Dream BIG for our youngest children

Final Report

California Early Learning Quality Improvement System Advisory Committee

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS >>> iii

BACKGROUND >>> p.1

What is a Quality Rating and Improvement System?

Why Develop a Quality Rating and Improvement System?

Legislative Charge

Goals of California's Early Learning Quality Rating and Improvement System

Defining High Quality Programs: Key Features and Outcomes

WHAT ARE THE KEY POLICY OPPORTUNITIES? >>> p.7

Address Concerns in Health, Safety, and Quality Review Processes and Phase In Appropriate Oversight for the Early Learning and Care System

Provide Objective Ratings of Programs for Families and Policymakers by Establishing Unified Statewide Standards

Pilot the Quality Review System and Design Incentives to Support the System.

Strengthen the Links between Early Educator Professional Development and Effective Teaching to Improve Child Outcomes

Establish a Statewide Evaluation and Research System to Determine the Impact of Early Learning and Care Programs on Child Outcomes

PROPOSED DESIGN CALIFORNIA'S QRIS >>> p.12

The Quality Rating Structure

Elements of the Rating Structure:

- Ratios and Group Size for Centers and Family Child Care Homes
- Teaching and Learning
- Family Involvement
- Staff Education and Training
- Program Leadership

Preventing Redundancy in Program Reviews

PROPOSED DESIGN OF SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT QUALITY IMPROVEMENT >>> p.22

Technical Assistance to Help Programs Improve

Workforce Development to Promote Effective Teachers

Strategies to Encourage Family and Community Involvement

Data Systems to Track Progress

Initial Work to Develop a Financial Model for California's QRIS

HOW THE QRIS WILL WORK >>> p.30

Pilot Projects to Field Test the QRIS

Participation and Phase-In

Oversight and Conduct of Ratings and Reviews

NEXT STEPS FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT THROUGH THE QRIS >>> p.33

APPENDIXES

Appendix A: CAEL QIS Advisory Committee Process and Timeline

Appendix B: Expanded Assessment of California's Early Learning and Care Infrastructure

Appendix C: Local Early Learning Quality Improvement Models in California

Appendix D: Quality Rating and Improvement Systems in Other States

Appendix E: Expanded Description of the Rating Structure and Support Services for Quality Improvement

Appendix F: Draft Matrix of Current Early Childhood Education Data

Appendix G: Matrix of Early Learning and Care Programs

Appendix H: Guide to the "Family Involvement" Element of California's Quality Rating and Improvement System

Appendix I: CAEL QIS Engagement Subcommittee: Developing a Strategic Communications Plan

Appendix J: Report of the Finance and Incentives, Including Funding Model, Subcommittee

GLOSSARY

REFERENCES

Acknowledgments

Dream Big for Our Youngest Children reflects the work of the California Early Learning Quality Improvement System (CAEL QIS) Advisory Committee members; early learning and care program staff; child care licensing officials; county superintendents of education; local child care planning council and child care resource and referral leaders; First 5 California and county commission representatives; higher education representatives; California Department of Education (CDE) staff; California Comprehensive Center (CA CC) at WestEd staff; and nationally known experts and content specialists who shared their knowledge about the components of quality early learning and care programs and the implementation of quality rating and improvement systems. Financial support for CAEL QIS was provided by First 5 California, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the CDE. The report also reflects the input of over 5000 participants at the Advisory Committee and subcommittee meetings, as well as public hearings. Participating agencies and organizations are included in Appendix A. We appreciate the major contributions of expertise, time, resources, and commitment from all the individuals who are represented in this work.

CAEL QIS Advisory Committee Members

The CAEL QIS Advisory Committee is a broadly based, diverse group with the following 13 members appointed in accordance with statute:

Language from Senate Bill 1629, Chapter 307	Committee Members
(1) The Superintendent of Public Instruction or his or her designee	1. Jack O'Connell, Superintendent; and designees: Geno Flores and Gavin Payne, Chief Deputy Superintendents of Public Instruction; and Camille Maben, Director, Child Development Division
(2) The Secretary of Education or his or her designee	2. Bonnie Reiss and Glen Thomas, Secretaries of Education, and designees: Kathryn Radtkey-Gaither, Undersecretary of Education; and Anne McKinney, Deputy Secretary of Education
(3) The President pro Tempore of the Senate or his or her designee	3. Dave Gordon, Superintendent, Sacramento County Office of Education
(4) The Speaker of the Assembly or his or her designee	4. Joan Buchanan, Assembly Member; Sarah Tomlinson, designee
(5) The Director of the Department of Finance or his or her designee	5. Ana Matosantos, Director; Jeannie Oropeza, Program Budget Manager, designee
(6) The Director of the Department of Social Services or his or her designee	6. John A. Wagner, Director; Venus Garth, Branch Chief, designee
(7) The Governor shall appoint two representatives	7. Dennis Vicars, Chief Executive Officer, Human Services Management Corporation/PACE 8. Celia C. Ayala, Chief Executive Officer, Los Angeles Universal Preschool
(8) The Chairperson of the California Children and Families Commission or his or her designee	9. Joe Munso, Chairperson; Kris Perry, Executive Director, First 5 California, designee
(9) The Senate Committee on Rules shall appoint two representatives from the early care and education community, one who is a program administrator of a child development program funded by the department, and another who is a caregiver for infants and toddlers	10. Cliff Marcussen, Executive Director, Options – A Child Care and Human Services Agency 11. Consuelo Espinosa, Infant/Toddler Specialist, WestEd
(10) The Speaker of the Assembly shall appoint two representatives, one from the early care and education community who has experience with English learners, and one who is a local educational agency teacher who teaches kindergarten	12. Yolie Flores, Board Member, Los Angeles Unified School District (resigned June 2010) 13. Toby Boyd, Kindergarten Teacher, Elk Grove Unified School District

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» Dave Gordon, Chair

Family Involvement and Stakeholder Engagement and Advocacy

» Celia Ayala, Chair, and Toby Boyd, Vice-Chair

Data Systems for Program Improvement and Research

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Finance and Incentives, Including Funding Model

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Final Report Background

The charge of the California Early Learning Quality Improvement System Advisory Committee (hereafter referred to as the "Advisory Committee") is to develop a systemic plan to promote school readiness and other positive child outcomes by improving the quality of early learning and care programs for children from birth to five years old. As required by legislation (Senate Bill [SB] 1629, Chapter 307, Statutes of 2008), *Dream Big for Our Youngest Children* describes the Advisory Committee's recommendations for a new quality rating structure for early learning and care programs, as well as necessary quality improvement support systems across the broad array of early learning and care programs.

