



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS – MISSISSIPPI QRS REPORTS

In July and August 2015, two concurrent reports about the status of enrollment and participation in the Mississippi Quality Stars program were released. The first is the result of a set of listening sessions conducted by the Mississippi State Early Childhood Advisory Council Quality Rating System (QRS) Committee ; the second is an evaluation of MS Quality Stars conducted through a contract with the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (FPG). In both cases, information was collected through a variety of methods to gain a better understanding of the current program and inform recommendations for improvements to the state QRS program. In addition, information from the Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative (MLICCI) was submitted to the SECAC, with the request that it be considered in addition the Council and FPG reports. The MLICCI information was gathered in 2014 and submitted to the MS Department of Human Services (MDHS) via a memo with attachments and an expenditure report from the project, funded by the Kellogg Foundation.¹

General statistics about participation in the MS Quality Stars program:

- According to MDHS data (June 2015), only 400 of the 1,612 licensed child care providers in Mississippi (25%) participate in MS Quality Stars (MS SECAC report). Of those 400 centers, approximately 180 of the centers have been rated, while another 220 are in process of being rated.
- Of those participating, 61% are rated as 1-star. Less than 20% of the participating programs are rated at the 3-, 4- or 5-star level (FPG report).
- MS' current QRS system requires annual reassessment when trying to improve ratings, and ratings every 2 years if trying to maintain the current rating. Current data for those trying to improve and maintain ratings shows that 24% of centers have improved their star rating, 21% fluctuated in their ratings (moving both up and down) and 3% have decreased in rating (FPG report).
- According to the MLICCI report, the average amount of "up-front" funding that it takes a center to move from a 1-star to a 2-star rating is approximately \$40,000 per center.

¹ The State Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC) is an advisory council that seeks to establish a higher quality early childhood (EC) system that will meet the educational and developmental needs of Mississippi's children. In June of 2014, SECAC approved six goals defining its focus and efforts, driving the work of SECAC. These goals, representing the critical components required to achieve a higher quality early childhood (EC) system, are supported by five committees: Data Systems, Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), Professional & Workforce Development, Standards, and Quality Rating System (QRS).



		Report Title	
		Getting a Fresh Perspective on QRS: Listening Sessions with Mississippi's Licensed Childcare Providers	Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative - Step-up
Study Characteristics			
Lead	MS SECAC QRS Committee	Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute	Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative
Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve understanding of provider needs on current QRS implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To examine policies, processes and implementation of Quality Stars program in Mississippi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A three year demonstration project supporting 16 child care centers from 2 regions in MS to enter and work to increase ratings in the MS Quality Stars program, for the purpose of documenting what is required to support successful participation
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eight public "listening sessions" conducted in multiple regions across the state. Child care providers recruited via social media and phone invitations Facilitated discussions with set questions 	<p>Multiple data sources were used, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> State (Quality Stars) and national documents (QRIS Compendium, The Build Initiative) State administrative data (Division of Early Childhood Care and Development (DECCD, and Mississippi State Early Childhood Institute) Focus groups Web-based surveys 	<p>Selection of a sample of 16 child care programs in 2 regions (Delta and Southern Mississippi). Centers included those that were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heavily reliant on child care subsidy for revenue; Financially "fragile"; and In areas that served highly vulnerable children
Participants	79 individuals representing public school, faith-based care, and private providers.	16 parents 52 educators participating in Quality Stars 13 educators not participating in Quality Stars Provider Surveys (n = 148)	16 centers in 2 regions of MS
Guiding Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you currently participate in the QRS program in MS? Why yes? Why not? What obstacles or barriers have you encountered that have prevented you from reaching a higher rating or from participating in QRS? What benefits have you seen in your children, staff or program overall, by participating in the current QRS program? How clearly are the expectations for improvement communicated in the current QRS program What factors of the early education experience are important to child care centers to be evaluated on? What benefits should child care centers receive by enrolling in a QRS program? How do you think provider input can be best represented in the QRS program? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the conceptual framework for Quality Stars? What evidence or support is used to support Quality Stars indicators? What critical aspects of early care and education do early childhood educators think are needed to improve program quality? What aspects are most critical for children's school readiness? How are they aligned with Quality Stars? What supports are needed to improve the quality of programs participating in Quality Stars? Is there evidence of program improvement and factors associated with improvement? What structures and supports are needed to professionalize and retain early childhood educators? What supports and training are needed to improve program leadership and management? How can parents be more engaged in advocating, supporting and selecting high quality early education programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does it take to support the successful participation of these centers in the Quality Stars program? What does it take to support these centers' ability to increase their star rating?

