level in the QRIS, the program can choose to work on a specialized endorsement known as an Award of Excellence. These awards and criteria are research-based, and include Family and Community Engagement, Inclusion of Children with Special Needs, Linguistically- and Culturally-Appropriate Practice, among others. Programs must complete a self-study and peer review with external committee review and recommendations and on-site verification by a state-approved assessor.
- **Maryland** embedded standards for accepting children with a variety of disabilities within all levels of its QRIS, not just at the higher level, which has been a more typical strategy. The state focuses on welcoming children of all abilities at all QRIS levels and added the requirement that programs ask families, upon enrollment, if children are receiving services, and/or have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP). Programs are expected to use this information for planning and implementing activities.
- **Minnesota** embedded standards to ensure support of children with all abilities by adding several rating indicators including: accommodations and modifications made within each program to support "all" children; communication and consultation and/or Child Find activities with Early Intervention (Part C of IDEA) and preschool special education (Part B of IDEA) service providers; use of child outcomes to inform Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individual Education Plan (IEP) for lesson planning (with parental consent); participation in child's IEP or IFSP process; and a process and transition conference, with parental consent.
- **New Mexico** took a multi-faceted approach, using indicators such as materials and visuals reflecting culture and language of children and families; collecting information about family life and planning activities to support each child and family's unique family life; communicating with families in their preferred language while promoting children's English language development and skills; engaging staff who represent children's cultures and languages; involving parents in program self-assessment surveys, including the Strengthening Families Checklist, and using this information for quality improvement; sharing child assessment results with families; providing a generally welcoming environment for parents that includes displaying family photos and ensuring posters and signs in families' languages; involving families in deciding on children's learning goals; encouraging families to share cultural heritage and practices within the classroom on a daily basis; and displaying lesson plans for families. New Mexico also issued *Guiding Principles for the Full Participation of Young Children in New Mexico's Early Learning System*.
- **Oregon** developed a provider and community engagement process, and with the support of national technical assistance, added standards for cultural and linguistic diversity with indicators embedded in three areas: curriculum, environment and interactions, and family partnership and engagement. Oregon has continued the process of review and reports it is likely to modify these standards further.
- **Colorado** integrated a child abuse prevention program, SafeCare Colorado, into its Office of Early Childhood (OEC), which also oversees the QRIS and other early learning programs, to integrate and more closely align prevention and early learning efforts.
- **Georgia** is using Early Education Empowerment Zones to focus extra resources in rural communities

which have many children with high needs. In these communities, providers receive tiered reimbursement and parents receive assistance with their child care assistance co-pays, with greater financial relief for those using higher quality programs.

- **Michigan** has developed a personalized strategy for subsidy-eligible families to help them directly locate quality programs, backed up by an easy-to-use online data base.
- Several states are using data-driven strategies to help focus on enrollment of children with high needs in the QRIS—particularly those participating in child care subsidy. **Delaware, Maryland, Oregon,** and **Pennsylvania** all have specific strategies. **Maryland** compared providers who were paid child care subsidy reimbursements for their participation in the QRIS and provided sign-up and support sessions targeting those providers. Subsidy participation grew from 38% to 88% in 15 months using this strategy. **Delaware** set up a data dashboard with monthly targets for reaching low-income children, as well as targets for providers to move up through the tiers of the QRIS. **Oregon** uses data, such as subsidy data, to help with recruitment and target programs that serve children furthest from opportunity. This results in a high percentage of subsidized children being served. **Pennsylvania** made increasing the numbers of subsidized children receiving care in higher quality settings a performance measure for the subsidy unit. One measurement of success that **Minnesota** uses is the number of children on subsidy who attend a program participating in the rating system.
- Pursuant to the new Early Start Act, all licensed or certified programs in **Washington** that serve children on state subsidies must participate in the state's QRIS, and achieve a certain rating over time.

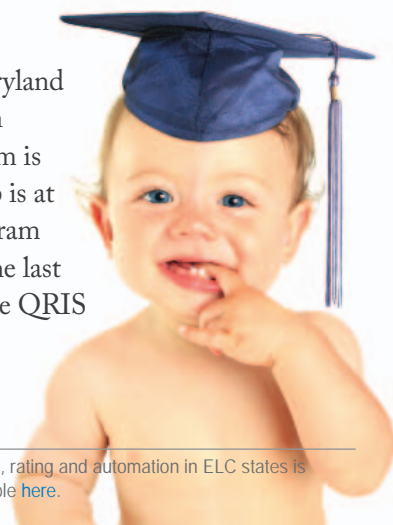
States are experimenting with new approaches to rating and monitoring.

