



National Child Care Information Center

A service of the Child Care Bureau

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COMMON CATEGORIES of CRITERIA USED in STATE QUALITY RATING 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 are part of a State's broader quality improvement continuum and have the following five common elements: 1) standards; 2) accountability; 3) program and practitioner outreach and support; 4) financing incentives specifically linked to compliance with quality standards; and 5) parent education.

According to information compiled by NCCIC between March and July 2004, 10 States (Colorado, District of Columbia, Kentucky, Maryland, Montana, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont) reported having a Quality Rating System with multiple levels available throughout their State. New Mexico reported plans to launch its new QRS in July 2005.

States have developed their Quality Rating Systems to address different needs and goals, and take into consideration factors such as the following:

- Availability of data on the child care workforce, such as the size and education of the workforce;
- Existence of a professional development system in the State;
- Extent to which child care is regulated and the specifics of those regulations; and
- Types of child care arrangements used, etc.

In the development of a Quality Rating System, a State examines research related to the quality criteria areas it wants to focus on and, typically, research that has provided evidence of significant relationships between the criteria and the quality of care. For example, a common focus of State Quality Rating Systems includes the structural elements of quality care, i.e., staff:child ratios and group size, staff qualifications/education, etc.

The following are a sample of common categories of criteria used in a sample of States with a QRS. The categories of criteria are used to assign quality levels. Also included within the common categories are examples of the requirements for the quality levels. Although the categories and requirements are typically based on research, there is considerable variance in the organization and requirements within the components of quality levels.

Administrative Policies and Procedures

- Annual performance evaluations
- Monthly staff meetings
- Planning time allotted to staff
- Written job descriptions
- Written personnel policies

Learning Environment

- Children are read to 15 minutes a day
- Developmentally appropriate materials
- Developmentally appropriate weekly lesson plans
- Minimize transitions children have throughout the day
- Space arranged in interest areas

Parent/Family Involvement

- Parent advisory board
- Bulletin board or newsletter
- Conferences and meetings
- Parent handbook/written program policies
- Parent resource center
- Parent satisfaction survey
- Families are welcomed at all times
- Written system for sharing daily happenings

Professional Development or Staff and/or Director Qualifications/Training

- Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, additional credit hours in early childhood education, Associate of Arts (AA) degree, Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in early childhood education or relevant field, Master of Arts (MA) degree in early childhood education or relevant field
- Increased minimal staff/director qualifications
- Increased training hours
- Level on a State career path/lattice
- Membership in a professional organization
- Professional development/growth activities
- Professional development plans in place

Program Evaluation

- Environment rating scales
- Parent and staff surveys
- Retention goals/reducing staff turnover
- Self-assessment

- Written improvement plans

Staff Compensation

- Child care benefit/discount
- Health insurance
- List of staff positions, salary, and tenure
- Paid family leave
- Paid sick leave with annual increments
- Paid vacation/holidays
- Retirement plan/fund
- Salary scale based on level of education, experience
- Tuition reimbursement

Additional common categories of criteria include licensing status/compliance, staff:child ratios and group size, and accreditation.

Additional Information

In the State resource listed below, the authors note that the brief introduces a quality indicator model as a means of opening the dialogue for a Statewide conversation about a potential quality indicator system that could eventually include all of the State's center and family child care programs. While the data are specific to Wisconsin, the quality indicator model and the testing of the validity of the model may be useful as States are developing (or expanding) their Quality Rating System.

■ “What Can Research Contribute to Child Care Consumer Rating Systems?” (December 2003), *Brief and to the Point* No. 13, by the Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership, uses data from the Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership as catalysts to inform the development of a Statewide child care rating system. The resource states:

In this Brief, [they] use data from questionnaires completed by child care directors from randomly-selected centers participating in the state subsidy program (n=253) to illustrate a potential quality indicator model. [They] test the validity of this model by comparing quality as assessed by structural indicators against quality as assessed through observation in 26 randomly-selected centers and 26 centers that participated in a state-sponsored quality improvement project ... (page 2)

The five quality indicators in this model include teacher education, wages, experience, director education, and center education. Centers were assigned one “star” for each measure for which their center met the designated criteria.

The Brief states that the findings:

... demonstrate a consistent relationship between the number of “stars” assigned and the observed quality of care in classrooms, using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R). These findings, indicating that centers with more stars earn higher

ratings on the 7-point ECERS-R scale, suggest that it may be possible to estimate child care quality without actually observing in child care classrooms. (page 2)

This resource is available on the Web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/wccrp/pdfs/brief13.pdf>.

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

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