



Use of Technology to Enhance Licensing Administration

Health and safety is the foundation of quality in child care. State licensing systems provide a vehicle to ensure that child care programs understand and meet minimum requirements for the health, safety and well-being of children in out-of-home care. The Office of Child Care, through the work of its National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement (NCCCQI) is committed to assisting States and Territories strengthen the effectiveness of their licensing systems.¹

As in most areas of program administration, technology and data are increasingly used to address demands for accountability, efficiency, and transparency within complex programs. While limited resources have kept many State/Territory child care licensing programs from taking full advantage of technology solutions, many others are moving forward in developing or purchasing data systems. In the 2014-15 Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) plans, 17 States and Territories identified goals that included enhanced use of technology and Web-based resources within their licensing programs.

Early childhood data systems were a priority of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge. This focus will result in significant progress in data collection and system linkages in States that were funded but also for those that described a new vision. States are becoming more focused on school readiness and child outcomes, and the quality of out-of-home care that children receive contributes to these readiness indicators. Therefore, data on the licensed status and compliance records of early learning and development programs will become more critical as cross-sector data systems evolve.

States should continue to expand the use of technology to enhance their licensing programs and create efficiencies that will lead to increased protection and improved quality of care for children. This issue brief will provide an overview of nine ways state child care licensing programs are increasing their use of technology.

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¹ As a resource to State agencies, specific products, vendors and systems are referenced throughout this document. However, the Office of Child Care and the National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement do not endorse any non-Federal organization, publication, or resource.

Mobile Technology for Monitoring Visits

State licensing agencies are moving toward equipping their licensing staff with portable, hand-held devices such as notebooks or tablets with software that can both capture the licensing inspection information and provide data and resources to support staff in the field. Preliminary results from the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) *2011 NARA Child Care Licensing Programs and Policies Survey* found that 33 States were using portable devices for licensing inspections. Some of the benefits that have been reported by States include:

- Monitoring data are recorded once during the inspection visit and do not have to be reentered upon return to the office.
- Pre-population of forms with program information can reduce the time spent on paperwork and allow more time for observing care.
- Software that performs spell check, provides an alert when something has been overlooked, and allows for the selection of standardized text from licensing requirements makes reports more accurate, complete, and consistent.
- Licensors can access relevant monitoring information, such as prior facility history, requirements, the licensing statute, and resource materials, while in the field.
- Supervisors and managers have ongoing access to individual case records. If there is statewide wireless connectivity, monitoring reports can be immediately shared with a supervisor and feedback provided.
- Licensors can produce an inspection report while onsite.
- Providers who are required to post the monitoring report in the facility feel that a typed copy is more professional and readable for parents.
- Reports can be emailed to other stakeholders, such as program board members.
- The full inspection report can be posted on the licensing Web site for consumers.

Some States work with their agency's information technology staff to develop the software and database, while others work with private vendors.²

Some factors to consider when looking at various mobile devices for purchase include the weight of the device, the visibility of the screen, durability, electronic signature capacity, printer options, battery capacity, frequency of hardware and software upgrades, and connectivity options. States might consider, for example, whether there is access in rural areas. If wireless connectivity is available, some vendors will provide an "evaluation unit" that States can try before purchasing.

Several States have noted the importance of staff training and support in the use of tablets, especially for staff with less experience with technology. One challenge of using technology is making sure that it does not create a barrier to communication or interfere with building relationships with providers.

² Kansas, New York, Florida and Texas developed their data systems internally. Georgia, Montana, New Mexico, and Ohio contracted with SansWrite to develop their systems, while Indiana, Maryland, Oklahoma, the Virgin Islands, and Washington contracted with TCC Software Solutions.

State Examples

The **Florida** Department of Children and Families Child Care Services utilizes Panasonic Toughbook mobile computers combined with portable printers to conduct licensing inspections. The software and full database download allow counselors to view past inspections and violation history. Prior to leaving the site, the counselor is able to produce a signed and completed inspection report for the provider. The internally developed and managed system contains the necessary business logic to conduct licensing inspections, including all background and screening requirements, in accordance with State statute, the Florida Administrative Code, and State guidelines. Once completed, these inspections are archived to the Child Care Licensing Application database and can be viewed in real time through the licensing Web portal.

