



Trends in Quality Improvement System Participation Over Time

NATIONAL CENTER ON EARLY CHILDHOOD QUALITY ASSURANCE

SEPTEMBER 2023

This document was developed by the National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance under contract GS-00F-010CA/75ACF122F80020 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care.

This factsheet is one in a series about the state of quality improvement systems (QISs) in the United States. Data for the factsheets are from the Quality Compendium, a catalog of the quality initiatives and quality rating and improvement systems (QRISs) operating in early childhood education (ECE) programs in the United States. The Quality Compendium houses data from 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2019, and 2021. The Quality Compendium uses the term “QIS” to be more inclusive of the range of quality supports available across the country. In 2021, there were 45 fully operational QISs in the United States.¹ Forty-two of those communicate a program’s level of quality through a rating component.²

Program participation rates help us understand the reach of quality improvement systems (QISs) across the country. This factsheet outlines which program types are eligible or required to participate in QISs, ways QISs recruit ECE programs for participation, and how participation in QISs has changed over time.

1. States with a QIS: Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Delaware, Florida (state and three localities), Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin. While most QISs operate at the state level, three represent separate counties in Florida (Duval, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach). The California QIS, while represented in the Quality Compendium as one system, is implemented at the county level and does not include all counties in the state.

2. The three QISs that do not have a rating system are Delaware, Florida, and Miami-Dade (Florida).

Key Trends in QIS Participation

Key trends and changes in participation over time include the following:

- The number of QISs that mandate participation by program type (e.g., licensed center-based programs) increased between 2017 and 2019. There were few changes to participation rules between 2019 and 2021.
- In 2021, about half of QISs ($n = 21$, or 47%) required participation for programs receiving Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidies, representing a large increase from two QISs with such requirements in 2015.
- In 2021, there were 107,346 ECE programs participating in a state or local QIS ($N = 45$). Of those with a rating component ($n = 42$), a total of 91,849 rated programs participated in QISs in 2021, representing a slight decrease from 2019 ($n = 92,001$).

