# Issues in Studying Child Outcomes in Quality Improvement Initiatives

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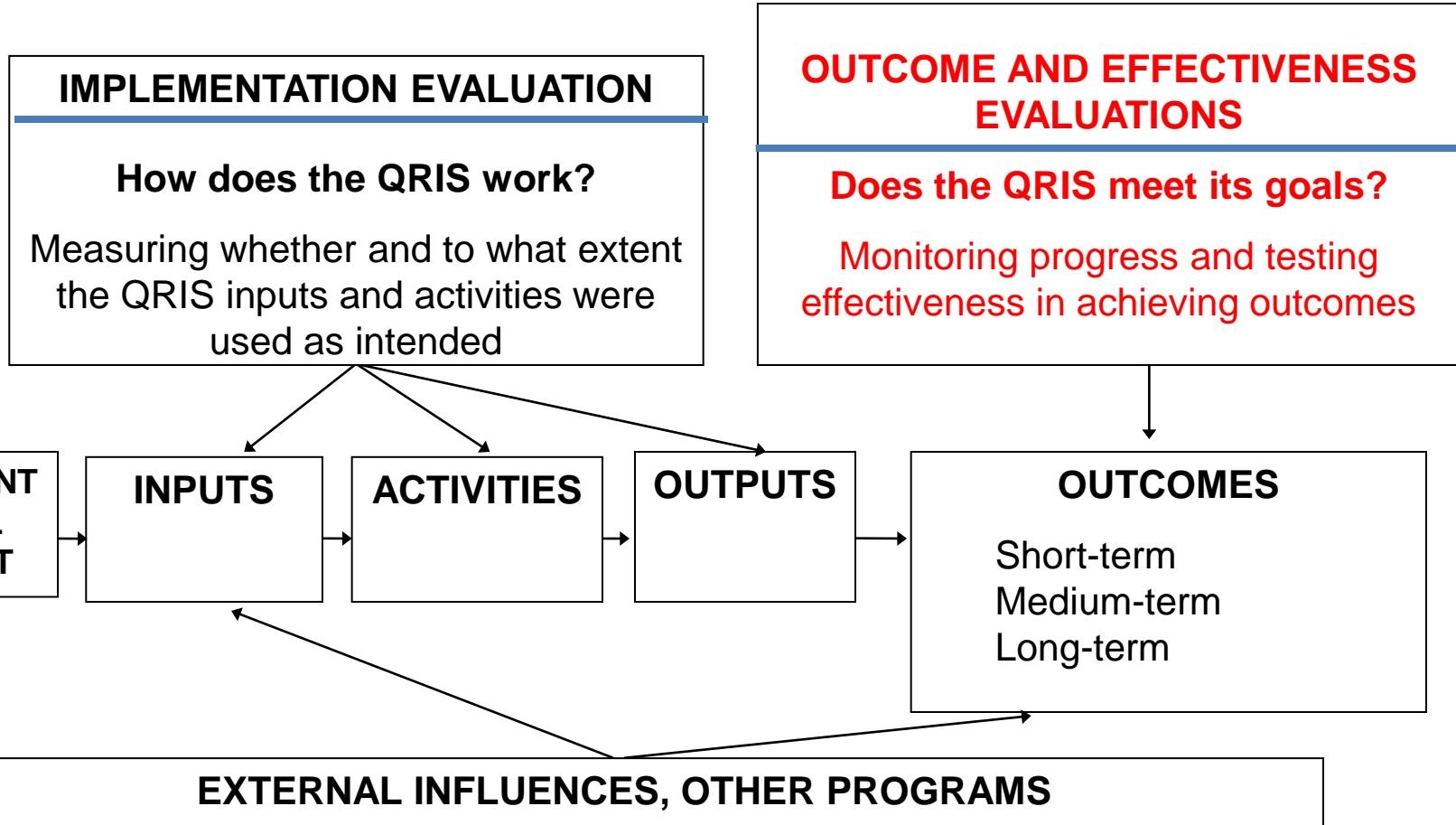**CCPRC Session B4:**

