

Measures of Quality: At the Intersection of Research, Practice, and Policy

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The Context for Measuring Quality is Changing

Context

- Strong state focus on improving the quality of early as well as school-age care and education
- As one indicator: many states exceed the required 4 percent set aside of the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) in allocating funds to improve child care quality

Context

Different quality initiatives include:

- Quality Rating Systems
- Strengthening Professional Development Systems
- Technical Assistance to Improve Health and Safety
- Strategies to Increase Retention

Context

- The measurement of quality is a central issue in each approach
- These initiatives are increasingly requiring the measurement of quality at a systems level

New Issues Emerge When
Quality is Measured
System-Wide

New Issues

System-wide measurement of quality needs to correspond to vision of quality

- Which measure or measures best capture the system-wide vision of quality?
- Are the measures driving the vision, or vice versa?

New Issues

System-wide measurement of quality requires an infrastructure for measurement

- What infrastructure is needed to support measurement of quality on a large scale?
- Does the infrastructure compete for resources that could go to improving quality? How should priorities be balanced?

New Issues

System-wide measurement involves being able to distinguish and communicate different levels of quality:

- Do our existing measures provide a clear basis for distinguishing levels or thresholds?

New Issues

The system-wide measurement of quality requires that we be able to measure quality in different types of care

- Do we have strong measures of quality for each type of care?
- Are there issues with equivalence of the levels of quality across types?

New Issues

There is a growing emphasis on selecting measures of quality that show strong linkages to child outcomes.

- What is a strong enough relationship to child outcomes?
- Which child outcomes should be taken into account?

Quality Rating Systems as an Example: Potential and Challenges

Quality Rating Systems as an Example

- 14 States have implemented statewide systems
- At least 24 are exploring or designing QRS

Quality Rating Systems as an Example

Initial state experiences with QRS are pointing
to both

potential
and
challenges

that emerge when quality is measured as part of
a system

Potential

Quality Rating Systems involve articulation of a common vision of quality and agreement on how this should be measured

- Development often involves drawing together a range of stakeholders
- QRS provide a perspective on quality that applies to different age groups and across different types of care;
- QRS require not just vision but also details. Decisions need to be made on components of quality, distinctions among levels of quality, and how information on quality will be collected.

Potential

Quality Rating Systems address consumers' need for information in units that are readily interpretable

- Economists have long viewed the child care market as affected by gaps in information available to consumers
- Information on some facets of quality is difficult for consumers to obtain: consumer may lack background to obtain the information (e.g., observational measures of quality) or documentation may not be readily available (e.g., turnover)
- Assumption that providing more extensive information—but in format that is readily interpretable--will affect demand for quality and eventually the quality of care

Potential

The measurement of quality in Quality Rating Systems can increase provider awareness of specific indicators and benchmarks

- Information on facets of quality is often provided through orientation for QRS participants
- The information collected in the rating process can help providers diagnose where improvements are needed
- There are early indications from pilot test results that participation can change provider understanding of quality

Potential

Quality Rating Systems can provide a framework for coordination and alignment with other systems and measurement approaches

- Examples include early learning standards, tiered reimbursement, pre-kindergarten and Head Start program standards
- QRS almost always involve the development of an automated system for data. Create new context for linking data
- With linking, potential for new questions to be addressed: E.g., geographical distribution of programs of different types and quality levels

Potential

Use of measurement of quality for monitoring and accountability is a core component of Quality Rating Systems

- There is a strong emphasis on accountability in both the private and public sectors
- Availability of data from the monitoring component of Quality Rating Systems can increase interest/willingness to invest in quality
- Monitoring is also a source of feedback to individual providers and those administering early and school age care and education systems as to where improvements are needed

Potential

The measurement of quality within Quality Rating Systems helps to create a complete ladder

- Tiered reimbursement efforts often had only two levels: licensed and accredited
- There was recognition that more levels were needed
- Multiple levels in Quality Rating Systems make it possible to engage providers at all levels to work towards improvement

Potential

The measurement of quality in Quality Rating Systems provides a framework for supporting quality improvement

- QRS involve not only rating and monitoring but also the provision of resources for supporting improvements.
 - financial supports for quality improvement
 - orientation to components of quality initiatives and observational measures,
 - feedback from observations,
 - ongoing technical assistance
- Measurement of quality is key to assessing whether supports are yielding results

Potential

The measurement of quality is central to the assessment of a logic model for quality improvement

- Development of QRS provide opportunities to articulate assumptions about how changes in quality are produced
- Two key pathways hypothesized: through changes in demand and through providers' making use of resources for improvement
- Monitoring of these pathways as well as of overall quality are central to assessment of logic model
- Such assessment rests on availability of good measures of each component of logic model

Challenges

Need to move forward before all needed research on measures of quality is available

- Do our measures of quality cover (and give appropriate weight to) the facets of quality that are important to child outcomes?
- We have data on the associations of observational measures of quality and children's development. Data from experimental evaluations of effects of quality improvements just emerging
- Research is now in progress focusing on the reliability of quality ratings and validating different levels. Are our measures functioning as we expect?

Challenges

Expense and precision required for appropriate monitoring and accountability components of Quality Rating System initiatives

- Some states are facing challenges concerning the frequency with which they can afford to carry out direct observations of quality
- Resources are needed to maintain appropriate levels of reliability for observations.
- There is a need to build in protections against pressure on observers, and at the same time, for providers to be able to appeal ratings

Challenges

Need to understand how parents utilize ratings

- Do the distinctions made in Quality Rating Systems have “face validity” for parents?
- Are Quality Rating Systems defining quality in the same way that parents do?
- Do parents prefer summary ratings or details?
- Do parents actually use the information in rating systems when they make choices about early and school age care settings for their children?
- Are there constraints on some parents that prevent or limit use of the information?

Challenges

Possibility that the system-wide measurement of quality may alienate some providers from the regulated system

- How can QRS create upward movement across the full continuum of early and school age care and education settings?
- How is the market affected when only regulated providers are included?

Challenges

Need to examine whether the assumptions about how QRS can affect the market are borne out

- Will rates of provider participation in voluntary Quality Rating Systems will be strong enough to provide families with information on a range of choices?
- Will all income groups will have access to high quality care if market effects increase demand for quality?
- Will the assumed market effects will occur as anticipated if the cost of high quality care exceeds what moderate and middle income families can pay?

Challenges

How to share the information on measurement as Quality Rating Systems move forward

- A body of information from state and community experiences in implementing Quality Rating Systems
- What process could help assure that states and localities learn from each others' experiences and research?

Learning from the Experience of
Measuring Quality at a Systems-
Level:
Priorities for Evaluation

Priorities for Evaluation

We need to learn about the widespread measurement of quality from multiple perspectives:

- Implementation
- Parents
- Providers
- Market
- Quality
- Policy

Building on Existing Knowledge
About the Measurement of
Quality

Building on Existing Knowledge

It is clear that initiatives like Quality Rating Systems that involve systems-wide measurement of quality need to be informed by our best knowledge about measures and how they function

We turn now to an overview of the research on measuring quality in different types of child care

Building on Existing Knowledge

- Donna Bryant: What is known about the measurement of quality in center-based child care?
- Barbara Goodson: What is known about the measurement of quality in home-based child care?