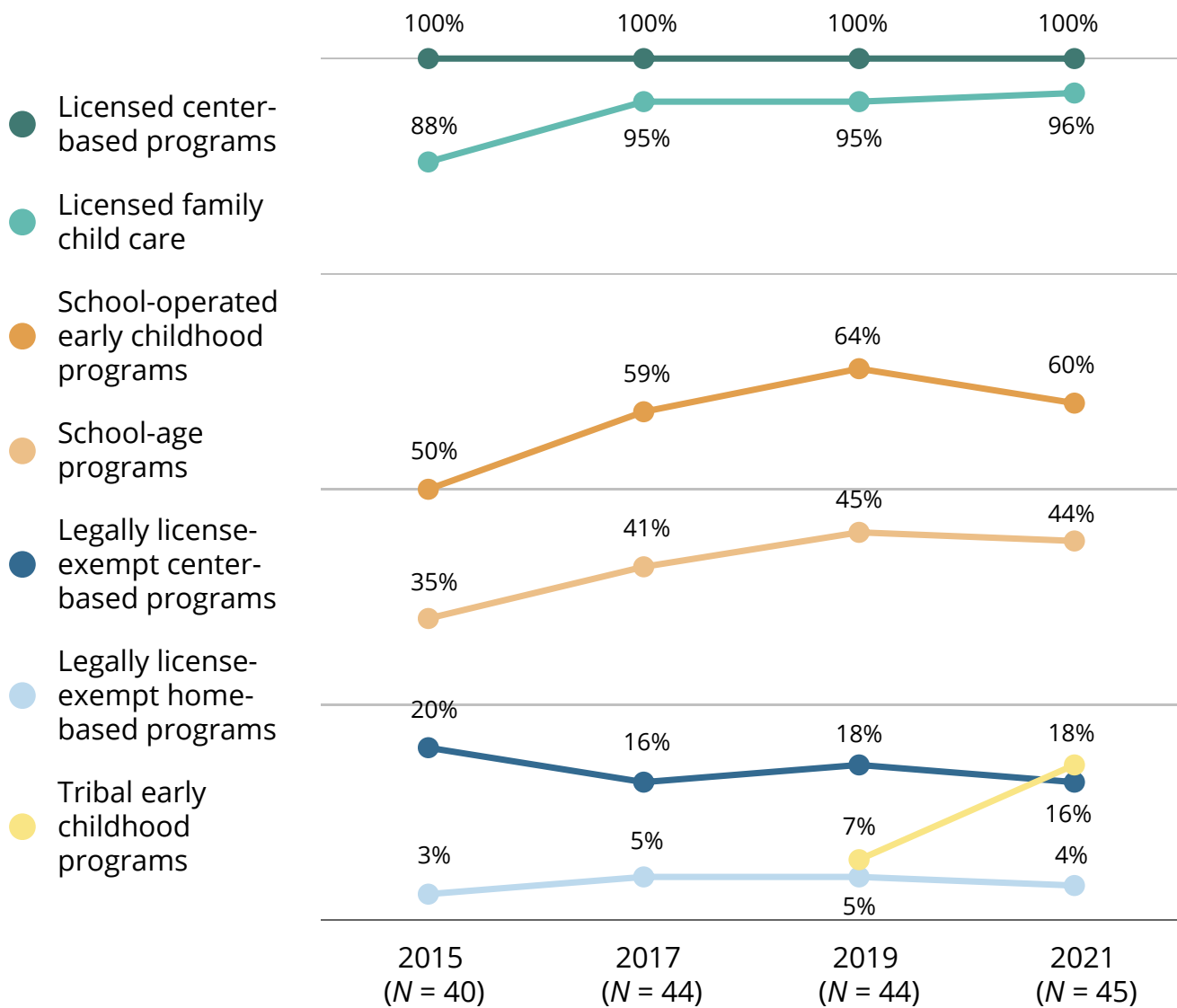
Participation in QISs

A total of 107,346 ECE programs participated in QISs in 2021 ($N = 45$). The number of programs participating in each QIS ranged from 134 (Alaska) to 10,843 (Illinois), and the median number of programs per QIS was 1,485. See appendix table A1 for QIS-level data.

Eligibility to Participate

Over time, QISs have expanded to include program types beyond licensed center-based ECE (see figure 1). In 2021, nearly all QISs had mechanisms for licensed center-based and family child care (FCC) programs to participate. Between 2015 and 2021, more QISs allowed school-operated or school-age programs to participate. The definition of license-exempt center- and home-based programs differs across states and territories and may include school-operated or school-age programs. Compared to licensed programs, few QISs allow all license-exempt center- or home-based programs to participate (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Proportion of QISs, Including Eligibility for Different Program Types, 2015–2021



Source: BUILD Initiative & Child Trends. (n.d.). *A catalog and comparison of quality improvement systems (QIS)* [Data system]. <http://qualitycompendium.org/>

Note: Slight variation in percentages over time may be attributed to changes in the total number of QISs. Also, note that data on Tribal programs was only collected for 2019 and 2021.

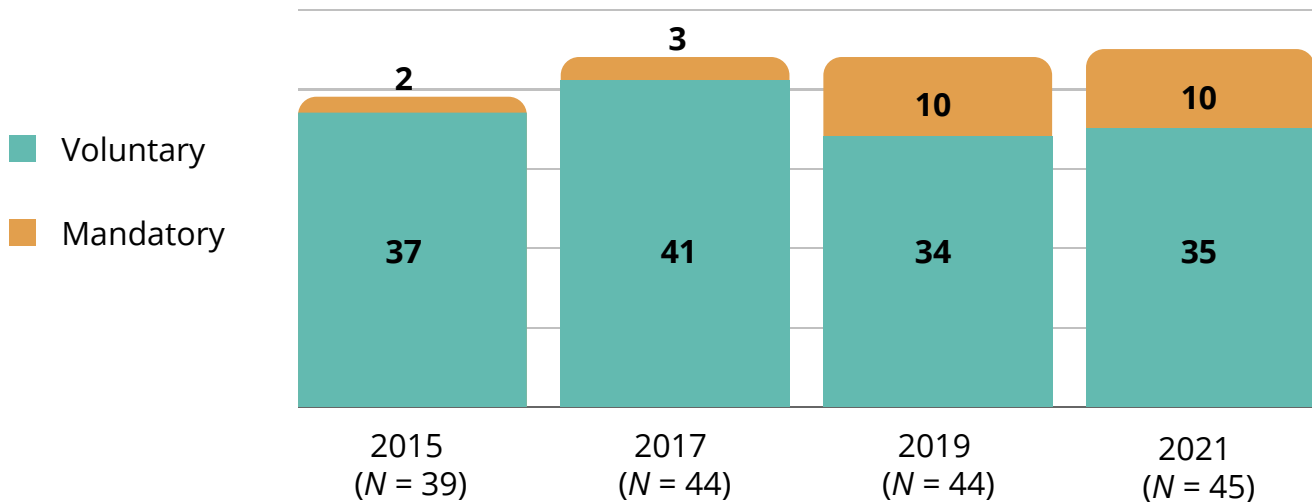
Eligibility to Participate

QISs began as largely voluntary systems, but some have adopted rules mandating participation based on program type (e.g., center-based care) or through licensing rules (e.g., licensed programs are automatically enrolled in the QIS).

