



Using the Child Care and Development Fund to Support a System of Quality Improvement for School-Age Programs

September 2009

Strategy Brief

This strategy brief is intended to provide information and considerations for State child care administrators and other policymakers for improving access to high quality school-age care that reflects the unique needs of school-age children. A systems framework illustrates strategic approaches to using the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and other resources to build a strongly aligned system of quality improvement for children birth through 12 and older, as applicable. The brief is based on a review of the literature and interviews with State child care staff and their school-age partners in seven States: Delaware, Florida, Minnesota, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Oregon. Respondents in these states offer promising approaches to investing time and resources in six system components, including governance and coordination, regulations, program and practitioner standards, program and practitioner supports, financing, and accountability.

Introduction

In schools and communities across the country, some children and youth are well-prepared to learn and they are actively engaged in meaningful activities outside of school. Many of these children have participated in high quality programs, designed with the needs of school-age children in mind, available before and after school, as well as during the summer. Unfortunately, not all children have access to high quality school-age programs, especially children from low-income and minority families.¹ This is the case, despite the fact that research shows that high quality school-age programs can have important benefits for children, families and communities. Children and youth thrive in school-age programs that are well-staffed, offer engaging and varied activities, and are linked to school and family goals and values. Children attending high quality school-age programs are more likely to succeed in school and have stronger social and interpersonal skills. Parents enter or sustain participation in the workforce, and experience less stress when their children are in high quality school-age programs.²

¹ Ann Duffett, Jean Johnson, Steve Farkas, Susanna Kung, and Amber Ott, *All work and no play? Listening to What Kids and Parents Really Want From Out-of-School Time* (Public Agenda Foundation, November 2004).

² Priscilla Little, *The Quality of School-Age Child Care in After-School Settings*, (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, Research-to-Policy Connections, June 2007), No. 7.

What are School-Age Programs?

As the field has grown, the language used to describe “school-age” programs is expanding, and includes terms such as “afterschool”, “out-of-school time”, and “extended learning”. In this brief, we have chosen to use the term “school-age” in order to put an emphasis on the developmental age range that is served in a wide variety of programs and settings, such as before and after school, on weekends, and during summer months. School-age programs are multifaceted, comprehensive initiatives offered in the non-school hours that may have goals focused on academic enrichment and personal growth, and are intended to provide developmentally appropriate, structured supervision for children and youth (ages five to 18) while parents are working or in school/training.

As State leaders face a growing demand for high quality school-age programs, they are increasingly looking to ensure that the investments they make are strategic and effective in meeting the needs of children and families.³ Policymakers are attempting to coordinate with other agencies and organizations serving children and youth to align programs and services with similar goals so they can more effectively achieve expected outcomes. Coordination across multiple agencies and programs can be complex and these efforts take time and persistence as many of the agencies that are now coming together around school-age issues may not have previously collaborated. However, a growing number of State decision-makers are working together to support a *system* of quality improvements to address the needs of a diverse group of school-age practitioners.⁴ A quality improvement system offers a series of interconnected requirements, incentives and supports to help programs to improve quality over time. Similar system-building efforts in early care and education offer both lessons to stakeholders in the school-age field and opportunities to connect and strengthen systems linking early childhood and school-age practitioners.⁵

Drawn from early childhood systems work, the following elements comprise a useful framework for identifying the strengths, opportunities, and gaps in a coordinated system of quality improvement for programs serving children birth through age 12 (or older)⁶:

- **Governance**, or a coordinating body, that is broadly representative of key stakeholders, and serves to establish a common vision and goals; and functions as the nexus of partnerships and collaborative efforts to build a coordinated system.
- **Regulations** that ensure the health and safety of children in care; and provide a baseline standard for quality in all regulated programs.
- **Program and practitioner standards** above those set by licensing regulations that spell out the components of a high quality program, including staff qualifications and core competencies, appropriate curricula, outreach to parents and other key topics. Practitioner standards define the core competencies and benchmarks of high quality practice. Credentials offer practitioners a career pathway by identifying the training and experience requirements that support quality practice.
- **Program and practitioner supports**, including strategies to reach out to practitioners and programs to ensure equitable access to supports; and a cohesive set of professional development and training opportunities to help practitioners to increase their professional skills.
- **Financing to support the system**, including the costs of developing quality standards, providing supports and incentives, and other costs associated with ensuring practitioners have access to quality improvement activities.

³ Daniel Princiotta and Ayeola Fortune, *The Quality Imperative: A State Guide to Achieving the Promise of Extended Learning Opportunities*, (National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers, March 2009).

⁴ Pamela Mendels, *Opportunities in Hard Times: Building Out-of-School Time Systems That Last* (The Wallace Foundation, April 2009).

⁵ Afterschool Investments. *Linking and Learning: Lessons for Afterschool from Early Childhood System Building Efforts*. (Afterschool Investments, October, 2006).

⁶ Ann Mitchell, *Stair Steps to Quality: A Guide for States and Communities Developing Quality Rating Systems for Early Care and Education* (United Way, Success by Six, July 2005).

- **Accountability systems** to collect and use data to track trends over time, and to monitor and continually improve system elements, and to conduct evaluations of initiatives and/or the system.

With these components in place, school-age program practitioners can clearly understand the State’s broad vision for quality and can seek out supports to help them work toward higher levels of quality. Moreover, investments in a system of quality improvement tend to be relatively sustainable over time. While any one investment in improving program quality may be threatened by budget cuts, State policymakers that jointly make investments in a coordinated system can make a stronger case for sustaining services.

Child care administrators, with access to flexible Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) quality set-aside and targeted funds, are uniquely positioned to invest in a quality improvement system for school-age programs that aligns with similar efforts in the early childhood field. In this way, CCDF administrators support access to quality care for the full range of children, birth through age 12, that are eligible for CCDF. Moreover, a short-

term boost in CCDF funding, available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), offers immediate resources to States that can support efforts to strengthen the alignment and integration of quality improvement initiatives.

“By embedding the school-age strategy in the systems approach within the context of a continuum of high-quality programs for children birth through school-age, that helps with the sustainability and not being able to lop it off and segregate it. School-age is protected by being part of a system. If you set up school-age as a separate piece, you run the risk of it being easier to cut.”

— **Pennsylvania** Office of Child Development (OCDEL) staff

The Quality Imperative: A State Guide to Achieving the Promise of Extended Learning Opportunities

A new report by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) highlights the positive impact high-quality Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) have on student success and offers state leaders a blueprint to ensure ELO effectiveness.

Extended learning opportunities provide safe, structured learning environments for students outside the traditional school day. In addition to before-and after-school learning programs, ELOs include summer, evening and weekend activities and appear in a variety of formats, such as tutoring, volunteering, academic support, community service, organized sports, homework help, and art and music programs.

The document urges chiefs, governors, and other state-level leaders, to take a systemic approach to ensuring ELO quality including:

- establishing a team of stakeholders to collectively develop a state quality system
- identifying federal and state funds that can be used to enhance program quality
- establishing program standards
- measuring program impact on student outcomes
- supporting the development of a strong ELO workforce
- providing incentives to drive quality
- facilitating student access to high-quality programs

The report can be accessed online at: <http://www.ccsso.org/publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=374>.

Strategic Approaches to Building a System of Quality Improvement

While States have flexibility in the use of CCDF quality and targeted funds, the current economic climate and the increasing demand by parents for quality school age programs requires that leaders invest wisely. Investments in initiatives that meet the unique needs of school-age children and are aligned with other quality improvements will result in a stronger system for all children and families.

Identified below are six key components necessary to strengthen the system of quality improvement: governance, regulations, program standards, program and practitioner supports, financing and accountability. These components provide an overarching framework to help child care administrators and their partners to make strategic investments in program quality.

I. Governance

As State leaders work to develop a system of school-age care quality improvement, it is critical to involve the range of stakeholders who provide, use and partner with school-age programs in order to have a clear understanding of the strategies and challenges in providing quality school-age care. State child care administrators typically rely on two strategies to inform the development of school-age quality improvement efforts: (1) including school-age perspectives in early care and education coordinating bodies; and (2) partnering with afterschool networks or associations. Many States, such as **Oregon** (see example on page 5) are using a combination of both approaches.

