

Research Notes

Published by the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National-Louis University

SUMMER 2007

States Efforts to Integrate Measures of Leadership and Management in Quality Rating Systems

Research has repeatedly confirmed that higher quality early care and education leads to better developmental outcomes for children, including school readiness.¹ Based on those findings, states across the country are implementing quality rating systems (QRS) as a strategy to improve the quality of early childhood services.

A quality rating system is a “systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education programs.”² Since the inception of the first QRS in 1998, 15 states have implemented statewide systems and 30 more are in exploratory or design phases. There is wide variation, however, in the program characteristics measured in these quality rating systems. Criteria related to staff qualifications and professional development, parent and family involvement, and the learning environment and curriculum are some of the most frequent quality indicators incorporated into state quality rating systems.³

The McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership conducted a survey to determine how leadership and management practices are being measured in state quality rating systems. Effective leadership and management practices in early care and education programs are crucial for ensuring high-quality outcomes for children and families so inclusion of indicators relating to different facets of program administration is important. Leadership practices help an organization clarify and affirm values, set goals, articulate a vision, and chart a course of action to achieve that vision. Management practices involve the orchestration of tasks and the setting up of systems to carry out the organizational mission.

Sample and Methodology

The sample consisted of the 15 states with statewide quality rating systems in place in July 2007. Twenty-one leadership and management practices included in the *Program Administration Scale* (PAS) were used as criteria for the analysis.⁴ A document review was conducted to learn which of these criteria are included in the quality rating systems of the 15 states. In addition, the inclusion of director qualifications and achievement of center accreditation as proxies for leadership and management practices were also assessed to determine how frequently these indicators were included in quality rating systems. Follow-up calls were made to state QRS administrators to confirm the accuracy of information found in their QRS documents.

Findings

Inclusion of Specific Leadership and Management Practices

Of the 15 states that have implemented a QRS as of July 2007, 11 include at least five of the 21 identified leadership and management practices. As Table 1 on the following page shows, three states (Ohio, Illinois, and Pennsylvania) include the most leadership and management criteria in their quality rating systems. In Ohio and Illinois, the QRS frameworks (Ohio’s Step Up to Quality and Illinois’ Quality Counts) use the PAS as the measure of center-based administrative practices. In Pennsylvania, the QRS framework (Keystone STARS) identifies the specific leadership and management criteria that must be met to achieve a given star level.

Some criteria—facilities management, external communications, technological resources, and use of technology—are seldom included in state quality rating systems. Other criteria are included more consistently. In particular, 14 states include criteria related to family support, 12 states include criteria related to family communications, 11 states include criteria related to staff development and compensation, and 10 states include criteria related to benefits and program evaluation.

Accreditation as a Proxy for Leadership and Management

Fourteen of the 15 states included in the survey recognize national accreditation in their QRS framework. While all national accreditation standards include some criteria of program leadership and management, it is important to note that accreditation standards vary in scope and the accreditation systems vary in their rigor of assessment. States also differ in how accreditation is recognized in their QRS frameworks. In some states, achieving national accreditation automatically qualifies a program for the highest level of the QRS; in other states, a relatively small number of points are awarded for program accreditation.

Continued on back page

Table 1. Leadership and Management Practices Included in Quality Rating Systems

Criteria	CO	DC	IA	IL	KY	MD	MT	NH	NM	NC	OH	OK	PA	TN	VT
Staff orientation			•	•					•		•		•		
Supervision/performance appraisal			•	•	•			•	•		•		•		
Staff development		•	•	•	•	•		•	•		•	•	•		•
Compensation		•		•	•	•		•	•		•	•	•	•	•
Benefits		•		•	•	•		•	•		•		•	•	•
Staffing patterns and scheduling				•		•					•				•
Facilities management				•		•					•				
Risk management			•	•					•		•		•		
Internal communications				•					•		•		•		
Identification of special needs				•				•			•		•		
Assessment in support of learning				•		•			•		•		•		
Budget planning				•				•	•		•		•		•
Accounting practices				•	•				•		•		•		•
Program evaluation			•	•	•	•		•	•		•	•	•		•
Strategic planning				•					•		•		•		
Family communications	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•		
Family support and involvement	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•
External communications				•							•				
Community outreach				•		•					•		•		•
Technological resources				•							•				
Use of technology				•							•				

Staff Qualifications

Staff qualifications are an important indicator of program quality and the different state models reflect this recognition. Virtually all states include some measure of teaching staff qualifications. Only nine states, however, include specific criteria related to director qualifications. Director qualifications comprise general education, specialized training in early childhood education or child development, specialized training in program administration, and management experience. As summarized in Table 2, three states require directors to have a minimum of an associate’s degree at one or more levels in their QRS, seven states include directors’ specialized training in program administration in their criteria, and two states consider administrators’ management experience. Director credentials recognize the specialized knowledge, skills, and experiences that define competency for program administrators. While some states have implemented director credentials, only four states (Iowa, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania) have included it as an indicator of quality in their QRS.

Table 2. Staff Qualifications Included in Quality Rating Systems

	CO	DC	IA	IL	KY	MD	MT	NH	NM	NC	OH	OK	PA	TN	VT
Teaching Staff Qualifications	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Director Qualifications															
– Minimum of AA required	•										•		•		
– Specialized ECE/CD training	•	•			•					•	•		•	•	
– Specialized management training		•	•		•					•		•	•	•	
– Administrative experience										•				•	
– Director credential			•		•					•			•		

Recommendations for Policy and Research

While there is a growing awareness of the importance of including leadership and management practices as well as director qualifications as essential components in quality rating systems, there is little consistency across states about how these criteria should be measured. There is also scant evaluation data across systems about how leadership and management indicators relate to other measures of program quality and child outcomes. Additional research in these areas will help improve consistency and reliability within and across states.

1. Vandell, D. L., & Wolfe, B. (2000). *Child care quality: Does it matter and does it need to be improved?* Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin.
2. Mitchell, A. (2005, July). *Stair steps to quality*. Alexandria, VA: United Way.
3. Kreader, L., & Lawrence, S. (2007, Winter/Spring). States rely on research for structuring QRS. *Child Care Bulletin*, 32, 4-5.
4. Talan, T., & Bloom, P. J. (2004). *Program administration scale: Measuring early childhood leadership and management*. New York: Teachers College Press.

For further information about research conducted by the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, call 800-443-5522, ext. 5060. Funding for the Center’s Research Notes is provided by the McCormick Tribune Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, and the Illinois Department of Human Services. Individuals may photocopy and disseminate freely.