What Is a Quality Rating and Improvement System?

A quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) is a uniform set of ratings, graduated by level of quality, to assess and improve early learning and care programs. Objective ratings help families identify programs, guide providers in making improvements, and give policymakers a basis for designing technical assistance. A comprehensive QRIS provides workforce development, financial incentives, and other supports to improve quality. Twenty-three states have already adopted these systems statewide, and California is one of at least 20 more states in the process of planning such systems. California is a leader in proposing a QRIS that purposefully links improvements in program quality with child outcomes, including school readiness.

Why Develop a Quality Rating and Improvement System?

More than a million children ages birth to five currently attend some type of out-of-home early learning and care setting in California. What is striking is that, according to the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), no statewide system measures the quality of these early learning and care programs (LAO, 2007); and even the basic licensing system has out-of-date standards and one of the lowest inspection rates in the country.

Quality Programs Improve Outcomes for Children, Including Reducing the Achievement Gap

The good news is that quality early learning and care programs can help improve children's readiness and school success, with higher test scores, better attendance, and reduced grade-level retention (Reynolds et al., 2007; Karoly & Bigelow, 2005). Other lasting benefits include higher rates of school completion, greater likelihood of attending college, and greater lifetime earnings (Ramey et al., 2000; Lally, Mangione, & Honig, 1988). By reducing grade retention, use of special education and welfare, and involvement in crime, these quality programs are estimated to save from $4 to $17 for every dollar invested (Reynolds et al., 2007; Schweinhart, 2004; Karoly & Bigelow, 2005).

- California is home to approximately 3.2 million children ages birth through five years old (Children Now, 2010).
- Fifty-two percent of the babies born in California in 2008 were Latino, 27 percent white, 6 percent Asian, and 5 percent black (California Department of Public Health, 2008).
- English learners constitute 40 percent of California's kindergartners (CDE, 2009).
- Half of the children birth to age five in California are likely to qualify for free or reduced-price lunch when they enter kindergarten (CDE, 2009).
- More than half of the third graders in California do not meet state educational standards in English language arts, and one child in three does not meet standards in mathematics (CDE, 2010).

Lasting positive impacts have been found for large-scale public early learning and care programs as well as for intensive programs implemented on a small scale (Pianta et al., 2009). Based on such findings, Nobel laureate economist James Heckman (2006) concludes that early intervention programs for disadvantaged children are a better investment than remedial programs for older children. Of particular interest, given the demographics in California, is that high-quality preschool programs have been found to benefit especially those Latino children whose mothers have little education, have low incomes, and are linguistically isolated (Karoly et al., 2008).

While the benefits are less dramatic for children from more advantaged backgrounds, attending a quality preschool program is associated with higher achievement in elementary school for children in all income groups (Gormley & Phillips, 2005). The educational benefits of quality

programs for non-disadvantaged, preschool-age children are substantial, perhaps 75 percent as large as those for low-income children (Pianta et al., 2009). Quality infant and toddler care, whether provided exclusively by parents or by other caregivers, influences brain development and hence lays the foundation for all future learning (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Only Quality Programs Improve Child Outcomes

However, only quality programs produce these improved child outcomes. There is no evidence that the average preschool program produces benefits in line with what the best programs produce (Pianta et al., 2009). Poor-quality programs may actually harm children, leave already disadvantaged children further behind, and thereby exacerbate the achievement gap (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2002; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Gilliam & Zigler, 2000, 2004; Phillips, 2010).

Shortfalls in Program Quality Affect All Income Groups

Unfortunately, shortfalls in the quality of early learning and care programs currently affect children in all income groups in California. Based on onsite observations of 251 centers serving preschool-age children in the state, the quality of services is mixed, at best (Karoly et al., 2008), with problems ranging from alarming deficits in basic health and safety to shortfalls in teaching and learning:

- If quality is measured by the kind of instruction in thinking and language skills that are most closely linked to school readiness, *85 to 90 percent of the disadvantaged children shown to derive the greatest benefit from a quality preschool program are not enrolled in such a program*.
- Programs serving all income groups fall short on measures of the quality of teacher instruction.

In an earlier study using similar methodology, researchers found that nearly half of the infant and toddler programs provided poor quality care (Helburn, 1995). While the research was conducted some years ago, it remains one of the most comprehensive studies conducted to date and includes a California-based sample. Not only were many of the programs unsafe, but also they did not

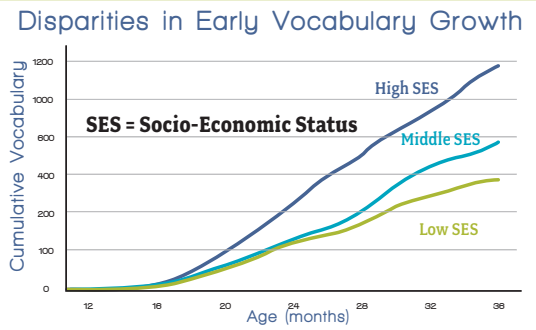
Roots of the Achievement Gap

Roots of the achievement gap start long before children enter kindergarten.

A major indicator for later school success is language and early literacy development, and disparities in early vocabulary growth between children from low socioeconomic status (SES) and high SES families can manifest themselves in children as early as 16 months of age.

Differences in language, social, and pre-mathematics skills are apparent when children enter kindergarten, and the children who start school behind tend to stay behind (Cannon & Karoly, 2007).

Disparities in Early Vocabulary Growth, Per Socioeconomic Status



Source: Hart, B., & Risley, T. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experiences of young American children*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

prove

provide warm and sensitive care or build on the "teachable" moments that occur each day.

Thus, California urgently needs to improve the quality of early learning and care program settings serving over a million children birth to age five, and to offer technical assistance and incentives for improvement by: 1) developing a QRIS that builds on the features of our most effective programs; and 2) redesigning the quality improvement and safety monitoring systems affecting one in three children birth to age five in California.

Legislative Charge

A broad partnership created the legislation that established the 13-member Advisory Committee and called for the creation of a QRIS. The legislation was sponsored by Senator Darrell Steinberg, with principal coauthor Assembly Member Dave Jones. A wide range of child advocacy, educational, and civic groups supported the legislation, which was signed into law by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. More than 300 organizations joined the CAEL QIS development process over the past two years (see Appendix A).

