

A POLICY POSITION OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

SUBJECT: Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

POLICY STATEMENT:

The quality of early care and education plays an important role in the growth and development of children. A system that accurately and fairly measures quality, and that promotes improving quality through financial incentives such as fair reimbursement rates, will not only improve the quality of early care and education, but will help to educate parents to make informed choices for their children.

Policy Recommendations:

Therefore, the Early Childhood Education Association of Colorado (ECEA) urges the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care to adopt a QRIS with the following guiding principles.

- **Objective:** The criteria for rating must be objective and not subject to a rater's biases or interpretation. Raters must be neutral and ECEA recommends that raters be separate from regulators.
- **Measurable:** The criteria for rating must be measurable. Use of terms such as "awareness" or "emerging" that cannot be easily measured and that are open to multiple interpretations will create difficulties and will not invite provider buy-in.
- **Sustainable:** Improving quality is costly and a funding stream that supports continued quality is necessary for success. One-time bonuses are not adequate to maintain quality levels. ECEA has serious concerns that the current system of county control of reimbursement rates and payment policies in the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program cannot support QRIS for low income providers since there is no State authority to increase funding to providers.
- **Adequate Incentives:** Financial incentives must be adequate to meet the increased cost of higher quality. For example, if the financial reward to meet a higher standard is \$100 and the cost to meet the new requirement is \$200 that is not an incentive to work toward higher standards.

- Diversity in Programming: ECEA supports a QRIS that allows for diverse educational programs and does not force programs into a cookie cutter model.

ECEA also supports a QRIS with the following structure:

- Three Tiered System: Licensing would be the first tier; a nationally accepted accreditation program would be the third tier, and the middle tier would incorporate some standards from accreditation and/or an environment rating scale and higher professional development than the first tier. The first tier would be mandatory and the second and third tiers would be voluntary. ECEA does not support two mandatory tiers. We recommend that the first tier should be a level of quality that meets with licensing expectations and then give providers sufficient time to come into compliance. Providers are looking for consistency in regulations. Requiring one set of standards initially and then requiring a higher set of standards in 3 – 5 years does not provide this consistency that providers want.
- Multiple Pathways: There should be multiple pathways for moving through the QRIS. Rigid requirements like a single accreditation model or single evaluation model can be a barrier to including many quality providers.
- Technical Assistance: ECEA supports free technical assistance and mentorship to be provided by trained early childhood professionals such as resource and referral staff. Technical assistance should be supportive not punitive; it is teaching not scoring.

Since Colorado already has a quality rating system in place, ECEA supports a roll out of a new QRIS that is not piecemeal and accommodates programs with existing quality ratings or accreditation.

In conclusion, ECEA supports a QRIS that is fully funded with appropriate incentives to participate, is based on fair and objective standards that are measurable, provides knowledgeable technical assistance, and respects diverse programming.