ECE is offered in a variety of settings or **program types** (e.g., center-based, home-based, licensed, license-exempt). QISs may have different participation rules depending on the setting where ECE is provided.

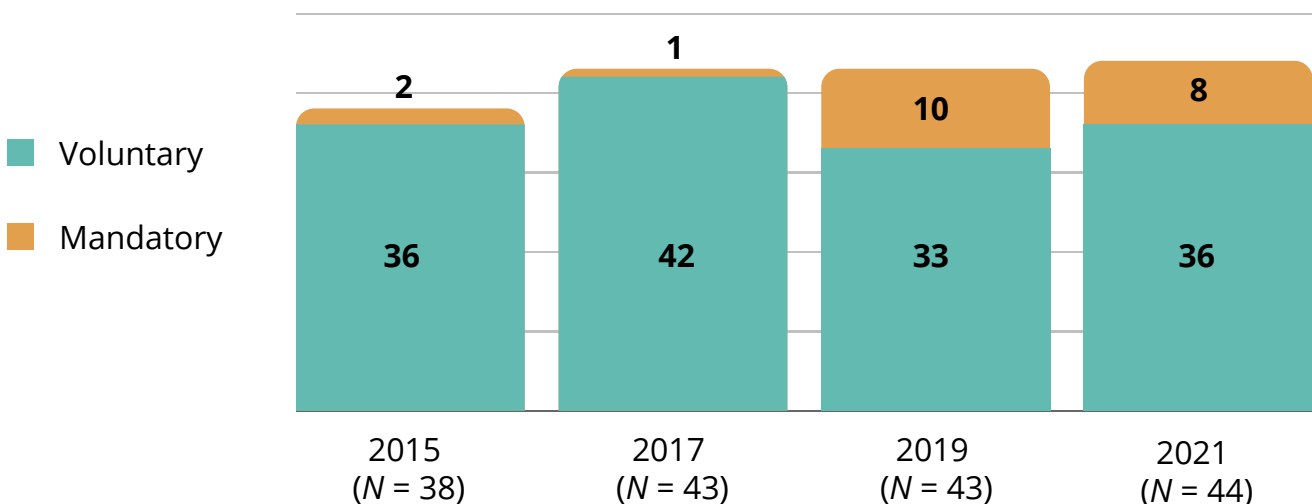
For both center-based and FCC programs, the number of QISs that mandated participation increased between 2017 and 2019. There were few changes between 2019 and 2021 (see figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2. Number of QISs with Voluntary and Mandatory Participation Rules for Center-Based Programs, 2015–2021



Source: BUILD Initiative & Child Trends. (n.d.). *A catalog and comparison of quality improvement systems (QIS)* [Data system]. <http://qualitycompendium.org/>

Figure 3. Number of QISs with Voluntary and Mandatory Participation Rules for FCC, 2015–2021



Source: BUILD Initiative & Child Trends. (n.d.). *A catalog and comparison of quality improvement systems (QIS)* [Data system]. <http://qualitycompendium.org/>

Requirements to Participate by Funding Stream

In 2021, 29 QISs had mandatory participation rules for programs receiving one or more of the following funding streams: CCDF subsidies, Head Start (HS) or Early Head Start (EHS), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), state prekindergarten funding, and other funding streams (see table 1).³ In the “other” category, some of the common funding streams were programs that receive local or municipal funds and programs eligible to receive other types of scholarships.

ECE programs may be eligible for a variety of public **funding streams** (e.g., CCDF subsidies, Head Start funding, IDEA funding). QISs may have different participation rules depending on the type of funding a program receives.