Including School-Age Perspectives in Early Care/Education Coordinating Bodies

Since a number of States already have mature early care and education quality improvement systems and accompanying governance bodies to guide this work, one promising strategy is to incorporate stakeholders from the school-

age field into an existing governance structure. States report a variety of governance structures for informing their investments in an early care and education system. Some have developed advisory councils composed of a wide range of stakeholders with subcommittees to address different aspects of the system. Other states rely on informal coordination among the key agencies supporting young children. Child care administrators may consider inviting stakeholders from the school-age field to be part of these governance structures to help decision-makers think through opportunities to expand or adapt early care quality initiatives to support school-age programs.

Linking to early care and education ensures that States support a seamless system for practitioners caring for children across the age range from birth through age twelve. In States that have adopted this vision, resources can be shared and/or leveraged in a systemic approach applied across the full age range within the purview of CCDF administrators. For example, investing in a quality rating and improvement system⁷ or professional development system that is inclusive of early childhood and school-age programs is a cost-effective strategy to link services and supports for school-age programs to an existing infrastructure. State child care administrators reported that an integrated system is also a way to promote a developmentally consistent message about the importance of access to high quality for all children from birth through school-age.⁸ (See, for example, **Minnesota's** approach described on page 10.)

“Our approach is to try to ensure that many of our programs and initiatives are inclusive of all program types and it pushes us to recognize that children are in a whole range of settings and need services across that range of settings.”

— **Minnesota** Department of Human Services staff

⁷ A quality rating and improvement system is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care programs. See page 16 for further discussion of this topic.

⁸ For more information, see: *Linking and Learning: Lessons for Afterschool from Early Childhood System Building Efforts* (Afterschool Investments Project, October 2006) available online at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/linking_learning.pdf.

Partnering with Afterschool Networks and Associations

Child care administrators report that it is also valuable to coordinate with State networks or associations supporting school-age and youth programs. Partnerships can expand the reach of quality initiatives to programs that do not otherwise have access to the services and supports of state agencies. Many school-based and youth development programs, for example, are exempt from State child care licensing regulations; offer free services not requiring child care subsidies; and are not connected to the training and support offered by resource and referral agencies. Through outreach and partnership with State networks and associations, CCDF-funded quality initiatives can support this broader range of programs.

Since 2002, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation has provided core funding to statewide afterschool networks, which are now funded in 38 States. Networks bring together different stakeholders—from policymakers to grassroots advocates—to consider ways to improve the quality, quantity, and sustainability of school-age programs in their State. Afterschool networks are a critical resource to State child care administrators and other key stakeholders for achieving consen-

sus and buy-in among the various players in the State around quality improvement strategies.

State child care administrators are key partners in many afterschool networks; and in some States, such as **Oregon** and **Minnesota**, CCDF quality dollars have provided the matching funds required to draw down Mott Foundation funding. Afterschool networks are spearheading quality improvement efforts in many States, ranging from developing school-age professional development systems to program quality standards.⁹

In addition to the statewide afterschool networks, other potential partners may include State associations of school-age programs affiliated with the National AfterSchool Association, or statewide coalitions focused on coordinating services for youth.

“Much of the disparity in coordination is due to lack of a single Statewide policy platform supporting afterschool programs. OregonAsk [Oregon’s statewide afterschool network] is working to fill that gap.”

– **Oregon** State child care administrator

Oregon’s Advisory Groups Informing Investments in Program Quality

Oregon relies on a number of governance and advisory groups that work together to support decision-making around investments in child care and school-age initiatives. This coordinated approach incorporates school-age care into the broader system of early care and education, while also making connections to initiatives serving youth that are outside the purview of the State’s child care administrator.

Oregon’s *Childhood Care and Education Coordinating Council (CCECC)* is a collaborative ad hoc partnership that provides input on investments in early care and education in the State. CCECC’s members include State agency staff, child care provider associations, and parent and foundation representatives. The Council is charged with developing the biennial CCDF State plan; creating a State child care system infrastructure; coordinating programs and service delivery; and creating and prioritizing funding for new projects. Oregon’s statewide afterschool network, *Oregon AfterSchool for Kids (ASK)*, is a participant in CCECC and ensures that school-age care issues are represented.

Oregon ASK promotes collaboration among more than 25 public and private partners to address common issues and concerns across all out-of-school time services - child care, recreation, education and youth development. The State’s child care administrator is a member of Oregon ASK’s steering committee and provides CCDF quality dollars to support the network’s activities. The network has recently led Statewide quality initiatives, including school-age program standards, youth worker competencies, and professional development initiatives.

⁹ For more information, see: National Network of Statewide Afterschool Networks, available online at: <http://www.statewideafterschoolnetworks.net/>.

II. Regulations

Licensing regulations provide a baseline of health and safety requirements that child care practitioners must meet in order to operate in a given State.¹⁰ While school-age care is typically included in State child care regulations, States have primarily developed regulations with a focus on early care and education practitioners. Several States have recently revisited licensing requirements around staff qualifications, facilities, and other areas with an understanding of how school-age care differs from early care. For example, while States often require licensed centers to hire staff that have taken coursework or earned credentials in early child development, some States now allow licensed school-age programs to hire staff with professional backgrounds in elementary education, recreation or other relevant fields. For more information on School-Age Adaptations to Child Care Licensing, see text box at right.¹¹

Many States exempt school-age programs from licensing requirements if they operate for limited hours, take place at public school facilities, or do not charge a fee. Since regulation is often the gateway for programs to other quality supports, including quality rating systems and professional development offerings, license-exempt school-age programs may be inadvertently left out of a State quality improvement system. In an effort to build a system of quality improvement, State leaders may need to consider if exemptions are merited or find alternative pathways for exempt programs to participate in quality initiatives.

Delaware's recent experience (see pages 6-7 below) provides an example of a State that removed licensing exemptions for part-time programs and subsequently developed new regulations for school-age programs.

School-Age Adaptations to Child Care Licensing

Currently, 14 States have separate licensing regulations for school-age programs, while nearly all (46) States have requirements for school-age care within their licensing requirements for child care centers. For more information, see Appendix I, *Quick Facts on School-Age Care: Trends in Quality Improvement or Promoting Quality in Afterschool Programs through State Child Care Regulations*, available online at: <http://www.nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/childcareregs.pdf>.

“School-age activities complement early childhood activities in Delaware. That is our strength. Our school-age capacity grants, competencies, etc. are modeled after systems for early childhood. It is one big system with developmentally appropriate activities for different age groups. It makes it easier for legislators and staff when we have a consistent message.”

– **Delaware** Department of Education staff

Delaware's Licensing Regulations for School-Age Programs

Delaware revised their licensing regulations for all age groups served in centers in 2007 and in family child care homes in 2009. This followed a 2002 legislative decision to remove an exemption for part-time care, such that many previously exempt school-age programs would now need to meet State regulations.

To engage the input of practitioners and help them to understand the implications of these changes, the Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families (DSCYF) held focus groups in each region of the State, coordinated with Delaware's Afterschool Alliance (a statewide afterschool network), and convened a school-age subcommittee with representation from various types of school-age care to provide input to the department.

(continued on page 7)

¹⁰ The 2007 Child Care Licensing Study, National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center and National Association for Regulatory Administration, available online at: http://www.naralicensing.org/associations/4734/files/2007%20Licensing%20Study_full_report.pdf.

¹¹ For more details on this strategy, see: *Promoting Quality in Afterschool Programs through State Child Care Regulations* (Afterschool Investments, June 2006) available online at: <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/childcareregs.pdf>.

Delaware’s Licensing Regulations for School-Age Programs *(continued from page 6)*

As a result of this outreach to practitioners, the DSCYF made a number of key adaptations to regulations to support school-age programs. For example, new licensing regulations include:

- Age-appropriate health and safety requirements for school-age children (ranging from playground equipment to health and nutrition guidelines);
- Staff qualifications for multi-site school-age program supervisors, in addition to site coordinators, reflecting a finding that many school-age programs in Delaware operate multiple sites.
- Training requirements that accommodate staff members’ part-time schedules.

