

The first statewide QRIS began in Oklahoma in 1998. Tribes were involved in the planning and implementation and many Tribes currently participate in Oklahoma's Reaching for the Stars QRIS program. Since then, 28 States have implemented QRIS statewide systems and 9 States have implemented pilots. QRIS systems vary from State to State. Some States have three or four levels of quality while others have five. The standards and number of standards also differ, though all include professional development and the learning environment. Other common standards include parent and family involvement, administrative policies and procedures, licensing status/compliance, program evaluation and child/staff ratios.

QUALITY

What does quality child care mean to you?

- Well-trained, caring and responsive teachers
- A safe and healthy environment
- A place where children will develop and flourish

It's all those things and more. Research has shown that high quality child care in early learning and school-age programs makes a positive difference in children's lives. It impacts their school readiness and helps to establish a foundation of social, emotional and cognitive development that carries on throughout their lives. Those of us who work with children know this to be true. We also know it takes intentionality, effort and time to develop and implement higher levels of quality. Any quality improvement effort is a step-by-step process, building upon what you have in place, and keeping your goals in the forefront to guide the process.

WHAT IS QRIS?

QRIS is a method to improve the quality of child care programs by developing gradually increasing levels of quality criteria in child care programs – from minimum to higher levels of standards. Most QRIS programs begin with licensing, certification or approval requirements as the minimum level and build upon that foundation with higher standards.

The following *example* illustrates possible scenarios of standards and levels of standards. Because centers, relative care and family home settings are different in their structures, size and other factors, the QRIS tiered levels can be customized to each type of child care program. One size does not fit all.

STANDARDS	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3
<i>Staff Qualifications</i>	High School Diploma (HSD) for center staff OR No educational requirement (relative care)	HSD and a certain number of training hours completed (centers) OR HSD (relative care)	Child Development Associate™ for Lead Teachers (centers) OR HSD and a certain number of training hours completed (relative care)
<i>Professional Development</i>	Six hours of annual training	Nine hours of annual training	Twelve hours of annual training
<i>Learning Environment</i>	Teachers will read to children 15 minutes a day	Level 1 and program has at least five books for each age group	Levels 1 and 2; for Tribes with large centers, each group also has three interest centers
<i>Ratios</i>	Same as licensing requirements	Same as licensing requirements	One less child per provider than in licensing requirements

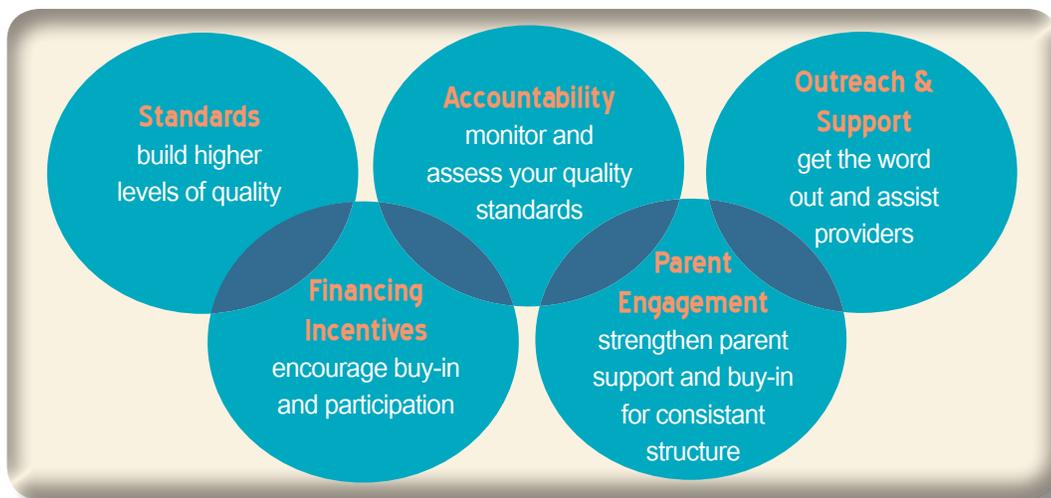
In tribal child care, programs may be required to go through an approval process, be licensed or certified. Level One in a QRIS program can either be the same as your requirements already in place for approved, licensed or certified programs, or can include one or two standards higher than what you currently require. In most States with QRIS programs, participation is voluntary for child care programs.

As Tribal Leaders read these briefs, it is hoped that they will be inspired to begin exploring the possibility of developing their own QRIS programs. Following this first overview brief, subsequent briefs will discuss QRIS relative to small and large Tribes and ideas on how to connect and participate with States that have developed QRIS.

COMPONENTS OF QRIS

A comprehensive QRIS system includes five components. These can be developed on a scale that meets your needs and is doable for you. It depends on your current licensing, certification, or approval requirements, resources, the number and types of child care programs you have, and a commitment from key individuals and organizations in your Tribe to help develop a QRIS program. Whether your child care is mainly relative homes or a combination of homes and centers, each one of these components is important. The key is to customize the scope of each component to fit your specific circumstances. The five components are:

1 Standards: Building upon your current licensing, certification or approval requirements with added steps to higher quality standards. For example, if your rules require providers to complete three hours of CPR/First Aid training in one year, the next level could be an additional training requirement in an area such as child development.



2 Accountability: Monitoring and assessing programs to determine if they are meeting QRIS standards, and rating the programs to assign a specific level in your QRIS program. It also means being able to track the number of programs in QRIS and develop reports on your monitoring and assessment efforts.

3 Outreach & Support: Getting the word out about QRIS to child care programs. Once programs are participating in QRIS, providing them with training, mentoring, and technical assistance to help them succeed.

4 Financing Incentives: Identifying resources to help providers meet higher levels of quality. Making incentives available – whether monetary or other meaningful non-monetary incentives – helps to increase participation in QRIS programs. Some possible examples include: helping providers pay for required training classes, holding a recognition ceremony for providers who have attained higher levels of quality, or paying higher reimbursement rates to programs who participate in QRIS under a tiered reimbursement policy.

5 Parent Engagement: Informing parents about what higher quality means for their children and getting buy-in and support from parents. Educating parents and the public on the importance of quality and impact on children is important to the success of your program.

The following resource may be helpful as you continue to explore QRIS:
Administration for Children and Families; Quality Rating and Improvement System Resource Guide:
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/qrisk/resource/wwwroot/>

