



Early Learning Quality Improvement System

Overview

In August 2018, The Trust established the Thrive by 5 Early Learning Quality Improvement System (QIS) to increase access to high-quality early learning for children and families in greatest need. This initiative builds on prior Trust research, evaluation, and board policy guidance, as well as the state's strategic investments through the Early Learning Performance Funding Project, to improve the quality of early learning programs in Miami-Dade County. The Children's Trust implements the QIS in partnership with several key partners and community stakeholders. Our main role is to develop the vision, fund contracted services, review ongoing system performance, and disseminate learning. The model includes multiple components that aim to intervene across systems levels (i.e., children, parents, early learning practitioners, directors, and owners, as well as policymakers and legislators) including:

- Tiered payment differentials for programs that offer exceptional early learning experiences
- Child scholarships for families who do not qualify for a federal school-readiness (SR) subsidy but still cannot afford the high cost of quality childcare
- Salary supplements INCENTIVE\$ (formerly known as WAGE\$) for early learning professionals
- Continuing education scholarships and career advising for early learning professionals
- Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) supports for directors and educators implementing an ongoing observation-based child assessment system
- School-based Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) consultation for early learning professionals, children, and families

Initiative History:

Many of the Thrive by 5 QIS components are an evolution of The Children's Trust former quality rating and improvement system, known as Quality Counts, which operated from 2008-2018. The primary change in the move to Thrive by 5 QIS involved narrowing the criteria for participation to focus more exclusively on building quality in the greatest areas of need. Quality Counts previously served 420 programs that included 4,000 early learning practitioners and 25,000 children. Implemented with many of the same key partners of the Thrive by 5 QIS, Quality Counts included:

- Accountability for voluntary standards of high-quality early care and education
- Program quality assessment every 18 months
- Salary supplements (WAGE\$) for early learning professionals
- Continuing education scholarships and career advising for early learning professionals
- On-site coaching, educator communities of practice, accreditation supports, and implementation of curriculum following the USDA health and food guidelines
- Social-emotional supports for approximately 300 children per year needing short-term behavior intervention



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Theory of Change

Young children in high-poverty neighborhoods have limited access to affordable, high-quality early learning programs. With the lack of high-quality care, children from disadvantaged backgrounds lag in preparedness for school, which further exacerbates the achievement gap. Research shows that comprehensive early childhood well-being has strong links to long-term outcomes such as educational attainment, annual income, and mental health (Sarakatsannis & Winn, 2018). Every dollar invested in early childhood well-being has the potential to produce approximately \$8 in return for society (Lynch & Vaghul, 2015). With tight budgets and uncertain future funding, many early learning programs find investment in quality improvements to be a daunting task. Additionally, Miami has an oversaturation of the childcare market that, coupled with low payment rates for children receiving the School Readiness (SR) subsidy, leaves providers challenged to meet and maintain quality standards.

The purpose of the Thrive by 5 Quality Improvement System is to increase opportunity to access high-quality early learning for young learners in high-poverty neighborhoods. In doing so, we offer financial incentives to programs to pay for and maintain the cost of high-quality early learning experiences. We offer child scholarships to working parents to be used at higher tiered programs to allow quality to drive the market for early learning programs. We professionalize the early learning workforce by offering scholarships for continuing education and salary supplements. We assess classroom quality by using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and help teachers link curriculum to assessment using Teaching Strategies GOLD so that teachers can use that data to inform lesson planning and tailor instruction to meet children's needs. The long-term outcome of this initiative is for children to enter kindergarten socially and academically ready to learn.

Intended Service Populations: Children ages 0-5 years living in high-poverty neighborhoods of Miami-Dade County who do not have access to affordable, high-quality early learning. Licensed early learning programs meet the following criteria to participate in the QIS:

- Serve 30 percent or more young children (under age 6) receiving a SR subsidy
- Located in a high-poverty census tract (programs that are not in a high-poverty census tract but serve more than 50 percent of children receiving a SR subsidy may be allowed)
- Provide care for infants and toddlers

Intended Implementation Approach: Informed through an equity lens, this initiative is grounded in the five guiding principles of a collective impact approach focused on developing a shared agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support. To promote healthy development for children in poverty, we use a two-generation approach to provide economic stability for families. System partners provide additional supports to programs for continuous quality improvement with a focus on workforce development. Together, we aim to build the capacity of locally responsive early learning programs that meet the needs of children and families.

Intended Child/Family Outcomes: Increased access to high-quality early learning for youngest learners in high-poverty neighborhoods, with a long-term outcome of children who succeed when they arrive at kindergarten.





