Equity Considerations for Key Indicators of High-Quality Family Engagement: A 2023 Update for Quality Rating and Improvement Systems
State and community leaders, including leaders in Tribes and territories, regularly update and revise their quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). This resource supports their efforts to establish equitable and high-quality family engagement indicators for their QRIS.

Introduction

Child care and early education programs have been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most child care professionals across the country were forced to close or scale back their operations between 2020 and 2021. As program staff are adapting to pandemic-related staffing challenges and relief support through stabilization funding, early childhood experts are considering revisions and new frames for defining and measuring quality in early childhood settings.

A Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is an approach used in most states to measure and assess the quality of child care and early education programs. In doing so, states and communities design standards to illustrate quality markers for program staff, and program staff receive ratings based on the degree of quality they have demonstrated. In some QRISs, programs with higher quality ratings receive higher child care subsidy reimbursement rates than providers with lower quality ratings.

Many states are in the process of updating their QRIS. In some cases, these changes have been planned. In others, the change reflects a response to lessons learned during the pandemic, specifically about promoting equitable access to high-quality care. When they address issues of equity, these changes have the potential to reduce existing biases that are present in some QRISs.

These systemic biases are due to existing research and design processes that are based on the needs and preferences of some children and families (usually white, middle-class children and families), while the needs and preferences of those from historically marginalized groups (e.g., Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian and Alaska Native [AIAN], and low-income children and families) are often ignored. Revisions to QRISs that specifically incorporate equity would therefore help providers to better serve children and families of all backgrounds.

Experts in the field are working to support states in this evolution. They have developed guidance for redefining and measuring quality in a more equitable way. One component of this expert guidance involves family leadership and engagement.

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As defined in the **Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems**, family engagement is an interactive process. Through this process, program staff and families build positive and goal-oriented relationships, or partnerships. Partnerships between program staff and parents/caregivers are shown to be an integral part of a child’s development and wellbeing.⁴

Central to these partnerships is leadership from parents and family members—also sometimes referred to as “family voice.” Parent and Family Leadership requires programs to both seek out and then incorporate perspectives, lived experiences, and expertise of families and caregivers in program policies, procedures, and practices.⁵ Strong family voice is grounded in strong partnerships between providers and families.

The QRIS in most states includes at least some standards related to family engagement, including:

- Communication between providers and families (e.g., sharing program policies or hosting parent-teacher conferences)
- Engagement in program activities (e.g., creating a welcoming environment)
- Family partnerships with the program (e.g., creating an advisory committee)

Fewer QRIS include standards directly related to family voice (e.g., parents providing feedback on curriculum and materials). Yet family engagement—including family voice—is a key component of quality and of equity.

When it comes to early childhood services, equity means acknowledging and adapting to families’ individual needs and preferences, rather than offering the same type of support to all families.

Equity also includes uplifting families’ unique strengths. Program staff and others who work with families can only learn about these strengths through active and meaningful engagement. Promoting equity in a QRIS, therefore, requires incorporating standards that support meaningful family engagement. High-quality family engagement standards should be applied to all child care settings, including child care centers and family child care (FCC) settings.

In 2018, the **National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement** published the **Key Indicators of High-Quality Family Engagement for Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS)**. The eight indicators in this resource are research-based strategies developed from current literature and input from experts and parents.

In line with the original resource, this update offers examples from state QRIS standards. This new resource provides additional considerations for equitable and high-quality family engagement. These considerations can serve as a guide for QRIS revisions.

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⁵ The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement is currently developing a definition of parent and family voice that will be published on The Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center website.
Supporting Family Engagement Within Systems and Program Foundations

System components and program foundation elements work together to support child care quality including high-quality family engagement. To learn more about the early childhood system and these components, explore the *Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems Series*.

Below we describe various system components and program foundations and the important role that each play in promoting high-quality family engagement.