Rating and monitoring are essential features of the QRIS. States are creating many unique options around rating, with states searching for the optimal balance between rating and improvement. Likewise, the ELC states are making different choices about the frequency and depth of monitoring and use of differentiated monitoring. At the same time, states are taking a deep look at roles of staff currently responsible for overseeing early learning programs in public and private agencies and looking for synergy, efficiency and economies. For example, ELC states are evaluating if licensing or pre-k

staff can be refocused fully or partially to monitor for the QRIS. ELC states are using technology to support QRIS implementation; some states are uploading portfolios which are monitored from a central point and random site visitation to assure validity of the self-report protocol.⁸

State Examples

- **Maryland** is using technology to drive its QRIS through an on-line application, a virtual navigator and electronic desk audit – all designed to ensure the QRIS uses staff efficiently and effectively, making it administratively sustainable over time.
- States are looking at how to maximize existing personnel in other early learning programs to support the QRIS. For example, in **Maryland** the QRIS Quality Assurance Specialists are embedded into licensing and in **North Carolina**, the licensing personnel assign the ratings.
- A number of states, such as **Georgia, Maryland** and **Oregon** are limiting or removing on-site verification prior to the assignment of ratings. In these states, programs submit a portfolio, which is reviewed to establish the rating. Maryland conducts on-site monitoring visits to verify implementation of observable items, and follows up with technical assistance when needed. Although Georgia doesn't have on-site verification, it does use an on-site observational tool, the greatest focus of which is rating. Researchers in both Georgia and Maryland are slated to do random visits as they work on validation to determine the reliability of the approach. Additionally, Maryland is currently monitoring 20-25 facilities per month to see if the published ranking matches what is actually happening onsite. When a monitoring visit does not coincide with the published rating, the program is referred to the appropriate technical assistance provider for program improvement. The only punitive action would result from a licensing violation. Maryland has a 3-step verification process before a program is published. The first step is at the online-system program coordinator level and the last two steps are at the state QRIS management level.



⁸ The information on monitoring, verification, rating and automation in ELC states is gathered in the *QRIS Compendium*, available [here](http://www.buildinitiative.org).

- In **Oregon** two reviewers review each portfolio. If there are discrepancies, a third reviewer is added in order to provide a reliable assessment. The feedback loop to providers adds considerable time to the process, but is valuable. **Michigan** completes a random validation for the beginning ratings and on-site validation for higher quality ratings.
- Data connections across programs are also assisting with issues of accountability and rating. For example, in **Maryland** and **Minnesota**, data flows back and forth between the QRIS, licensing and the professional development registry. Soon Maryland will be able to connect with the enrollment/attendance system and data will go into the larger longitudinal data system, providing information about what facility a child is in and the qualifications of his or her assigned teacher. In Minnesota, rating revocation is related to licensing status and whether the program has had a licensing violation. **Michigan** has a long history connecting its data systems. There is an automated data-sharing process between systems with data flowing on a nightly basis between licensing, Child Development and Care Program (child care subsidy), and QRIS. Because of tiered reimbursement, Michigan established a nightly data share so that the ratings of programs are used to inform the amount of tiered reimbursement it receives daily. **Oregon** and **Pennsylvania** also report focusing on data-system connectivity.
- In **New Mexico** there is a standard called [Intentional Teaching: Authentic Observation Documentation and Curriculum Planning Process](#) that includes a detailed process [measuring curriculum implementation in the Focus QRIS](#). Many states have a curriculum standard,

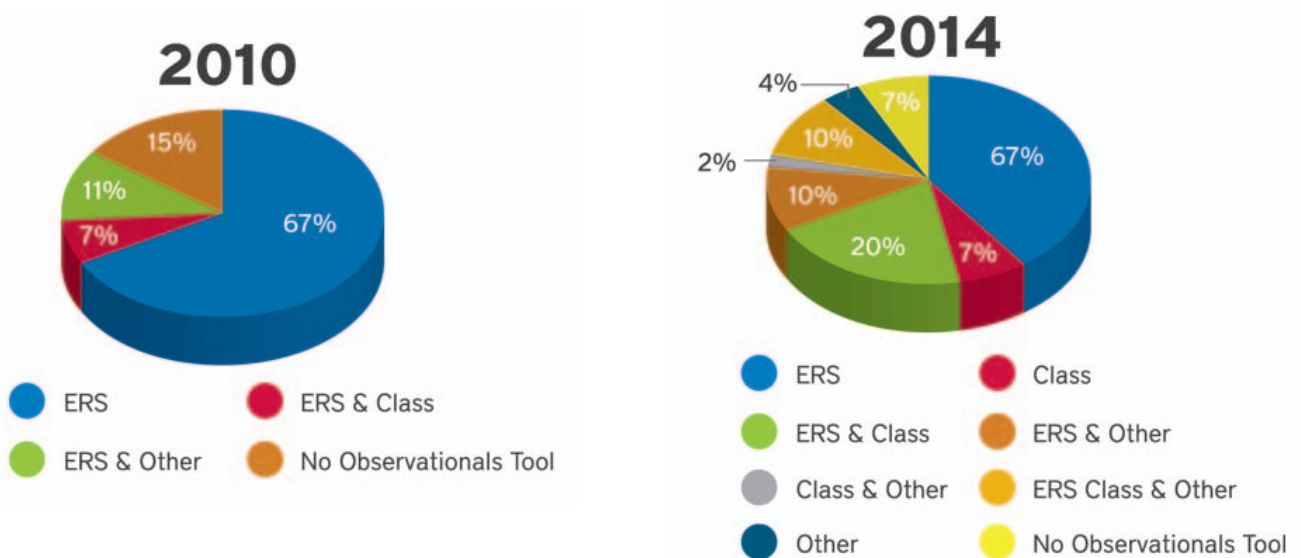
but few have such a concrete way to determine if the curriculum is effectively implemented.

