

# Targeted Communities, Programs, and Children in QRIS

QRIS often set goals to include programs that serve children who face challenges, including those with a developmental or physical disability, who are homeless, or who are in foster care. Children from diverse cultures or who are English language learners may also face unique challenges. Additionally, many QRIS target early learning programs that are situated in communities where a high percentage of children who face challenges reside. This fact sheet summarizes how QRIS targets communities and programs that serve at-risk children.

This fact sheet is one of a series about the state of quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) in the United States. In 2016, there were 41 fully operational QRIS in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Data are from the QRIS Compendium (<http://QRIScompendium.org>), a catalog of the QRIS operating in the United States as of October 31, 2016.<sup>2</sup>

## Provisions for Children With Special Needs

More than half of QRIS (21; 51 percent) include indicators that promote inclusion and provisions that allow for the access and care of children with special needs in high-quality programs. How each QRIS defines and designates “special needs” varies, but for most, it includes children with developmental or physical disabilities or educational delays. The ways in which QRIS support children with special needs vary between systems.

**Michigan’s Great Start to Quality** embeds provisions for children with special needs in its curriculum and instruction indicator category by giving providers the opportunity to earn points for having written plans for serving children with disabilities. In the professional development indicator category,

“Annual professional development training attended by all staff includes at least 3 hours focused on cultural competence OR inclusive practices, related to serving children with special needs or disabilities, as well as teaching diverse children and supporting diverse children and their families.”<sup>3</sup>

**Vermont’s STep Ahead Recognition System** recognizes providers with specialized skills in caring for children with special needs in its families and communities indicator category:

“[To earn 2 points] the program adheres to all standards for one point plus the program’s practices and policies support and strengthen families by providing:

<sup>1</sup> State with a QRIS: AR, AZ, CA, CO, DE, FL (3 localities), GA, IA, ID, IL, IN, KY, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MS, MT, NC, ND, NE, NH, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, UT, VA, VT, WA, WI. While most QRIS operate at the state level, three represent separate counties in Florida (Duval, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach). The California QRIS, while represented in the Compendium as one system, is implemented at the county level and does not include all counties in the state.

<sup>2</sup> Data compiled in 2014 and 2015 from <http://QRIScompendium.org> are used to show change in the number of QRIS with specific features. These data are supplemented by an earlier version of the Compendium titled *Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations*, which was released in 2010. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/compendium-of-quality-rating-systems-and-evaluations>. Publicly available details about QRIS standards and implementation and interviews with QRIS administrators also inform the fact sheet.

<sup>3</sup> Great Start to Quality Program Quality Indicators Guidance for Child Care Centers (2017). Retrieved from <http://greatstarttoquality.org/sites/default/files/Provider%20Guidance%20Document%20for%20Centers.pdf>

- A program that is prepared to serve children with special needs including children who have been abused or neglected. The program is either a specialized services provider or a school-operated program that ensures all staff are trained in policies regarding the care of all children including children who are at risk, have disabilities, have been abused or neglected, or who are in the foster care system.”<sup>4</sup>

## Children Who Are Homeless

A few QRIS have indicators that recognize programs that serve homeless children. In addition to Vermont, **Montana’s Best Beginnings STARS to Quality** indicators specifically note:

“Programs must serve a minimum 10% high needs children [including homeless children] in their programs at STAR 1, STAR 2, STAR 3, and STAR 4. STAR 4 (after 3 renewals) and STAR 5 programs must serve a minimum 15% high needs children.”<sup>5</sup>

## Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Slightly more than 40 percent of QRIS (17) include indicators on cultural or linguistic diversity. The most common (5 QRIS; 12 percent) cultural and linguistic diversity indicators are related to providing parents with resources and information in their home languages. Four QRIS (10 percent) have indicators that refer to cultural or linguistic training or communication plans. **In New York’s QUALITYStarsNY** cultural and linguistic diversity shows up in five separate indicators:

- ◆ Program has a plan to ensure that child screenings and assessments are done in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner, including in the appropriate language.
- ◆ Program completes a self-assessment of cultural competence using a tool and uses the results for program improvement.
- ◆ Program staff greets children and parents in the home languages of the children and parents.
- ◆ Program staff is trained to address the needs of children whose home language is not English.
- ◆ Program employs at least one staff member who speaks the home language(s) of the children.<sup>6 6</sup>