The **Indiana** Family and Social Services Administration maintains a contract with TCC Software Solutions to provide technical support to staff using Wireless Webforms software. Licensors are provided with a tablet computer with USB camera, rugged field case, docking station, Blue Tooth-enabled portable printer, and a wireless card to transmit data. After the initial licensing data are entered, all forms are automatically populated with that information, ensuring that required forms and data elements are complete. A Plan of Correction form is populated with any noncompliance information and requires a response, including the name of the person responsible and the date by which the noncompliance must be corrected. The following benefits were reported by Indiana's Bureau of Child Care after implementation of the Wireless Webforms application.

Cost Reductions

- Reduction in labor costs for consultants, saving 26 percent (or \$316,605 annualized)
- Reduction in clerical effort by 82 percent (or \$30,360 annualized)
- Potential savings by reducing the risk of making subsidy payments to providers with negative enforcement actions
- Savings in travel expenses by eliminating trips into the office to submit and pick up forms
- Elimination of costs associated with preprinting of paper inspection forms

Increase in Productivity

- Reduction in licensing application processing time from a 35-day average to less than 2 days
- Increase in the number of inspections that can be completed from 6,849 to 9,288 (annualized)
- Increase in accurate reporting and data-driven management decisions with more timely data
- Implementation of standardized workflow processes

Increase in Quality

- Reduction of typographical errors as clerical staff no longer interpret handwritten inspections
- Assurance that data are complete and comply with business rules because of required data fields

The **Texas** Department of Family and Protective Services implemented an agency-side initiative to create a more efficient way for caseworkers to do their jobs and allow more time to spend with clients. Licensing staff are equipped with mobile technology consisting of a tablet PC, connection to the agency network, and software that will allow documentation in the field. This initiative expands staff flexibility as they no longer have a fixed commute

hour or planned office and work schedule. Increased interactivity and connectivity allows them to collaborate and contribute at any time, from any location, allowing many alternatives to the traditional office and permitting licensors to spend the majority of their time in the field.

Washington licensors have more flexibility of services since they are able to access the state systems in the field by using tablets, Air cards and VPN, including Washington's Managed Education and Registry Information Tool (MERIT). MERIT is the Washington Department of Early Learning's online tool used to document and recognize the professional achievements of early care and education and school-age professionals. MERIT also electronically stores records of all trainings, certificates and background checks for early learning professionals.

Use of Data for Caseload Management and Supervisory Oversight

The *Child Care Administrator's Improper Payments Information Technology Guide, Part I* (Walter R. McDonald & Associates for the Office of Child Care, 2011) report notes that 37 States use automation to manage provider applications and licenses and track all aspects of the licensing process. It is anticipated that more States will begin to offer providers the opportunity to apply online for a license. Like the licensing monitoring report software, online applications can include edits that ensure that an application is complete before it's submitted and thus reduce the time required for manual data entry.

A licensing database can be programmed to automatically generate license provider notices for renewal, deficiencies, noncompliance, and other follow-up contacts. Data systems can also assist licensors with managing their caseloads through automated notices of routine and follow-up inspections that are due. An administrative report can provide a detailed summary of each licensor's workload, including the number of completed and upcoming inspections. This provides a quality assurance feature that ensures that inspections and follow-up visits are made in a timely manner and that workloads are equitable and manageable. If staff performance evaluations are based on measurable tasks—for example, that 90 percent of monitoring visits be made within an established timeframe—a database can greatly simplify this labor-intensive supervisory responsibility.

As licensing programs face increasing demands with limited resources, States are seeking ways to target their efforts on the programs that need more intensive monitoring or support. In *Strong Licensing: The Foundation for a Quality Early Care and Education System* (NARA & Lapp-Payne, 2011), differential monitoring is defined as

a monitoring technique whereby the frequency of inspections a licensed facility receives varies according to the facility's compliance history with program requirements. Facilities that exhibit a low level of compliance are inspected more frequently. (p. 22)

Preliminary results from the *NARA 2011 Child Care Licensing Programs and Policies Survey* show that 26 States reported using differential monitoring for child care centers. States may also begin to use levels in a tiered quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) as another indicator of how frequently to conduct monitoring visits, with staff being able to override the projected inspection date when appropriate.

State Examples

The **Florida** Department of Children and Families Child Care Services relies on the Child Care Licensing Application, a Web- and client-based information system, to manage the department's child care licensing program. It provides an online application process for registered family day care and religious exempt providers. The portal is a comprehensive Web-based resource for child care licensing staff and contractors to use in conducting and managing licensing inspections, managing administrative action, reviewing and approving inspections for public

viewing, and reporting on all data captured within the application. Supervisors have the ability to review and approve inspections and access a variety of different management and staff performance reports.

