
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Florida's Gold Seal Quality Care program, created in statute in 1996, serves as a policy lever to improve program quality in child care and serve as a symbol of quality for parents when choosing a child care provider for their children. Child care programs can receive a Gold Seal certificate if they submit evidence that they are accredited under one of the approved accrediting associations to the Florida Department of Children and Families, the state agency responsible for child care licensing and regulation. The state invests approximately \$33 million in additional payments for Gold Seal programs for children receiving child care subsidies through the Florida Office of Early Learning. Gold Seal programs, inclusive of private for profit, non-profit, faith-based and public schools, are approved as providers of the state's Voluntary Pre-kindergarten program. Additional incentives include property tax abatement for ad valorem taxes for programs that are private, for profit businesses. Sales taxes on certain educational supplies, materials and equipment are also waived for Gold Seal programs which is estimated to cost the state approximately \$200,000 per year.

This study examined the differences in observed quality between Gold Seal and non-Gold Seal programs in 1,760 early childhood center-based and home-based settings yielding 3,506 assessments in 11 Florida counties over a two year period from 2010-2012. Observable quality was measured by the Environment Rating Scales (ERS), a valid and reliable set of instruments for measuring quality in early childhood settings. The study also examined the differences between programs accredited by one of 11 accrediting associations approved under Gold Seal and observed quality as measured by the Environment Rating Scales.

Findings showed that Gold Seal programs scored higher on measures of quality than non-Gold Seal programs and differences were statistically significant, although the differences were relatively modest. Four of the 11 accrediting associations approved under Florida's Gold Seal policy were positively associated with higher scores on the ERS. In spite of the positive findings, the distribution of scores showed that only 19.4% of Gold Seal programs scored in the good to excellent range compared to 14.9% of non-Gold Seal programs. Further, 11.4% of Gold Seal programs and 21.3% of non-Gold Seal programs scored in the range of inadequate care. These results suggests that while Florida's Gold Seal programs scored slightly higher than non-Gold Seal programs on the ERS, overall program quality in the majority of programs was minimally adequate in the state.