Research Connections conducted a comprehensive search of its collection for resources focused on child care quality rating systems. This Key Topic Resource List includes an overview and listing of selected resources from the literature.

While research on this topic is still emerging, resources of various types— including reports and papers, fact sheets and briefs, summaries, and reviews are included. Selection criteria included policy relevance and relatively recent publication (from the years 2000 to 2008). Based on the search results, resources were grouped into the following categories:

- Recommendations for designing child care quality rating systems:
  - Planning and Implementation, Financing, Administration, Workforce Improvement, Accreditation, and Informing Parents
- Evaluating quality rating systems
- Quality rating systems for after school programs

Within each category, resources are organized according to publisher type and publication date. Research Connections’ one-sentence descriptions are included for each resource. For complete citations, which include abstracts and full text for some resources, click on the titles.

Overview:

In response to research linking high quality child care and education to positive child outcomes a number of states have implemented, are piloting, or are in the process of creating quality rating systems (QRS) or sometimes referred to as “quality rating and improvement systems” (QRIS). These quality initiatives are a method to measure and improve the quality in early care and education settings through a uniform approach that is available throughout a state or locality. Early care and education programs are generally awarded “stars” representing their quality (similar to hotel and restaurant ratings) for meeting set program standards and accountability measures. Financial incentives, such as tiered subsidy reimbursement, are in some cases used to encourage program participation and quality. Additionally, QRS can also help parents understand quality and make informed child care decisions.
The literature on quality rating systems is beginning to grow. Much of the literature to date is prescriptive on how to develop QRS, particularly how to finance and administer QRS, and expanding QRS for after school programs. New evaluation research however, is emerging on the extent to which QRS improves the quality of care. Other emerging research issues on QRS include:

- How do quality rating systems affect parents’ child care choices? What are parents’ perceptions of quality as rated by QRS? How might quality rating systems affect parents’ access to arrangements of different types and levels of quality?
- How can quality rating systems be inclusive of children across age groups (i.e. infants and toddlers, preschool, and school-age), as well as across cultural and ethnic groups?
- How are state professional development systems responding to QRS?
- How is the supply and demand of care affected by QRS (across types of care)?

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**Recommendations for Designing Child Care Quality Rating Systems**

**Planning and Implementation**

**Government**


A presentation of background information regarding the phasing in of Washington State’s Quality Rating System (QRS) to assess, improve, and communicate the quality of individual child care sites through tiered ranking and reimbursement


Recommendations from the KidsFirst: Quality Counts for Kids task force for quality rating, tiered reimbursement, and professional development systems for licensed and/or certified child care providers in Wisconsin

**Journal**


A history and discussion of child care affordability, accessibility, and quality in Oklahoma, with a description of the Reaching for the Stars Program, a child care quality and accessibility initiative.

**University and Research Organizations**

**Elicker, James.** (2007). *Paths to QUALITY: A child care quality rating system for Indiana: What is its scientific basis?* West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University, Center for Families

An analysis of the potential for quality standards in Paths to QUALITY, a proposed child care quality rating system for Indiana, to increase child care quality and improve child development outcomes, based on results from pilot sites and a review of research literature related to quality indicators in the standards
A paper describing how the Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership and a state Task Force developed recommendations for a child care quality rating system that was tied to tiered reimbursement

Edie, David. (2005). How would a quality rating system be likely to work in Wisconsin? (Brief & to the Point Issue Brief No. 14). Madison: University of Wisconsin--Extension
A discussion of the implications of implementing a child care quality rating scale in the state of Wisconsin

An identification of issues regarding the State of Florida’s efforts to implement a statewide Quality Rating System (QRS) to improve and communicate the quality of individual child care sites, based on a survey of stakeholders

Recommendations for developing a system of state standards-based child and program assessments to be used for informing early childhood program policy and to be linked to standards-based assessments in the early elementary grades

A guide for implementing a community-wide or statewide Quality Rating System (QRS), including guidance for the early planning stage, the development and assessment of standards, the use of incentives to encourage quality improvement, the financing of the system, and the outreach to promote parental awareness of the system

Definitions of Tiered Reimbursement Systems (TRS), Quality Rating Systems (QRS), and Rated License Systems (RLS), and recommendations for their use in efforts to improve child care quality in Virginia

A catalog, directory, and report on the evaluations of 104 local and state child care quality improvement initiatives funded through the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF)
Other


A cost estimate for a statewide Quality Rating System (QRS) for child care centers in Florida, broken down into the following categories: quality monitoring, professional development, technical assistance, facility improvements, financial incentives, communication, and evaluation.


A description of the processes and financing strategies states used to develop quality rating systems used to establish quality standards for early childhood care programs and evaluate existing programs.