Delaware leaders are phasing in a requirement that each licensed program site is led by a professional with an associate’s degree in one of several relevant fields.

Delaware’s State policy makers revised school-age licensing requirements in alignment with other initiatives led by the Delaware Afterschool Alliance to strengthen the professional development system for school-age program staff. For example, the Alliance (which is funded with CCDF quality dollars as well as other public and private resources) created a school-age professional certificate based on key competencies of qualified staff and an accompanying 63 hour certificate course. The Alliance is now working to develop an articulation agreement among colleges in the State to implement the certificate. Completing the certificate will help school-age practitioners meet the new staff qualifications requirements in State licensing regulations. As Delaware seeks to expand the career pathways for school-age practitioners, state leaders are considering adding a competency demonstration, through either direct observation or portfolio, to the certificate program. With the competency demonstration in place, this certificate would be considered a professional credential for school-age professionals.

The new regulations are also aligned with the Delaware Stars quality rating and improvement system, which includes separate standards for school-age programs. Licensed school-age programs qualify for “Star 1” in the state’s five-star tiered quality system.

III. Program and Practitioner Standards

Research-based program standards are criteria that a State uses to assess the quality of school-age programs.¹² While licensure provides a baseline for what programs need to have in place in order to operate safely, program quality standards offer specific benchmarks for programs to achieve higher levels of quality. Program standards typically address staff qualifications, appropriate curricula, outreach to parents and other key areas indicated in the research to improve program quality. Similarly, professional core competencies define standards for practitioners and offer an important way to assess and guide training for the school-age workforce as they increase their knowledge and training to provide higher quality programs.

Program Standards

Several States are developing voluntary program quality standards to guide practice and inform

training. In some States, the program standards are accompanied by a self-assessment tool that school-age programs can use to voluntarily assess and improve the quality of care that they provide. For example, **Florida** recently used the CCDF school-age quality set-aside to support its statewide afterschool network in developing voluntary quality standards (highlighted on page 9).

The benchmarks associated with program accreditation offer yet another set of standards to guide program quality improvement. Several States have used CCDF funding to support

“The Florida Afterschool Network (FAN) is doing a lot to bridge silos and put all the players in the room. It is because of their work that we connected with the right person at 21st Century Community Learning Center. We give credit to FAN for supporting a growing infrastructure supporting school-age care.”

– **Florida** State child care administrator

¹² Ann Mitchell, 2005.

programs in achieving accreditation often through the National Council on Accreditation (COA)¹³ or through a State accreditation body. (See text box, Accreditation and School-Age Programs for a list of States engaged in this strategy, as well as the description of **Minnesota's** quality investments on page 18.) In some cases, programs that are nationally accredited can automatically reach the highest level of a State quality rating and improvement system (QRIS).

Practitioner Standards

Research increasingly demonstrates the importance of school-age practitioners' education and training in supporting quality programs. In order to effectively support school-age professionals, many States are identifying core knowledge and competencies (i.e. what every practitioner should know and be able to do) to provide high-quality school-age programs.¹⁴ Core knowledge and competencies can serve as an important basis for the other components of the professional

Accreditation and School-Age Programs

A growing number of States are encouraging school-age programs to become accredited. There are at least 16 Statewide school-age initiatives that help programs achieve accreditation:

- **Arizona** — Quality Programs Initiative
- **Arkansas** — Arkansas School-Age Quality Initiative
- **Connecticut** — Connecticut Charts-A-Course (CCAC)
- **Florida** — Florida Afterschool Network (FAN)
- **Kansas** — The Kansas Enrichment Network (KEN)
- **Michigan** — Model Standards for Out-of-School Time Programs
- **Minnesota** — Accreditation Facilitation Project (formerly the Program Improvement and Accreditation Grant through MNAEYC/MNSACA)
- **Missouri** — CCDF Quality Dollars for Afterschool
- **Missouri** — Missouri Afterschool State Network (MASN)
- **New Hampshire** — PlusTime New Hampshire
- **North Carolina** — North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs
- **South Dakota** — Move to Quality Initiative
- **Texas** — The Texas Afterschool Association (TAA)
- **Washington** — Improving Program Quality (IPQ) Project
- **West Virginia** — Staff Training and Registry System (STARS)¹⁵

On the national level, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has a voluntary accreditation system to set professional standards for early childhood education programs that includes school-age children ages five to eight. <http://www.naeyc.org/accreditation/>.

The national Council on Accreditation (COA's) accreditation process for afterschool programs is based on 36 "keys" to quality which include both standards for both program activities and administrative policies. The COA After School Standards were developed in partnership with the National AfterSchool Association (NAA). <http://www.coaafschool.org/>.¹⁶

¹³ In 2008, the school-age accreditation process was transferred from the National Afterschool Association to the Council on Accreditation (COA). For more information, see: <http://www.coaafschool.org/>.

¹⁴ National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center, *Elements of a Professional Development Center for Early Care and Education: A Simplified Framework*, available online at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/goodstart/pd_section2b.pdf.

¹⁵ For more information, see: Afterschool Investments Project, State Profiles, available online at: <http://www.nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/results.php?category=20&state>.

¹⁶ The National AfterSchool Association managed this accreditation process until 2008, when it was transferred to COA.

Florida's Standards for Quality School-Age Programs

At the request of the Florida Afterschool Network (FAN), Florida's child care administrator dedicated school-age quality targeted funds toward the development and dissemination of school-age program quality standards. Florida's child care administrator reflected that, due to budget challenges, the Office of Early Learning is not able to fund as many school-age programs as are needed in the State. Instead, a targeted investment in quality standards is intended to bring attention to the importance of quality school-age care and help build capacity from the ground up. Additionally, the development of school-age program standards offered an opportunity to align standards across the age ranges served by CCDF since the Office of Early Learning had already developed standards for programs serving children from birth- kindergarten.

A steering committee, which includes the Office of Early Learning and partners from the FAN, the State Department of Education and the Department of Children and Families, worked together to develop the standards. Their efforts were also informed by practitioner input and national research on program quality.

The standards were approved in 2008 and distributed to the Early Learning Coalitions and school-age stakeholders across the State, serving as a guide to quality for school-age programs. The Office of Early Learning is partnering with FAN to roll out a train-the-trainer module with the Early Learning Coalitions. The Coalitions will use the standards to inform the training and technical assistance offered to school-age programs. In addition, FAN is developing a self-assessment checklist that program staff can use to gauge their progress in meeting the standards.

For more information, see the Florida Afterschool Network's website at: <http://www.myfan.org/>.

development system. (See, for example, **Missouri's** core competencies described on page 10.) The Afterschool Professional Development Working Group, a group of national experts convened by the C. S. Mott Foundation, has recently developed a set of core competencies for program leaders that may inform state efforts.¹⁷

In addition, several States are also developing a school-age professional credential. While the early care field has an established national credential for professionals [the Child Development Associate (CDA)], at least 11 States have recently

developed a professional credential for school-age care practitioners.¹⁹ (See text box below as well as the **Missouri** example on page 10 for more information.) Typically, a State outlines the types of trainings, number of training hours, and continuing education requirements required to obtain a professional credential.

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems

A growing number of States are developing Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) for early care and education programs, in which the State sets standards for programs and

School-Age Practitioner Credentials

Credentials are certifications that recognize when an individual has fulfilled a set number of relevant professional trainings. While the early care field has an established national credential for professionals [the Child Development Associate (CDA)], at least 11 States¹⁸ have developed a professional credential for school-age and youth care providers. For more information, see Appendix I, Quick Facts on School-Age Care: Trends in Quality Improvement, or materials from Afterschool Investments' *Professional Development Audio Conference: Creating a Credential for a School-Age Workforce*, available online at: <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/tactivities.html>.

¹⁷ Afterschool Professional/Staff Development Working Groups, *Core Competencies for Afterschool Educators*, (The C.S. Mott Foundation, March 2009), available online at: http://www.afterschoolprofessional.info/images/Mott_CC_web.pdf.