Table 1. Mandatory Participation by Funding Stream, 2021

Funding Stream	Number of QISs
CCDF	21
HS/EHS	12
IDEA	2
State prekindergarten funding	12
Other	5

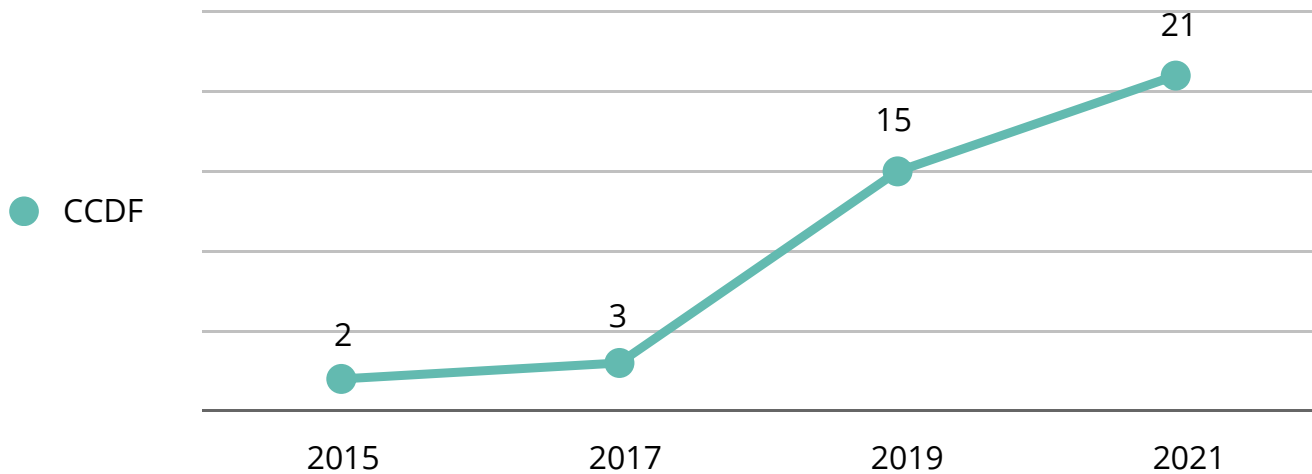
Source: BUILD Initiative & Child Trends. (n.d.). *A catalog and comparison of quality improvement systems (QIS)* [Data system]. <http://qualitycompendium.org/>

Note: N = 29 QISs.

Most participation requirements by funding stream have remained relatively consistent over time. However, in 2021 nearly half of QISs (n = 21, or 47%) required participation for programs receiving CCDF subsidies, representing a large increase from two QISs in 2015 and three QISs in 2017 (see figure 4).

3. The states that mandate participation among some or all programs are Arkansas, Colorado, District of Columbia, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Figure 4. Number of QISs Mandating Participation for Programs Serving Children Receiving CCDF Subsidies, 2015–2021



Source: BUILD Initiative & Child Trends. (n.d.). *A catalog and comparison of quality improvement systems (QIS) [Data system]*. <http://qualitycompendium.org/>

Approaches to Recruitment

Participation in their state, territory, or local QIS is optional for many practitioners. This section describes who QISs prioritize for participation and provides an overview of some strategies used to reach priority populations.

In 2021, 25 QISs reported strategies to recruit specific populations of practitioners for participation.⁴ Table 2 details the primary groups of providers and practitioners that QISs recruited. In the “other” category, the responses were Tribal or military programs ($n = 3$, or 12%), home-based providers ($n = 2$, or 8%), programs serving children in the child welfare system ($n = 2$, or 8%), or programs serving children with disabilities ($n = 1$, or 4%).

4. This information combines data from two data elements in the Quality Compendium: (1) racial equity approach and (2) targeted recruitment and engagement strategies.

Table 2. Specific Populations of Providers Recruited for QIS Participation

Subgroups	Number of QISs
Programs with children receiving a subsidy or other forms of assistance	14
Providers who speak languages other than English	10
Programs serving infants and toddlers	4
Programs located in child care deserts ⁵	4
New providers or those already participating at levels 1 or 2	4
Other	8

Source: BUILD Initiative & Child Trends. (n.d.). *A catalog and comparison of quality improvement systems (QIS)* [Data system]. <http://qualitycompendium.org/>

Note: *N* = 25 QISs.

Strategies to recruit programs and practitioners differed depending on the population of interest. Table 3 shows some of the most common recruitment strategies.

5. "A child care desert is any census tract with more than 50 children under age 5 that contains either no child care providers or so few options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed child care slots." (Center for American Progress, 2018).

Table 2. Specific Populations of Providers Recruited for QIS Participation

Strategies	Number of QISs
Collaboration with other ECE services or organizations (e.g., subsidy, child care resource and referral agencies)	10
Tailored outreach materials	10
Training, technical assistance, consultation, or outreach by quality improvement specialists	9
Promotional events	4
Financial incentives (e.g., sign-up bonus)	4

Source: BUILD Initiative & Child Trends. (n.d.). *A catalog and comparison of quality improvement systems (QIS) [Data system]*. <http://qualitycompendium.org/>

Note: $N = 21$ QISs.