**Challenges and Options for**

**Studying Child Outcomes**

**in the Context of QI/QRIS**

# Overview

- **The QRIS evaluation logic model and definitions.**

- **QRIS assumptions about quality and child outcomes.**

- **Examples of QRIS evaluations with child outcomes; synthesis findings.**

- **The next generation of QRIS/QI outcome evaluations.**

# QRIS Evaluation Logic Model

| IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION | OUTCOME AND EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATIONS |
|---|---|
| **How does the QRIS work?** | **Does the QRIS meet its goals?** |
| Measuring whether and to what extent the QRIS inputs and activities were used as intended | Monitoring progress and testing effectiveness in achieving outcomes |

| ENVIRONMENT AND GOAL STATEMENT | → | INPUTS | → | ACTIVITIES | → | OUTPUTS | → | OUTCOMES Short-term Medium-term Long-term |

**EXTERNAL INFLUENCES, OTHER PROGRAMS**

# Definition of EvaluationTypes

- **Implementation evaluation**
  - Descriptive study designed to determine whether the QI inputs and activities were implemented as intended, with fidelity to the model.
  - Informs decisions about how to change or adapt inputs and activities to improve system functioning.

- **Outcome and effectiveness evaluation**
  - Measures progress toward meeting the QRIS's desired outcomes.
  - The level of evaluation design rigor determines whether it is an outcome evaluation or an effectiveness evaluation.
  - Validation studies tend to be outcome evaluations.

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# Validation Study

| | A validation study assesses the degree to which the quality standards component of the QRIS reflects meaningful quality levels that are linked to desired outcomes. |
|---|---|
| **What is this approach?** | It is a way to ask critical questions about the tools used in a QRIS and how they are functioning |
| **What can be learned with this approach?** | Whether the quality ratings actually mean something important to programs, parents, and children |
| **What research questions can be answered with this approach?** | • Do the quality standards reflect the current research base?<br>• Do the quality standards represent distinct areas that do not overlap with other standards in the QRIS?<br>• Can improvement be detected in the quality levels?<br>• *Are the quality levels related to children's functioning?* |
| **What are the key factors to consider when using this approach?** | • The timing of the validation study and how findings can inform QRIS design and implementation<br>• The degree to which the QRIS includes a representative sample of providers from the communities served by the QRIS |

# QI/QRIS Assumptions about Quality and Child Outcomes

- **Settings with higher ratings provide care that fosters better outcomes.**

  – Research demonstrates minimal association, mostly at the high end of quality.

- **Moving a setting up one or more rating levels should be associated with better outcomes.**

  – Evaluation designs generally cannot assess this.

- **Children's exposure is relatively similar across and within settings.**

  – Attendance rates vary widely and quality-quantity studies are rare but increasing.

# Examples of QI/QRIS Evaluations That Include Child Outcomes

- **Outcome evaluation (correlational/descriptive)**
  - Descriptive approach (CO, IN, KY, MN, NC, OH, OK, PA, VA)

- **Effectiveness evaluation (experiment or quasi-experiment)**
  - None

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# Recent Synthesis

- **Identified 10 studies that included child outcomes.**

- **Included direct assessments and teacher reports of children's development.**

- **No strong evidence of developmental outcomes consistently linked to QRIS rating levels.**

- **Methodological issues make studies of child outcomes challenging to conduct.**

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# Next Generation QRIS Child Outcome Evaluations

- **Aligned research questions, evaluation logic model, evaluation design, expected outcomes, and outcome measures.**

- **Evaluation begins after the early stage of QRIS implementation.**

- **Inclusion of fine-grained child-level and teacher-level attendance and continuity data.**

- **Revisit implementation and quality dimensions examined as mediators/moderators.**

# For More Information

- **Kim Boller**

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- **QRIS Assessment toolkit and products:**
  - **http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/quality-rating-systems-qrs-assessment-project-2008-2011**
  - **http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/Cire/forums/20111110/index.asp**

- **INQUIRE products:**
  - **http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/child-care-and-early-education-policy-and-research-analysis-and-technical**

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# Resources

Elicker, J. & Thornburg, K. R. (2011). *Evaluation of quality rating and improvement systems for early childhood programs and school-age care: Measuring children's development.* Research-to-Policy, Research-to-Practice Brief, OPRE 2011-11c. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Zellman, G. L. & Fiene, R. (2012). *Validation of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems for Early Care and Education and School-Age Care,* Research-to-Policy, Research-to-Practice Brief OPRE 2012-29. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Zellman, G.L., & Karoyl, L.A. (2012). *Moving to Outcomes: Approaches to Incorporating Child Assessments into State Early Childhood Quality Rating and Improvement Systems*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2012.

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**Zellman, G.L., & L.A. Karoly. Moving to Outcomes: Approaches to Incorporating Child Assessments into State Early Childhood Quality Rating and Improvement System, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2012.**

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