¹⁸ National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center, *State Professional Development System Credentials for Individuals* (NCCIC, August 2008), available online at: <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/pd-credentials.html>. Also see: Program Quality, Michigan Afterschool Partnership, available at: <http://miafterschool.org/program-quality/certificate-credentials/>; The Youth Development Credential, Missouri School-Age Community Coalition, available at: <http://www.mosac2.org/tra/index.htm>; and Wisconsin, Early Childhood Career Guide, available at: http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/career_g/Licensure.html.

¹⁹ For more information, see: *Setting the Stage for a Youth Development Associate: A National Review of Professional Credentials for the Out-of-School Time Workforce* (National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2006), available online at: http://www.ncchildcare.org/NIOST_YDA%20Credential06.pdf. Also see: *Building Professional Development Systems for the Afterschool Field*, (Afterschool Investments Project, September 2007), available online at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/pd_systems.pdf.

practitioners, and offers incentives, supports and recognition to reach higher levels of quality.²⁰ Some States have embedded school-age program standards in quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) or developed separate standards for school-age practitioners participating in QRIS. Of States with a QRIS in place, at least nine States

have made key school-age care adaptations to the standards that underlie the rating system.²¹ (See Appendix I on page 21 for more information.) For example, a State may require that school-age programs at higher tiers align their curriculum with K-12 education standards, while early care programs at the same tier are aligning their curriculum

Missouri's Program and Practitioner Standards

With strong leadership from the Missouri Afterschool Network and support from CCDF quality funds and other public and private resources, Missouri offers a comprehensive and aligned set of program and practitioner standards for school-age practitioners. While developed by leaders in the school-age field, quality standards are part of a broader system supporting quality for the full range of child care and youth program practitioners. Key program and practitioner standards include the following:

- **Afterschool Program Standards** – The Missouri Afterschool Network developed afterschool program standards with funding from the C.S. Mott Foundation. Relying on several existing research-based standards, the standards serve as a foundation for a self-assessment tool to guide program improvement. The Network uses a train-the-trainer model to help programs understand how to use this tool.
- **Core Competencies for youth professionals** – Missouri's Opportunities in a Professional Education Network (OPEN) receives CCDF funding and funds from other State agencies to serve as an “umbrella organization” for career development in early childhood and school-age fields. In this coordinating role, OPEN partnered with afterschool networks in both Missouri and Kansas to develop core competencies for school-age youth professionals in both States. The competencies include eight content areas and can be used to assess professionals' skill level and to inform the delivery of training
- **Youth Development Credential** – Missouri's School-Age Community Coalition (an association of school-age programs) offers a youth development credential that recognizes school-age care practitioners for completing 120 clock hours of relevant professional trainings. This is designed as an alternative certification to the Child Development Association (CDA) used in the early care and education field.

OPEN also takes the lead in implementing Missouri's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), currently in a pilot implementation stage. The QRIS has a separate set of quality standards for school-age programs, which incorporate both the Core Competencies and the voluntary Afterschool Program Standards. For example:

- At Tier 1 in the rating system, program directors must have a copy of the Core Competencies and Program Standards available to staff.
- At Tier 2, program directors hold annual staff trainings in the Core Competencies and Program Standards.
- At Tier 3, the Core Competencies are included in professional development plans for staff and Program Standards guide a program's self-assessment process.

In addition, the rating system uses an “intentional teaching” checklist to assess participating programs. This checklist is drawn from the afterschool program standards.

The staff qualifications requirements in the QRIS also recognize the Youth Development Credential as one route toward meeting quality standards.

For more information, see the websites of OPEN (<https://www.openinitiative.org/>), the Missouri Afterschool Network (<http://www.moasn.org/>) and the Missouri School-Age Community Coalition (<http://www.mosac2.org/>).

²⁰ Recent evaluations find that several QRIS systems are improving measures of program quality and helping parents to make more informed choices about child care. For more information, see: National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center, *QRS and the Impact on Quality in Early and School-Age Care Settings* (NCCIC, February 2009), available online at: <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/qrs-impactqualitycc.html>.

²¹ Research conducted by the Afterschool Investments Project (May 2009).

with State early learning guidelines. Other States include school-age adaptations for requirements around ratio and group size, staff qualifications and training requirements, or use the School-Age Environment Rating Scale (SACERS) to assess program quality. Quality standards for both programs and practitioners are most effective when they are part of a coordinated quality improvement system and inform the development of trainings and program supports (See section III).

Missouri, for example, has developed a quality rating system that integrates both program and practitioner standards for the school-age field. (For more information, see box on page 10.)

IV. Program and Practitioner Supports

Another critical piece of a quality improvement system is a set of supports for programs and practitioners to help them to reach higher standards of quality. School-age practitioners in various program settings have diverse needs. Supports (such as coaches and mentors) and incentives (such as grants and compensation) help all programs to successfully access and complete the requirements of quality improvement systems.

Supports to Programs

Many States use CCDF quality set-aside and targeted funds to support technical assistance and training to program staff. One innovative strategy is to use CCDF funding to create regional capacity to support to school-age care programs in meeting higher levels of quality. As described on page 12, **Ohio** funds regional resource and referral agencies to provide professional develop-

ment, assessments, and technical assistance for school-age practitioners.

In States that have QRIS in place, program supports may include technical assistance and training opportunities designed to help programs to advance to higher tiers in the rating system. For example, technical assistance providers can work with school-age programs to develop an individualized quality improvement plan that helps them to advance toward a higher quality tier. In many cases, States also provide financial incentives to encourage programs move to higher levels of quality.

In addition to supporting technical assistance and training, another common State strategy is investing CCDF quality funds in small grants to school-age programs that assist them in becoming accredited or otherwise support quality improvement efforts.

Supports to Practitioners

Building on core knowledge and competencies, States may offer relevant and accessible trainings that help practitioners to increase their professional skills. In some cases, States are developing a Teacher Education and Compensation Helps

“It is a thoughtful process and [school-age care] is not an afterthought. You have to make a conscious effort to be inclusive, particularly with school-agers who are not receiving full-day, full-year, full-payment subsidized dollars.”

– **Ohio** State child care administrator

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems: Adaptations for School-Age Programs

Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) provide a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age programs. Nine States have made key school-age adaptations to their rating systems.²² For more information, see Appendix I, Quick Facts on School-Age Care: Trends in Quality Improvement, or *Using Quality Rating Systems to Promote Quality in Afterschool Programs*, available online at: http://www.nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/qrs_afterschool.pdf.

²² Research conducted by the Afterschool Investments Project (May 2009).

Ohio's Investments in the Capacity of Regional Resource and Referral Agencies

Ohio's child care administrator has used the CCDF school-age set-aside to fund Ohio's 12 child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agencies to provide support to school-age programs. While guided by the State's goals for quality, CCR&Rs tailor their services to each community needs. CCR&Rs in Ohio also have the opportunity to build local partnerships and leverage local funding to support school-age program quality. Services include: technical assistance, assessments using the School-Age Care Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS), professional development, and efforts to build the capacity of school-age care programs. The State supports similar work in the CCR&Rs for infant/toddler care and early literacy.

CCR&Rs also provide operational support to Ohio's Afterschool Network. As a result, CCDF funding is considered part of the match that leverages funding for the Network from the C.S. Mott Foundation. In recent years, afterschool specialists staffed at the CCR&Rs have coordinated with the network around implementing State-level quality improvement initiatives, including:

- Development of school-age specific professional development opportunities aligned with the State quality rating system; and
- School-age program quality guidelines that will inform technical assistance offered in all regions of the State.
- Funding development of core knowledge and competencies for afterschool professionals.

For more information, see: <http://www.ohioafterschoolnetwork.org/> and www.occrra.org.

(TEACH) Early Childhood® scholarship (a national model offering incentives to practitioners for gaining additional education) specifically for school-age program staff. For example, **Pennsylvania** piloted a TEACH scholarship this year specifically for school-age program staff who are working toward a school-age professional credential, youth work certificate, or other related degrees. In other cases, States may set up mentoring programs to support new program staff, provide coaches or mentors, or develop individualized professional development plans.