**System Components**

- **Leadership and governance**: State, Territory, and Tribal leaders and administrators play an important role in promoting high-quality family engagement. These leaders can set an agenda that includes family engagement and voice. They also can allocate resources that are geared towards strengthening family engagement in their state, Territory, or Tribe. For example, leaders can create family engagement-focused roles (e.g., a state family engagement coordinator) to provide guidance and to support programs in their family engagement efforts. They also can create and participate in advisory councils with parents and other systems leaders.

- **Infrastructure and funding**: QRIS is an integral part of the early childhood infrastructure and is the piece of the system that most directly aims to support quality. Financial investments in the early childhood system, including to support strong QRIS, can affect how well family engagement efforts are designed and implemented.

- **Consumer education and engagement**: Consumer education involves providing information to parents to ensure that they are well-informed when making decisions about child care programs and services. Consumer engagement involves a two-way relationship between families and early childhood professionals, with families and providers working together to build on each other’s knowledge and strengths. Consumer education and engagement are also important for the recruitment and retention of children and families in early childhood programs.

**Program Foundations**

- **Program leadership**: Program leadership, including child care and family child care directors, sets the vision, goals, and expectations for high-quality and equitable family engagement. When leaders set high expectations for equitable family engagement and when they model those practices, they set the tone for all professionals within the program to follow suit.

  Program leadership also can enact program policies and practices that support equitable family engagement—for example, by promoting a policy that describes goals and practices for family engagement for all families served by the program. Leadership can and should proactively seek out family voice and integrate family perspectives into program policies and practices.

- **Professional development**: Program leadership provides training and/or supports (including time) for staff to participate in professional development opportunities focused on equitable family engagement. Professional development ideally incorporates both data and insights from families about the strengths and needs of the community in which the program operates.

- **Continuous learning and quality improvement**: Continuous learning and quality improvement involves regularly using data, lessons from past efforts, and input from families to improve program quality. Efforts should be made to gather and integrate family input that represents the strengths and needs of all family types served by the program to ensure that continuous learning benefits all families.
Eight Key Indicators of High-Quality, Equitable Family Engagement

This section defines each of the eight key indicators and provides examples of how each one can inform standards for high-quality family engagement in a new or revised QRIS.

For each key indicator, you will find:

- The original description of the indicator (from *Key Indicators of High-Quality Family Engagement for Quality Rating and Improvement Systems*), along with considerations for equity as it applies to each indicator.
- Examples of how each indicator could be used to promote equity in child care programs. These examples are intended to provide some initial ideas that programs can consider creatively with the individual needs of children and families in their program and community in mind.
- Examples of the key indicator found in current state QRIS. These examples were chosen from a scan of state QRIS that have been updated since 2018. Other states can use these examples as they consider ways to incorporate the indicators into their own QRIS, again with the needs of local communities in mind.

**Indicator Descriptions and Examples:**

**1. Ensuring Program Staff’s Knowledge of Child and Family Development and Family Engagement Practices**

**Original description:** QRISs commonly include quality indicators related to staff knowledge about child and family development. Strengthening family engagement practices requires that program staff and FCC providers understand why family engagement is important, as well as how to make necessary changes to enhance practices.

When professionals ground their practice in knowledge about child and family development and family engagement, they can build stronger partnerships with families and improve child outcomes. These efforts include strategies and skills for building relationships with families and partnering in ways that are respectful and culturally and linguistically responsive.

**Additional equity considerations:** Quality indicators related to staff knowledge about child and family development should include knowledge about the importance of recognizing that children’s and families’ development occurs within the context of their racial and cultural backgrounds. As well, indicators should address how those backgrounds are influenced by the history of racism in this country. In general, training in cultural and linguistic competency can help staff to more fully understand the development of the children and families they serve.

**Examples:**

- Program staff have appropriate training and effective supervision to support families with diverse backgrounds and their relationship with their infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children.6

- Program staff have access to diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development opportunities that aid their understanding of the history and impact of racism in the United States.