References:

Lynch, B. & Vaghul, K. (2015). *The benefits and costs of investing in early childhood education*. Equitable Growth. Retrieved from: <https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/the-benefits-and-costs-of-investing-in-early-childhood-education/?longform=true>

Sarakatsannis, J. & Winn, B. (2018). *How state governments can improve well-being for all children, from birth to age five*. McKinsey and Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/how-states-can-improve-well-being-for-all-children-from-birth-to-age-five>

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LOGIC MODEL

INPUTS 	ACTIVITIES 	OUTPUTS 	OUTCOMES 
<p>Young Children and families from high-poverty neighborhoods in Miami-Dade County</p> <p>Early learning Workforce staff in Miami-Dade County</p> <p>Early Learning Programs in Miami-Dade County</p> <p>Cross implementation partners</p> <p>Technology & Equipment</p> <p>Trust Funding</p>	Early Learning Program Level		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier payment reimbursements • Program quality assessments • IECMH & TSG supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of programs receiving QIS supports • Tier rankings by program • Amount of tier payment reimbursements by program 	<p>Short Term: Improvement in program quality assessment scores among QIS programs</p> <p>Mid Term: Increased enrollment in higher tier QIS programs</p> <p>Long Term: Stability to the early learning market</p>
	Early Learning Workforce Level		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salary supplements • Education scholarships • Career advising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of staff utilizing salary supplements, scholarships, and career advising • Number of staff receiving IECMH & TSG supports • Amount of salary supplements/scholarships for workforce 	<p>Short Term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators receiving QIS supports demonstrate improvement in early learning educator knowledge, teacher-child interactions, and lesson planning • Increased hourly wages of educators receiving salary supplements <p>Mid Term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher credentials and qualifications among educators receiving QIS supports • Reduced educator turnover <p>Long Term: Early learning educators earn at or above a living wage</p>
	Child/Family Level		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Scholarships • TSG child Assessments • IECMH supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of child scholarships utilized • Number of children assessed • Number children/families receiving IECMH supports 	<p>Short Term: Children in high poverty neighborhoods have access to high quality early learning programs and infant/toddler care</p> <p>Mid Term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents in QIS programs are engaged in their child's development and learning through teacher feedback and child assessments • Decreased number of suspensions and expulsions in QIS programs <p>Long Term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are informed of and seek out high-quality early learning programs • Reduced financial stress and greater economic stability for families • Children are ready to succeed and prepared for kindergarten



Early Learning Quality Improvement System

Key Questions

Who are we serving and how well does that match our intended service population?

1. How many children/families were served?
2. What are the age groups of children we are serving?
3. What are the demographics of children/families?
4. How many early learning educators/staff were served?
5. Early Learning Educator/Staff Demographics
6. How many early learning programs were served?
7. What are the locations of children/families served?
8. What are the characteristics of early learning programs and the communities in which they are located that choose to participate in the QIS?
9. What are children's current level of development?

What supports are programs, workforce, and children/families getting and how well does this match the intended delivery model in terms of quality and fidelity?

10. How much funding are we investing into our early learning programs?
11. Are funds being evenly distributed through all high poverty census tracts?
12. How much funding are we investing into our Early Learning workforce?
13. Are there differences by subgroups (i.e., demographics, level of need, etc.)?
14. How much funding are we investing into our children/families through our QIS?
15. How are QIS supports helping to professionalize the early learning workforce?

What are the structural and process benefits realized?

16. How long does it take for a QIS program to change tiers?
17. Are there trends in QIS program's movement between tiers? What are the differences in trends based on supports received?
18. How are tier payments being reinvested by QIS programs? Are there correlations between these investments and program quality?
19. What are the differences between programs participating in the QIS and those not participating?
20. What is the relationship between early learning staff qualifications and teacher child interactions?
21. What is the relationship between teacher-child interaction quality and professional development activities?
22. Is there a relationship between professional development investment and teacher compensation and retention?
23. Is there a relationship between supports received (monetary and professional development) and child outcomes?
24. Is there a relationship between Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation supports received and child suspension and expulsion rates?
25. Are there differences in outcome results by subgroups (i.e., demographics, level of need, etc.)?

What is the long-term impact in the community (initiative-level)?

26. What impact does QIS supports have on child school readiness outcomes?
27. How does receipt of child scholarships benefit families? (i.e. financial stress, economic stability)
28. What is the trajectory for professional growth of the current workforce?
29. Has there been a change in access to high quality early learning in high poverty neighborhoods?
30. What is the impact of the initiative on applicable community-level indicators?