## Data About Targeted Communities

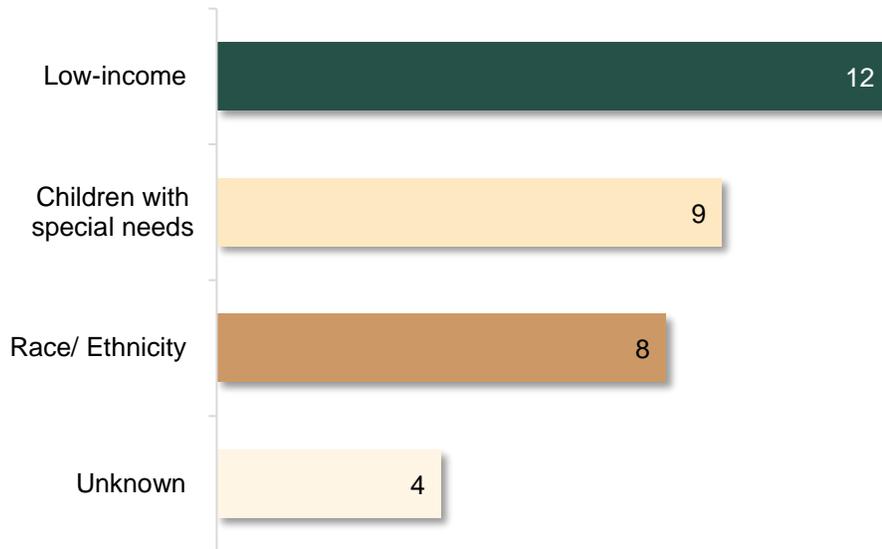
QRIS are increasingly collecting and using data about the reach of the system in providing access to high-quality care for children with unique needs. QRIS commonly collect data about the number of children from low-income families and those with special needs. Figure 1 shows that 12 QRIS (29 percent) collect data about children from low-income families while nine QRIS (22 percent) collect data about children with special needs.

<sup>4</sup> STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS) Standards (2010). Retrieved from [http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/DCF/files/CDD/Docs/Adopted\\_STARS\\_rule\\_FINAL.pdf](http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/DCF/files/CDD/Docs/Adopted_STARS_rule_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> A list of “high needs children” is included in *Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Guidance and Procedures Document* (2017). Retrieved from <http://dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/Childcare/STARS/standardsandguidanceprocedures#la-598126701-stars-standards-guidance-and-procedures>

<sup>6</sup>Guidance for QUALITYstarsNY Center-based Standards (2014). Retrieved from [http://www.qualitystarsny.org/pdf/QUALITYstarsNY-Standards-Center\\_Based.pdf](http://www.qualitystarsny.org/pdf/QUALITYstarsNY-Standards-Center_Based.pdf)

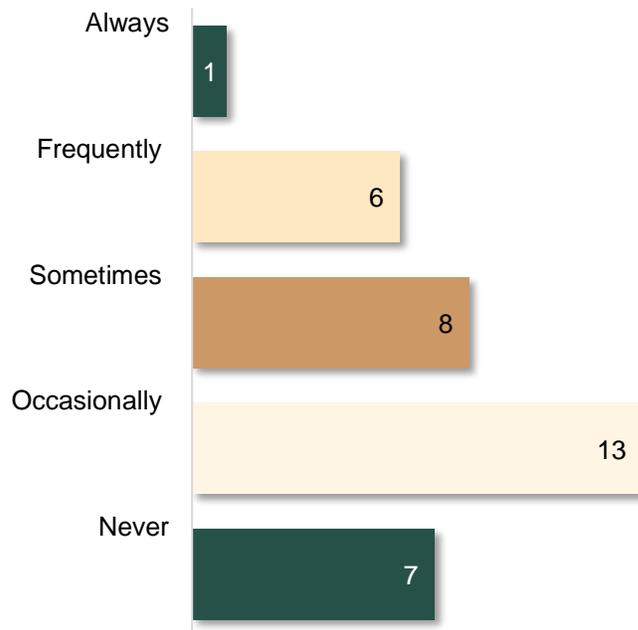
**Figure 1: Number of QRIS Collecting Participation Data for Special Populations, 2016**



Note: N = 41 QRIS. Some are in multiple categories.

