



The Nebraska Quality Rating System Pilot Study

What is a Quality Rating System (QRS)?

Many states now are establishing a way of demarking 2-5 levels of child care quality. Many of them refer to these as “star” systems, similar to how hotels are rated. Most states use ratings based on provider training and education; director training and education (for centers); learning environment; health, safety and nutrition; parent involvement; and administrative practices and policies. Some include licensing criteria. Most consider licensing as “one star” and accreditation as “five stars.”

What is happening with a pilot study QRS in Nebraska?

Nebraska is participating in a 5-state (with Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Mississippi) pilot in two geographic areas per state (one rural and one urban). Each of the 5 states develops its own QRS (though they are fairly similar to one another) and researchers from state universities will measure the “star rating” at the beginning of the project and one year later. We will then have data about how a QRS system could be implemented in our state, how training affects star levels and how providers and parents feel about this system.

What are the potential benefits of a QRS?

States use QRS to develop tiered reimbursement for families receiving subsidies. QRS also helps to create a differentiated market so families pay more for higher levels of quality they seek. Eventually, a QRS gives parents information about quality so they can find the quality they seek.

Who decided what was included in a Nebraska QRS?

A team of representatives from NE Department of Education, Health and Human Services, NeAEYC, Early Childhood Training Center, Regional Training Projects, family and center-based providers, and researchers have been working on the pilot document for the Nebraska QRS. We assume that providers who participate in the pilot will have further comments. We have drawn from QRS from other states.

What are the benefits for providers who participate in the pilot study?

During the pilot study, participating providers can help shape how the QRS might play out in Nebraska. Your feedback will be vital to the how we think about QRS in Nebraska!

Participating providers will be reimbursed for observations and interviews.

Providers can apply for quality improvement grants to move from one star level to another (HHS).

QRS can help providers define what small steps towards higher start levels of quality look like.

Another possibility is that the state will adopt a tiered reimbursement strategy (now there are 3 tiers for unregulated, licensed and accredited for different market rates) so higher level quality will pay off in higher payments.

Providers participating will have documentation for rate changes (e.g., stars).

Providers working hard to develop a quality program have a way to be recognized.

Who can participate in the pilot study?

Any center and home provider in two regions of Nebraska—a 10-county NE Nebraska area: Wayne, Thurston, Madison, Stanton, Cuming, Burt, Platte, Polk, Colfax, Butler, or in Lincoln/Lancaster County (urban area).

When did it begin?

The pilot study began in October 2005. We selected participating providers (both centers and family child care providers) from a pool of willing providers in the two areas in late summer.

What did participating providers do?

In October and November 2005, there were baseline observations done during the program day (typically morning). There was also an interview about the provider's background and training experiences. A few providers and parents were invited to participate in in-depth focus groups. There was payment for each research contribution. Providers were given feedback about their star levels and in specific areas. A year later, the provider will be visited again for another observation and to record training and changes made during the year.

Who is doing this research?

The pilot is being conducted by the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium, and is funded by the Child Care Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Midwest Research Consortium is a team of researchers and program partners from Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. Recently, Mississippi joined the team and provided additional resources to enlarge the rural sample, through their National Center for Rural Early Childhood Learning Initiatives. Researchers are from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Iowa State University, Kansas University, University of Missouri-Columbia, and Mississippi State University. The research in Nebraska is reviewed by the University of Nebraska Institutional Review Board.

Who can I talk to more about this?

In Lincoln: Tracy Gordon (402) 477-0388, Vickie Heyer, (402) 441-7949, or Melody Hobson, (402) 471-0263

In Northeast Nebraska: Susan Strahm, at the Northeast Regional Training Coalition, (402) 287-2061, or Kelly Vanness (402) 564-0815

Overall: Members of the research team: Helen Raikes, (402) 483-7278, Carolyn Edwards, (402) 472-1673, Linda Zinke, (402) 476-2089 at the Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children, Inc., or Jessica LaChere, 1-800-89CHILD or (402) 597-2827, at the Early Childhood Training Center.

The latest update on the QRS Pilot Study can be found at: <http://www.esu3.org/ectc/Qi/qi.htm>