Data on Children and Programs Participating in QISs

Many QISs collected information about programs participating in their QIS in 2021 and the children they serve. Of those QISs that collected child-level data ($n = 30$, or 67%), the most common types of data were income or eligibility for child care subsidies ($n = 23$, or 77%), whether children have disabilities ($n = 18$, or 60%), and race or ethnicity ($n = 12$, or 40%). Of the QISs that collected provider-level data ($n = 25$, or 56%), the most common types of data were the provider's preferred language ($n = 18$, or 72%), language(s) spoken with children in care ($n = 13$, or 52%), and race or ethnicity ($n = 12$, or 48%).

Participation Rate

Of the QISs that reported participation data and had a rating system in 2021 ($n = 42$), there were 91,849 total rated programs participating.⁶ This represents a slight decrease from 2019 ($n = 92,001$), which makes it the first year there was a reported decrease in the number of rated programs participating. This decrease is likely due to program closures or changes to rating or re-rating rules during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (Harris et al., 2021). In 2021, the median number of rated programs per QIS was 1,545, and the number of rated programs ranged from 124 (Alaska) to 10,843 (Illinois).

Rated Programs Participating in QISs

Participation density is the percent of rated programs participating in the QIS out of the total number of eligible programs that could participate within that state or locality. Table 4 shows the average density across all QISs and the average density across QISs with voluntary participation for licensed centers and FCC programs.⁷

Table 4. QIS Density, by Program Type

Program Type	Average Density Across All QISs	Average Density Across QISs with Voluntary Participation
Licensed center-based programs	61% (37)	52% (28)
Licensed family child care	52% (38)	40% (29)

Source: BUILD Initiative & Child Trends. (n.d.). *A catalog and comparison of quality improvement systems (QIS)* [Data system]. <http://qualitycompendium.org/>

Of the 40 QISs with rating systems that reported participation data for FCC in 2021, there were 34,587 rated FCC programs in total. Of the 41 QISs that reported information about centers, there were 46,385 rated centers in total.

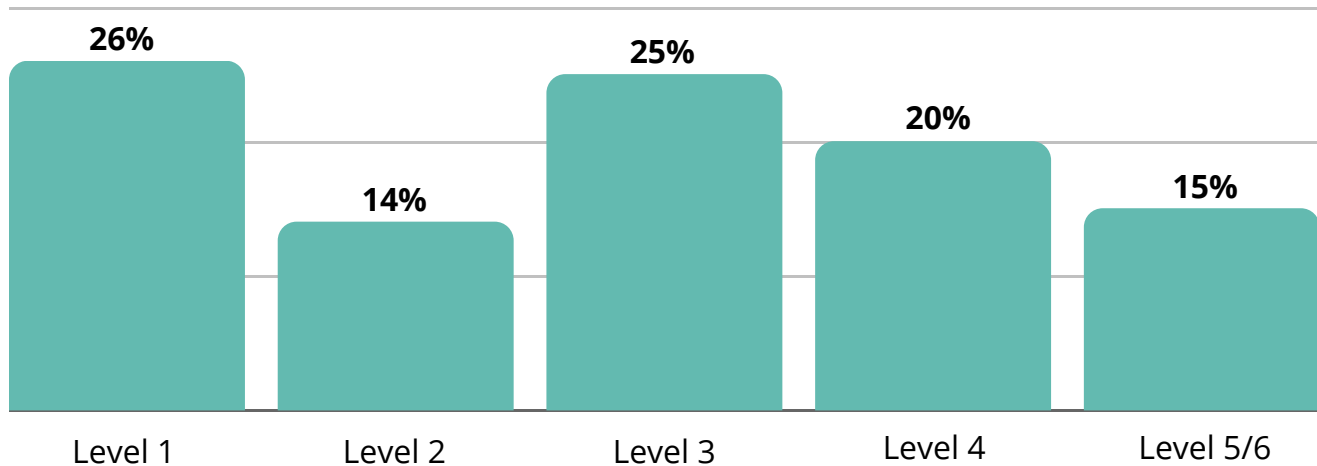
Of the 24 five- and six-level QISs that reported data about quality ratings for centers and FCC, the highest percentage of programs were rated at level 1 (26%, or 11,244 programs total) and the lowest percentage were at level 2 (14%, or 6,188 programs total). See figure 5 for the combined center and FCC breakdown by level. For the purposes of this report, data for the five- and six-level QISs were combined.⁸

6. Of the 45 QISs that existed in 2021, only 42 had a rating system.

7. While 40 QISs reported participation data for FCC and 41 did so for centers, only 38 and 37 (respectively) reported density data.