SB 1629 requires the Advisory Committee to report to the Legislature and the Governor on the following four tasks related to the development of a QRIS:

1. An assessment and analysis of the existing early care and education infrastructure, including other state and local early learning quality improvement systems
2. The development of an early learning quality rating scale for child development programs, including preschool as well as programs for infants and toddlers
3. The development of a funding model aligned with the quality rating scale for child care and development programs
4. Recommendations on how local, state, federal, and private resources can best be utilized to complement a statewide funding model as part of a comprehensive effort to improve the state's child care and development system

CAEL QIS builds on the work that State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell's P-16 Council envisioned in 2007, when it noted that any effort to close the achievement gap must begin with a system that includes high-quality preschool and other early learning and care programs. Governor Schwarzenegger's Committee on Education Excellence (2008) called for a comprehensive early childhood system as a foundation for school reform, stating that a culture that puts students first should start with its youngest children.

Californians give their best for their children, as evidenced by the heroes who provide services without the support of a state budget, the champions who strive to provide the best possible professional development despite funding challenges, and the voters who approve improvements to school programs and other opportunities that impact our children's futures. CAEL QIS builds on the commitment, expertise, and resources in our early learning and care programs – and then proposes further improvements so we can establish consistent high quality as we seek to expand access. In this report, the assessment and analysis of the existing early learning and care infrastructures are addressed in "What Are the Key Policy Opportunities?" and in Appendixes B, C, and D. "Proposed Design of California's QRIS" and Appendix E describe the proposed design for the early learning quality rating structure and the work on the funding model, with additional information on the resources to complement the model provided in Appendix J.

Goals of California's Early Learning Quality Rating and Improvement System

The major goal of California's QRIS is to increase the number of programs that have the features shown to improve child development outcomes, including readiness for school and success in life. The QRIS is a model of continuous program improvement that will be linked to child outcomes through pilot projects and ongoing research and evaluation. Based on the experience with quality early learning and care systems in states and communities across the nation (Mitchell, 2009), and with the support of current federal policy and resources encouraging the development of such systems, a QRIS has the potential to:

- Effectively improve child outcomes and reduce the school readiness gap by improving the quality of early learning and care programs.
- Use standardized program assessment tools to objectively and consistently rate early learning and care, including the quality of teacher effectiveness and caregiver interaction with young children, across the wide span of licensed center and licensed home-based early learning and care settings.
- Provide objective ratings of early learning and care settings to families in a clear, easy-to-understand format.
- Increase family and public awareness of the characteristics of early learning and care program quality that promote better outcomes for children.
- Implement research-based recommendations related to improvements in teacher preparation and effectiveness that affect child development and school readiness outcomes.

- Serve as the basis for technical assistance to help programs improve.
- Improve accountability and transparency for public investments.

Defining High-Quality Programs: Key Features and Outcomes

A QRIS design must begin with a definition of high-quality early learning and care. Based on syntheses of more than 40 years of research (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006; Jacobson, 2004; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2000; Jorde-Bloom, 1988), key features of high-quality programs that improve child outcomes for all children include:

- Intensive education (e.g., small classes, low ratios, regular attendance), which ensures that young children receive consistent, individualized attention over an extended period of time
- A learning environment with adequate physical space, equipment, and materials in which teachers interact responsively with children and help develop their social-emotional, thinking, and language skills

- Family involvement and services provided in a culturally and linguistically responsive manner
- A "curriculum" or plan of activities that engages young children, is based on research and age-appropriate expectations, and is aligned with state educational policy
- Adequate numbers of well-trained, qualified staff, with compensation sufficient to limit turnover and promote continuity of care
- Commitment to continuous quality improvement based on measures of teacher performance and children's progress
- Program directors who understand child development; provide leadership and recruit, train, and support staff; and manage the fiscal and legal responsibilities

What are the key Policy Opportunities?

Based on its assessment of California's existing early learning and care infrastructure, the Advisory Committee identified several major policy changes needed to raise more programs to a level of quality sufficient to promote school readiness. Key opportunities for policy change include the following:

Address concerns in health, safety, and quality review processes and phase in appropriate oversight for the early learning and care system.

California currently has multiple early learning and care "systems" administered with great variability in standards and far too little oversight.

- The state has three early learning and care "systems": Title 22 licensed facilities, Title 5 state-contracted child development programs, and the federally administered Head Start, as well as a publicly funded "non-system" of license-exempt care. Only two of these "systems" (Title 5 and Head Start) have standards that are designed to promote child development or school readiness.
- Publicly supported license-exempt care is not subject to any monitoring or even initial inspection; state oversight is limited to background and criminal record checks through the TrustLine Registry.

- Separate agencies are charged with program oversight. The Department of Social Services (DSS) administers Title 22 licensing, the CDE conducts Title 5 reviews, and the federal government monitors Head Start.
- With the exception of Head Start, none of these programs is monitored or rated with sufficient frequency by trained, objective reviewers to ensure that standards are met.

Based on a recent national study of oversight and regulation, California's Title 22 licensing system ranks 46th in the nation (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies [NACCRRA], 2009). Only 30 percent of programs are required to be inspected annually in California, as compared to 50 to 100 percent in most states (DSS, 2010; Karoly, 2009); and currently, some licensing inspections are being delayed or halted due to budget constraints. As a result of a reduction in resources, DSS may be unable even to meet the requirement to conduct thorough inspections of facilities every five years. Each inspector has an average caseload of 169 settings, far more than the nationally recommended ratio of 50:1 (NACCRRA, 2009). To improve the monitoring of health and safety in centers and family child care homes, DSS has proposed a new compliance protocol. This protocol would restore annual inspections of centers and biennial inspections of family child care homes by reducing the number of items assessed and raising licensure fees by 10 percent.

California's licensing standards need to be updated to reflect effective practice and research. Compared to nationally recommended standards, California's licensing requirements are lenient in several important areas. The center requirements allow considerably larger-than-recommended staff-child ratios, do not require staff to complete any annual training, and do not require any post-secondary degree for lead teachers (NACCRRA, 2009). Other important issues include developing a common definition of the age span for "infant," changing the definition of "toddler" to 18 to 36 months, recommending health and safety training annually, and developing appropriate nutrition requirements for family child care homes. Title 5 standards for state-contracted child development programs come much closer to meeting nationally recommended standards. However, as a result of cutbacks in budget and staffing, on-site reviews of Title 5 programs by CDE staff are limited to urgent situations; hence oversight is primarily limited to a paper review of program compliance.