- **Washington** is working on aligning standards across licensing, QRIS and state-funded pre-k to eliminate duplication, remove conflicts, and align concepts and language as part of the Early Start Act.

States are diversifying the number and use of research-based observational tools.

The incorporation of research-based observation tools, such as the Environment Rating Scales, has been a common practice since the early years of QRIS. These tools have allowed states and programs to rely on research-based instruments; develop a reliable cadre for the assessment; leverage already developed professional development and technical assistance protocols; and bundle multiple indicators into the tool criteria. With the cross-sector, school readiness focus of the ELC, states are diversifying the number and use of these observational tools. There are many variations across the states in how they are incorporating research-based observational tools. States are modifying tools to assist with cross-sector program alignment and development. While states might use one tool for accountability (i.e. rating), they made use other tools for continuous quality improvement process. States are also strategically considering which tools to use at different levels along the quality continuum and whether the tools are self-administered (typically with a professional development prerequisite) or completed by an authorized, reliable assessor.

The graph below shows how all states are changing the use of observational tools, and the *QRIS Compendium* provides information that is specific to the [observational tools used in the ELC state QRIS](#).





State Examples

- Environment Rating Scales (ERS) and CLASS™ make up a majority of the rating instruments being used. In **Washington**, ERS is used in one-third of the learning environments and CLASS™ in the other rooms. **Georgia**, **Pennsylvania** and **Washington** are planning to transition to the newer version of the ERS, as well.
- Four of the ELC states use both the ERS and CLASS™ — **California**, **Colorado**, **Illinois** and **Washington**— in determining the rating. In most cases a cut score is required to be awarded points toward a level or to attain a level.
- While **Rhode Island** uses the ERS and the CLASS™, cut scores are required for the ERS only. The CLASS™ is used at the highest level of quality for continuous quality improvement planning but no specific cut score is required. **Oregon** does the opposite—it embedded structural quality standards in the QRIS rather than use the ERS and only uses the CLASS™ tool as part of the rating at the highest level.
- In another variation, **Maryland** and **New Mexico** use both the Environment Rating Scales and CLASS™ assessments for program improvement purposes, with CQI plans created based upon sub-scale scores as indicated in the QRIS standards. **Vermont** is using ERS for continuous quality improvement only.
- Beyond the ERS and CLASS™, examples of ELC states using the BAS and PAS as evidence for continuous quality improvement include **Massachusetts** and **New Mexico**.
- **Michigan** requires the Program Quality Assessment (PQA), a tool developed by the High Scope Educational Research Foundation, for all QRIS on-site observations at the higher quality levels (prior to receiving a rating of 4 or 5). There are different versions of the PQA tool available based on age and/or setting (infant/toddler, pre-k, family child care). The rating process begins with self-assessment at the lower levels of the QRIS.
- Some states have developed their own tools such as **Ohio**, which developed its own Classroom Observation Tool for programs seeking a 3- to 5-star rating. Similar to how CLASS™ and ERS are implemented, the tool is completed in 50% of all classrooms, with at least one room in each age group observed (infant, toddler, pre-k and school age). The Ohio Classroom Observation Tool observation is completed in 30 minutes and includes elements assessing both classroom environment and staff/child interactions. There are a total of seven elements, with multiple indicators in each element. Each classroom must successfully meet the requirements of the Ohio Classroom Observation Tool in order for the program to obtain a rating of 3-star or higher.
- In **North Carolina**, a new measurement tool, EQUIPS, is being developed with ELC funds. The aim of the tool is to evaluate programs, not just classrooms, and has a strong focus on the role of the program administrator.
- States have made different decisions on the frequency of administration of tools used for ratings such as

the ERS or CLASS™. **Kentucky** and **Wisconsin** administer the tool annually. **California, Michigan, Pennsylvania** and **Vermont** administer it every two years and **Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, North Carolina, Rhode Island** and **Washington** are administering the tool every three years. Many states require an additional assessment based on director and/or staff turnover.

- In **Delaware**, the Personal Care Routine section of the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) was eliminated and the cut scores were modified accordingly. This facilitated efficiency with licensing, which is required for most Delaware QRIS participants, with the exception of legally exempt public schools. Delaware requires the ERS data as part of a program's CQI Plan. **Illinois** also eliminated the Personal Care Routine section, helping with cross-sector application of the tool, particularly in school-based pre-k.
- **Wisconsin** combines self-assessment and external assessment. For example, starting at Star 3, a program must use a provider-chosen self-assessment tool leading to a Quality Improvement Plan. At Star 4, a program must use an externally verified Environment Rating Scale (ERS) score of 4, taking into account the age or setting appropriate tool: Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R), and/or School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS). At Star 4, the same tools are used with a cut score of 5.

States are incorporating evaluation and data in the QRIS.

The ELC requires states to conduct evaluations focusing on whether the levels in the QRIS differentiated quality and how the QRIS impacted outcomes for children. Research Connections, supported by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has produced a compendium showcasing the work at [Quality Rating and Improvement System State Evaluations and Research](#). A [short brief](#) prepared for Early Learning Challenge Technical Assistance summarizes the key questions that states are asking in these studies. Further, ELC descriptions of evaluation and validation approaches from the QRIS compendium are located [here](#).