Smart Start National Technical Assistance Center. (2005). *Linking finance to program & practitioner standards: Financing quality rating systems*

A description of and approach to financing a Quality Rating System (QRS), a tool used to improve the quality of child care.

Administration
University and Research Organizations


Findings from a survey of states' methods for measuring leadership and management practices in quality rating systems.

Workforce Improvement
University and Research Organizations


A discussion of strategies to be used for improving the quality of teaching and caregiving by early care and education staff, both nationally and for Washington State.

Accreditation
Other

McDonald, Davida. (2007). *Elevating the field: Using NAEYC early childhood program accreditation to support and reach higher quality in early childhood programs* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

An overview of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) early childhood education program accreditation process and the ways in which the accreditation process can support improvements in child care and early education quality.
Informing parents
University and Research Organizations

A guide to developing, implementing, and evaluating a child care quality initiative involving the collection and dissemination of child care quality indicator information to parents

A study of differences by race and ethnicity in welfare leavers' preferences for various characteristics of child care settings, including the role of Pennsylvania’s Quality Rating System in informing parents’ child care choices

Evaluating Child Care Quality Rating Systems

Government

A summary of a 2005-06 evaluation of Kentucky’s statewide Quality Rating System (QRS) for center-based child care

Journals

An outline of rationales for promoting statewide child care quality rating systems, with a focus on the range of quality measures used in states’ rating systems and research-based planning for a quality rating system in Wisconsin

University and Research Organizations

An evaluation of the Colorado Qualistar Early Learning quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), including: an assessment of system components and the relationships between them; a comparison of Qualistar measures to other established quality measures; and an examination of the association between quality improvements as measured by Qualistar components and children's socioemotional and cognitive outcomes.

A study of the quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) in five early QRIS-adopting states, including descriptions of: the theory of action underlying QRISs; each state's system, including the aspects of quality included in the system; the development of each state's system; and challenges facing system designers and lessons learned from these states, all based on in-depth interviews with 4 key stakeholders in each state

An observational study examining the effects of Pennsylvania’s Keystone STARS Quality Rating System on child care quality in participating child care centers, group child care homes, and family child care homes.


A study of Oklahoma’s Reaching for the Stars program, a child care quality improvement initiative, examining quality differences between family child care homes representing the various levels of the Reaching for the Stars program’s quality rating system.


A summary of an assessment of the quality of child care facilities voluntarily seeking the highest ratings in the North Carolina Rated License program.


An analysis of the validity of North Carolina’s 5-star child care licensing system, based on data collected from 84 child care centers.


An examination of quality differences between child care centers in the various levels of the "Reaching for the Stars” Quality Rating System (QRS) in Oklahoma.

Coming soon...

- An evaluation conducted by Cornell University of the Child Care Programs of Excellence project, a quality rating system in New York, is also in process. The evaluation aims to: collect and communicate information about the quality of child care providers in the counties using well-established rating systems; and evaluate the impact of the program on choices made by parents and on the structure of the child care market in terms of quality, cost, and availability of child care.

Quality rating systems for after-school programs

University and Research Organizations

Spielberger, Julie, Lockaby, Tracey. (2008). Palm Beach County’s Prime Time Initiative: Improving the quality of after-school programs Chicago: University of Chicago, Chapin Hall Center for Children

A study of the implementation of a Quality Improvement System (QIS) in 37 after school programs for elementary- and middle-school-age children in Palm Beach County, Florida, during the third year of the system’s implementation.
A discussion of a strategy to promote school-age caregiving quality by adapting states' tiered quality rating systems, which were designed primarily for early care providers, for providers serving school age children

A summary of an examination of a strategy to promote school-age caregiving quality by adapting states' tiered quality rating systems, which were designed primarily for early care providers, for providers serving school age children

A description of the challenges facing after school child care programs' attempts to comply with state child care licensing regulations, as well as ways in which licensing regulations can be used to promote program quality

**Other Resources:**

National Child Care Information Center resources on state quality rating and improvement systems: [http://www.nccic.org/topics/topic/index.cfm?topicId=44](http://www.nccic.org/topics/topic/index.cfm?topicId=44)

Roundtable on Measuring Quality in Early Childhood and School-Age Settings: At the Junction of Research, Policy and Practice: Meeting summary [http://researchconnections.org/location/12621](http://researchconnections.org/location/12621)


**Coming Soon...**

To suggest additions to this Key Topic Resource List, please email us at contact@researchconnections.org.

To view and sort the full search results from which these resources were selected, including any resources added to the collection since selection of the Resource List, use the Create Updated Search Results function. The full results came from a search on— quality rating system* exact phrase, or quality improvement all of the words.