In this report, the Advisory Committee proposes a quality rating structure that integrates the above multiple sets of standards into one coherent, evidence-based system. To improve the frequency of reviews and link programs to technical assistance and other quality improvement incentives, coordination of current licensing and programmatic reviews with the QRIS should be explored. While it is important to separate regulatory activities designed to enforce compliance from the provision of technical assistance, some streamlining in the monitoring of health, safety, and quality issues is essential.

Provide objective ratings of programs for families and policymakers by establishing unified statewide quality standards.

Studies show parents value high-quality child care, but they often do not spot shortfalls (Barraclough & Smith, 1996; Wolfe & Scrivner, 2004; Cryer, Tietze, & Wessels, 2002). Families rated centers nearly twice as high as did trained assessors on such key elements as health, safety, and staff-child interaction (Helburn, 1995). These findings highlight a need for easily accessible, objective ratings about the safety, health, and quality of the early learning taking place in these settings where children spend up to 11 hours per day.

The state funds child care resource and referral programs in every county to provide information to parents on the range of services available and tips on how to look for quality programs (*California Education Code*, Section 8212). However, there is no objective quality rating system upon which to base the information and referrals. Parents need access to these ratings to make wise choices on behalf of their children and families, and policymakers need the ratings to hold programs accountable and to invest in quality improvement efforts.

In the "Proposed Design of California's QRIS," the Advisory Committee recommends a system for standardized assessments to rate the early learning and care settings. The information should be made available to families in a clear, easy-to-understand format. Consideration should also be given to posting licensing inspection findings and quality ratings online for easy parent access, as recommended by the LAO (2007) and the NACCRRA (2009).

Pilot the quality review system and design incentives to support the system.

Good policy dictates conducting a pilot of the proposed quality review system before attempting statewide implementation. Participation will be voluntary during the pilot and the initial period of statewide implementation. The major non-financial incentive for a privately funded program to participate is the publicity associated with marketing a high-quality rating. However, virtually all states with a QRIS also employ various financial incentives to encourage programs to participate in the system and to help them improve their quality (see Appendix D). These incentives range from tiered reimbursement rates (higher subsidies for publicly funded programs that meet higher standards), to tax credits for parents who choose high-quality settings, to program grants to support quality improvements.

Unfortunately, in California, current reimbursement rates for state-funded programs provide little financial incentive to improve quality. In fact, the state currently has what might be called a reverse tiered reimbursement system, typically offering higher voucher payments for programs that are only required to meet minimal licensing standards than for state-contracted programs that are held to higher Title 5 child development program standards. In California, license-exempt providers, who are not required to meet any standards, have typically received nearly the same per-child reimbursement as licensed family child care providers, thereby providing little incentive for home-based providers to seek licensure. A provision in the 2011 state budget limits license-exempt providers to 80 percent of the

licensed family child care rate, but California still provides higher payments for license-exempt providers, as well as less oversight, than do many other states. Some states require at least initial visits to license-exempt providers receiving public payments, while others do not provide any subsidies to unlicensed settings (National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center [NCCIC], 2008).

The Advisory Committee report provides some preliminary information on the cost of various incentives in other states with QRISs, but estimating the cost and efficacy of the different incentives in California will require further work best conducted as part of the proposed pilot projects described later in this report. However, an urgent need exists to correct the current financial disincentives in publicly funded early learning and care programs. Such a correction would logically accompany, but need not wait for, the full implementation of a QRIS.

Strengthen the links between early educator professional development and effective teaching to improve child outcomes.

Effective early educators, whether in a center or family child care home (FCCH) setting, help young children grow and learn, observe children's progress, encourage curiosity and creativity, and keep families involved in their children's development. For children birth to age three, "teaching" and "care giving" typically occur simultaneously; and the manner in which the adult listens to and responds to the infant or toddler is a key indicator of the quality of the early learning and care (Lally, 2009).

Although there is broad agreement that understanding child development and engaging in effective interaction with young children are central to the capacity of quality early learning and care programs to improve child outcomes, most early educators lack sufficient professional development and academic training in child development (Whitebook et al., 2009). Recently, some studies have not found the expected added value in advanced degree training, nor in any other form of training, such as non-degree, in-service training (Early et al., 2007). However, researchers do not conclude that higher education and in-service training are unimportant. On the contrary, as indicated by University of Virginia researcher Robert Pianta and colleagues (2009) in a recent review of preschool research, the early learning and care programs found to achieve dramatic

improvements in child outcomes all have well-paid, highly qualified teachers with strong supervision. There is no evidence that programs without these attributes can achieve a fraction of the same results. The much-touted Tulsa pre-kindergarten program, for example, employs fully qualified public school teachers and pays public school salaries. In addition, the program is coupled with a curriculum focused on literacy and accompanied by focused professional development.

What the researchers are saying is that higher education for early educators needs to focus more on the desired child outcomes, and that degree-bearing courses need to include more observation of early educators in the classroom, with ample time for feedback on their effectiveness in interacting with young children.

While many early educators in both center and FCCH settings want to pursue further education, they cannot easily attend college during normal business hours because they already work full-time. Courses are needed at a variety of day and evening hours, in convenient locations, and using online technology. As at all levels of education, policymakers are struggling to determine the best ways to prepare teachers who can promote children's well-being and learning, such as supplementing formal education with coaching and training models. Moreover, early educators in preschool settings typically earn about half of what kindergarten teachers earn (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009); and turnover is high, hovering around 30 percent per year (Phillips, 2010).

California needs to build on innovative projects and commit to statewide access to an articulated pathway through higher education based on early educator competencies; equitable compensation and environments; and research- and data-driven professional development practices, policies, and resource allocations that link effective teaching and learning relationships to child outcomes.

Establish a statewide evaluation and research system to determine the impact of early learning and care programs on child outcomes.

