



State Early Childhood Advisory Council of MISSISSIPPI

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & 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) Committee¹; 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 to 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.

In order to understand the commonalities and findings of each of these reports, an analysis of the three reports was completed and a summary table created that includes the designs, major findings and recommendations from each report. This executive summary distills the information further into key concepts that were common across the three reports. It contains the following:

- General statistics about participation in the MS Quality Stars program
- Findings - Participation in MS Quality Stars
- Recommendations
- Summary of Next Steps

For specific information within each of the common findings, please refer to the summary and analysis table.

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.

¹The 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).



- 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.
- 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.

Findings – Participation in MS Quality Stars

The findings from all three reports can be categorized into the benefits of participating in the state's QRS program, and the barriers to participation. The **benefits** included:

- The opportunity to engage in program improvement activities.
- The ability to access higher rates of reimbursement through being able to accept the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) subsidy.
- Access to technical assistance (TA) supports.

Barriers to participation in the program included:

- Policies and instructions are unclear and difficult to understand, and are not in written form and available to providers.
- Requirements and paperwork are overwhelming to providers.
- The MS Quality Stars system is not perceived as equitable.
- Participation in QRS is expensive; quality is expensive to achieve and maintain.
- Reimbursement from TANF is not enough financial benefit to incentivize participation.
- The scoring system is seen as punitive, subjective and too rigid.
- Technical assistance options are unclear, limited and inequitable.

Recommendations

All three reports had recommendations that fall into four areas: general recommendations for improvement, recommendations for the process of revising MS Quality Stars, recommendations for elements to include, and recommendations for professional development.

General Recommendations for Improvement

- Align MS Quality Stars policies and requirements with other programs and standards, such as kindergarten readiness standards, licensure, Head Start, public PreK and other relevant programs.
- Provide financial compensation for participation, including maintaining the TANF reimbursements and offering incentives beyond the subsidy program.
- Create and distribute a written policy manual with clear guidelines for participation.

Recommendations for the Process of Revising MS Quality Stars

- When revisions are made, ensure representation from multiple groups, including those from different regions in MS and different sectors in the state (private, non-profit, for-profit and faith-based).
- Develop clear, cross-sector consensus on the goals of MS' QRS.
- Improve communication with the child care community.

Recommendations for Elements to Include In MS' QRS

The following is a list of elements considered important for inclusion in the MS quality rating system:

- Staff quality, including credentials, interactional styles, etc.;
- Promote child outcomes;
- Developmentally appropriate curriculum;
- Environment and classroom materials;
- Parent-provider relationships; and
- Professional development requirements for providers.

Recommendations for Professional Development

- Create more flexibility and methods for accessing required training and professional development.
- Provide differentiated and responsive technical assistance that is based on the individual needs of the participating centers.
- Provide mentorship opportunities between newer and more experienced providers and centers.
- Improve the rating process (i.e., # of visits) and relationship between raters, TA providers and child care providers.
- Develop written quality improvement plans.

Summary of Recommended Next Steps

- 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:

State Early Childhood Advisory Council • Office of the Governor
Laurie J. Smith, Ph.D., Policy Advisor/Executive Director, SECAC
P.O. Box 139, Jackson, MS 39205
601-576-2010 (phone) • 601-576-2791 (fax)
laurie.smith@governor.ms.gov