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6 The Maryland Family Engagement Coalition. (n.d.) *The early childhood family engagement framework: Maryland’s vision for engaging families with young children.*
Ensuring Program Staff’s Family-Specific Knowledge

Original description: To be able to engage fully with families, early childhood providers learn about the cultures of the families they work with, the contexts in which they live, and their goals and aspirations for their children and themselves.7

Program staff can demonstrate cultural and linguistic responsiveness when they seek to learn specific insights from families. Providers and programs can also serve as a resource and refer families to other community resources when appropriate. Family-specific knowledge is particularly important for families that are isolated or face unique challenges or barriers to quality early childhood services and other services.8

Additional equity considerations: When considering families’ backgrounds and cultures, program staff should remember that not all families within a specific racial or ethnic group always identify with or uphold the same values or beliefs. It is important to engage with individual families to learn about their unique beliefs and circumstances rather than make assumptions based on a presumed group membership. It is also important to seek out families’ strengths (in addition to their challenges) when learning about them. Examining one’s own biases—or preconceptions about groups of people—is an important first step in understanding individual families’ values and strengths.

Program staff should use the information learned about specific families to honor and respect their individual preferences. For instance, some families may not want to be contacted on specific days of the week due to religious traditions or observances.

Examples:

- Time is dedicated to asking families open-ended questions about their hopes and dreams for their families during home visits and/or parent-teacher conferences.9
- Families are invited to share information about important traditions and cultures with children and staff in multiple ways.10

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Colorado Shines</td>
<td>“The program has a process for teachers to collect family information such as priorities, interests, home routines, cultural and social practices, and/or goals that inform interactions and instruction with children.”</td>
<td>Colorado Shines QRIS Program Guide</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alaska Learn &amp; Grow</td>
<td>“At enrollment, [the] program provides families [with the] opportunity to tell the program about their family and their children (ethnicity, culture, language, abilities, preferences, etc.).”</td>
<td>Learn &amp; Grow Quality Activities Guide</td>
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<td>“Families are invited at least two times a year to provide information and/or participate in the development of program activities to provide opportunities for family’s culture to be infused in the program.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grow NJ Kids</td>
<td>“Program promotes multicultural learning opportunities by requesting that participating parents/family members share examples of their cultural practices (books, food, music, clothing, etc.) in parent meetings, as well as in their child’s classroom.”</td>
<td>Grow NJ Kids: Center and School-Based Standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wisconsin YoungStar</td>
<td>Programs have hiring practices for staff and volunteers to reflect families’ diverse backgrounds. For example, a program “can demonstrate that there are racial, ethnic, and cultural similarities between program staff/volunteers and the children/families enrolled.”</td>
<td>YoungStar Evaluation Criteria for Group Programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minnesota Parent Aware</td>
<td>“Developing partnerships with families that include ongoing two-way communication allow teachers and providers to learn about the child's interests and routines; family traditions, religion, language, and expectations; gather information that can be used to create a program that is sensitive to the child's culture; and provide a curriculum that meets the child's individual needs.”</td>
<td>Parent Aware QRIS: Standards and Indicators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Massachusetts QRIS</td>
<td>“Families are encouraged to: volunteer in the program, to assist in the classroom, and share cultural and language traditions or other interests such as their jobs, hobbies, and other relevant information.”</td>
<td>MA QRIS Center-Based/ School-Based Standards</td>
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Fostering Positive, Two-Way Communication

Original description: Communication is the basis for relationship building. It is critical for establishing strong working relationships between parents and teachers and other staff. Communication may be one-way or two-way.

One-way communication occurs when information is provided: the individual who receives the information does not have the opportunity to provide any input or feedback about the information shared. A welcome letter at the beginning of the school year, progress reports, newsletters, and school websites are examples of one-way communication.

Two-way communication is interactive and involves an exchange of information and ideas. Home visits, parent-teacher conferences, and open house events can be opportunities for two-way communication.

Both types of communication are important. Two-way communication allows early childhood program staff to learn about families’ preferences and concerns. Program staff can also use two-way communication to show that they value parents’ expertise and would like to learn more about their cultures, and to lay the foundation for building trust in ongoing relationships.