In the context of these evaluations, state leaders reported that they felt pressure to modify program and

implementation design quickly when there were signs a strategy or policy was not working as intended or rigorous enough to achieve the desired results.

Beyond the federally required studies of the QRIS, states are electing to use administrative and other data to inform QRIS development. These smaller studies are important to understanding how the policies and implementation are working to achieve the objective of improved quality.

State Examples

- **Delaware** used the initial assessment by its evaluator, the Rand Corporation, to make changes in the design and delivery of its QRIS in order to improve rigor, provide a focus on school readiness at the top tiers and eliminate duplication between the QRIS and licensing.
- Oregon is evaluating processes for examining all of the data collected at the portfolio level. The underlying goal is to make data-driven decisions work for the state and to evaluate whether the QRIS process and components are effective in creating program improvement.
- A number of states have outlined additional evaluation questions beyond those required by the ELC. Additional details are found in the [QRIS Compendium](#).
- A number of states are using connections among data systems to inform research, evaluation and systems changes. The table below shows the connections in the data systems for selected ELC states; ✓ means the data bases are connected.



Data System Connections							
State	QRIS Data System	Licensing Data System	Professional Development Registry	Early Intervention (Part b and C) Data System	Education State Longitudinal Data System	Other	Notes
MD	✓	✓	✓		✓		
MI	✓	✓				Child Development and Care Program (subsidy)	
MN	✓	✓	✓		✓	NACCRRAware	
OH	✓	✓	✓		✓		
OR							
PA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Subsidy	All are linked but not necessarily integrated
WA	✓	✓	✓				

Family engagement and outreach

Many states used the ELC opportunity to design or redesign, improve and coordinate family engagement strategies. States also took this opportunity to strengthen community and stakeholder engagement as well as focus on developing business supports.

States are using a variety of strategies to enhance families' decision making information, engage families in evaluating how services are working for them and support families as critical players in the early development of their children.

Engagement of families and support of their participation throughout the development and implementation of early learning systems building is important to success. Families are the targeted users of the program. From a QRIS perspective, the ELC states are approaching family engagement in three ways. First, they are encouraging families to select high quality early learning programs for their children. Second, states are working with families to evaluate and provide feedback about the development and effectiveness of the QRIS and the participating programs. Third, they are promoting the role of early childhood programs in providing sound information to and partnership with families to support their pivotal role in supporting their children's development.⁹

⁹ Additional details on the states can be found in the *QRIS Compendium*, specifically in this [ELC report](#).

State Examples

- A number of states, including **Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, Michigan** and **Pennsylvania** held family focus groups to inform the family engagement strategy. In Pennsylvania, the following message was an outcome of parent focus groups: "Start your child care search with Keystone STARS [the state's QRIS]," which identifies as messengers the families currently participating in QRIS programs, who are a trusted source for their friends and family.
- In **North Carolina**, the state agency regularly holds regional round tables and community dialogues in order to hear from families; similarly, **Pennsylvania** has an annual survey distributed to families receiving government services to assess program success and inform program improvement.
- States are targeting families and the public through bus ads, local media, radio and TV, videos social media, and through distribution of materials in doctor's offices, WIC program centers and other community hubs. **Delaware, Maryland, Michigan** and **Washington** have been active in conducting family outreach using these methods. **Minnesota** has a unique relationship with a business-led nonprofit organization that was instrumental in supporting the upgrading of the state's parent on-line search tool and has invested heavily in marketing to inform families about the state's rating system.
- Social media is emerging as an important part of QRIS family-engagement work, as it can support



outreach and help families learn more about child development. States, therefore, are investigating and supporting these platforms more robustly. For example, state website search features are becoming more compatible with cell phones. States working on using social media include **Delaware, Michigan, Minnesota** and **Pennsylvania**. Michigan uses a regional approach to engaging families with media.

- **Delaware, Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania** and **Washington** help providers market their quality levels by providing a suite of materials and templates including banners, logos and print materials for self-promotion by the programs. In Washington, the state is working to have providers submit a short description of their programs to post on the state's Department of Early Learning facility page, Child Care Check, which will also be updated to include additional facility information, licensing history, and general information about Early Achievers and what each level may represent in a program.
- **Michigan** is developing a Trusted Advisor to support parents in accessing high quality. Specialized consultants will support providers with their family engagement at the program level. Regional staff will contact subsidy-eligible families directly to help them locate quality programs.
- To assist families of diverse languages, several states have focused on providing information both about their QRIS and child development in multiple languages. **Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois,**

Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania and **Rhode Island** have all done work in this area.

- Many states, such as **Pennsylvania** and **Maryland**, are building online and social media connections with families to provide helpful information and developmentally appropriate activities for families to reinforce and strengthen early learning. [PA's Promise for Children](#) is a robust website for families and includes innovative features such as [Learning is Everywhere](#) and [Early Learning GPS](#).
- **Maryland's** [Healthy Beginnings](#) website provides a number of activities based on the age of the child.

States are reaching out to community stakeholders to build public will around the importance of early learning.