In States with school-age credentials, State leaders may work with local colleges to develop coursework available on site or through online distance learning opportunities. Some states provide support for tuition and books; as well as supplies or other materials to enhance the learning environment to address the developmental needs of children and youth.

V. Financing to Support the System

States use the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) to support programs to meet the needs of children and youth for care during non-school hours while their families work. In the federal fiscal year 2007, Federal and State combined

expenditures for this program totaled over \$10 billion.²³ While the majority of these funds directly support child care subsidies, States are required to set aside a minimum of four percent of their CCDF grant to support initiatives to improve the quality and accessibility of child care, consumer education, and activities supporting parental choice. In FY2007, States dedicated over \$580 million or almost six percent of all CCDF funds to these initiatives. ARRA provides an additional \$2 billion for CCDF to be obligated in fiscal years 2009 and 2010. The requirement to spend four percent of funds on quality and accessibility initiatives also applies to these funds.

In addition to the resources available through the four percent set-aside, Congress also annually appropriates targeted funds to States that support specific quality improvement activities. Consistent with prior years, in FY2008, States had access to the following funds:

- \$18 million to support school-age care quality activities, as well as resource and referral initiatives.
- \$167 million to supplement the four percent set-aside funds and support general quality improvement initiatives.

²³ 2007 CCDF Expenditure Data, Child Care Bureau website, available online at: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/data/expenditures/07acf696/exp_detailed.htm.

- \$96 million to support quality improvement activities for infants and toddlers.²⁴

CCDF investments are significant, representing the largest Federal funding source to improve child care access and quality for children and families. States have discretion in how they choose to allocate these various streams of funding to meet their specific needs and priorities. State child care administrators looking to invest in school-age quality improvement can do so most effectively when guided by a strategic financing framework. This means that the coordinating or governing bodies supporting school-age quality need to first determine what it is that they want to finance to meet the needs of providers and families.

Financing for quality improvement systems generally fall into four categories related to infrastructure needs, access and incentives, professional development and training, and monitoring and accountability. Most States already have pieces of a system of quality improvement in place for school-age programs, so leaders can start by assessing the gaps that need to be filled to implement a comprehensive system. For example, does the State need to invest in revisions of licensing regulations? Do State leaders need to develop

quality standards for school-age programs and/or practitioners? Does the State need to develop a school-age care credential? Are additional training and technical assistance opportunities needed to meet the needs of a broader range of programs or to support higher levels on the career pathways?

Once State leaders are clear on what they want to finance, the next step in strategic financial planning are to estimate the costs of implementation and whether those cost are short-term; for example, an investment in developing quality standards, or ongoing costs, such as technical assistance and training. When costs have been identified, child care administrators can assess how to access the other funding sources in the State that might be tapped or used in ways that align with the system.²⁵ Finally, child care administrators can look to innovative strategies using CCDF to coordinate with other funders or to leverage other resources to support quality programs.

Partnering with Other Funders

CCDF targeted and quality funds are a significant and flexible source of funding for quality initiatives, but it is likely that other school-age program funders in the State are also investing in program quality. Child care administrators may look for

New Resources to Help State and Local Leaders Understand the Costs of Quality Out-of-School Time Programs

The Cost of Quality Out-of-School-Time Programs is one of the nation's largest and most rigorous cost studies on OST, with analysis of data from 111 programs in six cities (Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Denver, New York and Seattle). All of the programs in the study had key characteristics associated with quality OST services, including high attendance rates and high staff/youth ratios.

The Online Cost Calculator is an interactive tool designed to help decision-makers better understand the costs of funding OST efforts. Modeled on calculators used in other fields, users input their unique characteristics of the OST program they desire information on, such as age groups served, program content, location, operator, schedule of operation, size, and staff/youth ratio, and the calculator generates cost estimates to guide their financial planning and operation.

Investments in Building Out-of-School Time Systems: A Six City Study (forthcoming) explores the goals, strategies, and activities commonly pursued in building citywide OST systems in six cities: Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Denver, New York and Seattle, including resources (monetary and in-kind) associated with these efforts; and the variety of funding sources that can be tapped for system development and maintenance.

For further information, see: <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/Out-Of-SchoolLearning/Pages/default.aspx>.

²⁴ Child Care and Development Fund Fact Sheet (Child Care Bureau website, November 2008), available online at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/ccdf/factsheet.htm>.

²⁵ *Sustainability Planning Workbook* (The Finance Project, 2003). For more information, see <http://www.financeproject.org/special/engage/workbook.cfm>.

opportunities to partner with other funders and strategically coordinate CCDF set-aside and targeted funds with other funders' resources that support quality to make more efficient use of available funding. Partnering can ensure that States make efficient use of existing resources and also help to expand the reach of CCDF-funded quality initiatives to a broader array of programs.

State education agencies, for example, receive federal funding to support 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC) for school and community-based school-age programs. As with CCDF, States receive set-aside funding from this grant to support quality assessment and improvement activities. Other significant funding sources supporting school-age programs include the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) for youth employment training and preparation and TANF dollars to fund activities for older youth or other prevention programs. Appendix II provides a summary of several of the major federal grant programs supporting school-age programs. In some communities, State, local and private funds also play a significant role in supporting school-age programs.

Several States have begun to coordinate the training opportunities offered through different funding streams. For example:

- **Pennsylvania** has coordinated resources from CCDF and 21CCLC to support joint training opportunities for practitioners receiving subsidies as well as those receiving 21CCLC grants
- **Missouri's** OPEN (see example on page 10) maintains a training registry of experienced trainers in various fields and is developing a training calendar. These initiatives are designed to help professional to identify relevant trainers and professional development opportunities across various fields and sponsoring programs.

Leveraging New Resources

As a relatively substantial and stable source of revenue, States can use CCDF targeted and quality funds to provide start-up and ongoing support

to school-age care quality initiatives. By making strategic investments, States have an opportunity to use these funds to leverage additional resources to support a system of quality improvement for early childhood through school-age care. For example, child care administrators can apply for grants where CCDF quality and targeted funds can serve as required matching funds. Several States reported using CCDF to leverage private funds to support a TEACH scholarship that provides incentives for school-age professionals to receive additional education.

In other cases, CCDF leverages additional public and private investments in State quality initiatives. For example, **Delaware** has used CCDF quality funds to contribute to the Statewide afterschool network - the Delaware Afterschool Alliance. This funding leverages support from the Mott Foundation and other public and private funds. With support from a range of funding sources, the Alliance took the lead in developing a school-age competencies and a professional certificate. Delaware also used CCDF quality funds to support a Statewide public-private effort to build Delaware Stars, a quality rating and improvement system for practitioners serving all age groups.

Finally, child care administrators in States with regional technical assistance specialists focused on school-age care, such as **Ohio** (see description on page 12), report that having a regional technical assistance infrastructure provides an opportunity to leverage local resources to support school-age care quality, including materials and space for trainings. In **Florida**, where the State requires that local Early Learning Coalitions provide a local match, the State has used CCDF quality dollars to support a contract with Western Kentucky University to help local coalitions identify funding opportunities and write grants.

Planning for Sustainability

A number of school-age leaders, at the state and local level, are engaged in sustainability planning—a comprehensive process that helps leaders establish a clear vision, identify measurable results, craft a strategic financing plan, and

identify a broad base of community support.²⁶ State child care administrators are important partners in these efforts because of the relative flexibility and stability of CCDF quality and school-age targeted funds. For example, **Ohio** has recently engaged in intensive sustainability planning with the 21st Century Community Learning Center programs, and implementation of the plan is likely to have a ripple effect on the community-based school-age programs they collaborate with. Some states embed sustainability planning in other quality improvement initiatives, for example, Missouri requires programs at higher tiers in the QRIS to have a sustainability plan. Other states, such as **Florida, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming**, are planning similar efforts to ensure that funding for school-age programs is sustainable over time.

One key piece of sustainability planning is a thorough understanding of the fiscal resources available to support school-age care access and quality. **Ohio**²⁷, **Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Colorado** are among the states that have conducted a fiscal mapping study to identify available resources for school-age programs in order to identify opportunities to maximize resources and increase sustainability of programs.