The **Louisiana** Department of Social Services is able to track the following program performance measures: (1) licensing complaints received during the reporting period and the percentage that were completed within 30 days of the receipt of the complaint; (2) the percentage of annual inspections completed prior to the annual renewal date; (3) the number of on-site annual inspections conducted by DCFS; and (4) the number of follow-up inspections conducted by DCFS.

The **New York** Office of Children and Family Services' automated statewide database, the Child Care Facility System, reports on a multitude of statistical data, such as number of applications in process; number and variety of violations; status of violations; number of overdue inspections; safety assessments in process, completed, or overdue; and the enforcement status of programs. The Office of Children and Family Services uses this information as a management tool, and to identify training and professional development topics for both providers and regulatory staff. Through a series of monthly management reports, regional and home office managers can evaluate caseloads and track performance measures such as the timeliness of initial licensing, renewals, complaint investigations, safety assessments, and completed inspections. The reports also help to identify trends, adherence to regulatory requirements, and reasons for inspections. These reports are used as tools for regional managers to assess their office workloads, identify problem areas, and institute changes to better serve children in child care settings. The Office of Children and Family Services-contracted registration offices are also assessed using these standards and can be fiscally penalized for not meeting contractually agreed-upon performance-based standards.

Automation to Support Risk Management and Consistency in Enforcement Actions

States are seeking approaches to focus their efforts on programs that need increased monitoring. Many States are identifying and prioritizing health and safety violations that pose a greater risk to children. They may do this by identifying serious or critical standards, and a few are assigning a weight or category to each standard to further refine risk management and enforcement. Identifying the most critical requirements can help providers, parents, and licensing staff better understand the potential consequences of noncompliance. Weighted standards can also support a more sophisticated data system, for example, one that can report on recommended monitoring and enforcement actions. As noted in the Texas example below, there are limitations to the use of weighted standards—for instance, they cannot capture the scope and severity of a violation.

Strong Licensing: The Foundation for a Quality Early Care and Education System (NARA & Lapp-Payne, 2011) suggests the use of data to

examine associations between and among specific program requirements, violations, compliance histories, and relative risk for licensed facilities, then tailor the scope or frequency of inspections or greater attention to those requirements and facilities. It requires extensive analysis of facility characteristics/profiles to develop a suitable method. (p. 37)

An automated licensing data system can improve consistency and timeliness in determining how frequently monitoring should occur and also in recommending enforcement actions. While licensing staff will always need to assess such recommendations to determine their appropriateness, a data system can help ensure that problem facilities are not overlooked and that enforcement actions are consistently utilized.

State Examples

The **Arizona** Department of Health Services, Division of Public Health Licensing, completes a Regulation Compliance Evaluation for every inspection that provides a quick picture of the facility. It allows staff to quickly pull reports and statistics in a variety of areas for the department, other agencies, the public, etc. Based on the Statement of Deficiencies data, staff can determine the number of citations for each rule, whether they are repeated deficiencies, and the types of enforcement actions (fines, training, denials, revocations) taken. They are also able to tabulate data for reports or trend analyses of enforcement actions at the stroke of a key.

The **Massachusetts** Department of Early Education and Care has launched a Differential Licensing initiative to support its vision to make their licensing and inspection system more efficient. As part of this initiative, the department has documented a series of Information technology recommendations, such as the need for abbreviated monitoring tools for program visits, the development of program profiles that would be viewed prior to conducting a visit, and the use of mobile devices. The department is planning on conducting a pilot of the Differential Licensing model as well as developing an IT work plan to revamp their technical infrastructure and ensure access to data in real time.

The **Texas** Department of Family and Protective Services' automated data system includes its weighted enforcement approach, which is based on the risk posed to children. Licensing staff continue to document observations to capture the scope and severity of the deficiency, but the weighted standards are now part of the decision-making process, resulting in more consistent and equitable enforcement practices. An electronic Compliance History Report provides a snapshot of all standards evaluated and deficiencies cited, broken down by weight, in a 2-year period. This assists the program's risk analysts in making a recommendation when staff seek feedback on corrective or adverse actions. Weighted standards have also provided a more efficient way of collecting data on deficiencies and subsequent licensing actions that will help identify and address trends, disparities, and risk to children more effectively.