Program staff can make one-way communication methods two-way. For instance, sending home photos of children to show what happened during the day is an example of one-way communication. Providing an opportunity for families to ask questions about the pictures and activities makes it two-way communication. For further engagement, program staff can invite families to bring in photos and activities from home that reflect families’ cultures and languages. Two-way communication is core to family engagement.

Additional equity considerations: To ensure that all families can access two-way communication opportunities, communication should occur in the format and language that families prefer. For instance, some families may wish to communicate virtually (e.g., via email, text message, or video calls) either due to barriers to in-person communication or to personal preference. Social media can be a good way to make program announcements and send updates but should not take the place of more interactive (i.e., two-way) communication.

To communicate with families that speak a different language than program staff, programs may need to use translators (for in-person or phone conversations) or translation services (for email or text message communication).

Examples:

- Program staff use text messaging (or a messaging app such as WhatsApp) as an easy and quick way to communicate with families.
- Programs conduct family preference surveys to gather input on families’ preferences for communication mode and frequency.
- Programs make efforts to hire staff who speak families’ preferred language. As possible, staff who speak families’ preferred language are available to communicate with families in families’ preferred mode.
- Programs hold events such as parent-teacher conferences and open house events to form relationships with families, discuss children’s strengths and challenges with families, and invite families to ask questions.\(^\text{12}\)
- Program staff collect data to help them reflect on their communication patterns and identify new strategies for individualizing their methods if biases are revealed.

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<tr>
<td>Utah's Child Care Quality System</td>
<td>“When in-person communication is not possible, teaching staff can communicate through established alternative means, such as emails or phone calls.”</td>
<td><a href="https://www.deseretconnect.org">Child Care Quality System Framework for Centers</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin YoungStar</td>
<td>“Efforts are made to communicate with children and families in their preferred language. Program can access linguistic supports as necessary.”</td>
<td><a href="https://www.wisconsin%E6%95%99%E8%82%B2%E9%83%A8.edu">YoungStar Evaluation Criteria for Group Programs</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Colorado Shines</td>
<td>“The program staff uses email, apps, or other messaging tools for two-way communication with families.”</td>
<td><a href="https://www.coloradoshines.edu">Colorado Shines QRIS Program Guide</a></td>
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Creating Program Environments That Encourage Family Engagement

Original description: The program environment sets the stage for first impressions, impacts interactions, and influences families’ experiences over time. The environment includes physical space and the emotional and psychological atmosphere in the program. A program’s environment reflects the program’s philosophy, curriculum, and the cultures and languages of the families it serves. The environment is informed by, affirms, and celebrates all families in the program.

The physical environment creates space that promotes relationship-building, learning, inclusion, and a sense of community. Physical space includes:

- Furniture and fixtures and how they are arranged
- Supplies and developmentally appropriate materials that are organized, accessible, and available in sufficient quantities
- Materials, books, and toys that represent all families and show diverse gender roles
- Posted materials for families (in the languages spoken by families)
- Displays of children’s artwork and projects
- Special areas for families and children to use as spaces to say goodbye, take a break, and reunite

Additional equity considerations: For parents and family members who do not regularly visit the program (e.g., due to work or other schedule conflicts), share pictures and videos of the program and classroom space so that they can see the environment that staff are creating for their children.

Welcoming physical and psychological atmospheres are important. At the same time, programs should ensure that any virtual spaces where they interact with families are also welcoming and accessible. An example might be that programs post materials in languages spoken by families living in the community. It also involves ensuring that any images, audio or video clips, or other media are inclusive and reflect the appearances and cultures of families served in the program. In addition, all audio and video clips should include subtitles and/or captions in languages spoken by families when possible. Subtitles and subtitle translations can be added to videos using the free YouTube Studio platform.  

Creating welcoming virtual environments also includes making virtual spaces and methods of communication easy to access and use. If engaging with families virtually, programs should offer multiple options for communication, including text messaging, phone and video calls, or communication through social media platforms. Always consider the cultures and preferences of families in your program as you consider ways to virtually engage them.