Report Title

Getting a Fresh Perspective on QRS: Listening Sessions with Mississippi's Licensed Childcare Providers

Evaluation of Mississippi Child Care Quality Stars Program Final Report

Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative - Step-up

Findings – Participation in MS Quality Stars

<p>Positive Perceptions and Benefits to Participation</p>	<p>Program Improvement Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides the opportunity for program improvement, including guidance, motivation and resources to improve the quality of programs. Creates accountability within programs to ensure quality. Creates alignment with other requirements (accreditation and eligibility for funding). Supports improvement in parent-provider interaction. <p>Financial Benefit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers access to higher rates of reimbursement through being eligible to accept the TANF subsidy. <p>Access to Technical Assistance and Other Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> QRS Includes access to technical assistance 	<p>Program Improvement Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides the opportunity for program improvement <p>Financial Benefit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers access to higher rates of reimbursement through being able to accept the TANF subsidy. <p>Access to Technical Assistance and Other Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes access to technical assistance 	
<p>Specific Obstacles and Barriers to Participation in QRS</p>	<p>QRS Overall Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requirements for program improvement are unclear; there is no policy manual or clear instructions The system is not equitable QRS requirements are unrealistic to attain and maintain Too many requirements to meet, including too much paperwork to maintain <p>Funding/Finances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in QRS is expensive; many care providers cannot afford it QRS doesn't create any major advantage for child care programs that participate. Access to higher rates of TANF subsidy doesn't provide enough financial benefit to invest resources into participating in QRS. Quality staffing is difficult to maintain (funding, turnover) Lacking access to funding ng and travel needed for training <p>QRS Scoring System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current system is perceived as punitive rather than supportive Current system is perceived as subjective to the individual raters; evaluators are seen as inconsistent Scoring system is too rigid – it is too focused on certain items like handwashing <p>Access to Technical Assistance and Other Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical assistance options are unclear, limited and inequitable Lack of well-timed consistent feedback that was helpful and supportive 	<p>QRS Overall Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern that public school slots for children would replace community providers slots The system is not perceived as equitable <p>Funding/Finances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining quality is expensive and beyond program budget TANF subsidy reimbursement rates don't provide enough financial benefit for sustainability The cost of quality staffing is a barrier to providers Lacking access to training <p>QRS Scoring System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current system is perceived as punitive Providers expressed concerns about subjectivity and inconsistency of the raters. Current scoring system too rigid – it focuses too much on environment, and this has too much influence over the overall ratings. <p>Access to Technical Assistance and Other Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TA options are limited, inequitable, inaccessible and sometimes duplicative Lack of trust a barrier to participation Providers felt misled with information given Providers are not kept informed of changes in the program; providers need more information about QRS 	<p>QRS Overall Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies and instructions need to be available in written form and available <p>Funding/Finances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's expensive to move up in star ratings <p>Access to Technical Assistance and Other Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TA is required to support a center's progress from 1 –2 stars. The Step-up project noted that TA providers spent an average of 190 hours in intensive TA to develop and implement plans of activities needed for this level of improvement.