California does not track children's enrollment in early learning and care programs across the wide range of program settings, and hence these data cannot be linked to children's school readiness and achievement in kindergarten through grade twelve. Establishing a unique child identifier for children enrolled in early learning and care programs would help to understand patterns of enrollment and to link these data with trends in child outcomes in elementary through higher education. While rigorous quasi-experimental studies would be needed to determine causal effects, tracking the enrollment data would improve the accountability and transparency of the public's investments. Also, the child, family, and program data sets need to be connected to better determine the most effective early learning practices for California's diverse population of young children.

Proposed Design of California's QRIS

The Quality Rating Structure

Non-Weighted Block and Five-Tier System

The proposed QRIS establishes a cohesive set of quality standards for all early learning and care programs. The Advisory Committee approved a non-weighted block system for the rating structure's basic design. In a block system, all the quality criteria in each tier need to be accomplished to obtain that rating, and the criteria included in each tier build on those in previous blocks. Unlike a point system, where providers may meet some but not all criteria for a particular tier, a block system structure promotes more consistency in the meaning of the ratings and makes it easier for families to understand and compare ratings.

In addition, the Advisory Committee approved five tiers for each element. Tier 1, with the addition of an educational program and annual licensing visits, is roughly modeled after Title 22 licensing standards. Tier 3 parallels the Title 5 child development program standards, and Tier 5 is similar to nationally recommended standards, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation standards and the National Institute for Early Education Research quality benchmarks. The top tier represents a level of quality to which the Advisory Committee hopes programs will aspire, with the expectation that only a minority will attain the higher tiers initially. Over time, the QRIS will motivate and assist centers and family child care homes in moving up the tiers to achieve higher ratings.

Five Quality Elements

As shown in the table on page 20, the Advisory Committee approved five quality elements for the rating structure: ratios and group size; teaching and learning (measured by Environment Rating Scales [ERS], and alignment with the *California Preschool Learning Foundations*, *California Infant/Toddler Learning & Development Foundations*, and the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework*); family involvement; staff education and training; and program leadership. The elements included in the quality rating structure are limited to those most closely linked through research and effective practice to improved outcomes for children. The selected elements are also proxies – or leading indicators – for the many additional factors that are important for optimum child development. By limiting the number of items to be "rated" and, therefore, the cost of the quality rating process, the QRIS will attempt to preserve resources and allow more emphasis on the support systems and technical assistance for quality improvement.

The Advisory Committee approved a five-tier rating structure that integrates:

- Cultural and language competence (using the definition developed in conjunction with the *Early Childhood Educator [ECE] Competencies;* see Appendix B for more detail)
- Children with special needs
- Nutrition, health, and physical activity

These important characteristics need to be embedded into each quality element and all aspects of professional development, family involvement, and technical assistance, as well as other supports for quality improvement. California's QRIS envisions early learning and care programs that support the many cultures and languages of California's children and families, are fully inclusive of children with special needs, and promote the healthy growth and development of young children.

Elements of the Rating Structure

The following section summarizes the Advisory Committee's decisions on the five quality elements, and it briefly describes the related policy statements and considerations for each element. For more detail on the work of the five subcommittees, including the subcommittee meeting highlights, see http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/rt/caelqis.asp.

Ratios and Group Size for Centers and Family Child Care Homes

Staff-child ratios represent complex issues in developing the QRIS. Providing sufficient individual attention to young children in a stimulating – though orderly – setting is a key quality indicator. Evidence suggests that a relatively high ratio of adults to children may be especially important for infants and toddlers (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). However, staff-child ratios, like teacher and provider education requirements, are key factors affecting the cost of early learning and care, and therefore these factors must be considered in tandem.

Ratio and group size for centers: For infants in the highest two tiers, the Advisory Committee proposes more stringent staff-child ratios similar to those recommended by NAEYC and the Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC).[1] For preschool-age children, however, the proposed staff-child ratios generally follow Title 22 licensing requirements in the first two tiers. The Toddler Option is a requirement of Tier 2, which means that a toddler is defined as 18 to 30 months of age, and a ratio of 6:1 is required. The ratios maintain Title 5 and Head Start child development program requirements in the higher three tiers for toddlers and preschoolers, allowing for more emphasis on stronger educational requirements for program directors and early educators to improve quality.

Group size: The number of children in a group is often considered to be as important as staff-child ratios to the overall quality of a program. Title 22 licensing regulations currently do not have group size requirements. In the proposed rating structure, all five tiers would have a limitation on group size. For infants in Tiers 3 and 4 and for all age groups in Tier 5, group size would indicate the maximum number of children in an individual classroom. For infants in Tiers 1 and 2, and for toddlers and preschool children in Tiers 1 to 4, group size may be defined as "well-defined spaces" in a larger room. In Tiers 3 to 5, programs would either have to meet the Title 5 child development program requirements, or a research-based alternative of 10:1 and group size of 20 children, assuming higher teacher education qualifications, such as those being implemented in Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Ratio and group size for family child care homes: The proposed rating structure uses current Title 22 licensing criteria as ratio and group size criteria for family child care homes. Keeping FCCH ratio and group size constant also assumes increased staff qualifications to improve program quality.

Teaching and Learning

As stated earlier, the proposed quality rating structure will measure a few key criteria for each element, with the understanding that these criteria serve as proxies — or key indicators — for the many important attributes that affect program quality. The teaching and learning quality element has two criteria:

- The quality rating structure should ensure that all tiers include an adequate measure of teacher-child interaction, which is one of the factors most strongly related to improved child outcomes.
  - » The entry level of the QRIS will require self-assessments using the environment rating scales (ERS) to measure structural quality and teacher/provider-child interaction. The ERS are a group of scales including the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale —Revised (ECERS-R) to assess programs for children ages two to five, the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R) for programs serving children up to age two-and-a-half, and the

[1] WestEd's PITC recommends primary care ratios of 1:3 or 1:4, in groups of 6 to 12 children, depending on the age (2010). NAEYC recommends 1:4 for infants up to 15 months of age in a group of 8 children, a 1:4 ratio for toddlers ages 12 to 18 months, and a 1:6 ratio for those up to 36 months with a group size of 12.

Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised (FCCERS-R) for home-based child care settings. Each set of scales has items to evaluate the physical environment, materials, basic care, curriculum, the interaction between early educators and children, and opportunities for learning and development. The ERS, first published in 1980, have demonstrated reliability and validity, and they are used in most other states that have QRISs. Additional tools may be needed to adequately assess and improve program facilities.