VI. Accountability

As with any State investment, it is critical to regularly monitor and assess effectiveness of investments and to collect and track data on the use and effectiveness of individual initiatives as well as the system of quality improvements. Beginning with a clear vision of quality improvement and identified goals determined as part of a strategic planning process, States will determine what outcomes they want to achieve through a quality improvement system.

State leaders will then look to strategies to assess quality initiatives and mechanisms for collecting

and sharing data that can inform future investments. In some cases, State leaders may also choose to commission an independent evaluation to understand the effectiveness of a particular strategy or the system.

Quality Assessment

Many States are already using quality assessment tools to support individual program improvement. (See Section II.) In addition to informing program-level improvement strategies, data from quality assessments can provide powerful State-level information about the effectiveness of quality improvement strategies. For example, in **Ohio** and **Pennsylvania** (see examples on pages 12 and 16) regional technical assistance providers administer the School-Age Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS) with programs before and after providing technical assistance.²⁸ Leaders in both States are currently analyzing SACERS data to determine the impact of their quality improvement strategies on program quality.

While the SACERS is a common assessment tool used in the child care field, some States and communities rely on other assessment tools drawn from the youth development field, such as the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) developed by High Scope.²⁹ This reflects new research on the predictive validity of measures of quality for school-age programs and the interest of policy makers in ensuring that data to inform decision-making has a well-researched link to specific youth outcomes.³⁰ In addition, as outlined in section II, some States have developed their own program self-assessment tools.

Data Collection Mechanisms

State leaders may be challenged to fully understand the connections between quality improvement strategies and outcomes if relevant information and data is maintained in disconnected

²⁶ Kate Sandel, *Snapshots of Sustainability: Profiles of Successful Strategies for Financing Out-of-School Time Programs* (The Finance Project, September 2007).

²⁷ The executive summary of Ohio's "Map of Resources for Extended Learning Opportunities" is available at <http://occr.aaffiniscape.com/associations/10110/files/02-16-09%20S3%20Resource%20Mapping%20Exec%20Summary%20-%20FINAL%20for%20distribution.pdf>.

²⁸ SACERS is an adaptation of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and is based on criteria of developmental appropriateness for school-age children. For more information, see: *Development of the SACERS*, available online at: <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ECERS/>.

²⁹ For a detailed discussion of different assessment tools, see: *Measuring Youth Program Quality, A Guide to Assessment Tools, 2nd Edition*, available online at: http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/files/MeasuringYouthProgramQuality_2ndEd.pdf.

³⁰ Child Trends, *What We Know and Don't Know About Measuring Quality in Early Childhood and School-Age Care and Education Settings* (Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation Issue Brief #1, May 2009).

data collection systems. For example, States may maintain records of technical assistance provided to programs separately from quality assessment data.

By integrating the various systems used to track information on quality initiatives, States can monitor how programs participating in quality improvement strategies through a variety of criteria, including:

- SACERS;
- program's status in a QRIS;
- accreditation; and/or
- key program staff earning a professional credential.

While it can be a challenging endeavor to coordinate data stored in different locations, **Pennsylvania** has taken a lead in integrating data collection in one place. (See example below.)

Data collection systems may be even more powerful if they can link to information on student participation in school-age programs or even data on children and youth outcomes, such as school attendance or academic performance. City-level school-age systems have recently made strides in connecting quality assessment data to data on daily program attendance. This data coordination strategy has helped cities to better understand the relationship between program quality and student attendance and retention. (See **Providence** example on page 17.)

Evaluation

States may choose to conduct an evaluation of quality improvement strategies to assess their effectiveness in improving outcomes. An evaluation can be a particularly effective strategy when a State chooses to pilot a quality initiative to understand what works before bringing it to scale. For example, Prime Time Palm Beach County hired an

Pennsylvania - Building Accountability into the Quality Improvement System

In recent years, Pennsylvania's Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) has developed a comprehensive system of quality supports for school-age programs, including Keystone Stars (a quality rating system that incorporates school-age care), a statewide school-age professional development system and a network of regional technical assistance specialists that help program leaders to develop and implement program improvement plans. Regional technical assistance specialists regularly use the SACERS tool to assess program quality and use the results to inform professional development plans for staff. Since the SACERS tool is already in use, State leaders are currently implementing an accountability and quality assurance system for Keystone Stars that will in part use SACERS data to inform how the State targets funding and technical assistance.

Agency leaders reflected that a significant lesson learned from developing this system was the value of tracking data on program and staff quality improvement efforts in one place. As a result the state developed **Pennsylvania's Enterprise to Link Information Across Networks (PELICAN)**, a single integrated information system that will allow OCDEL to track how children and families use various state programs, with a focus on quality. In 2008-2009, the grants management component for Keystone STARS was integrated into PELICAN. In 2009 – 2010, OCDEL will begin work on the integration of professional development and technical assistance accountability. Over time, PELICAN will help Pennsylvania measure program, service, and provider performance as it relates to progress and outcomes for children.

Finally, Pennsylvania's Department of Public Welfare is developing the Early Learning Network, a web-based system, will combine new and existing program and demographic data sources from government agencies, schools and early learning facilities in combination with child outcomes data to guide continuous quality improvement activities. ELN will also include a data warehouse feature that will follow longitudinal research on programs serving children in Pennsylvania. This system will support the State's efforts to track the impact of investments in quality on outcomes for children and youth.

Learning from Local Efforts to Promote and Assess Quality – Collaborative for Building After-School Systems (CBASS)

The Collaborative for Building After-School Systems (CBASS) initiative is an eight city partnership dedicated to increasing the availability of quality after-school programming by building citywide after-school systems. CBASS relies on leadership from non-profit intermediary organizations, with relative autonomy, to advocate for and leverage public and private funds to improve city-level systems of school-age quality.

The Providence Afterschool Association (PASA), a CBASS member, is implementing a systemic approach to assessing the impact of quality initiatives on program and youth-level outcomes. Building on existing standards from other communities, PASA adopted a common set of quality standards that provide an overarching framework for quality improvement efforts for school-age programs at middle schools. Standards address the following core areas: health, safety and the environment, relationships, programming and activities, and staffing and professional development. PASA used the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) to assess school-age program quality and captured data on daily student participation in programs. Connecting participation data with quality assessment data helps system leaders to understand the relationship between quality and program attendance. Data on which programs are attracting and retaining students is also valuable in informing future planning and investments.

For more information, see the Providence AfterSchool Alliance (PASA) website at: <http://www.mypasa.org/>. For more information on The Collaborative for Building After-School Systems, visit <http://www.afterschoolsystems.org/>.

outside evaluator to conduct a rigorous three-year evaluation of a countywide Quality Improvement System (QIS) for 64 local school-age programs. This evaluation has helped Prime Time to refine their strategy as they grow the initiative to serve more programs. (For more information, see text box below.)

The Path to a Strong Quality Improvement System

Challenged by limited funding and a political environment that often prioritizes early childhood programs, many States have in place some components of a school-age quality improvement system, while they are continuing work to strengthen other elements needed to support the school-

age workforce. Building any quality improvement system is a long term process that benefits from a strategic plan and vision developed by many stakeholders. A good process takes advantage of opportunities to strengthen the links between system initiatives and takes the time to build collaborative relationships across agencies and stakeholders. **Minnesota** is used as an illustrative example of the growing number of States making significant progress in developing stronger quality improvement systems that address infants, toddlers, preschools, and school-age children.

Prime Time Palm Beach - Evaluating a Quality Improvement System

Prime Time Palm Beach County, also a CBASS participant, has implemented and evaluated a countywide Quality Improvement System (QIS) for 64 local school-age programs. The QIS offers self-assessment, external assessment, technical assistance, training and other program supports to participating programs. Prime Time commissioned Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago to conduct a three-year process evaluation to document the evolution of the QIS and assess its effectiveness in improving the quality of after-school. The third and final evaluation report offers findings with implications for State system-building efforts. Evaluators found that implementing quality improvement is a long-term process, and that participants need sufficient time and flexibility to bring about changes in quality. In addition, the evaluation found, that despite turnover in leadership at pilot sites, programs remained committed and completed all phases of the process. For more information on the reports of the Palm Beach County evaluation, visit http://www.chapinhall.org/article_abstract.aspx?ar=1455&L2=62&L3=105.