		Report Title		
		Getting a Fresh Perspective on QRS: Listening Sessions with Mississippi's Licensed Childcare Providers	Evaluation of Mississippi Child Care Quality Stars Program Final Report	Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative - Step-up
Recommendations				
General Recommendations to Improve QRS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align QRS to kindergarten readiness Provide financial compensation for participating in QRS beyond access to the TANF subsidy program Align QRS with other agencies' expectations and requirements Provide assistance to teachers and staff to further education so a center may raise its star rating Create community recognition for centers that participate in QRS Provide resources and other supports to make QRS a benefit to parents as well as children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align Quality Stars with kindergarten readiness (parent) Maintain reimbursement levels to encourage quality improvement (FPG) Align QRs with licensure, Head Start, PreK and other related programs using a crosswalk approach (FPG) Make participation in Quality Stars mandatory (parent) Adopt a strengths-based approach to implementing a new system to improve relationships with providers (FPG) <p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a clear policy manual for the program with clear guidelines about the standards (provider) Endorse minimum quality standards in curriculum implementation (providers) Require teachers to participate in professional development in a variety of areas (provider) Consider making the reassessment period every 2-3 years (FPG) Consider differential monitoring (FPG) 		
Recommendations for the Process to Revise QRS	<p>To ensure that the child care community is represented, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> representation from providers in any group that works on revising the QRS representation from child care providers from different counties and regions across the state representation from the different child care sectors in the state – private, non-profit, for-profit, and faith-based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop clear, cross-sector consensus about QRS goals and activities Ensure all sectors are included in QRS advisory and redesign groups Improve communication and transparency with child care providers about the system, including a clearly posted policies and procedures manual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop written policies and procedures. 	
Recommendations for Elements to Include in the QRS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff quality – credentials, interactional style, affective skills Child outcomes – academic skills, behavioral/social skills, overall well-being Curriculum – developmentally appropriate practice, curriculum content Environment – room arrangement, health and safety Parent-provider relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of staff - nurturing, attentive, and passionate about children Opportunities for socialization Curriculum Teacher-child interactions Professional development Classroom materials School Readiness Communicate research base underlying the QRS program so that providers understand the importance of the standards included in the system 		

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Recommendations for Professional Development and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More flexibility and methods for accessing required staff training, including having training come to the centers, methods that allow teachers to do the training on their own. • Create more flexibility in the assessment visits, including coming more than one time, staying for an entire day, etc. • Provide coaching and mentoring by those who will end up assessing the center; create relationships between center staff and QRS staff • Provide coaching and peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide targeted TA to centers to programs whose ratings fluctuate (FPG) • Use feedback to better schedule training opportunities • Incorporate surprise visits rather than announced visits (parent) • Have two ratings rather than one (parent) • Have the TA providers be the raters (parent) • Provide TA to the classroom that will then be rated (parent) • Consider the feasibility of requiring peer mentorship, particularly in rural settings (FPG) <p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDE should provide TA to all providers for Early Learning Standards and the MS Early Childhood Guidelines (providers) • Expand training and TA to meet the needs of providers (FPG) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide TA and financial resources to centers that volunteer to enter the QRS program. • TA providers need to be available for an intensive level of support to help programs improve. • TA providers need to develop quality improvement plans

Summary

It is evident from comparing the three different reports that there are commonalities in recommendations across all three projects, even given their different purposes and methodologies. That which stand out the most include:

- There is an immediate need for clear, **written** guidance in the form of policies and procedures – providers need to be fully informed of the program’s requirements, assessors need to be well trained and consistent, and in general, transparency and communication need to be improved.
- Technical assistance efforts need to be streamlined and coordinated in order to promote equal access to the support services needed to make quality program improvements.
- A revision of the MS Quality Stars program should be considered, and stakeholders representing the diverse nature of the child care community in Mississippi should be engaged in every level of revision and decision making.
- Parents also need to be included as critical members of the ongoing discussions about QRS.
- The awareness of the need to increase quality programming and the funds that it takes to do so are evidenced in all three reports; to some extent, they all mention consideration for the funding that it would take to support higher participation in the program.
- There is a need for QRS to be purposefully and intentionally aligned with other standards, such as child care licensure, Early Learning Standards and Guidelines and other early learning standards.
- There is a need to research and learn from best practices providing a quality rating and improvement system in other states as a starting place for the revision to the MS QRS system.

For more information, please contact:

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