The **Virginia** Department of Social Services, Division of Licensing Programs, has used DOLPHIN, a mobile-based technology system, for licensing inspections since 2003. The system features a searchable database for families and can provide the last 5 years of inspection reports; it is also used for caseload management, to ensure consistency in enforcement actions, and to assist in supporting research on the effect of licensing policies. It includes a Performance Tracking or Risk Profile Report that enables an inspector to track the performance of a licensee—including complaint investigations—based on the initial, renewal, and all subsequent inspections conducted during the licensure period selected. The Performance Tracking Report enables a supervisor and an inspector to compare the licensee with the facility's peer group on four performance indicators: (1) the average number of noncompliances; (2) the average Risk/Safety Matrix score assessed from violations of key health and safety standards; (3) the average number of non-compliances from focused inspections, and (4) one or more negative events, such as receiving a sanction; having a valid complaint with a Risk/Safety rating of "B-2" or higher; and/or being required by the division to develop an Intensive Plan of Correction for one or more egregious noncompliances. The first three measures can be generated by the automated system, while the fourth measure requires an inspector to review the facility's files for negative events.

Use of Licensing and Compliance Data

There is a shortage of national research on the elements of a licensing program—e.g., frequency of visits, enforcement actions, and technical assistance—that have the greatest impact on ensuring children's safety and well-being. Licensing databases will for the first time enable State agencies to assess the impact of their decisions, both in revisions to licensing policies and in quality improvement initiatives. Supply and demand data can help

target where recruitment efforts are needed. Assessing and utilizing noncompliance data by licensing specialist, region, and at the State level can identify trends that will guide use of resources and inform the development of QRIS criteria.

Licensing and compliance data offer a wealth of information on the status of child care providers if they are consistently recorded and retrievable. Standard 10.4.3.3 of *Caring for our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-home Child Care Programs Third Edition* (American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) et al., 2011) states:

The state regulatory agency should have access to an information system for collecting data relative to the incidence of illness and injuries, confirmed child abuse and neglect, and death of children in facilities. This data should be shared with appropriate agencies and the child care health consultant for analysis. (p. 411)

Identifying problem areas for child care providers can result in targeted technical assistance and training as well as clarification to licensing regulations.

CCDF administrators are now required to submit to the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Child Care a biannual Quality Performance Report (QPR).³ Strong data systems will make it possible to answer the following QPR questions for each provider category:

A.1.2.1 Number of licensed programs

A1.2.2 What percentage of programs received monitoring visits, and at what frequency, for each provider category during the last fiscal year?

A1.2.3 How many programs had their licenses suspended or revoked due to licensing violations as defined in your State/Territory during the last fiscal year?

A1.2.4 How many programs were terminated from participation in CCDF subsidies due to failure to meet licensing or minimum CCDF health and safety requirements during the last fiscal year?

A1.2.5 How many previously license-exempt providers were brought under the licensing system during the last fiscal year?

A1.2.6 How many injuries as defined by the State/Territory occurred in child care during the last year?
How many fatalities occurred in child care as of the end of the last year?

State Examples

The **Georgia** Department of Early Care and Learning assesses licensing staff for reliability in evaluating licensing rules. All licensing consultants participate in this project, which measures the consistency of licensing findings between consultants and regions. The information is used to refine licensing instruments and target specific content area for training for staff and for child care programs. In 2009, Georgia developed inter-rater visit tools to assist consultants with consistently evaluating licensing rules and conducted an internal study with the tools in 2010. Since that time, DECAL has implemented various procedures to continue measuring inter-rater

³ The QPR is an annual progress report that collects data on child care quality activities and quality outcomes. The full QPR is presented as Appendix 1 at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/resource/pi2013-06>.

reliability. Beginning in July 2014, DECAL is expanding inter-rater efforts and repeating some of the same processes implemented in 2010.

The **Indiana** Family and Social Services Administration will begin to evaluate whether enrollment and participation in the QRIS decreases the incidence of serious licensing noncompliances.

The **New York** Office of Children and Family Services uses a geographic computer-based system that can identify child care programs within a ZIP Code, within a radius of a location, county, or near properties that are known for environmental issues such as Super Fund sites, gas stations, nail salons, body shops, etc. The ability to locate clusters of child care programs in specific locations enables the Division of Child Care Services to contact specific providers in the event of a disaster or public threat. The system is also being expanded to collect demographic and program information on legally exempt providers of child care.

The **South Carolina** Office of Research and Statistics has developed Web-based analytic data cubes for Child Care Services that allow staff to analyze aggregated data, drill to the provider level, and create maps. As a result, staff have the ability to easily examine data from the licensing database through tables, graphs, and maps. In one example, staff used the cubes to track numbers and types of deficiencies and to determine areas of focus for training regarding regulatory topics. Using the data, staff then identified areas of the State with the most violations in specific regulatory categories, thereby targeting training and technical assistance efforts. Primary areas of focus include, but are not limited to, fire and life safety, nutrition, health and safety, and program administration.