There is an emerging trend to bring the QRIS and systems building closer to the ground in states and to more deeply engage local communities in supporting early learning in general and QRIS in particular. This important work impacts sustainability and buy in and ultimately helps move the needle on quality¹⁰



There is an emerging trend to bring the QRIS and systems building closer to the ground and to more deeply engage local communities

State Examples

- **Colorado, Delaware, Maryland, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Washington**, among others, have informative websites and e-newsletters to keep the community involved and up-to-date on progress. Other efforts to create public awareness about early learning in general, and the QRIS in particular, include partnerships with school districts, libraries, and other entities that can host recruitment events and provide input into systems-building decisions. For example, Colorado Shines, the state's QRIS, distributes a bi-weekly email newsletter to a variety of stakeholders including providers, Child Care Resource and Referral staff, early childhood council staff, policy makers, and parents. Additionally, Child Care Resource and Referral agencies and local early childhood councils distribute information locally to the providers and parents in their communities.
- As part of its community engagement and sustainability strategy for the ELC, and, in particular,

¹⁰ Karen Ponder, "Local Systems Building Through Coalitions," in *Rising to the Challenge: Building Effective Systems for Young Children and Families*, a BUILD E-Book (2015).

the QRIS, **Delaware** convenes the Commission on Early Education and the Economy. Comprised exclusively of private-sector senior executives, this group meets four times per year and its collective voice has been heard by and become increasingly powerful among legislators. **Pennsylvania** has a strong [Early Learning Investment Commission](#) (ELIC) that brings together private-sector business leaders to support public investment in early learning. In rural areas, **Minnesota** has directed ELC grant resources to the growing efforts of First Children's Finance and its Greater Than MN initiative, both of which build local public-private partnerships to support early learning, including QRIS.

Financial Supports and Financing

States used the ELC funding, along with other sources of financing, to craft a variety of financing strategies to help pay for initial quality improvement as well as ongoing costs. Additionally, states started new financing strategies to add resources in the area of teaching and learning. And finally, states are looking at the overall financing of the system, particularly for the first round of ELC states.

Offering sufficient financing strategies aligned with the goals of the QRIS to improve services and outcomes for children, especially in child care, is proving challenging.

Each of the ELC states crafted a series of financial incentives designed to encourage and support provider participation in the QRIS. Most states built on existing strategies (such as tiered reimbursement, quality grants and teacher scholarship initiatives) and leveraged other state quality funds. A number of states (such as North Carolina, Wisconsin, and soon, Maryland and Washington) are now requiring QRIS participation (at a certain level) if the programs want to draw down public money from child care subsidy and/or pre-k programs.

The amount of funding available to the QRIS varies tremendously by state. ELC QRIS funding, especially for child care, began during a financial crisis and was often an antidote to stagnant or eroding child care assistance or subsidy funding. A question remains about whether the ELC resources are sufficient to meet the cost of providing high-quality early learning, especially for infants and toddlers. A number of states are testing new, innovative ideas, touched upon below.

State Examples

- **Delaware** and **Pennsylvania** established multiple awards—for teacher compensation, professional development and infrastructure costs as well as tiered reimbursement and targeted grants. These states then modeled the cost¹¹ of providing services at each level of their QRIS in order to readjust the combined financial value of these awards to better meet actual costs for providers to achieve and maintain the various quality levels in the QRIS.
- Like Delaware and Pennsylvania, **Rhode Island** also modeled the cost of providing services at each level of its QRIS. However, rather than establishing tiered-reimbursement rates, Rhode Island used the results to craft quality grants and awards it made available to public and privately-funded early learning programs. Other states, such as Delaware and Pennsylvania, used both tiered reimbursement and quality grants.
- In addition to higher subsidy rates for higher rated programs, **Minnesota** created portable [Early Learning Scholarships](#) which are awarded to families for use in quality programs. Per child scholarship awards range from up to \$3,000 for programs with a signed QRIS participation agreement to up to \$5,000 to a 3- or 4-Star rated program. Using ELC funds, Minnesota is evaluating this aspect of its work to learn if this is an effective strategy to ensure children with high needs are able to enroll in high-quality programs.
- In **Minnesota**, Title I Pre-K Incentive funding is available to school districts with classrooms participating in QRIS that use Title I dollars to serve children with high needs. One-time planning grants are available to school districts willing to start new early learning classrooms participating in QRIS. In **Delaware**, as well, school districts and other providers can apply for capital funds that are needed to comply with initial child care licensing and/or necessary to move up in the QRIS.
- **Ohio** and **Washington** have focused on linking QRIS to pre-k expansion dollars and are making QRIS participation a requirement for all state early learning funding streams.
- **California's** financing approach is locally driven. Local consortia must establish a QRIS, based on the statewide framework, and are encouraged to link participation to all federal/state/local dollars.

¹¹ For those interested in learning more about open-source tools for this work, please see Appendix: Resources.

This has enabled California to tap funding from a broad range of sources, including public and private funding streams only available at the local level. Half of the state's counties use a variety of funding streams to increase compensation for early learning providers (e.g., wage subsidies, teacher incentives) for participating in a QRIS and provide monetary incentives based on tier achievement (both to individuals and/ or the program). Most consortia blend funding streams to provide site-level monetary incentives for QRIS participation or provide non-monetary incentives such as resources, materials, and supplies to sites and individuals participating in quality improvement activities.

