



QUALITYstarsNY Proposal Moves Ahead

A Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is a strategy for a systemic approach to enhancing the quality of services in every early care and learning setting. A QRIS provides a roadmap for program improvement and an accountability measure for progress and funding. It simultaneously supports parents in becoming better educated consumers of early childhood services by providing them with new tools and information.

The Office of Children and Family Services has agreed to fund the pilot of New York State's QRIS, QUALITYstarsNY, out of the \$12 million earmarked over two years for quality initiatives in the federal Child Care Development Block Grant portion of the stimulus package. Private foundations have agreed to provide the funding for the first phase of implementation, provided that there is a state match.

QUALITYstarsNY is a comprehensive initiative that will give the 1.5 million New Yorkers under the age of six opportunities for high-quality early learning experiences. It will set a common approach to early learning policy and funding. Currently, an array of early care and learning programs – child care (including group and family), Head Start, UPK, nursery schools – exists in New York State. Each has its own standards, procedures and policies. Neither parents nor policymakers have any assurance that these various programs are delivering the high-quality services that build healthy brains and bodies and lead to success in school.

Twenty states have responded to similar challenges by developing a QRIS. These voluntary systems rest on a set of common standards, focus public and private resources on continuous quality improvement in all kinds of programs, offer families an easy-to-understand way to judge the relative quality of different programs for their children, and provide policymakers with an efficient accountability measure.

Under QUALITYstarsNY, successful models for quality improvement and professional development that are already working across the state will be united in support of common quality standards. In addition, parents will have an easy-to-understand rating system. All forms of regulated early childhood programs would receive up to five stars based on their levels of quality, along with state support for these higher standards. The QUALITYstarsNY workgroup has not yet made final decisions about how to handle center-based accreditation systems. Please visit <http://www.earlychildhood.org> for more specific information.

QUALITYstarsNY will ensure that funding for early childhood services produces results, providing policymakers with accountability for public investment. By linking funding, professional development and support for quality improvement based on participation in this initiative, programs and funding streams can be unified into a quality early learning system. Ultimately, this system can eliminate the school readiness gap by improving early learning for all children and increasing access for low-income children to higher quality programs.

Another good resource for general information about QRIS is the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) QRIS toolkit at: <http://www.naeyc.org/policy/state/pdf/WebQRSToolkit.pdf>.