Appendix

Description of Thrive by 5 QIS Supports (Administered by Cross Implementation Partners)

Child Scholarships: Scholarships are awarded to parents who do not qualify for a school readiness subsidy (SR) but still cannot afford the high cost of quality childcare. While SR eligibility covers families with incomes up to 150 percent of the federal poverty level, Trust scholarships cover families with incomes up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level. Parents can use the scholarships to enroll their children in high-quality programs, based on CLASS assessments, and those programs benefit from increasing enrollment to financially sustain their high levels of quality. Families may use their Children's Trust child scholarships at any programs at a quality level of tier 4 or 5. The child scholarship is offered to a family for a period of two years at which time a family's income will be reviewed to determine continued eligibility. The Trust pays the full amount of tuition plus the differential rate while families are responsible for a weekly co-payment of \$70 for the first child and \$35 for the second child.

Continuing Education Scholarships and Career Advising: All Miami-Dade directors and teaching staff, regardless of participation in the QIS, have access to career advising services and educational scholarships aimed at furthering their education and professional development. Scholarships may be used for childcare credentials, document translation, and professional development opportunities. There are a wide range of bilingual opportunities available including college credit-earning courses and continuing education unit (CEU) bearing trainings. Career Advisors are available to guide early learning professionals along a career path and connect them with the appropriate opportunities.

Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: Infant and early childhood mental health consultation is available to QIS programs upon request. The University of Miami's Jump Start, Building Capacity through Partnership (JS) is designed to support social and emotional development of children and to increase the capacity of early care providers to address the mental health needs and challenging behaviors that place children at risk for negative outcomes. JS consultants help adults understand, assess and address a specific child's needs by developing an individualized plan with teachers and parents of a child exhibiting behavior that is of concern. They provide program focused, classroom focused, and child-focused consultations. Directors are supported by consultants to make changes in childcare practices and policies, teachers are supported by identifying the attitudes, beliefs, practices, and conditions that undermine quality relationships between teachers and children.

Salary Supplements (INCENTIVE\$): Eligible teachers, regardless of participation in the QIS, have access to semiannual wage supplements issued through The Child Care INCENTIVE\$® FLORIDA Project. They are intended to increase the education of the early childhood workforce and reduce staff turnover. Annual wage supplements ranging from \$200 to \$3,000 are available depending on level of education qualifications. Eligibility criteria includes that educators must work in a licensed (or exempt) program and earn less than \$17.50 per hour to qualify. They must be employed at the center for at least six months before applying and at the same site at the time of employment confirmation every six months.

The Child Care INCENTIVE\$® FLORIDA Project aims to improve child care quality by reducing turnover and encouraging the continued education of early childhood teachers, including center staff and family child care providers. This program is designed to provide young children with more stable relationships with teachers (a key component of quality) by rewarding teacher education and continuity of care.

Teaching Strategies GOLD: The implementation of the Teaching Strategies GOLD child assessment is supported via professional development and coaching for teachers and directors as they better individualize instruction for children based on their development. Teachers conduct ongoing child assessments and analyze data to evaluate child knowledge, skills and behaviors. These assessments also provide a means by which to track the development of children and assess the impact of the education they receive. In order to achieve successful implementation, it is critical that all center staff, including the directors, participate in trainings and professional development opportunities. Supports for the implementation of GOLD assessments is limited to QIS participating centers in tiers 3, 4 and 5.

Tiered Payment Differentials Description (Administered by The Children's Trust)

Programs receive a payment differential on all children ages birth through 5 years old attending their program (subsidized and private pay). The Division of Early Learning (formerly Office of Early Learning) uses the rates identified in the table below (based on the implementation of Florida's House Bill 1091) and The Children's Trust adds to said rates to meet the total tiered payment rate allocated to Thrive by 5 early learning programs.

Tiered payment differentials are based on program quality, as defined by performance on classroom observations using the CLASS tool, which assesses teacher-child interactions. Programs are ranked from tier 1 through 5 based on a composite score of their CLASS observations which are conducted in 50% of the classrooms by care level, where 5 is the highest quality program.

The table below is applicable to children receiving school readiness dollars. The Trust pays the full total amount for private pay kids.

Tier	Composite CLASS score	Tiered Payment Differential Rate from Division of Early Learning	Tiered Payment Differential Rate from Children's Trust	Tiered Payment Differential Rate Total
5	6.00 - 7.00	10%	5%	15%
4	5.00 - 5.99	7%	5%	12%
3	4.00 - 4.99	4%	6%	10%
2	3.0 - 3.99	0%	3%	3%
1	2.51 - 2.99	0%	0%	0%