» Higher levels of the rating structure would focus in more depth on teacher-child interaction, with independent assessments using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) or the Program Assessment Rating Scale (PARS) at Tiers 4 and 5. The CLASS is an assessment tool with demonstrated reliability and validity that is particularly noted for its capacity to assess the quality of teacher instruction for preschool-age children; it is now being required by the federal government to evaluate the quality of Head Start programs. Developed by PITC, the PARS measures the early educator's responsiveness to children ages birth to three.

» Alignment with the *Foundations* and *Frameworks* serves as a proxy for curriculum, child assessment, developmental and health screenings with appropriate referrals, inclusion of children with special needs, and cultural and language competence. The *Foundations* and *Frameworks* contain these (and other) program quality criteria and are also aligned with kindergarten standards.

The use of the ERS family of tools, Title 22 licensing requirements, and the *Foundations* and *Frameworks* will together address the following proposed "Nutrition Criteria":

- Meals and snacks meet the Child Care Food Program (CCFP) requirements (for centers).
- Meals and snacks are served at regular times.
- Children have access to water throughout the day.
- Menus are posted.
- The program decides what is offered; the child decides what to eat and how much.
- Meals are served family style; adults sit with children during meals.

In addition, orientation to the CCFP's nutrition guidance and state nutrition standards will provide nutrition criteria. Beginning with Tier 1, programs will be encouraged to participate in the CCFP. Representatives from nutrition programs and from health and mental health consultant organizations support including additional criteria.

Family Involvement

Incorporating parent and family engagement is a critical component of California's proposed QRIS. It is the interaction between the child's family and early learning and care setting, whether it is a center or FCCH, that promotes the best developmental and child outcomes. For example, the

Chicago Child-Parent Centers found that family engagement is not only an essential component of a high-quality early learning program, but also a key factor associated with more positive student outcomes and greater family involvement in the elementary school years (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999).

Family involvement has been linked to school readiness, school performance, academic achievement, and social and emotional development. Studies have found that *all* families, regardless of income or educational level, or ethnic or cultural background, are important in supporting children's learning and investing in children's school success. Indeed, research suggests that family participation in education is twice as predictive of students' academic success as family socioeconomic status. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that regardless of family income or cultural background, children whose parents are involved in their education are more likely to achieve higher grades and test scores, have more consistent school attendance, demonstrate better social skills and self-esteem, show improved behavior, and adapt well to the school environment (Coughlan et al., 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Therefore, it is essential to establish widely available opportunities for families to become involved in their children's early learning and care settings; work collaboratively with schools, centers, and family child care homes; and develop partnerships with early educators so that young children receive the full benefit of the programs and are prepared for kindergarten and future school success.

The five tiers of the proposed family involvement quality element focus on relationship building, shared goals, and family demographics. These partnering strategies extend and deepen in intentionality and variety as programs advance through the five tiers. Early learning and care programs need a full range of options and opportunities for family engagement, so families can choose the type of engagement activities based on their priorities.

The family involvement element integrates three components of effective partnering to do the following:

- Develop partnering relationships with families and recognize the primacy of family.
- Address diversity; acknowledge the differences of culture and family values and practices.
- Build trusting relationships that grow out of shared knowledge.

The Advisory Committee proposes using the ERS measure for family involvement and the Title 22 licensing requirements related to family engagement as proxies for the family engagement element of the rating scale.[2] The Advisory Committee recommends including family education topics appropriate to the community beginning at Tier 2 and topics appropriate to transition planning at Tier 3. Cultural and language competency must be integrated into all family involvement strategies. For more information on effective strategies for encouraging family involvement, with an emphasis on cultural and language competency and assisting families who have children with special needs, see Appendix H.

[2] Family Involvement tiers reference ECERS-R subscale "Parents & Staff," item 38; ITERS-R subscale "Parents & Staff" item 33; and the FCCERS-R subscale Parent & Provider, item 35.

Staff Education and Training

The Advisory Committee approved tiers for early educator professional development, with consideration of *Early Childhood Education (ECE) Competencies* and the professional development delivery system. The intent is to acknowledge the extensive research indicating that early educators with degrees and appropriate training in the field are a standard component of the high-quality programs that have been found to increase school readiness and improve children's achievement in elementary school. Degrees alone are not a panacea, however.[3] Both degree-bearing and in-service training need to focus more on the kind of interaction between the early educator and child that has been found to promote school readiness across domains. Promoting teacher effectiveness calls for a mix of strategies, including ongoing support for learning, rewarding work environments, and equitable compensation. As indicated earlier, program observations are also needed to assess teacher effectiveness and provide ongoing feedback.

Staff education and training criteria vary at each tier of the QRIS, encompassing the following components:

- Formal education – credit-bearing courses, including degrees and credentials. Coursework in early childhood education requires a "C" or better grade.
- Practical experience – credit and non-credit bearing professional practice experiences, such as reflective practice, internships, college practicum experiences, and fieldwork.
- Ongoing professional development – credit or non-credit courses and seminars, including coaching and mentoring.

With respect to teacher qualifications, the proposed design gradually advances teacher educational qualifications by tier. QRIS "staff education and ongoing professional development" criteria apply to all lead teachers as the proxy for the education and professional development of staff in the early learning and care program.

[3] Well-qualified teachers are an important element of high-quality programs, although levels of education need to be accompanied by equitable pay, which means salaries that are commensurate with the level of education. Research indicates that centers that offer equitable compensation are better able to recruit and retain well-educated staff. Other factors that contribute to high-quality programs include high-caliber curriculum, intensive education (i.e., small classes, low teacher/student ratios), steady attendance, measurements of teacher performance to guide training to improve teacher effectiveness, and helping teachers learn to measure children's progress to inform efforts to promote student progress (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006).

Program Leadership

Early learning and care directors are responsible for personnel and fiscal management, oversight of the program's curriculum, and educational leadership for staff and families. For program leadership, the program director's educational and professional experience serve as the proxies related to establishing effective administrative policies and procedures, developing leadership, compensating staff, supporting professional development, and evaluating programs. Program leadership involves a wide array of knowledge and skills in administration, staff management, and understanding policies and processes (McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, 2009).[4] The quality rating structure uses the program director's qualifications as a proxy for these multiple skills, recognizing that this measure of effectiveness will need to be evaluated.

