

***From the NAEYC Public Policy Program, as adopted by the NAEYC Governing Board
September 26, 2011***

Quality rating and improvement systems should be used for (1) increasing the supply of and access to higher quality early childhood programs, (2) creating system-wide improvements in the quality of all programs, including all settings, auspices and ages of children served, (3) providing resources to help programs improve and sustain higher quality, (4) and creating greater consumer awareness of the importance of program quality indicators and the supply of high quality early childhood programs.

Quality rating and improvement systems should provide at least three tiers or levels in order to provide a continuum that sets clear benchmarks of quality that build upon each other. The lowest tier should start with minimal state licensing requirements and lead up to the highest tier that includes program accreditation by a national early childhood program accreditation system, including the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation for center-based and school-based programs, or other recognized national accreditation systems for family child care and school-age care.

Quality rating and improvement systems should exist within an adequately financed early care and education system that supports equitable access for all families and ensures that the highest quality programs are affordable for all families. Quality rating and improvement systems must be supported by a system-wide strategy for:

- Linking to a statewide tiered child care subsidy reimbursement program that includes higher reimbursement rates for higher quality programs.
- Improving professional development and higher education opportunities for program staff and directors.
- Linking to a career pathway in the field of early childhood education.
- Enhancing compensation that reflects additional education and promotes retention in the field.
- Expanding family engagement opportunities and consumer's understanding of quality early childhood education in ways that are inclusive and respectful of the diversity of families and children.
- Fairly assessing programs for meeting evidence-based conditions for quality.
- Promoting programs' continuous improvement to encourage achievement of higher levels of quality.

Quality rating and improvement systems should not replace the child care regulatory system and should strongly link to the components of the early childhood system infrastructure to enable greater systemic improvements.

As a strategy for early childhood program quality improvement, quality rating and improvement systems should be used to support strong child care licensing standards and should address:

- Physical environment, including class size and ratios as well as health and safety.
- Staff qualifications and education and professional development.
- Interactions between teachers, children and families.
- Developmentally and culturally appropriate curriculum and classroom practices.
- Regular program evaluation and public reporting.
- Supports to programs that include having an adequate number of well-trained evaluators and access to technical assistance and mentoring to help programs reach the next level of the quality rating.
- Continuous program quality improvement.

An effective quality rating and improvement system should promote accountability by:

- Creating an accountability system that includes program assessment for the purpose of assessing a rating as well as program evaluation of the overall quality improvement system by a third party entity.
- Linking the accountability system to an integrated data system that captures information on all children birth through age 21 and characteristics of the workforce providing care and education for children birth through age 21.
- Ensuring that the parameters of the accountability system are state-defined but adhere to standard guidelines.

An effective quality rating and improvement system should provide adequate consumer education and outreach that includes:

- Resources and materials that promote cultural and linguistic competence.
- Education and outreach that uses publicly available modes that have been shown to be used by families in a given county, state or region.
- Outreach modes that are responsive to the needs and schedules of working families.

An effective quality rating and improvement system should provide adequate provider education and outreach that includes:

- Resources and materials that promote cultural and linguistic competence.
- Resources and materials that include information about the basics of program quality improvement, conducting appropriate program assessment, and the mechanics of the quality improvement initiative in which programs will participate.

- Outreach and education modes that are responsive to early childhood program staff needs and schedules.

An effective quality rating and improvement system should provide adequate incentives linked to compliance with standards that:

- Include a variety of financial and non-financial incentives that have been shown to be linked to program quality improvement.
- Are linked to compliance with standards and identified program technical assistance needs.
- Are tracked in the accountability system to determine any links between the availability of incentives and a progression along a continuum of quality.
- Are designed to support continuous program quality improvement.



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