Additionally, most QRIS report that they use data they collect about children living in high-need communities. As shown in Figure 2, approximately one-third of QRIS (13) use those data at least occasionally (at least once per year), 8 (20 percent) use it sometimes (3 to 4 times per year), and another 7 (17 percent) use it frequently or always (every month to every week).

**Figure 2: Frequency of QRIS Using Data About Children Living in High-Need Communities, 2016**



Note: N = 41 QRIS

## QRIS Showcase: Maryland's EXCELS

Maryland's QRIS, Maryland EXCELS (Excellence Counts in Early Learning and School-Age Care), features various components that encourage programs and providers to support and serve families and children from diverse backgrounds and with unique needs. One way to do this is by focus on the needs of children who require additional learning or developmental support to ensure that they have access to the same high-quality programs as typically developing children.

To address this goal, changes were made in 2014 to the Maryland EXCELS rating framework. Revisions were made to ensure that indicators to support children with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP), or those with special health needs were incorporated at all five levels of quality rather than just at the highest levels of quality. This expansion was undertaken after reflection about the importance of these standards as a cornerstone of quality and through an engagement process with the Maryland EXCELS stakeholder community to learn about how best to represent standards to support children with unique needs.

Six different content areas that assess programs' early care and education for children with unique needs are now in the indicators for both centers and family child care homes. Some of these are represented within Maryland EXCELS' administrative policies and practices category of indicators, which specify that programs request information on whether the child has an IEP or IFSP upon enrollment, although parents have the choice to decline to provide this information. Maryland EXCELS also features indicators in its developmentally appropriate learning and practices category that specify individualization of interactions to meet the unique needs of all children in the classroom.

Additionally, Maryland EXCELS technical assistance model allows programs to request specialized support on specific criteria, including those on meeting children's unique needs, from a child care resource and referral center specialist or a Maryland EXCELS quality assurance specialist.

Maryland EXCELS also focuses on outreach to communities where there is a high percentage of children who are high needs to encourage and support providers in joining and moving up the levels of EXCELS. Providers serving children whose families receive child care subsidy assistance are required to participate in EXCELS. Outreach to these providers has focused on keeping them in Maryland EXCELS so that parents do not have to leave to find a new provider. The tiered reimbursement model is one main incentive for providers with a published quality rating of level three, four, or five. These programs receive an EXCELS payment as a quality differential of 10 percent to 44 percent more than the regular reimbursement rate. Technical assistance providers emphasize to programs at the lower levels the strong financial benefits of higher reimbursement levels and encourage them to set goals for moving up the levels of quality to where the higher rates become available. Additionally, Maryland EXCELS is doing outreach to families living in culturally diverse communities through advertising at minor league baseball games, radio spots, and other methods in order to promote Maryland EXCELS and quality programs within their neighborhoods.

## References

The Build Initiative & Child Trends. (2016). A Catalog and Comparison of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) [Data System]. Retrieved from <http://qriscompendium.org/>

Mathematica Policy Research Inc. & Child Trends. (2010). Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/compendium-of-quality-rating-systems-and-evaluations>

*This document was developed with funds from Grant # 90TA0002-01-00 for the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, Office of Child Care, and Health Resources and Services Administration, by the National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance in cooperation with Child Trends. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission.*

*The National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance (ECQA Center) supports State and community leaders and their partners in the planning and implementation of rigorous approaches to quality in all early care and education settings for children from birth to school age. The ECQA Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.*

### National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance

9300 Lee Highway  
Fairfax, VA 22031

Phone: 877-296-2250  
Email: [QualityAssuranceCenter@ecetta.info](mailto:QualityAssuranceCenter@ecetta.info)

**Subscribe to Updates**  
[http://www.occ-cmc.org/occannouncements\\_sign-up/](http://www.occ-cmc.org/occannouncements_sign-up/)



ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**