



PROFILES: SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

State:	Georgia
Partnership name:	Quality Rated
Web site(s):	https://qualityrated.dec.al.ga.gov/ http://dec.al.ga.gov/QualityInitiatives/QualityRated.aspx
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1. Background

Starting in 2006, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) gathered a group of diverse stakeholders to discuss and design a systemic approach to enhance the quality of Georgia's early care and education system. Extensive research was done to explore best practices in other States and to determine what quality standards and measurement tools would be most effective in Georgia. As part of this process, in 2009 DECAL engaged the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina (FPG) to conduct a statewide, representative study of quality across Georgia's licensed child care programs. FPG's Georgia Study of Early Care and Education found that very few young children in Georgia receive care that is generally considered high quality and thus highlighted the genuine need to bolster quality in early care and education across the State.

In light of the FPG study findings, Governor Nathan Deal created a path to initiate Quality Rated in 2011 by authorizing DECAL to design and implement a tiered quality rating and improvement system (TQRIS) for early childhood education programs throughout the State. After extensively researching best practices in other States, a team of Georgia educators and community leaders designed Quality Rated, a statewide TQRIS to elevate the quality of the State's approximately 6,000 early care programs. Quality Rated rewards programs for meeting higher quality standards and provides families with valuable information to make important early childhood education decisions.

Through Quality Rated, Georgia education stakeholders established an innovative public-private partnership focused on quality improvements in early care and education statewide. Three lead partners—Bright from the Start: Georgia DECAL; the Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP); and the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS)—each play a key role in coordinating Quality Rated and are uniquely positioned to secure the initiative's success. This partnership is now leading the implementation of Quality Rated and securing the investments to establish and sustain it statewide.

2. Mission and Goals

Quality Rated provides opportunities for Georgia to accomplish the following:



- Identify indicators that enhance children's development and promote school readiness;
- Increase quality of early care and education services;
- Increase families' understanding and demand for higher quality early care and education;
- Increase professional development opportunities, benchmarks, and rewards for a range of early care and education practitioners; and
- Create a cross-sector framework that links standards, technical assistance, monitoring, finance, and consumer engagement for programs in a range of settings, including family child care (FCC) homes, child care centers, school-based programs, Head Start programs, and others.

3. Governance and Partnership Members

The three lead partners in the Quality Rated initiative are:

- Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL);
- The Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP); and
- The Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS).

DECAL, GaFCP, and GEEARS have committed to working together to improve the well-being and school readiness of Georgia's children by enhancing the quality of early care and education programs statewide.

DECAL

Quality Rated is operated by DECAL, the department of state government responsible for meeting the early care and education needs of Georgia's children and families. Among other functions, DECAL administers Georgia's Pre-K Program, funded by the lottery, and licenses and oversees the State's child care programs.

DECAL is leading the implementation of Quality Rated efforts and is the primary decision maker on policy matters. It sets statewide uniform quality standards evaluates child care learning centers, FCC homes, and group child care homes; and provides all of these early care and education programs with ongoing support to improve quality and participation. DECAL delivers onsite technical assistance and a range of professional development opportunities at no cost to early care programs. DECAL works with the full range of early care and education programs in Georgia (for example, faith-based early education settings, center-based providers, Montessori schools, FCC providers, facilities serving dual language families, and Georgia's public Pre-K and special education programs) and aims to meet their unique needs. Ensuring the success of Quality Rated is a top DECAL priority.

Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP)

GaFCP is a statewide 501c3 nonprofit organization that connects the efforts of government, the private sector, and local communities to address challenges faced by families in Georgia. GaFCP serves as the fiscal agent for Quality Rated, receiving charitable donations for the initiative and administering incentive programs. Based on DECAL quality evaluations, GaFCP orders customized supply packages for eligible one-star and two-star programs and delivers teacher bonuses to three-star early care programs. GaFCP closely monitors the receipt of these items at early care and education programs and ensures they are put to their intended use.

GaFCP also works with collaboratives in each county to promote Quality Rated, helping to educate local programs and families on the importance of quality early care and education.



GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS)

GEEARS helps business, civic, and government leaders maximize the economic return on the State's investments in early childhood education through public awareness, advocacy, and public policy initiatives. Established in 2010 as an independent successor to the United Way's Early Education Commission, GEEARS has quickly become a critical thought leader promoting best practices and advocating for increased quality, accessibility, and affordability of early care and education.