Examples:

- Program uses family-friendly apps or platforms that families are familiar with to connect with families, communicate information, and share program materials.
- Program posts all online materials in the languages spoken by the families of children enrolled.

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<td>Minnesota Parent Aware</td>
<td>“Program creates environment that supports a sense of belonging for each child and family. . . . The best environments have engaging materials and equipment, are welcoming to families, provide for the safety and comfort of all who use it, and are affirming and respectful of the children’s cultures, abilities and languages.”</td>
<td>Parent Aware QRIS: Standards and Indicators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utah’s Child Care Quality System</td>
<td>“Teaching staff should support the development and maintenance of children’s home language whenever possible. . . Teachers can help children understand spoken language—particularly when children are learning a new language—by using pictures, familiar objects, body language, and physical cues.”</td>
<td>Child Care Quality System Framework for Centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin YoungStar</td>
<td>“Diversity is reflected in images and languages included on posters, signs, and other program materials.”</td>
<td>YoungStar Evaluation Criteria for Group Programs</td>
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## Providing Peer-to-Peer Activities and Other Social Networking Opportunities

**Original description:** Formal and informal peer-to-peer activities and social networking opportunities for families foster a sense of community within a program. These activities and opportunities also increase families’ abilities to obtain supports and resources.\(^{14}\) When families are a part of a social network of peers, they can share ideas and aspirations and problem-solve together.

**Additional equity considerations:** Whether in person or online, efforts should be made to ensure that all families who want to participate in peer-to-peer activities have the opportunity to do so. These efforts could involve offering multiple networks that meet at different times to accommodate all family schedules. The efforts could also include offering specific groups for families who speak a particular language, or even virtual options for peer-to-peer connections.

### Examples:
- Program creates a group on Facebook or other social media platform where families can connect with each other and easily access program updates. Groups are monitored and maintained by program staff.
- Past program parents and community volunteers are invited to share educational and career experience with families.\(^{15}\)
- Program staff encourages parent-to-parent support and facilitates connections among parents during program-wide events.\(^{16}\)

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<td>Wisconsin YoungStar</td>
<td>“Frequent family participation in the program is encouraged. To ensure that all enrolled families are able to participate in some opportunities, they are flexibly scheduled in consideration of families’ employment/education schedules, language preferences, cultural practices, and holiday and religious commitments.”</td>
<td><a href="https://www.youngstar.wi.gov">YoungStar Evaluation Criteria for Group Programs</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts QRIS</td>
<td>“Program ensures that there are translators available, as needed, at meetings, workshops and conferences to ensure strong communication between the program and families.”</td>
<td><a href="https://www.mass.gov">MA QRIS Center-Based/ School-Based Standards</a></td>
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\(^{15}\) The Maryland Family Engagement Coalition. (n.d.) The early childhood family engagement framework: Maryland’s vision for engaging families with young children.

\(^{16}\) The Maryland Family Engagement Coalition. (n.d.) The early childhood family engagement framework: Maryland’s vision for engaging families with young children.
Fostering Respect, Flexibility, and Openness to Change

**Original description:** Program staff’s positive, respectful attitudes towards families are important to the development of high-quality, trusting relationships. Staff’s respect, flexibility, and openness and cultural sensitivity toward families set the tone for constructive staff-family interactions.

**Additional equity considerations:** Fostering respectful attitudes towards families includes showing respect for a family’s racial and cultural backgrounds and identities. Families may have views, beliefs, or customs that differ from those staff members hold. When staff are curious, however, rather than judgmental their curiosity will set the tone for trusting and positive relationships.

A family’s racial, cultural, and personal histories affect how they view the role that schools and program staff play in supporting children’s learning and development. Program staff should be aware of and open-minded about the power of these influences. Program staff also should be flexible, understand that families’ experiences with schools vary, and know that those experiences may affect how families approach relationships with staff members.