Linkages With Other Systems

Coordinated early care and education data systems can provide multiple benefits to partners. In the broadest use, linked data systems can answer questions such as where children are receiving care as well as assisting policymakers with evaluating State investments and targeting resources. The Early Childhood Data Collaborative has established 10 fundamentals of coordinated State early care and education data systems (Early Childhood Data Collaborative, 2011). One of the fundamentals addresses program site data on structure, quality, and work environment. As cross-sector data analysis becomes more sophisticated, the licensing agency may be asked to provide information such as ages of children served, funding sources, the availability of special services, accreditation, classroom staff-child ratios, curriculum, wages, benefits, and turnover.

Linkages with other data systems can provide ready information to licensors in preparation for a monitoring inspection or to support the issuance of a license or the investigation of a complaint. Some examples include:

- Reviewing staff qualifications and training through a professional development registry
- Accessing criminal history and child abuse registry checks
- Determining the number of children receiving a subsidy at each facility
- Checking the QRIS status and history
- Checking the delivery of any technical assistance to the program

An increasing number of States are including participation in a practitioner professional development registry as a minimum licensing requirement or a QRIS criterion. Personnel registries track practitioners' completed education, training, and other experience, and professional activities. A State's core knowledge or competency areas and its career lattice can be the foundation of a registry, tracking practitioners' attainment of training in the core areas and determining placement on a career lattice or pathway. Reviewing this information electronically before or

during a monitoring visit can improve the accuracy of information and reduce the time spent going through paper files.

Several States require an electronic fingerprinting process in which scanned fingerprints of child care providers are submitted to the State public safety agency. The results are then shared with the licensing agency. Results from the *50-State child care licensing study: 2011-2013 Edition* (National Association for Regulatory Administration, 2013) reflect that background check systems will notify the licensing manager in 15 states if a provider's criminal record has changed. Electronic background check records can also aid in the portability of background checks when staff move between programs, reducing the burden and cost of re-administering the check if it is within the state's parameters.

The *Child Care Administrator's Improper Payments Information Technology Guide, Part I* (McDonald, 2011) notes that 37 States have automated alerts for when a provider is no longer eligible to participate in the subsidized child care program for any reason. Information linkages can help inform both licensing and the subsidy program in multiple ways:

1. To verify that the number of children receiving subsidies at a given time does not exceed the licensed capacity.
2. To discontinue subsidy reimbursement when a provider is no longer eligible, such as when a licensing enforcement action is taken against a facility.
3. To capture a QRIS level so that the appropriate tiered reimbursement rate can be paid.

As most QRISs are based on the foundation of licensing, linkages with QRIS managers are becoming increasingly important. Licensing staff may be the first to know when significant changes have occurred at a facility (such as a new director) or when an enforcement action is being taken that could affect the QRIS rating level. Technology can support automatic alerts or a strong communication protocol to ensure that information is shared.

When licensing staff have access to information on facilities receiving technical assistance or can view program assessments such as the Environment Rating Scales, they can provide additional support and reinforce areas needing improvement during their monitoring visits. Child care resource and referral agencies and technical assistance providers can also benefit from access to the licensing database, being able to better target their services and prepare appropriate training and resources. Some systems ensure security measures in which various users only have access to data that they are authorized to view.

State Examples

The **Indiana** Family and Social Services Administration's licensing database is linked to the QRIS database so that all partners are aware of current regulatory issues and corresponding technical assistance needs. For example, when a provider enrolled in Paths to QUALITY is moved to "not in good standing" within the licensing database due to a negative enforcement action, the technical assistance partners are immediately notified through the Paths to QUALITY database. This ensures that Paths to QUALITY awards, incentives, and technical assistance are not offered to providers who are ineligible due to their loss of good standing, thus protecting limited resources and the integrity of the Paths to QUALITY level displayed for parents. Licensing consultants will soon be able to electronically request technical assistance for providers who are having issues with a specific regulation. This will allow for even closer alignment between licensing and the quality specialists and greater tracking and reporting of quality interventions and improvements. Last, the licensing database is also linked to the Automated Intake System for subsidy eligibility. This ensures that providers are eligible to receive CCDF payments prior to a parent selecting

them; links the Paths to QUALITY level with CCDF children; and assists with monitoring for potential fraud issues, such as cross-matching CCDF parents who are also providers.

