

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Paths to QUALITY-- Child Care Quality Rating System for Indiana What is its Scientific Basis?**

**James Elicker  
Carolyn Clawson Langill  
Karen Ruprecht  
Kyong-Ah Kwon**

**Child Development & Family Studies  
Purdue University**

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## **Paths to QUALITY—A Child Care Quality Rating System for Indiana: What is its Scientific Basis?**

### **Executive Summary**

**Paths to QUALITY** is Indiana's new statewide child care quality rating system, scheduled to begin implementation in selected regions of the state in 2008 and then continue phased implementation through 2009. Child care quality rating systems are a relatively recent trend in the United States.

The main components of most state QRS programs are: 1) a set of quality standards that apply to home-based and center-based child care; 2) a process for objectively assessing child care quality and maintaining accountability; 3) a system of training and technical assistance to help child care providers improve quality; 4) incentives to encourage providers to reach higher levels of quality; and 5) public information to inform parents about what the QRS is and how to use it when they make child care decisions. As of January, 2007, 15 states had already implemented a QRS for child care, and several other states, including Indiana, were planning QRS programs.<sup>1</sup>

In 2007 Indiana's Bureau of Child Care, a division of the Family and Social Services Administration, contracted Purdue University to complete a scientific review of the quality standards contained in **Paths to QUALITY**, the proposed quality rating system. The overall goal of this review was to conduct an external evaluation of the scientific validity of the **Paths to QUALITY** standards.

### **The review focused on the following three questions:**

1. What are the known results and effects of the two existing Indiana QRS pilot programs to date? (Fort Wayne and Evansville areas)
2. Will the proposed Indiana QRS levels and criteria result in increasing the quality of child care children receive? (What does existing research tell us?)
3. Will the Indiana QRS system improve developmental outcomes for children? (What does existing research tell us?)

## **Paths to QUALITY Levels and Criteria**

Indiana Paths to QUALITY (PTQ) establishes four levels of quality that apply to licensed child care centers, licensed family child care homes, and registered child care ministries. Each level includes specific criteria that must be met in order for that level to be awarded. The quality levels are labeled:

**Level 1 – Health and Safety**

**Level 2 – Learning Environment**

**Level 3 – Planned Curriculum**

**Level 4 – National Accreditation**

## **Paths to QUALITY History**

### **Paths to QUALITY in Indiana**

The Paths to QUALITY program was created by the Child Care and Early Education Partnership, a group of organizations working together in the Northeast Indiana “to develop awareness of and commitment to the importance of high quality early care and education for all children in the community.”<sup>2</sup> During 1996 to 1999, Paths to QUALITY, a child care quality indicator system, was created as a strategy to identify high quality early care and education.

### **Goals of Paths to QUALITY**

Paths to QUALITY is a voluntary system created to assist parents in identifying and selecting quality child care and recognize providers for ongoing efforts to achieve higher standards of quality that the minimum state licensing requirements. Providers who choose to join PTQ receive a verification visit, are assessed, and are placed on one of four levels. Providers receive yearly re-verification visits to determine if they have maintained their current level or achieved a higher level.

### **The goals of the Paths to QUALITY as originally conceived were:**

- 1. raise the quality of child care and early education experiences for children,**
- 2. give parents tools to help determine the best quality program for their children, and**
- 3. support and recognize providers for quality care.**

### **Implementation of Paths to QUALITY**

In 2000, PTQ was implemented in Allen County in Northeast Indiana by the Early Childhood Alliance (ECA) Child Care Resource and Referral agency. In 2001, PTQ was implemented in the surrounding 5 counties of DeKalb, Whitley, Steuben, Noble, and LaGrange.

In 2005, 4C of Southern Indiana implemented the PTQ program in the 11 county service area of Vanderburgh, Posey, Pike, Dubois, Warrick, Knox, Martin, Daviess, Spencer, Gibson, and Perry Counties.

**Conclusions from PTQ pilot programs in Northeast and Southwest Indiana:**

- The dramatic growth in participation rates and increases in levels by providers in both regions illustrate the success of the program.
- In both regions relationships between providers and child care resource & referral staff, in particular mentoring services and training opportunities, were reported to be critical to the success of the programs and advancement in PTQ levels.
- Barriers for providers to advance levels in PTQ included: completing voluntary certification participation, meeting education and training requirements of staff, providing accessible, appropriate learning materials, understanding and implementing a developmentally appropriate curriculum, providing parent/teacher conferences, and implementing various administrative changes (developing parent contracts, writing strategic plans, instituting parent surveys and evaluations).
- Increased participation in training and professional development events made the greatest difference in helping providers advance to higher levels.
- The pilot programs demonstrate that the PTQ system is understandable to child care providers and provide preliminary evidence that when providers reach higher levels, they are increasing the quality of care and education they provide for children, as assessed by objective and valid quality measures.
- The successes of PTQ pilot programs provide encouragement for the development of a statewide quality rating system using the PTQ levels.

### **Key Quality Indicators Contained in the Paths to Quality Levels**

After reviewing the Paths to QUALITY standards, the Purdue research team identified 10 “key quality indicators” within the standards: 1) Regulation, 2) Teacher education and specialized training, 3) Structural quality, 4) Process quality, 5) Assessment, 6) Provisions for children with special needs, 7) Program policies and procedures, 8) Director professional development, 9) Parent-teacher communication and involvement, and 10) Accreditation by NAEYC or other organizations.

We defined a “quality indicator” as something that:

1. is a concrete, observable, or otherwise documentable aspect of child care settings or practices;
2. has been identified as a “best practice” in national policies or professional position statements; and
3. has been evaluated specifically in the published scientific early education and child care literature.

Next, we identified the Paths to QUALITY levels and criteria that include each indicator and reviewed available evidence for the importance of each indicator and its relation to other measures of quality and its relationship to children’s development and well-being.

### **Conclusions: Validity of the PTQ Levels and Criteria**

- A thorough review of 10 main quality indicators (including 12 additional sub-indicators) within the PTQ levels and standards revealed substantial scientific evidence for the validity of the PTQ quality criteria.
- 75% of the quality indicators we examined had “substantial evidence” for their validity.
- In addition, most of the PTQ quality indicators had significant evidence that they support children’s development, learning, or well-being in child care.
- Overall, we found significant support for the validity the PTQ quality indicators in the child development and early education scientific literature.
- In addition, most of the PTQ standards have the support of prominent early childhood education organizations, which have designated them as “best practices.”

### General Conclusions

- Based on our analysis of the PTQ program as developed in regional pilots and upon review of the evidence for the validity of the proposed PTQ quality standards, we conclude that, if implemented with diligence, care, and accountability, the PTQ program has the potential to increase the quality in child care centers, child care ministries, and child care homes in Indiana.
- Further, if implemented with care, the PTQ system has the potential to help child care providers increase their support of Indiana young children's learning, development, and well-being.

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<sup>1</sup> National Child Care Information Center. (2007, April). Quality rating systems: Definition and statewide systems. Retrieved September 21, 2007 from [www.nccic.org/pubs/qrs-defsystems.html](http://www.nccic.org/pubs/qrs-defsystems.html).

<sup>2</sup> Child Care and Early Care Partnership Mission, 1996.