The Program Administration Scale (PAS) is designed to reliably measure the leadership and management practices of center-based early childhood organizations. The Business Administration Scale (BAS) measures management practices and quality of care in family child care settings. Both scales are highly correlated with program director qualifications and are helpful tools for technical assistance, though they are not appropriate for rating all programs. The Advisory Committee also recommended using other administrative rating tools to improve program leadership, such as the coordinated management review the CDE uses to monitor Title 5 child development programs, as well as NAEYC materials. Ensuring a process for measuring the effectiveness of program leadership is critical to ensuring that an early learning and care program contributes to improved child outcomes.

Each center should identify the "program director," defined as the person who administers and/or manages a center or program. For purposes of assessing program leadership, family child care homes will use the staff education and training element and will not be asked to also meet the program leadership element criteria for the program director. However, the BAS instrument may be used as a self-study resource and for technical assistance for family child care providers.

Preventing Redundancy in Program Reviews

To guard against duplication in program reviews, the Advisory Committee proposes exploring agreements with accreditation agencies and other entities, such as Head Start and Title 5 programs, which conduct validated performance reviews. The purpose of this policy is to prevent duplication of effort and save expenditures on multiple procedures, such as environment ratings. In addition, this process may trigger a review of current interagency program monitoring

[4] Policymakers should heed the following advice for early child care program directors: (1) Support the use of the federal Child Care and Development Fund quality set-aside funds and Head Start training and technical assistance dollars for director leadership training; (2) encourage institutions of higher education to expand early childhood administration courses and degree programs; (3) create incentives for early childhood administrators to enhance their professional qualifications and attain a state or national director credential; and (4) ensure that organizational measures of program administration are included in system reform efforts, such as QRISs (McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, 2009).

processes to provide for similar reciprocity, given the redundant aspects of many early learning and care program reviews, including Title 5 reviews and Title 22 licensing inspections. Ultimately, of course, preventing redundancy in program reviews raises the larger question of the relationship of Title 22 licensing inspections and QRIS monitoring. The Advisory Committee recommends piloting various approaches to achieve efficiencies, from coordinating the two processes to possibly experimenting with combining them.

The QRIS will set the standards for quality in each tier. Third party accreditation and validated performance reviews will be used in conjunction with tiers, but not incorporated into the tiers. Accrediting agencies will be encouraged to map their quality criteria to California's QRIS. Reciprocity with part or all of the QRIS, such as the ERS and CLASS/PARS reviews, will be considered with time-limited memoranda of understanding. The agency requesting reciprocity will be required to pay for any related costs.

It is important to stress that the quality rating structure and support systems will be field tested over the next several years. The intention is also to eventually create a California-specific quality rating tool so that California does not depend on proprietary tools and can develop a resource that reflects California's priorities and resources. The Advisory Committee anticipates that these recommendations will be reviewed as more data, information on effective practices, and stakeholder input become available. However, the key decisions here provide the essential foundation for moving forward to test implementation of the QRIS design.

CAEL QRIS Block System: Tiers and Elements

Quality Elements	Tier 1		Tier 2		Tier 3			Tier 4			Tier 5		
Ratios and Group Size	**Ratio**	**Group Size**	**Ratio**	**Group Size**	**Ratio**		**Group Size**	**Ratio**		**Group Size**	**Ratio**		**Group Size**
Infant (Center)	4:1	12	4:1	12	3:1 4:1	or	12 8	3:1 4:1	or	12 8	3:1		9
Toddler (Center): Ratio varies; depends on definition of toddler & whether toddlers are grouped with infants.	4:1	12	6:1	12	4:1		12	4:1		12	4:1		12
	Toddler is defined as 12-24 months, and it is assumed that toddlers are included with infants.		Toddler is defined as 18-30 months and; a ratio of 6:1 is required.		Toddler is defined as 18-36 months.			Toddler is defined as 18-36 months.			Toddler is defined as 18-36 months.		
Preschool (Center)	12:1	24	12:1	24	8:1 10:1	or	24 20	8:1 10:1	or	24 20	8:1 10:1	or	24 20
Family Child Care Homes	The Advisory Committee approved using current Title 22 licensing criteria as Ratio and Group Size Criteria.												
Teaching and Learning													
a. Environment Rating Scale(s) – ECERS-R, ITERS-R, FCCERS-R	**Facilitated self-assessment.** Includes a one-on-one facilitated training after self-assessment completed. No requirement for score level.		**Facilitated peer assessment.** Includes a one-on-one facilitated training after peer-assessment completed. No requirement for score level.		**Independent assessment.** All subscales completed and averaged to meet overall score level of 4.0. Self- assessment with CLASS (pre-k) or PARS (infant/toddler) to measure teacher/child interactions in alternate rating periods.			**Independent assessment.** All subscales completed and averaged to meet overall score level of 5.0. Plus CLASS (pre-k) or PARS (infant/toddler) to measure teacher/child interactions in alternate rating periods.			**Independent assessment.** All subscales completed and averaged to meet overall score level of 6.0. Plus CLASS (pre-k) or PARS (infant/toddler) to measure teacher/child interactions in alternate rating periods.		
b. Alignment with Early Learning *Foundations* and *Frameworks*	**Awareness.** Have a copy of and receive orientation on *Foundations* and *Frameworks*. **Education Plan:** Program has philosophy statement.		**Exploring integrating the *Foundations* and *Frameworks*.** **Education Plan:** A developmentally, culturally, linguistically appropriate (DCLA) curriculum.		**Developing competency in integrating *Foundations* and *Frameworks*.** **Education Plan:** Social, emotional, cognitive, and physical domains in lesson plans linked to DCLA child assessments. **Professional development** plan for *Foundations* and *Frameworks*.			**Building competency in integrating *Foundations* and *Frameworks*.** **Education Plan:** Social, emotional, cognitive, and physical domains in lesson plans linked to DCLA child assessments. **Professional development** plan for *Foundations* and *Frameworks*.			**Fully integrating *Foundations* and *Frameworks*** **Education Plan:** Include all domains of learning in an integrated fashion in lesson plans linked to DCLA child assessment. **Professional development** plan for *Foundations* and *Frameworks*.		