8. Idaho is the one QIS with six levels.

Figure 5. Percentage of Licensed Center-Based and FCC Programs at Each Quality Level in All Five- and Six-Level QISs, 2021

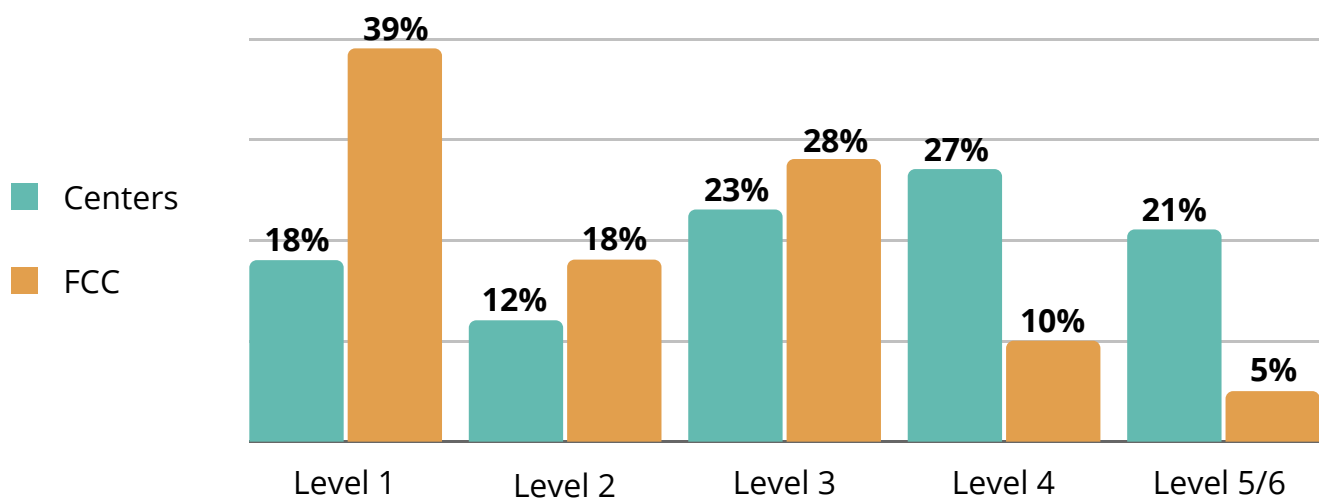


Source: BUILD Initiative & Child Trends. (n.d.). *A catalog and comparison of quality improvement systems (QIS)* [Data system]. <http://qualitycompendium.org/>

Note: N = 24 QISs.

Of the five- and six-level QISs, FCC programs had a higher percentage of programs at levels 1, 2, and 3 than centers. Center-based programs had a higher percentage of programs at level 4 and levels 5 and 6 than FCC programs (see figure 6 below). A similar distribution of ratings by program type was also apparent in 2019 (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, 2020).

Figure 5. Percentage of Licensed Center-Based and FCC Programs at Each Quality Level in All Five- and Six-Level QISs, 2021

