



# National Child Care Information Center

*A service of the Child Care Bureau*

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## QUALITY RATING SYSTEMS: DEFINITION and STATEWIDE SYSTEMS

Quality Rating Systems (QRS) are a method to assess, improve and communicate the level of quality in early care and education settings. QRS are systemic, addressing multiple aspects of early care and education through a uniform approach that is available throughout a State. QRS may be launched as a locally piloted initiative intended for Statewide application. The scope of a Quality Rating System may include a broad range of early care and education programs (e.g., center-based child care, family child care, after school, prekindergarten, and/or Head Start) and funding streams. Quality Rating Systems are part of a State's broader quality improvement continuum, and have the following five common elements:

- 1) **Standards** that are based on the foundation of compliance with the State's child care licensing regulations (taking into account exemptions) and include two or more levels, or tiers, of quality criteria above basic licensing requirements. Quality rating standards are based on early care and education research and on standards of quality for programs and practitioners that have gained wide acceptance (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Academy for Early Childhood Program Accreditation and other valid forms of accreditation, educational qualifications and continuing professional development, and Head Start Program Performance Standards). Quality rating standards may align with the State's early learning guidelines.
- 2) **Accountability**, through appropriate means of assessment and monitoring, for compliance with the specific criteria of the standards. Quality Rating Systems use valid and reliable methods of assessment to monitor compliance with standards and assign quality ratings. These ratings provide a benchmark for measuring improvement in the quality of care and education. Monitoring and assessment together provide the accountability measures for funding and for program and practitioner support.
- 3) **Program and practitioner outreach and support** including efforts to promote participation in the Quality Rating System, as well as technical assistance, training, mentoring, and other supports.
- 4) **Financing incentives specifically linked to compliance with quality standards** such as quality bonus payments, tiered reimbursement rates, contracts, quality grants, and wage supplements.
- 5) **Parent education** designed to ensure that parents understand the Quality Rating System and how it benefits children, families, and the early care and education system as a whole. Parent education includes the development of a quality rating indicator or symbol that parents can use as a consumer guide. These symbols, which represent varying quality rating levels, are easy-to-understand indicators of quality such as a

“three-star” or “gold level” that parents can use when making decisions about the care and education of their children.

*Stair Steps to Quality: A Guide for States and Communities Developing Quality Rating Systems for Early Care and Education*,<sup>1</sup> includes information about each of the five elements of a QRS and discusses the related principles, policies, and practices. The Guide is organized as a planning tool for readers to use as they consider how to develop a new QRS or review and improve an existing one.

Quality Rating Systems are a rapidly advancing approach for improving child care quality. As of March 2006, 12 States (Colorado, District of Columbia, Kentucky, Maryland, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont) have a Quality Rating System with multiple levels available throughout their State. Below is a list of the 12 Statewide QRS, along with the QRS Web site for additional information on these systems.

Additionally, 30 States (Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin) reported having a Statewide tiered reimbursement system in which higher rates are paid to programs that meet higher standards than the State’s licensing regulations. The information included in this summary is specific to QRS. For information on tiered reimbursement, see *State Tiered Quality Strategies (TQS), 2004*, available in HTML format on the Web at <http://nccic.org/poptopics/statetqs.html> and at <http://nccic.org/poptopics/statetqs.pdf> in PDF.

**STATEWIDE QUALITY RATING SYSTEMS (QRS):  
SYSTEM NAME and WEB SITE**

STATE	START DATE	SYSTEM NAME and WEB SITE (when available)
<b>Colorado</b>	2000	Qualistar Rating System <a href="http://www.qualistar.org">http://www.qualistar.org</a>
<b>District of Columbia</b>	2000	Going for the Gold Web site not available
<b>Kentucky</b>	2001	STARS for KIDS NOW (Kentucky Invests in Developing Success) Child Care Quality Rating System <a href="http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Early+Childhood+Development/STARS+-+The+Childcare+Quality+Rating+System.htm">http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Early+Childhood+Development/STARS+-+The+Childcare+Quality+Rating+System.htm</a>

STATE	START DATE	SYSTEM NAME and WEB SITE (when available)
<b>Maryland</b>	2001	Maryland Child Care Tiered Reimbursement Program <a href="http://63.236.98.116/cca/creden/tiered.htm">http://63.236.98.116/cca/creden/tiered.htm</a>
<b>Montana</b>	2002	Star Quality Rating System <a href="http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/programsservices/starqualitychildcare.shtml">http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/programsservices/starqualitychildcare.shtml</a>
<b>New Hampshire</b>	2006	Licensed Plus <a href="http://www.dhhs.state.nh.us/DHHS/CDB/licensedplus.htm">http://www.dhhs.state.nh.us/DHHS/CDB/licensedplus.htm</a>
<b>New Mexico</b>	2005	Look for the Stars <a href="http://www.newmexicokids.org/caregivers">http://www.newmexicokids.org/caregivers</a>
<b>North Carolina</b>	1999	North Carolina Star Rated License <a href="http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/parents/pr_sn2_ov_sr.asp">http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/parents/pr_sn2_ov_sr.asp</a>
<b>Oklahoma</b>	1998	Reaching for the Stars <a href="http://okdhs.org/childcare/ProviderInfo/provinfo_stars.htm">http://okdhs.org/childcare/ProviderInfo/provinfo_stars.htm</a>
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	2002	Keystone STARS (Standards, Training, Assistance, Resources, and Support) <a href="http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/child/childcare/KeystoneStarChildCare">http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/child/childcare/KeystoneStarChildCare</a>
<b>Tennessee</b>	2001	Child Care Evaluation and Report Card Program (Required for all licensed and approved child care providers in Tennessee) <a href="http://www.tnstarquality.org">http://www.tnstarquality.org</a>
	2001	Star-Quality Child Care Program <a href="http://www.tnstarquality.org">http://www.tnstarquality.org</a>
<b>Vermont</b>	2003	STep Ahead Recognition System for Child Care Programs (STARS) <a href="http://www.STARSstepahead.org">http://www.STARSstepahead.org</a>

Additional information about QRS is available under the Quality Rating Systems topic in the Popular Topics section of the NCCIC Web site at <http://nccic.org/poptopics/index.html#qrs>.

*The National Child Care Information Center does not endorse any organization, publication, or resource.*

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<sup>1</sup> This July 2005 paper, by Anne W. Mitchell, was prepared for the United Way of America/Success By 6<sup>®</sup> and Caliber, an ICF Consulting Company.