Minnesota's Efforts to Build a Quality Improvement System

Minnesota provides an example of a State that has a vision that promotes quality in all settings serving children from birth through school-age. While the system is still a work in progress, Minnesota's decision-makers have addressed many of the system components described in this brief.

- **Governance** – Minnesota's Department of Human Services (DHS) invests in quality initiatives that span all age groups, while considering adaptations that take into account how school-age care differs from early care. Planning for school-age quality investments occurs as part of the biennial effort to draft a State plan. Partner agencies, such as the Departments of Education and Health, work closely with DHS in developing the State plan, and conversations with the Legislature inform decisions about funding. DHS staff seeks input from both the Minnesota School-Age Care Alliance (MNSACA), a practitioner association, and Youth Community Connections, the statewide afterschool network. DHS is also part of discussions led by Youth Community Connections to ensure that agencies supporting school-age programs maximize available resources and avoid duplicating services.
- **Regulations** – Minnesota licensing regulations allow school-age program practitioners to count degrees in school-age child care or elementary education toward their staff qualifications requirements. While school-based programs are exempt from licensing in Minnesota, a partnership with MNSACA helps ensure that these practitioners can access DHS trainings and supports.
- **Standards** – DHS staff are using CCDF quality dollars to develop school-age program and practitioner standards that align with standards for early care and education. In 2006, DHS partnered with the Department of Education and MNSACA to develop core competencies for practitioners working with children from ages five to 12. Youth Community Connections developed a similar set of core assets and capacities for staff serving older youth. Both sets of competencies guide the development of trainings to State school-age care professionals.

DHS has worked with a national expert to develop research-based indicators of progress for school-age children. This effort will parallel the Early Learning Guidelines developed for young children. For each indicator, the guidelines will offer strategies for caregivers, parents, policymakers, and community members to promote healthy development.

Although the State does not have sufficient funding at this time to expand a QRIS pilot program to settings serving children from birth to school-age, DHS is funding the Accreditation Facilitation project to provide assistance to settings serving children from birth to school-age in their efforts to achieve accreditation. In this way, DHS is building programs' capacity to offer quality school-age care.

- **Program and Practitioner Supports** – Minnesota's school-age care core competencies inform the development of trainings delivered throughout the State. The State also uses its Eager to Learn online training system to offer free web-based trainings to school-age practitioners.

Minnesota uses CCDF quality funds to support resource and referral agencies in providing quality improvement grants to programs. This initiative serves all types of programs, but a portion of total funding is allocated each year to settings serving school-age children and youth. Finally, the State is investing CCDF school-age targeted funds to support technical and financial assistance to programs participating in the Accreditation Facilitation Project.

- **Financing** – DHS's partnerships with school-age stakeholders helps to ensure that their investments in quality reach a wide range of programs. For example, DHS provided a decade of CCDF funding to MNSACA to launch and establish the organization. The agency continues to work closely with MNSACA to offer trainings, since the association can reach a larger group of school-age programs not currently served by resource and referral agencies.

DHS has also used CCDF quality dollars to leverage investments in Statewide school-age system-building efforts. DHS provided CCDF quality dollars to Youth Community Connections for three years to leverage matching funding from the C.S. Mott Foundation and build a statewide afterschool network. The Department continues to work with the statewide network to achieve coordination in shared quality improvement goals.

(continued on page 19)

Minnesota's Efforts to Build a Quality Improvement System *(continued from page 18)*

- **Accountability** – DHS staff take key steps to evaluate ongoing investments of CCDF funds. For example, the Department is currently working with an outside evaluator to measure the impact of training on professionals' work with children.

While recognizing that there is more work to be done to truly build a strong system of quality improvement for school-age programs, DHS staff reflect that it has been valuable involving school-age program stakeholders in decision-making processes. They also noted that while their school-age investments may appear "hidden" in their larger child care initiatives, there is value in building a system of care that supports quality in the range of settings where children of all ages are in care.

Conclusion

This brief provides a framework and a set of strategies to guide States in using CCDF to support key components of a quality improvement system, including governance, regulations, quality standards, practitioner and program supports, financing, and accountability. States are making great strides in using CCDF quality and targeted dollars to strategically invest in strong systems to support school-age programs and practitioners — in schools and communities across the country. Together with parents, youth, and other stakeholders, they are designing systems and programs that meet the needs of families for safe and affordable care, and the needs of youth for dynamic and engaging out-of-school time experiences. Continued efforts to invest CCDF funding in a system of quality will ensure that States are maximizing resources to support and sustain high quality school-age programs that contribute to positive outcomes for children and youth.

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Related Resources from the Afterschool Investments Project

Afterschool Professional Development Toolkit, 2008. Available by request at: afterschool@financeproject.org.

Building Professional Development Systems for the Afterschool Field, 2007. Available at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/pd_systems.pdf.

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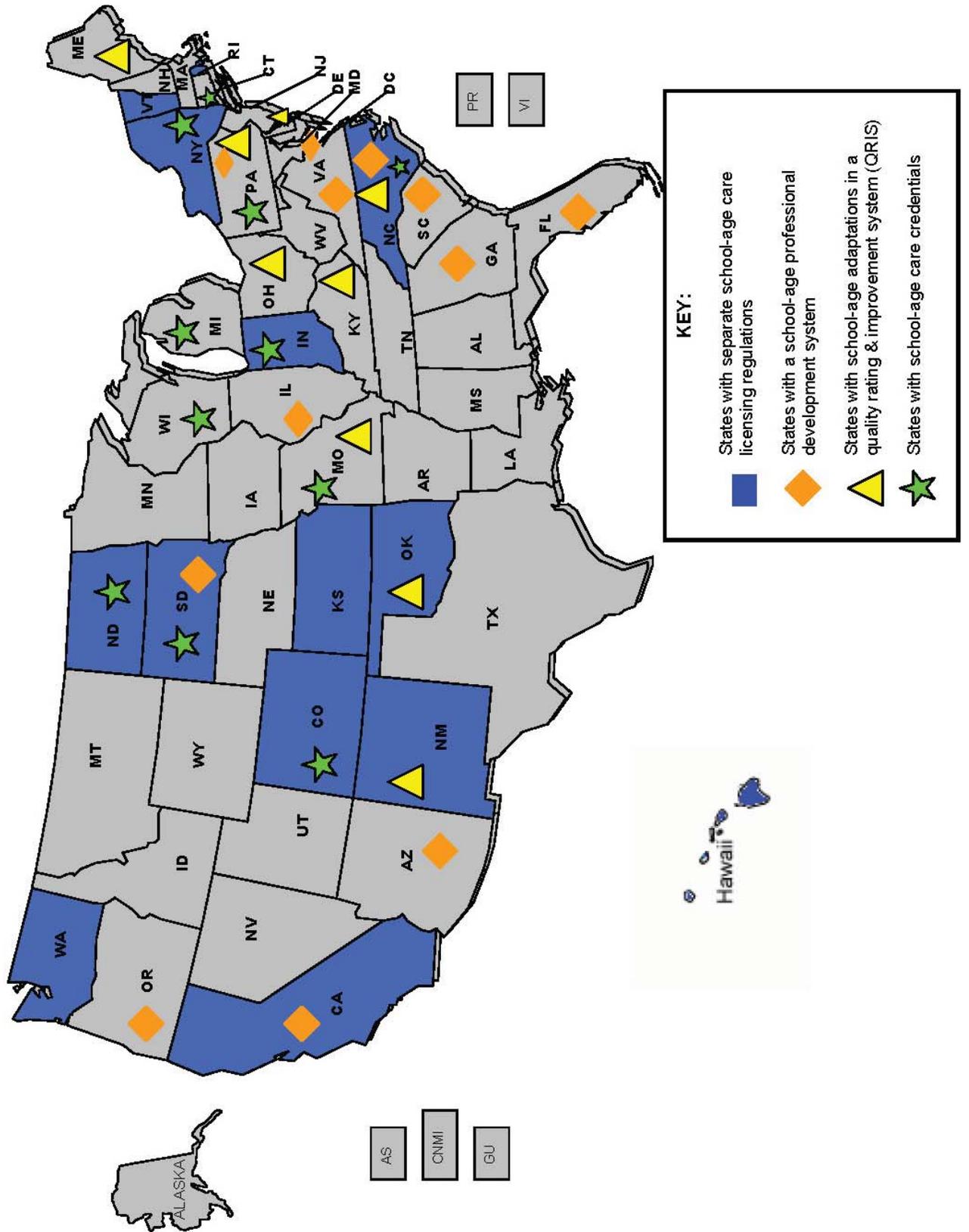
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*Appendix I: Quick Facts on School-Age Care:
Trends in Quality Improvement*