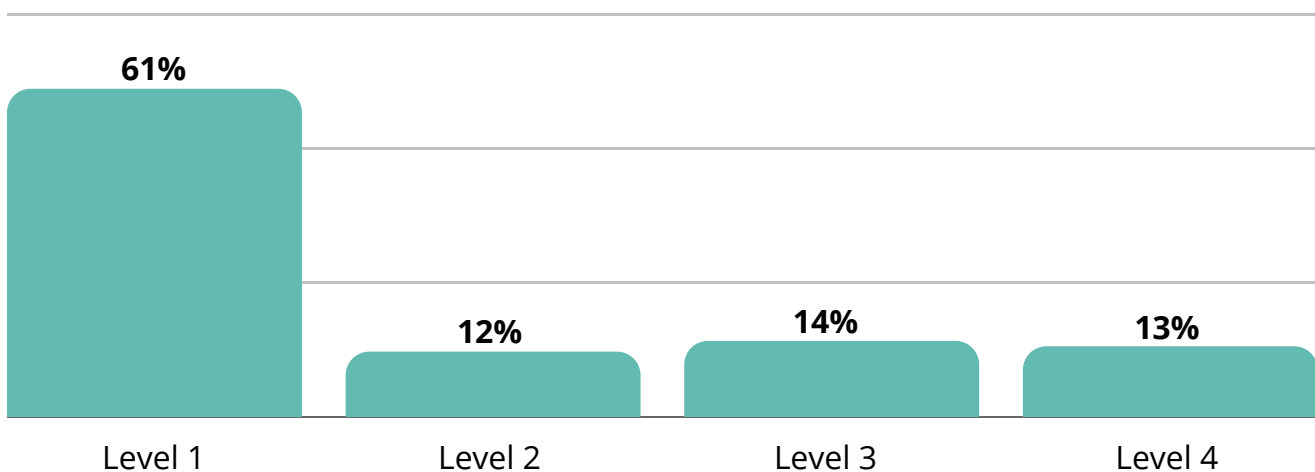


Source: BUILD Initiative & Child Trends. (n.d.). *A catalog and comparison of quality improvement systems (QIS)* [Data system]. <http://qualitycompendium.org/>

Note: N = 25 QISs reporting center data, and N = 24 QISs reporting FCC data.

Among the QISs with a four-level rating system in 2021 ($n = 11$, or 24%), there were a total of 29,053 licensed center-based and licensed FCC programs with ratings. Most programs were at the first level of quality (61%), while fewer rated programs were rated at subsequent levels (12, 14, and 13%, respectively; see figure 7). The high percentage of programs at the first level among four-level systems may be explained by the fact that most (9 of 11 QISs) mandate participation for centers and FCC programs. Relatedly, more than half (6 of 11 QISs) mandate participation for programs that receive CCDF subsidies.

Figure 7. Percentage of Licensed Center-Based and FCC Programs at Each Quality Level in All Four-Level QISs, 2021

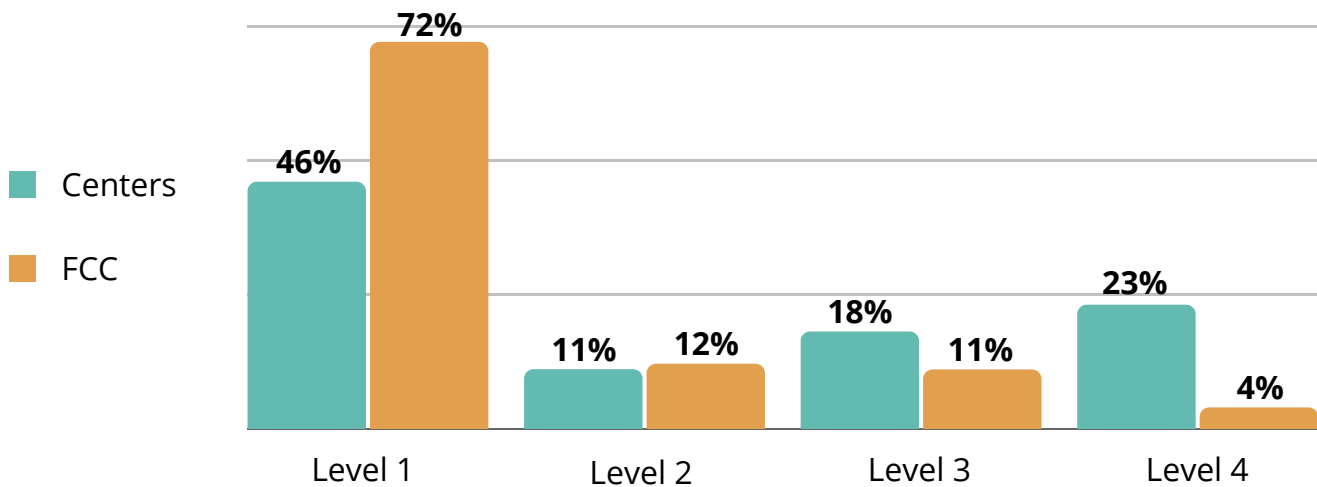


Source: BUILD Initiative & Child Trends. (n.d.). *A catalog and comparison of quality improvement systems (QIS)* [Data system]. <http://qualitycompendium.org/>

Note: $N = 11$ QISs.

Of the four-level QISs, FCC programs had a higher percentage of programs at level 1 than centers. Center-based programs had a higher percentage of programs at level 4 than FCC programs (see figure 8). A similar distribution of ratings by program type was also apparent in 2019 (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, 2020).