- Infant and toddler financing within the QRIS is of concern in several states. **Delaware, North Carolina** and **Rhode Island** created new financial incentives designed to encourage QRIS programs to serve infants and toddlers and provide increased funding to help address the higher cost of serving this population.
- **Georgia** is taking an incentive-based, public-private approach for its QRIS financing. The incentives are primarily privately funded through the efforts of GEEARS, Family Connection Partnership, and Voices for Georgia's Children, agencies that have contributed a great deal to the support of providers in the quality initiative.
- **Washington** provides incentive-based awards as well. Quality Improvement Awards (connected to Quality Improvement Plan) are available annually once a program is rated. Starting in FY17, these awards will be reserved for participants offering programs to an enrollment population consisting of at least five percent of children receiving a state subsidy. Tiered reimbursement is also available for the programs in the QRIS as are needs-based grants for providers to prepare for rating and as part of an ongoing sustainability effort. Washington is increasing the tiered- reimbursement rates for its higher levels to incentivize and support improvement.
- A number of states such as **Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania** and **Vermont** are supporting discounted access to supplies and equipment directly or through supporting a shared services alliance. Other states, such as **Georgia, Minnesota** and

Pennsylvania, are providing awards for supply purchasing aligned to their quality improvement plans.

- Tiered reimbursement is a dominant financing incentive in 13 of the ELC states: **Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Vermont** and **Wisconsin**.

States are adding financing to support their new, more rigorous standards that focus on school readiness and positive child outcomes but this support is outpacing investment in teacher compensation.

States are interested in strengthening support for teaching in order to improve outcomes for children, and are using financing to help put a focus on curriculum, assessment and credit-bearing professional learning.¹² Lesser work is being done in the ELC states to address issues of teacher compensation and supportive teaching conditions, or, as recently recommended by the 2015 national report from the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Eight: A Unifying Foundation*, moving to a minimum B.A. qualification.

“States are interested in ... teaching ... and are using financing to help put a focus on curriculum, assessment and credit-bearing professional learning.”

State Examples

- **North Carolina**, which links nearly every funding stream to its QRIS, has recently focused on boosting financial support for college credit-bearing training and technical assistance. North Carolina's validation study is testing various aspects of a supportive work environment as well as higher teacher education requirements.
- T.E.A.C.H. or other credential/degree-based scholarships are available in several ELC states including **Delaware, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Washington** and **Wisconsin**.
- Increasingly, states are focusing supports on targeted strategies to improve curriculum and assessment implementation to advance teaching and learning that results in improved school readiness for children. Delaware has a curriculum incentive and hosts curriculum fairs to which programs can come and

review all of the approved curriculums, pick one, and apply for the money to purchase it. **Delaware** also pays for formative child assessment tools for its programs at the highest levels of the QRIS, as well as developmental screeners. The state also provides no-cost professional development. **Maryland** has a similar strategy, which involves the Accreditation Support Fund, Curriculum Fund, Training Vouchers and Reimbursement, and the Child Care Career and Professional Development Fund. **Minnesota** has boosted its supply of trainers on the most frequently used published curriculum and assessments tools.

- In Maryland, credential bonuses are offered to staff and administrators on a one-time and annual basis. The amounts and frequency are dependent upon completed education and training in alignment with current Maryland Child Care Credential levels.
- Education and retention bonuses based on the credentials of the staff are offered in a number of states such as **Delaware, Maryland, Oregon, Pennsylvania** and **Wisconsin**, with the amounts varying by state.

States are wrestling with financing of the system, including financing for sustainability.

All of the strategies noted above are focused on encouraging early learning programs to participate and move to higher levels of quality. However, states must also finance and sustain the QRIS system as a whole. System level costs include items such as monitoring compliance, providing technical assistance and professional development, and collecting data. States receiving ELC funding made significant investments in technology aimed at making QRIS administration more cost-efficient and sustainable over time. Program costs are equally critical and states must also grapple with strategies to improve the per child resources available and address critical issues of teacher and leader compensation.

As states cycle through the end of the ELC funding, they are faced with multiple decisions about sustaining comprehensive systems-building. States are struggling to craft meaningful and sufficient financial resources to support and sustain programs—especially child care—at higher levels of quality. **Oregon** and **Washington** have been successful advocated for state funding to address the financing gap at the end of the federal ELC funding. These examples are discussed below.

State Examples

- **Maryland** is identifying funding sources to continue the essential elements of the QRIS, which it has identified as the maintenance of the online system and the continuation of technical assistance and support for providers.
- States uncovered gaps in financing based on the use of data, including the [Cost Estimation Model \(CEM\)](#) and [Provider Cost of Quality Calculator \(PCQC\)](#).¹³ **Delaware, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island** are among the states that conducted this analysis. A number of these states responded to results with changes in funding array and policy implementation, providing them with more accurate and defensible calculations for financing over time.
- In **Minnesota, Washington** and **Oregon**, state legislatures, in collaboration with gubernatorial support, approved numerous large investments that will improve and expand early learning, allowing ongoing support for the QRIS and other critical aspects of the Early Learning Challenge. In Washington, the Early Start Act was signed into law, providing a major increase for Washington and continuing the core strategies of the ELC. In Oregon, the state legislature approved multiple investments to improve and expand early learning for the 2015-2017 biennium, all drawing on the strategy of the ELC. This includes a new high-quality, diverse-delivery pre-k that will require QRIS participation, expansion of voluntary home visiting, and child care assistance reform and expansion. It also will increase grants that connect early learning to early grades.
- In 2015, the First Five **California** Children and Families Commission approved its First 5 IMPACT (Improve and Maximize Programs so All Children Thrive) program, which stems from the QRIS work of the Early Learning Challenge. First 5 IMPACT is designed to align with and leverage other initiatives and funding sources.



