

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Interest in the quality of provider-family relationships in early care and education (ECE) settings has increased during the past several years. Research has demonstrated that families have a much greater influence on their children's positive outcomes than participation in ECE.<sup>1</sup> Evidence from a variety of studies indicates that the magnitude of the association between participation in high quality child care and child outcomes varies.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that traditional child-focused measures of child care quality may be missing aspects of quality that contribute to positive child outcomes.<sup>3</sup> A small body of research suggests that strong partnerships between providers and families are associated with positive outcomes for children<sup>4</sup> as well as positive outcomes for parents.<sup>5</sup> This interest has sharpened the focus on defining and measuring elements of these relationships across ECE settings for program improvement purposes.<sup>6</sup>

There has also been a growing interest in better preparing providers for their work with families.<sup>7</sup> Many state professional development systems (PDS) include building partnerships with families as a competency area.<sup>8</sup> PDS often rely on national and/or accreditation standards to inform these competencies.<sup>9</sup> These accreditation standards are also commonly used as the highest rating for family partnership indicators in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS).<sup>10</sup> Although there has been some research on the issue of alignment across professional standards, PDS ECE competencies, and QRIS indicators,<sup>11</sup> little attention has been paid to alignment in the area of provider partnerships with families.

This brief aims to explore the alignment across professional standards, PDS ECE competencies, and QRIS indicators. This is accomplished by identifying the areas in which there are consistent definitions across standards, competencies, and indicators regarding elements of quality in family-provider relationships. Specifically, this brief seeks to answer the following questions:

- How do existing ECE professional and performance standards align with research-based elements of provider-family relationships that are associated with positive child and family outcomes?
- What are some of the gaps in alignment across professional and performance standards and research-based elements of provider-family partnerships?
- What are some promising examples of language in the professional and performance standards, state PDS competencies, and QRIS indicators that could be used to fill the gaps in alignment in the professional and performance standards?

The findings from this brief serve as a starting point for building consensus across systems about common definitions, expectations about what providers need to know and do, and the development of measures that more closely capture quality in this domain.

## Methods

This brief describes findings from a systematic review of 1) elements of effective provider facilitation of family-provider relationships identified through the Family Provider Relationship Quality Project (FPRQ) literature review and conceptual model;<sup>12</sup> 2) professional standards, specifically the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation Standards,<sup>13</sup> the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) Accreditation Standards,<sup>14</sup> and the Head Start Performance Standards (HSPS);<sup>15</sup> and 3) promising examples of PDS competencies and QRIS family partnership indicators in Colorado and New Mexico<sup>1,16</sup>

Ten elements from the FPRQ conceptual model were selected for the analysis.<sup>17</sup> These elements include: positive, two-way communication, flexibility, advocating for and connecting families to supports and resources, collaborating and engaging in joint-goal setting and decision-making with families, developing parents' confidence and competence, providing social networking opportunities for families, theoretical knowledge about families, family-specific knowledge, respect, and openness to change. Using web-based document review, the authors independently coded all of the NAEYC, NAFCC, and HSPS standards, compared their results, and reached consensus about the standards that corresponded to these elements. A similar process was used to identify gaps and promising examples of alignment in two states' (New Mexico and Colorado) PDS competencies and QRIS indicators.

## Findings

Gaps in alignment were found between four FPRQ research-based elements (*developing parents' competence and confidence, social networking opportunities for families, theoretical knowledge, and openness to change*) and professional standards, state PDS competencies, and QRIS indicators. Across professional standards, only the HSPS include clear and explicit language for *developing parents' competence and confidence*; the NAEYC and HSPS standards, explicit items for *provision of opportunities for social networking* for families and *theoretical knowledge*; and the NAFCC standards, explicit items about *openness to change*. Explicit language related to *social networking opportunities* and *openness to change* was also missing across the state PDS competencies, and we did not find QRIS indicators in either state for *developing parents' confidence and competence, theoretical knowledge, or openness to change*. There was also a gap in the QRIS indicators for the element of *respect*.

Our analysis revealed explicit alignment between the three sets of standards and six FPRQ elements: *two-way communication, flexibility, advocating for families and connecting them to resources, collaborating with families; family-specific knowledge, and respect*. We also found promising language from the state PDS and QRIS that could serve as a starting point to fill gaps in standards or to strengthen existing definitions in the standards we reviewed.

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<sup>1</sup> Both Colorado and New Mexico are currently revising their QRIS.

## Conclusion

The strong evidence of alignment of most research-based elements of effective provider facilitation of family relationships with professional standards and state PDS competencies suggests that there is already a solid foundation for developing common definitions related to the quality of family-provider relationships in ECE. The potential for alignment in QRIS indicators, as well as promising language in both the PDS competencies, also point towards the beginnings of common expectations for providers and measurement of this aspect of ECE quality.

Findings in this brief suggest that further work is needed to support programs in building strong family-provider relationships to reach the full potential of positive outcomes for children, families and providers. There is a need for agreement about greater specificity and refinement in professional standards to strengthen consensus about how quality related to family-provider relationships is defined, and to capture elements of quality in this domain that have not been widely embraced by the ECE field. More specific language for standards and examples of indicators might also facilitate the development of clearer distinctions among levels of quality in specific elements and assist in the development of provider training materials. Finally, there is a need to build an even stronger research base on the relationships between provider practices with families and positive family outcomes, in order to provide systems with the evidence and rationale needed to integrate these elements into quality standards and competencies.

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