

Policy Brief SCHOOL READINESS

QUALITY RATING IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS (QRIS)

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A QRIS is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and school-age programs. Similar to rating systems for restaurants and hotels, QRIS awards quality star ratings to early care and school-age programs that meet a set of defined program standards. These systems provide an opportunity for States to increase the quality of care for children, increase parents' understanding and demand for higher quality care, and increase professional development of child care providers. A QRIS can also be a strategy for aligning components of the early care and school-age system for increased accountability in improving quality of care (NCCIC, 2009).

Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS) are being developed across the country to improve the quality of early childhood education programs. These systems have been developed to provide a more objective way to assess quality in a facility providing childcare. Currently, there are Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS) in 26 states or local jurisdictions in the United States and the remaining 25 states are in the process of developing a QRIS. Each of these systems varies slightly in its requirements and protocols, but all have the goal of improving the quality of early childhood education. The pilot project in the state of Nevada, which started in 2009, is the first QRIS in Nevada and has been working to test and refine the program processes before moving to full implementation.

To begin the process of implementing a QRIS, experts in early childhood education in Nevada were assembled to form a QRIS Workgroup. This workgroup created the Silver State Stars QRIS, including the structure of the system (a 5-star rating system), the quality indicators used to create the star rating, and the process for technical assistance and grant funding for quality improvements in centers. In the Spring of 2009, the QRIS Workgroup, along with the Nevada Office of Early Care and Education, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (UNCE), and the Nevada Institute for Children's Research and Policy (NICRP), implemented the Silver State Stars QRIS Pilot Project. This pilot project was designed to implement the program in 24 centers, over the two year period from 2009 to 2011, to evaluate the utility of the star rating system and processes designed to improve center quality. After working with the first 2 years of centers, changes were made to the program and improvements made to the associated processes and an additional six centers were chosen to pilot the revised program from July 2011 to June 2012. To date, 30 centers have participated in the process of assessment to test the star rating system. The program is now being implemented in Clark County. All centers have been assigned a star rating of 1, which indicates that a center is licensed in good standing. In order to be assigned a higher rating, centers must attend an orientation to the program and enroll in the process. Centers are provided with coaching and grant funds to help improve programming and learning environments to help them to receive a higher star rating. Planned for 2013 is an evaluation which will examine the relationships between star ratings and outcomes for children enrolled in those centers. This study will provide valuable data about the efficacy of Nevada's QRIS program and will be one of the first evaluations of it's kind in the country.

Recommendations:

Nevada’s Silver State Stars Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), which is designed to establish a structure and accountability system for ensuring the provision of high quality early childhood education in Nevada, currently lacks the appropriate resources for statewide implementation.

Statewide expansion should be implemented on a gradual basis, with continual assessment, evaluation and improvement to further refine the process. Efforts should also be made to include appropriate resources for marketing and outreach to ensure that parents are aware of and understand the star rating system. Under the current system, centers who demonstrate a 3, 4, or 5-star rating will receive an additional 6%, 9%, or 12% (respectively) reimbursement for children on the subsidy program. Upon statewide implementation, direct alignment between QRIS and child care subsidy reimbursements will ensure that state funds are being used both efficiently and effectively to provide the highest level of quality care and education to our state’s most vulnerable children.

Nevada Silver State Stars Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) for Early Childhood Centers	
	Center is licensed in good standing.
	Center is licensed in good standing, accepts child care subsidies, AND staff are engaged in quality improvements, having met at least 4 quality indicators.
	Center is licensed in good standing, accepts child care subsidies, has better than average group size and teacher to child ratios, has scored a minimum of 3 (out of 7) on a quality assessment, AND has met at least 8 quality indicators. Director is at least a 3.1 on the career ladder.
	Center is licensed in good standing, accepts child care subsidies, has better than average group size and teacher to child ratios, has scored a minimum of 4 (out of 7) on a quality assessment, AND has met at least 12 quality indicators. Director is at least a 4.2 on the career ladder.
	Center exceeds all of the requirements above and is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children or the National Early Childhood Program Accreditation. Director is at least a 5.2 on the career ladder.
Centers that participate in Silver State Stars QRIS demonstrate and document quality indicators above licensing regulations. It should be understood advancing from Star Level 1 to subsequent levels is an accomplishment that takes a significant amount of time and effort. A complete list of required criteria for each star level, including quality indicators, is available at www.nvsilverstatestars.org.	



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