Appendix I: Quick Facts on School-Age Care: Trends in Quality Improvement

Licensing regulations provide a baseline of health and safety requirements that child care providers must meet in order to operate in a given state. Currently, 14 states have separate licensing regulations for school-age programs, while nearly all (46) states and the District of Columbia have requirements for school-age care within their licensing requirements for child care centers. States with separate school-age licensing regulations are: California, Colorado, Hawaii, Indiana, Kansas, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, and Washington.³¹ For more information, see: *Promoting Quality in Afterschool Programs through State Child Care Regulations*, available online at: <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/childcareregs.pdf>

Professional development systems use a clearly articulated framework to guide a continuum of training and ongoing supports to child care and school-age care providers.³² The following 10 states and Washington D.C. report in their Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) state plans that they have professional development systems for school-age care providers: Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and South Dakota.³³ For more information, see: *Building Professional Development Systems for the Afterschool Field*, available online at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/pd_systems.pdf

Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) provide a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care programs. The following nine states have made key school-age care adaptations to their rating systems: Delaware, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania.³⁴ For more information, see: *Using Quality Rating Systems to Promote Quality in Afterschool Programs*, available online at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/qrs_afterschool.pdf

Credentials are certifications that recognize when an individual has fulfilled a set number of relevant professional trainings. While the early care field has an established national credential for professionals [the Child Development Associate (CDA)], at least 11 states³⁵ have developed a professional credential for school-age and youth care providers. These states are: Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Dakota and Wisconsin. For more information, see materials from Afterschool Investments' *Professional Development Audio Conference: Creating a Credential for a School-Age Workforce*, available online at: <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/tactivities.html>

³¹ National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC) and the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA). "The 2007 Child Care Licensing Study". NCCIC and NARA, <http://naralicensing.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=160>.

³² NCCIC. "State Professional Development System Credentials for Individuals." NCCIC, <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/pd-credentials.html>.

³³ Afterschool Investments review of state Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plans for the State and Territories, September 2008.

³⁴ Research conducted by the Afterschool Investments Project, May 2009.

³⁵ NCCIC. State Professional Development System Credentials for Individuals. NCCIC, <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/pd-credentials.html>.

Also see:

Program Quality, Michigan Afterschool Partnership, <http://miafterschool.org/program-quality/certificate-credentials/>; The Youth Development Credential, Missouri School Age Community Coalition, <http://mosac2.org/tra/index.htm>; and Wisconsin, Early Childhood Career Guide, http://collaboratingpartners.com/career_g/Licensure.html.

Appendix II: Federal Funds Supporting Afterschool Programs

Federal Program	Purpose and Use of Funds	Administering Agency	Additional Information ³⁶
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	CCDF funds are used to subsidize the cost of child care for children under the age of 13 (or up to age 19 if incapable of self-care or under court supervision). Subsidized child care services are available to eligible families through certificates or contracts with practitioners. Parents may select any legally operating child care practitioner.	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families	For more information on CCDF, visit: http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ccb .
Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Entitlement Grants³⁷	CDBG grants are used to develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing, a suitable living environment, and expanding economic opportunities for low and moderate income individuals. CDBG funds, usually administered at the municipal level, can support afterschool programs with facility improvements, provision of programs and services, and youth involvement in community school initiatives.	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Office of Community Planning and Development	For more information on CDBG, visit: http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/programs/index.cfm .
21st Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC)	The 21CCLC program supports the creation of community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities for students attending low-performing schools. Community learning centers, operated during non-school hours, are designed to help students meet State and local student academic achievement standards in core academic subjects and offer students a broad array of activities that can complement their regular academic programs.	U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education	For more information on 21CCLC, visit: http://www.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/index.html .
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	The TANF program provides assistance to needy families with children so that children can be cared for in their own homes. TANF aims to reduce dependency by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; reduce and prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and encourages the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. States may use TANF funds directly for afterschool programs or transfer funding to the Child Care and Development Fund.	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families	For more information on TANF, visit: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/ .

³⁶ For more information on these funding sources, including funding history, see the “How to Get Money” Federal Funding Database on the Afterschool.gov website, available online at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/afterschoolfund/>.

³⁷ For more information, see Roxana Torrico and Margaret Flynn-Khan, *Using CDBG to Support Community-Based Youth Programs* (The Finance Project, January 2008), available online at: http://www.financeproject.org/publications/CDBG_PM.pdf.

Appendix II: Federal Funds Supporting Afterschool Programs continued

Federal Program	Purpose and Use of Funds	Administering Agency	Additional Information³⁶
Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth Activities	Afterschool programs can use WIA youth funds to support a range of services related to youth employment, including academic enrichment, alternative secondary school services, summer employment opportunities, work experience, occupational skills training, leadership development, supportive services, adult mentoring, guidance and counseling, and follow-up services.	U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Youth Services	For more information on WIA Youth Activities, visit: http://www.doleta.gov/youth_services .
Title I Grants to Local Educational Agencies Title I Supplemental Services	Title I grants help local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools meet the needs of children who are failing State academic standards. Grants are targeted to LEAs and schools with high concentrations of children from low-income families. Title I funds are also used to provide supplemental educational services in core academic subjects for children in failing schools.	U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education	For more information on Title I Grants, visit: http://www.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html . For more information on Title I Supplemental Services, visit: http://www.ed.gov/nclb/choice/help/ses/index.html .



The Afterschool Investments Project

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) provides federal resources for child care that support both direct services and quality enhancements. With nearly half of the children receiving services being of school age, CCDF provides significant funding for afterschool care in a variety of settings. The majority of CCDF dollars are used to provide subsidies to eligible low-income children under age 13. A portion of CCDF funding is also used for quality improvement initiatives such as professional development and technical assistance with the goal of building the capacity of states to deliver quality services including programs before and after school, during summers and on school holidays.

To support state efforts to provide quality afterschool opportunities, the Child Care Bureau awarded a technical assistance contract on out-of-school time to The Finance Project. The Afterschool Investments project provides technical assistance to CCDF grantees and other state and local leaders supporting afterschool efforts. The goals of the project include:

- Identifying ways that states, territories, tribes and communities are using Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidy and quality dollars to support out-of-school time programs, and sharing these practices and approaches;
- Identifying administrative and implementation issues related to CCDF investments in out-of-school time programs, and providing information and context (about barriers, problems, opportunities) as well as practical tools that will help CCDF administrators make decisions; and
- Identifying other major programs and sectors that are potential partners for CCDF in supporting out-of-school time programs, and providing models, strategies and tools for coordination with other programs and sectors.

To meet these goals, the Afterschool Investments project is:

- Regularly updating and maintaining state profiles of afterschool resources, policies and issues;
- Creating tools and materials to support the development and sustainability of afterschool efforts; and
- Providing targeted technical assistance to state child care administrators and other state leaders around building partnerships, creating financing strategies, and developing state policies that promote investments in high-quality afterschool programs. Technical assistance activities include collecting and disseminating information on promising practices; conference calls and teleconferences; assisting in the identification of potential afterschool partners; setting up peer-to-peer exchanges; conducting workshops and trainings; and providing on-site consultation and facilitation.

CCDF grantees and other state and local leaders supporting afterschool efforts are eligible to receive technical assistance and training services under this contract. For more information about the project or to submit a request for technical assistance or information, contact The Finance Project at (202) 587-1000 or by email at afterschool@financeproject.org. All project tools and resources can be found online on the Afterschool Investments project website: <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/>.