GEEARS designs and executes Quality Rated's public awareness campaign. GEEARS has created easily recognizable symbols of quality, the new Quality Rated logo and star ratings, and coordinated the development of initial print ads, billboards, television ads, and radio spots. These important efforts are beginning to create market demand for quality programs, urging families to seek out early care and education programs with Quality Rated designations and encouraging programs to participate in the quality rating and improvement process.

Other Partners

In addition to Quality Rated's three lead partners, several other organizations are contributing to the initiative's work. Currently, Quality Rated is supported by dozens of public entities, community service providers, and nonprofit organizations such as United Way, Quality Care for Children, the Georgia Association on Young Children, and the Georgia Child Care Association.

4. Funding and Other Resources

The Quality Rated partnership determined that \$18 million in private sector and philanthropic investment was required to jump start statewide adoption and implementation of Quality Rated. As of 2014, \$8 million of the \$18 million had been raised. The plan is to sustain Quality Rated through public funding sources and minimal ongoing private investment after 2017. Investments in Quality Rated's \$18 million campaign are being matched more than 3:1 with public funding to achieve Quality Rated's goals during the initiative's start-up period. Federal and state funding totaling \$63 million is underwriting professional development, technical assistance, and other Quality Rated program support during this time period.

Before requesting initial funding, the partnership conducted a fundraising feasibility study, as well as a year of extensive outreach, and launched a public awareness campaign to communicate both the importance of quality early care and education and how Quality Rated is the key to achieving such quality across the State of Georgia. As of 2014, Quality Rated convened a fundraising advisory board comprised of members of the private sector. The goal of this advisory board is to engage their private business network and help the partnership leverage corporate donations.

5. Activities



Quality Rated is Georgia's system to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early education and school-age care programs. Quality Rated provides a path for early care and education programs to improve teacher practices and classroom environments. It encourages families to seek quality early care and education programs and make informed decisions for their children. Quality Rated assigns a rating (one star, two star, or three star) to early education and school-age care programs that go above minimum licensing standards. By participating in Georgia's voluntary Quality Rated system, early education and school-age care programs make a

commitment to work continuously to improve the quality of care they provide to children and families. Further, through Quality Rated, Georgia's early care and education programs have access to technical assistance, professional development, financial incentives, and other types of support to help them incorporate quality into their programs.

Early care and education programs were first invited to participate in Quality Rated in January 2012. DECAL began publishing ratings on July 1, 2013. Programs are encouraged to advertise their standing in Quality Rated and celebrate their success, with an emphasis on continuous quality improvement for all participating programs.

Also in July 2013, Georgia began reimbursing programs participating in the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program based on the program's quality rating. CAPS subsidizes child care for children from eligible, working families with low incomes and Quality Rated programs receive a higher reimbursement than programs that are not rated. One-star programs receive an additional 2 percent reimbursement, two-star programs receive an additional 5 percent reimbursement, and three-star programs receive 10 percent more than programs not rated.

6. Evaluation and Outcomes

A validation study is underway, and its three phases are described. The first phase of the Quality Rated validation process addresses content validity based on the work of Zellman and Fiene, (2012). The work on this phase began in 2007 as Georgia's TQRIS was being developed. This development was based on

two distinct, yet interwoven projects: the Quality System Indicators (QSI) Committee and the Georgia Quality Studies. The QSI Committee, composed of Georgia early education stakeholders, outlined specific standards, indicators, and measures of quality. The Georgia Quality Studies were studies of early learning and development quality commissioned by DECAL and conducted by lead researchers from FPG. The studies included data from a statewide, representative study of quality that measured quality using the Environment Rating Scales (ECERS-R, ITERS-R, and FCCERS-R) and gathered data around the standards and indicators developed by the QSI Committee. The information from these studies was used by DECAL to establish criteria for the tiers reflective of differential levels of program quality.

The second phase in the validation process addresses how well the Quality Rated system is actually measuring various components of quality. This second phase includes a focus on how well the various standards (and the way they are measured) correlate with and are independent of each other. Georgia initially began this phase as part of the quality studies and is currently implementing activities that validate measurement strategies in Quality Rated.

Phase three validation addresses the extent to which the tiers accurately reflect differential levels of program quality. It also examines how the ratings differ between varying types of programs. The primary strategy for gathering evidence that the tiers differentiate program quality is to use quality instruments not currently in Quality Rated (such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System) to determine if quality is different for lower and higher rated programs.

References

Zellman, G. L. & Fiene, R. (2012). *Validation of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems for Early Care and Education and School-Age Care*, Research-to-Policy, Research-to-Practice Brief OPRE 2012-29. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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