**Examples:**

- Program staff provide professional development opportunities, such as coaching, to reflect on and acknowledge their own biases and how those biases may affect interactions with families.
- Program staff should receive support to adjust behaviors, as needed.
- Program staff are reminded and encouraged to remain open-minded about how families choose to develop relationships. Reflective supervision is used to support program staff in being flexible to meet families’ needs, which are often shaped by their racial, cultural, and personal histories in institutions such as schools.

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<td>Grow NJ Kids</td>
<td>“Program asks all newly enrolled families to complete the Strengthening Families Protective Factor Survey. The survey results are tallied, summarized, and aggregated to inform program policies and procedures regarding parents/families.”</td>
<td>Grow NJ Kids: Center and School-Based Standards</td>
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Promoting Parents’ Sense of Competence

Original description: Parents’ sense of competence in their parenting roles is an important factor that can impact child outcomes. Early childhood programs can design and develop practices and activities that honor parents’ knowledge about their children and help to strengthen their sense of competence. These activities can be designed to reinforce family members’ abilities to support their children’s healthy development.

Additional equity considerations: Part of promoting parents’ sense of competence involves including parents in program decision-making. Parent voice should be sought out and then incorporated into all program policies, procedures, and practices. Family members should be recognized as existing and potential leaders and be encouraged to participate at varying levels in the program. This could include volunteering in the classroom, offering expertise on classroom content, and serving on parent committees and Policy Council.

Examples:

- Program establishes a diverse parent/family group to reflect diverse experiences and encourages all families to participate. These groups are frequently and meaningfully engaged in decision-making opportunities regarding the program.
- For those families who cannot regularly attend meetings to participate in decisions about the program, short surveys or phone calls (in families’ preferred languages) are periodically used to gather and uplift their voices.

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| Grow NJ Kids         | “Program establishes a parent/family group to engage enrolled families and support their participation in the education of their children. The group meets at least two times per year and provides input and advice on the center’s Strengthening Families Improvement Plan; reviews center policies, procedures, and practices.”  
   “Program holds at least two family education workshops per year on topics such as: early literacy, positive parent-child interactions, cultural awareness, developmental issues, and/or other topics that address the needs and interests of families. Whenever possible, sessions are delivered in the languages of the participants or translators/interpreters are available.” | Grow NJ Kids: Center and School-Based Standards |
| Pennsylvania Keystone STARS | “Families are engaged in ways that demonstrate their participation in shaping the policies and procedures of the program and encourages family networking.”                                                                 | Keystone STARS Program Performance Standards |
| Texas Rising Star    | “The director and teachers should be able to provide evidence that they are working together with the parents about decisions regarding the child’s experience, which may include written reports for children and a parent communication log.”  
   “Parents have structured opportunities to provide input that may influence the program.”                                                                                   | Texas Rising Star Facility Assessment Record Form (All Facilities) |
| Minnesota Parent Aware | “Program offers families opportunities to provide input into decisions that impact the program.”                                                                                                                  | Parent Aware QRIS: Standards and Indicators  |

Advocating for Families and Making Connections to Supports and Resources

Original description: Advocating for families and supporting families to advocate for themselves while connecting them to information, supports, and resources is essential to family partnerships in high-quality settings. Access to concrete, material community resources—such as safe housing, healthy food, a medical home, mental health services, and job advancement options—provides opportunities for parents to positively affect children’s health, development, and learning.

Supports and resources are most effective when they acknowledge families’ own advocacy, focus on family strengths, and recognize families’ concerns and priorities. These kinds of supports and resources also help to improve parents’ confidence and well-being.\textsuperscript{20}

Additional equity considerations: Recognize that families vary in the type and amount of support needed to make connections to supports and resources. While program staff may need to advocate “for” some families by using their “power” as an advocate, other families may only need support to advocate for themselves. Ideally, program staff should be supporting all families towards self-advocacy, even if the starting points may differ, depending on the family’s history and level of comfort.