Private funders in **Miami-Dade, Florida**, contracted with WELS (Web-based Early Learning System) to develop a data management system that includes licensing data; the professional development registry data; assessment data, including the Environment Rating Scales, Classroom Assessment Scoring system; and QRIS checklists. It was created to be a single point of entry for quality initiatives and provides a consolidated rating from multiple assessment tools and data sources. WELS' aggregated data system generates program profiles and creates quality improvement plans for child care programs that can include specialized accreditation plans and plans for Head Start programs. It is also used to track resources such as expenditures related to financial incentives, WAGES and scholarships, which helps inform investments. WELS, as utilized in Miami-Dade County, operates a Technical Assistance Activity Log for coaches/mentors that documents planning, onsite support, and program professional development. WELS also offers online provider training and archived Webinars for providers and community partners. WELS has launched and fully implemented a "paperless" QRIS process with a multilingual provider portal on which programs can apply online, submit a self-study, create and update a quality improvement plan, view a QRIS scorecard and apply for support grants.

The **New Jersey** Department of Children and Families conducts Criminal History Record Information background checks by a system of electronic fingerprinting known as Live-Scan. Fingerprints are scanned by computer directly from a specially programmed touch screen. The prints are then electronically transmitted to the Division of State Police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation for processing. Prints are flagged, and an automatic notification of any subsequent arrests or convictions is sent to the department. These background checks are required for child care center staff, resource family parents, staff working in treatment programs for youth, adoption agency staff, and prospective adoptive parents.

The **Wisconsin** Department of Children and Families includes participation in the State's professional development registry, The Registry, as a minimum licensing requirement and for participation in their QRIS. The Registry awards Career Level Certificates verifying that people have met all minimum entry-level and continuing education requirements as part of the Learning Record. Training beyond those requirements, along with years of experience and professional contributions, are represented by the levels of The Registry's career ladder. The Registry certificate reflects child care positions for which the participant qualifies. Licensors and QRIS consultants can access a secure portal to view staff training records for licensed programs. A data interface allows for a daily transfer of licensing staff data from the State to The Registry.

Online Licensing Information for Consumers

Consumers are increasingly relying on the Internet to research purchases, and this now includes searching for child care as well. Almost all States maintain a Web site that allows consumers to search for child care providers using criteria such as the provider's name, provider type, geographic location, types of care provided, and QRIS level. Resources on evaluating and choosing child care, such as checklists or links to child care resource and referral agencies, are also commonly provided.

According to the National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement's issue brief on licensing inspection policies (2014), 17 States post full licensing inspection reports on their Web sites, while 14 post inspection summaries. In addition, 6 States post all licensing complaints on their Web sites, while 19 post substantiated complaints only. However, State Web sites vary in how customer-friendly, accessible, and meaningful they are to consumers. *Recommended Best Practices for Human Care Regulation* (NARA, 2009) advises that inspection and sanction reports remain online for a period of at least 3–4 years, preferably longer.

Providers want assurance of fairness and consistency regarding information on the Internet that may affect their business. In some States, providers are given an opportunity to first review the posting or publicly respond when complaints or deficiencies are posted. Six States reported posting all complaints, while 19 States only included complaints that had been substantiated. In **Oklahoma**, inspection findings are posted immediately but removed if a grievance is filed. In **Connecticut**, complaints are only posted after the investigation is closed and the complaint was substantiated. Complaints remain posted online for three years.

While there is little research on this topic, a study in Broward County, Florida, found that the impact of posting licensing information on the Internet extended beyond parental decision-making. In *What Happens When Child Care Inspections and Complaints are Made Available on the Internet?*, Witte and Queralt (2004) studied the impact of placing child care inspection and complaint reports on the Internet when the information was accessible and easy to use, the media widely reported its availability, and the inspector's name and contact information were provided on the first page of the report. They found that inspectors completed significantly more reports and that findings were more likely to be mixed. They also found significant improvements in classroom environment and center management at centers serving children from low-income families with child care subsidies.

State Examples

The **Colorado** Department of Human Services posts providers' public file reviews online because they are considered public information under the State's open records information law. Every public file includes a summary sheet on each provider and the results of founded and unfounded complaint visits. The licensing program believes that complaints may reflect concerns even when not substantiated, but they do not accept anonymous complaints. Providers are asked to view their own records, and there is a process where they may have information expunged that should not be made public. Also included on the State portal page is a MapQuest function that shows the location of convicted perpetrators who live near any facility.

<http://www.colorado.gov/apps/cdhs/childcare/lookup/index.jsf>

The **Ohio** Department of Job and Family Services, Bureau of Child Care Licensing and Monitoring provides information about programs via the Child Care in Ohio Web site. Users can search for a child care program by name, city, or zip code and view inspection reports and non-compliances, including Serious Risk Non-compliances (SRNC) which are noted in red. The Web site also provides other information about programs including if the program is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, their participation in the federal Child Care Food program, the program's QRIS level, age groups served, days/hours of operation, and whether the program has an agreement to provide publicly funded child care.