¹³ For more information on these tools, see Appendix A: Resources.

Conclusion

Bringing any initiative to scale and sustaining it over time is a challenge. Accommodating the myriad requirements, infrastructure and resources included in current early learning funding streams in a single, coherent system through the QRIS framework is daunting. The fact that states receiving ELC funding are approaching the task in different ways offers an unprecedented opportunity to test ideas and continuously improve the capacity of a QRIS framework to raise the level of quality and strengthen accountability.

ELC leaders were asked about their recommendations and observations for QRIS systems building based on their grant experience. They shared the following:

- Be responsive to stakeholder groups. Engage everyone you can to obtain input and build buy-in from the early childhood community.
- Admit wrong choices when feedback is received and analyzed.
- Make the conversation bigger than the QRIS and do so early. QRIS is one critical framework but it exists within an even bigger system.
- Keep looking at the whole child—maintain a focus on comprehensive approaches.
- Maintain a focus on transition/alignment to K-12.
- Count on everything taking longer than you think it will!

States also shared their views of challenges:

- More than one state commented that it didn't have deep enough knowledge about where the providers *really* were when they began to accelerate the QRIS work. It was challenging to gain provider support within the rapid timelines contemplated by the ELC. It was also challenging to prioritize and implement modifications based on responses from the field and results of field tests. One state leader said, "If we had seven years, that would have been better since we rate every three years and then could have examined two cycles."
- State leaders were concerned about teacher retention. How do we keep great teachers in early childhood and not lose them to school systems or other employment? How to do we make the profession more attractive?
- A number of state leaders mentioned the concern that they were potentially promising results without the ongoing funding to enable those results.

Finally, state leaders shared the following ideas about next steps for QRIS, early learning systems building and sustainability.

- A number of states mentioned cross-sector and school-based alignment as critical to the overall effort. This would involve developing new strategies to engage public schools as part of the early learning system. Other states felt that it was important to continue to understand the different levels of quality for current providers and to build in the right supports, as well as accountability factors, to truly embrace the entire early learning provider community.
- States said it would be beneficial to have a unified evaluation study of QRIS across the states, and that the state-by-state approach that characterizes the ELC did not allow for any control of the considerable variation that exists across the states.
- Many states mentioned concerns about the silos they see with the new federal initiatives, noting the Early Head Start–Child Care Partnerships and the Preschool Development/Expansion grants. Further, states would like to see these federally funded programs have requirements to participate in state QRIS as part of a commitment to creating a robust early learning system.
- States felt that ongoing funding, rather than further competitive grants, is needed to stabilize the early learning systems in the states although they appreciated the creative opportunities offered by the ELC.

ELC funding has created a pioneering vision of early learning systems building. It has helped states advance a QRIS framework, stimulated innovation, and helped begin the alignment of early learning sectors through the QRIS. Much credit is due, both to the architects of the ELC, for emphasizing the importance of developing and implementing a QRIS, and to the states, for taking on the challenge with enthusiasm and creativity. The task has been formidable and doesn't end now that the ELC funding is winding down. But states are much further ahead in this work than they were six years ago, when the ELC grant competition was announced. They can now take the valuable lessons provided by the ELC into the next phase of QRIS work.

Appendix: Resources

A number of helpful resources are available for those interested in a deeper dive into QRIS.

The *QRIS Compendium* is a catalog and comparison of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) to promote thoughtful design, analysis and ongoing improvement in early care and education systems building. It includes state-by-state information as follows:

- Goals of the QRIS
- Basic Description of ELC State QRIS
- Standards - Curriculum, Assessment, Developmental Screening
- Standards - Cultural/language diversity, family partnerships and children with special needs
- Standards - CQI plan required in the standards;
- Technical Assistance
- Monitoring, Verification, Rating, Automation
- Observational tools used in the QRIS
- Evaluation and Validation
- Public Engagement and Outreach
- Financial Incentives
- Tiered Reimbursement and
- Standards – Context for Teaching

The Compendium is a joint project of BUILD and ChildTrends.

The *QRIS Cost Estimation Model* (CEM), the *Provider Cost of Quality Calculator* (PCQC), and the *Professional Development Cost Analysis Tool* are open-source tools provided through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, to assist states and programs in calculating costs involved in planning for a robust early learning system that includes a focus on QRIS as well as degree attainment and credentials for the workforce. Together these tools help state policymakers understand the costs associated with delivering high-quality early care and education.