It is also important to recognize that some families may experience barriers to accessing resources because of racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, or other forms of discrimination. Program staff should acknowledge these barriers and understand that families’ prior experiences attempting to access resources may have been negative.

Examples:

- Program provides advocacy training and opportunities for families to develop and improve advocacy skills in the context of their child’s lifelong learning and in other ways of interest to parents.\textsuperscript{21}
- Program staff model and discuss appropriate technology use during home visits and/or parent-teacher conferences and help families take advantage of local tech-related services.\textsuperscript{22}
- Program establishes relationships with community organizations and regularly connects families to needed community resources.\textsuperscript{23}

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<tr>
<td>Wisconsin YoungStar</td>
<td>“Program navigates resources for families, links them to family supports, and provides direct advocacy (e.g., helps make initial phone calls for families, attends IEP’s).”</td>
<td>YoungStar Evaluation Criteria for Group Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS)</td>
<td>The program provides “leadership in the profession through engagement in a variety of local, statewide, or national activities and initiatives (e.g., activism, advocacy, teaching, and mentoring).”</td>
<td>STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS) Standards</td>
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\textsuperscript{21} The Maryland Family Engagement Coalition. (n.d.) The early childhood family engagement framework: Maryland’s vision for engaging families with young children.

\textsuperscript{22} National Association for the Education of Young Children (2016). 10X: Using technology to engage families. Teaching Young Children, 9(5).

\textsuperscript{23} The Maryland Family Engagement Coalition. (n.d.) The early childhood family engagement framework: Maryland’s vision for engaging families with young children.
New Directions in QRIS

The early childhood field is going through a transformation. As our country considers its history of systemic bias and unequal access to opportunity, the field continues to reexamine how early childhood systems contribute to inequities in child care access and experiences.

In the process, state and community early care and education leaders consider revisions to their systems to promote equitable and high-quality experiences for young children and their families. As they tackle this important work, these leaders will want to ensure that family engagement and voice is incorporated both in the redesign of the systems themselves as well as in any new standards that are included in the redesigned structures.

We recommend the key indicators featured in this resource as a launching pad for states as they revise their QRIS. States can refer to these indicators, the examples of how each indicator might be included in a QRIS, and the examples provided from current state QRIS as considerations for strengthening their own quality indicators. In doing so, states will be encouraging child care programs to meaningfully engage with families.

An important part of the QRIS is relaying information about program quality to families through consumer education so that they can make informed child care choices. As states continuously revise and improve their QRIS, they can also consider how families will be incorporated into their consumer education efforts. For example, states can seek out family input on their preferences for consumer education tools (e.g., websites, search tools), gaps in existing tools and resources, and the kinds of information that parents want available when making child care decisions.

Notably, some states are moving away from quality rating and improvement systems to quality improvement systems (QIS). This movement reflects an intentional change from a focus on ratings to a focus on improvement. The shift is happening because quality ratings are not strongly linked to favorable child outcomes. In addition, some rating systems (e.g., those with tiered reimbursement structures) can even contribute to inequities.

States that are adapting QIS ratings may want to consider awarding programs “badges” (i.e., certifications that represent specializations) in different areas (e.g., family engagement, learning environment, trauma-informed care). Through consumer education, families can learn about these badges so they can choose the care that best matches their priorities and meets their needs. With this approach, states could use the key indicators to define what a program would need to do to earn a family engagement badge.

Whether using a QRIS or a QIS, however, all states can use the eight key indicators for high-quality family engagement to support programs in setting family engagement goals.

It is important to remember that child care programs don’t and can’t improve quality on their own. Child care programs exist within a larger child care system and work in tandem with other components of that system (including leadership and governance, infrastructure and funding, and consumer education and engagement) to promote quality. These system components must work together towards more equitable child care that includes family voice and engagement. Through collaboration, individual programs can successfully engage families.

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Additional Resources

- Equity Is Quality, Quality Is Equity
- Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework
- Key Indicators of High-Quality Family Engagement for and Improvement Systems
- The Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework: Maryland’s Vision for Engaging Families with Young Children