<http://www.odjfs.state.oh.us/cdc/query/asp>

The **Utah** Department of Workforce Services, Office of Child Care's Web site, <http://careaboutchildcare.utah.gov/>, is designed to promote quality child care for both families and child care providers. A short video featuring a Utah pediatrician and mother explains how parents can seek a provider who meets the quality indicators that are important to them. Every licensed center and licensed family/home provider has a profile page on the Web site where they can upload a statement about their program philosophy, pictures of their program, and links to their Facebook page, blog, or Web site. Each profile page also includes photos and information about ages accepted, operating hours, vacancies, etc. The licensing history provides inspection dates and types; the finding category (cited, repeat cited); the noncompliance level; and the rule, finding, and the date that correction was verified. Each provider profile page will also reflect which of seven quality indicators they have applied for and achieved through the Office of Child Care. <http://childcarelicensing.utah.gov/FileCheck.htm>

The **Washington** Department of Early Learning's Child Care Check Web site strives to provide as much information

as possible to help parents make the right child care decisions for their family. In addition to basic licensing information, upgrades now include: (1) certified providers who are not required to be licensed but wish to comply with State licensing rules, such as Tribes and other governments; (2) providers who are closed, and the date and reason for closure; (3) compliance agreements as of July 1, 2011, that are related to valid licensing complaints; and (4) the background check status for the past three calendar years. The Department of Early Learning (DEL) is developing a procedure for providers to request to have their names suppressed in the event they have a protection order from a court. <https://apps.del.wa.gov/check/CheckSearch.aspx> Only valid complaints for unlicensed child care providers are displayed.

Online Resources and Alerts for Providers

The *Child Care Administrator's Improper Payments Information Technology Guide, Part I* (2011) notes that

Providers may have the ability to view and update information about their facilities, staff, and the specifics of the services they offer, such as their hours of operation, types of care they provide, and relevant staff training and professional development activities. Typically, this function is administered through a secure online portal. Providers also may be able to view information about any complaints submitted and the status of related investigations. In addition, providers sometimes are able to view and sign contracts online and submit information necessary for the contracting process. Allowing providers to enter information online about their operations is an effective means of keeping provider information up to date. (pp. 13–14)

It will become increasingly common for providers to be able to access updated resources from agency Web sites. Letters that have been mailed to providers can be posted for future reference. Some States no longer make printed copies of licensing requirements available but post them on the agency Web site where they can be updated. At least 24 States have interpretive guidelines, and those that are designed to provide clarification for providers as well as staff can also be posted on the Web site. Some States have included a “contact us” option where Web users can make a comment or post a question.

Electronic licensing databases can facilitate communication and generate provider email addresses that can be used to share a newsletter, training opportunities, requests for feedback, or critical information before, during, and after an emergency or disaster.

State Examples

The **Indiana** Family and Social Services Administration’s Web site provides recent news such as updates on a measles outbreak, Let’s Move! Child Care, and new crib safety standards. Provider resources include product recalls, a video on lead poisoning, and a link to professional development opportunities. Licensing information includes clarifications to the interpretative guidelines for home and center, the meeting schedules of licensing advisory committees, and proposed changes to licensing rules.

In 2012 the **Kansas** Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) developed an online information dissemination system. The online availability of facility compliance history significantly increases the ability of Kansas families to research their child care options and make more informed child care choices. In addition, the KDHE website includes consumer information, current Bureau forms and regulations, and links to related websites including The Department for Children and Families (DCF) and Child Care Aware of KS. The online information system is part of a larger joint technology initiative between DCF and KDHE known as the Client and Provider Portal (CAPP). The online child care application launched in March, 2013. The online application features the option for providers to enroll with DCF to serve families receiving child care subsidies, eliminating the need to submit separate

applications to each agency. The ability to submit an initial or renewal application online significantly reduces the length of time necessary to process an application and issue a license compared to the paper-intensive process.

The **North Carolina** Division of Child Development and Early Education created an Emergency Preparedness Web page for providers, available on the Division of Child Development's Web site, which provides an extensive list of resources, including an emergency plan template and tips for providers.