Figure 8. Percentage of Programs at Each Quality Level in All Four-Level QISs, by Program Type, 2021



Source: BUILD Initiative & Child Trends. (n.d.). *A catalog and comparison of quality improvement systems (QIS)* [Data system]. <http://qualitycompendium.org/>

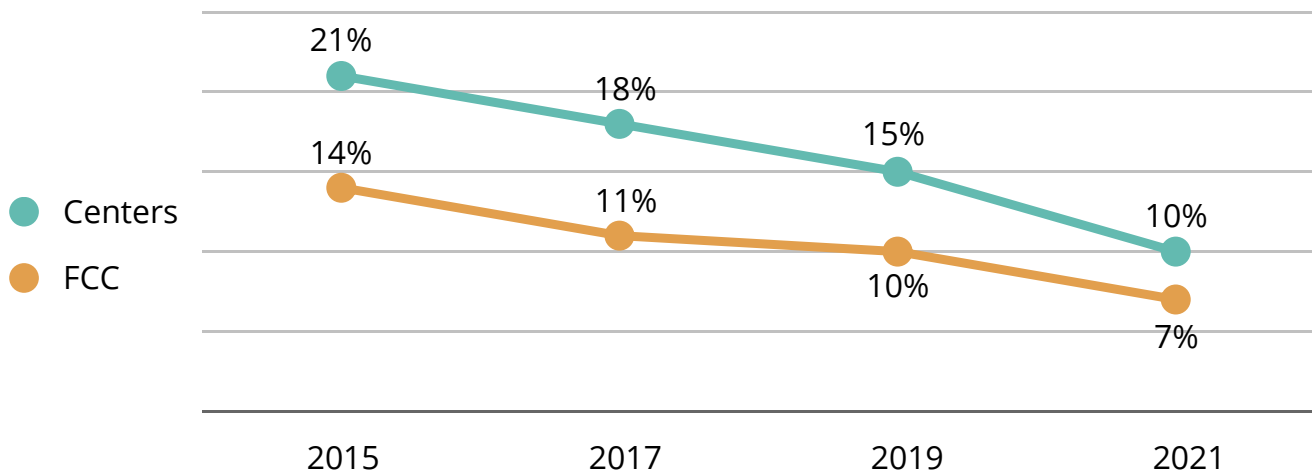
Note: $N = 11$ QISs.

Unrated Programs Participating in QISs

Unrated programs are considered participating in the QIS but have not yet received a formal rating. In 2021, 23 QISs (51%) had unrated licensed center-based programs participating. On average, 154 unrated licensed center-based programs were participating in each QIS, for a total of 3,541 programs. The number of unrated programs ranged from 2 (Massachusetts and Duval County, Florida) to 666 (California).

Twenty-two QISs had unrated licensed FCC programs participating in the QIS. On average, 197 unrated licensed FCC programs were participating in each QIS, for a total of 4,339 programs. The number of unrated FCC programs participating in QISs ranged from 2 (Duval County, Florida) to 1,770 (California).

After 2015, more QISs reported some unrated programs participating in the system, but the overall percentage of unrated programs participating out of the total number of rated and unrated programs has decreased (see figure 9). This trend is possibly due to changing participation requirements over time, an increase in the number of programs participating, and an increase in interested programs receiving ratings over time, among other factors. For example, between 2015 and 2017, Massachusetts switched from a voluntary system to a mandatory system for programs serving children receiving CCDF subsidies. The number of unrated programs in the state went from 794 unrated centers in 2015 to 23 in 2017.

Figure 9. Average Percent of Unrated Programs Participating in QISs, 2015–2021

Source: BUILD Initiative & Child Trends. (n.d.). *A catalog and comparison of quality improvement systems (QIS) [Data system]*. <http://qualitycompendium.org/>

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Appendix

Table A1. Total Number of Programs Participating in QISs, 2021

State	Total Number of Programs Participating in QISs
AK	134
AR	2,192
AZ	1,103
CA	8,502
CO	3,628
DC	249
DE	463
FL (Duval)	161
FL (Miami-Dade)	292
FL (Palm Beach)	223
FL (state)	4,667
GA	3,605
IA	1,485
ID	234
IL	10,843
IN	2,716
KY	1,915

State	Total Number of Programs Participating in QISs
LA	1,605
MA	5,140
MD	4,810
ME	918
MI	4,011
MN	3,103
MT	232
NC	5,260
ND	266
NE	1,110
NH	806
NJ	1,210
NM	449
NV	194
NY	865
OH	5,698
OK	1,103
OR	1,467
PA	6,843

State	Total Number of Programs Participating in QISs
RI	689
SC	1,153
TN	2,274
TX	2,070
UT	1,079
VA	1,808
VT	1,262
WA	3,869
WI	3,772

Source: BUILD Initiative & Child Trends. (n.d.). *A catalog and comparison of quality improvement systems (QIS) [Data system]*. <http://qualitycompendium.org/>

Note: N = 45 QISs.