Sheila Smith, Taylor Robbins, William Schneider, J. Lee Kreader, and Christine Ong, *Coaching and Quality Assistance in Quality Rating Improvement Systems Approaches Used by TA Providers to Improve Quality in Early Care and Education Programs and Home-based Settings* (New York City: Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health, Department of Health Policy and Management, National Center for Children in Poverty, 2012), accessed October 18, 2015, http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_1047.pdf.

Kathryn Tout, Dale Epstein, Meg Soli, and Claire Lowe, *A Blueprint for Early Care and Education Quality Improvement Initiatives* (Bethesda, MD: Child Trends, 2015), accessed October 18, 2015, <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2015-07BlueprintEarlyCareandEd1.pdf>

About the Author



Debi Mathias serves as the Director of the QRIS National Learning Network with the BUILD Initiative, a broad, cross-section of partners at the state and national level focused on early learning systems building, including the development and implementation of quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). From 2005 - 2012, Debi was Director of Early Learning Services, Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), Departments of Education and Human Services, in Pennsylvania. Her responsibilities included leadership and support of teams charged with the design, implementation and monitoring of a variety of programs and initiatives including Keystone STARS, family support programs, the state pre-k program, state Head Start and Collaboration Office, professional development systems, standards-aligned systems, and quality program evaluation and research. Prior to her years at OCDEL, Debi started what became a multi-site NAEYC-accredited early care and education program that grew to serve over 800 children. She was the program director there for 27 years.

Author Acknowledgements

This chapter is based on interviews conducted in the fall and winter of 2014 by Debi Mathias, Meghan Robinson, and Louise Stoney.

Thanks to many people, including Louise Stoney, for the first iteration of this chapter, which was based on her interviews and insights. Thanks to her as well for her ability to help us all look outside the box. As always, thanks to Anne Mitchell for her wisdom and value to the field as a thought partner.

Much appreciation is owed to the state leaders interviewed for this chapter who shared their thoughts, experiences, enthusiasm and challenges with such passion and commitment to the work of improving the lives of children and families through their systems-building efforts. State leaders interviewed or providing

information included Karen Beese, Joan Blough, Lisa Brewer-Walraven, Rachael Brown-Kendall, Lindi Budd, Sheri Butters, Tammy Camillo, Tracey Campanini, Katrina Coburn, Harriet Dichter, Patricia Donofrio, Karen Enboden, Cecelia Fisher-Dahms, Jessica Gillard, Rena Hallam, Lisa Hildebrand, Jennifer Johnson, Evelyn Keating, Liz Kelley, Maureen Murphy, Gail Nelson, Sarah Neville-Morgan, Mary Lee Porterfield, Alejandra Rebolledo, Meredith A Russell, Caroline Shelton, Phil Sirinides, Pam Stevens, Deb Swenson-Klatt, Juliet Taylor, Nara Topp, Jeff Van Deusen, and Dawn Woods.

Thank you to Kate Tarrant Ed.D., Iheoma Iruka Ph.D. and Diane Schilder Ed.D. for their thoughtful contributions and also to D. Toni Byrd for all her support.

Thank you to Harriet Dichter and to the BUILD team for their support, guidance and patience.

BUILD Initiative Credits

We thank the dedicated authors, along with the many state leaders, for their passion, insights, and time.

Many others have made important contributions to this work. Rising to the Challenge was first conceptualized by Joan Lombardi, Senior Advisor, Buffett Early Childhood Fund and Early Opportunities with BUILD's Executive Director, Susan Hibbard, in collaboration with Sherri Killins, Director of Systems Alignment and Integration at BUILD. Harriet Dichter ably served as general manager and editor. Without her the book might still be just a great idea. Ruth Trombka provided editorial assistance and the executive summary for this chapter; and Nada Giunta provided design services.

This early documentation of the impact of the Early Learning Challenge as well as the considerable support to state leaders as they quickly applied for ELC grants and then even more quickly began to implement the ambitious plans would not have been possible without the extensive support of the philanthropic community. We wish to particularly thank Phyllis Glink and the Irving Harris Foundation, the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, the Alliance for Early Success, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, George Gund Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, the Kresge Foundation, the McCormick Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the William Penn Foundation, the JB and MK Pritzker Foundation, the Rauch Foundation, and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation all of whom provided financing and encouragement.

Joan Lombardi and Sherri Killins co-chaired an exceptional Advisory Committee, bringing together Miriam Calderon; Jeff Capizzano, The Policy Equity Group; Debbie Chang, Nemours Health Policy and Prevention; Ellen Frede, Acelero Learning (now with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation); Phyllis Glink, Irving Harris Foundation; Bette Hyde, Washington Department of Early Learning; Stacey Kennedy, Colorado Department of Human Services; Tammy Mann, Campagna Center; Hannah Matthews, CLASP; Carmel Martin, Center for American Progress; Kris Perry, First Five Years Fund; Elliot Regenstein, Ounce of Prevention Fund; Yvette Sanchez Fuentes, National Alliance for Hispanic Families; Carla Thompson, W.K. Kellogg Foundation; Albert Wat, National Governor's Association; Sarah Weber, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; Marcy Whitebook, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment; Ceil Zalkind, Advocates for the Children of New Jersey.

Forward Ever for All Young Children!



Build
INITIATIVE
Strong Foundations For
Our Youngest Children

.....
www.buildinitiative.org • info@buildinitiative.org