The **Texas** Department of Family and Protective Services maintains a Web site to provide information to parents, consumers, providers, and anyone interested in child care issues. All licensing standards are published online, along with an extensive Frequently Asked Questions that helps to clarify standards. Providers can submit background check requests online and receive a reply within 1 or 2 days if there is no criminal history. Providers can download forms, obtain information about inclusive care, take online courses to meet their training requirements, and complete a survey after they have had an inspection. Potential child care providers can get information about starting their business, and home providers can apply for a permit online. Texas used Federal stimulus dollars to also develop a Technical Assistance Library. The library includes up to 500 one-page documents on resources and best practices related to maintaining or exceeding minimum licensing requirements. All documents are formatted to meet Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility guidelines, and some have been translated into other languages. Utilizing tablets and portable printers, staff are able to print resources from the Technical Assistance Library onsite during an inspection, email the materials to the provider, or direct the provider to the licensing Web site. A digital librarian is managing updates to the library and monitors usage to determine which resources are most requested.

The **Washington** Department of Early Learning uses their email listserv to notify licensed child care providers about time-sensitive information affecting their work, from changes in subsidy billing processes to legislative updates. DEL has the ability to tailor messages to a certain zip code which would allow for messaging to go out regarding natural disasters in specific areas.

Requests for Public Feedback

Several States are using newsletters, listservs, and Web sites to keep providers informed of updates to the licensing program. Such notices are used increasingly to solicit feedback to policy changes, especially revisions to licensing requirements. Standard 10.3.1.3 of *Caring for our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-home Child Care Programs, Third Edition* (AAP et al., 2011) notes that

State licensing rules should be developed with active community participation by all interested parties including parents/guardians, service providers, advocates, professionals in medical and child development fields, funding and training sources. The regulatory development process should include many opportunities for public debate and discussion as well as the ability to provide written input. (pp. 398-399)

Many States are now collecting provider email addresses or encouraging providers to voluntarily sign up to receive notices so that they can be made aware of upcoming rule revisions. Accepting comments online encourages greater participation in the process from all sectors and can also assist the licensing agency in capturing and analyzing the feedback.

State Examples

The **Texas** Department of Family and Protective Services is required by State statute to provide notice of proposed changes and the fiscal impact of each revision. Providers are notified by email of the opportunity to comment

online, by mail, or at public hearings. In Fall 2015, the department will use an online survey to solicit input from child care providers and other stakeholders as part of their comprehensive review of minimum standards that is conducted every 6 years. Their Web site also includes a page on “what’s new in licensing.”

Licensing Staff Development

As is the case with child care providers, turnover and geographic distribution of licensing staff can make training a challenge. States are exploring ways to use technology to deliver initial and ongoing training, communicate program changes, and support the professional development of staff.

State Examples

The Colorado Department of Human Services licensing administration and supervisory group received the NARA credential with the regulatory experience endorsement in August of 2012. The Colorado Department of Human Services licensing specialist have completed the four NARA online courses and will be receiving their credential by the end of 2014. The **Louisiana** Department of Social Services first contracted with NARA for onsite training on the NARA Curriculum. All licensing field staff and management staff completed the online curriculum and were awarded with the NARA credential effective August 2012.

The **North Carolina** Division of Child Development and Early Education has responded to a communication challenge that is common when staff are located across the State; opportunities for in-person meetings are limited; and legislative, rule, or policy changes can occur quickly. The Division Director conducts webinars on an as-needed basis including information that is agency specific—for example, updates on travel or new policies—or related to partners or activities such as prekindergarten expansion or the Early Learning Challenge. The webinars include a question and answer time. Electronic newsletters also expand upon topics shared and provide links to research that is relevant to the work that the agency does. This can help staff stay up-to-date on the latest topics discussed both within the State and nationally.

Washington’s Department of Early Learning uses the Learning Management System, which houses training modules for licensing staff, to increase the efficiency of licensing staffs’ training and professional development.

Conclusion

Rapid advances in technology are assisting licensing programs to operate in a more intentional, data-driven manner as well as providing valuable resources to agency staff and stakeholders, including child care providers and parents. We anticipate that advances will continue to occur quickly and lead to new strategies to better protect the safety and well-being of children in out-of-home care. Some of these outcomes will include:

- Increased focus on oversight of programs not meeting requirements
- Improved requirements that are informed by data analysis and public feedback
- More timely and consistent use of enforcement actions
- Enhanced and targeted professional development of licensing staff
- Better informed families in choosing and engaging with their child’s program
- Easily accessible and current resources for providers
- Improved communication and coordination within the early childhood system.

The Office of Child Care supports States and Territories in their movement toward greater efficiencies through the use of new technologies. Each of these advances brings us closer to our goal of safer, healthier places for children.

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