Refer to Appendix E for more information about the quality elements and tiers.

continued on next page >>>

Quality Elements	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	Tier 5
Family Involvement					
Family Involvement: Environment Rating Subscale ("Parents & Staff") (ECERS-R, ITERS-R, FCCERS-R)	**Communicate with Parents** **a.** ERS: Facilitated self-assessment. **b.** If subscale item is less than 3, an improvement plan is developed. **c.** Title 22 Center requirements. **d.** Comparable Title 22 FCCH requirements.	**Educate Parents and Receive Information** **a.** ERS: Facilitated peer-assessment. **b.** If subscale item is less than 3, an improvement plan is developed. **c.** Topics offered in support of subscale. Provisions for parents, indicators for family information and/or education may include topics such as how children learn at home and in early learning and care; developmental levels and brain development; physical activities and nutrition.	**Involve Parents** **a.** ERS independent assessment. **b.** ERS average score of 4; when subscale item is less than 4, a quality improvement plan will be developed. **c.** Provider has a written transition plan that is activated when a child moves into another child care setting or into kindergarten.	**Engage Parents** **a.** ERS independent assessment. **b.** ERS average score of 5; when subscale item is less than 5, a quality improvement plan will be developed.	**Partner and Advocate with Parents** **a.** ERS independent assessment **b.** ERS average score of 6; when subscale item is less than 6, a quality improvement plan will be developed.
Staff Education and Training					
Education	**Center:** 12 units of ECE **FCCH:** 15 hours of health and safety	**Center:** 24 units of ECE (core 8) **FCCH:** 12 units of ECE (core 8)	24 units of ECE (core 8) and 16 units of General Education (same as Title 5 and current Child Development Teacher permit).	Associate's degree in ECE **OR** 60 degree-applicable units, including 24 units of ECE OR associate's degree in any field plus 24 units of ECE (similar to a Master Teacher in Title 5 Programs or new (October 2011) Head Start requirements.	Bachelor's degree in ECE (or closely related field) with 48+ units of ECE OR master's degree in ECE.
Experience	Title 22 teacher with 6 months experience	One year of experience	Two years of experience	Two years of experience	Two years of experience
Professional Development	21 hours per year	21 hours per year	21 hours per year	21 hours per year	21 hours per year
Program Leadership					
Program Leadership	12 units core ECE (early childhood education, child development, family/ consumer studies, or related field), 3 units administration, 4 years experience. Introduction to PAS or BAS.	24 units core ECE, 16 units General Education, 3 units administration, 1 year management or supervisory experience. Self-study with PAS or BAS.	Associate's degree with 24 units core ECE, 6 units administration, 2 units supervision 2 years management or supervisory experience. Continuous improvement through a PAS or BAS action plan.	Bachelor's degree with 24 units core ECE, 15 units management, 3 years management or supervisory experience. Continuous improvement, through a PAS or BAS action plan.	Master's degree with 30 units core ECE including specialized courses, 21 units management, or Administrative Credential. Continuous improvement through a PAS or BAS action plan.

Refer to Appendix E for more information about the quality elements and tiers.

Proposed Design of Systems to Support Quality Improvement

Technical Assistance to Help Programs Improve

Because one of the chief purposes of a QRIS is to support quality improvement, technical assistances (TA) is a major focus. Based on the concerns about the quality of programs identified in studies (Karoly et al., 2008; Helburn, 1995), merely rating programs without providing TA resources will not foster continuous program improvement and better outcomes for children in early learning and care programs. While the Advisory Committee's work focused on the rating structure's design, the Committee approved actions to guide the TA that will accompany the rating structure to form a complete QRIS by providing a pathway for improvement.

Upon entry into the QRIS, every early learning and care program would be offered information to explain the ratings and an opportunity to develop a "quality improvement plan" in collaboration with TA staff. The plan would provide direction on how to improve quality in the areas of concern to the program, and, if desired, offer clear direction on how to qualify to move up to the next tier. While entry-level programs are likely to require the greatest support, TA would also be available to help programs maintain their current tier, particularly at the higher levels. The plan is to build on existing TA expertise and effective delivery strategies using the resources of early QRIS

model programs and early learning and care associations. To avoid conflicts of interest, different groups, or at least separate parts of organizations, would provide QRIS ratings, ERS, and program reviews; and conduct TA. For example, with sufficient safeguards, TA could be provided through different administrative groups but not necessarily separate agencies, since in some regions few agencies have sufficient expertise.

Prior to implementation, administrators would examine local TA models that have experience with assessing and providing technical assistance to programs. Administrators could then explore the use of reciprocal reviews and TA to build a QRIS learning community that strengthens program leadership and invites ownership. TA would also be available for license-exempt providers to help them prepare for licensure and to support them in providing information to families on child development.

The proposed TA will be a strengths-based approach that uses coaching and mentoring for continuous quality improvement. The coaching model is client-driven, beginning with a baseline QRIS assessment of the early learning and care program. The QRIS coaches need to have (or acquire) training in specific skill areas. Statewide oversight is needed to monitor QRIS coaches' credentials and evaluate the effectiveness of their approaches. TA resources should focus on improving: (1) the quality of "teaching and learning," primarily to improve outcomes for children; and (2) operational considerations, such as leadership, human resources management, and program resources.

During the pilot phase, it will be important to build on statewide TA networks and local TA resources as described in Appendix B. Maximizing the use of technology (such as Webinars and teleconferences) will facilitate broader participation and dissemination of information. In addition, the pilot phase will be an important time to examine options for selecting an "honest local broker" to identify regional and local TA resources without posing a conflict of interest.

Building on California's Early Learning Resources

California has developed some important documents to help early learning and care programs improve child outcomes, and the proposed QRIS will build on these resources. The resources described here are designed to be developmentally, age, and culturally/linguistically appropriate while also linking with kindergarten standards. Thus, they provide a platform for a continuum from birth to age eight. The resources include the following:

- *California Infant/Toddler Learning & Development Foundations* provide a comprehensive understanding of young children's learning and development during the first three years of life. The *Foundations* outline key knowledge and skills that most children can achieve when offered the kinds of interactions, guidance, and environments that research has shown to promote early learning and development. The *California Preschool Learning Foundations* describe the knowledge, skills, and competencies that children typically attain at around 48 and 60 months of age when they participate in a high-quality preschool. The *Preschool Foundations* are research-based, link to the kindergarten standards, and encompass the kindergarten through grade

twelve content standard areas with important additions for social-emotional development and dual-language learners.

- The *California Preschool Curriculum Frameworks*, released in 2010, are companion documents to the *Foundations*. The *Frameworks* include information on the environment and experiences to support each learning domain, suggested interactions with children and families, and teaching strategies in a format that allows early educators to reflect on their teaching practices. Local programs can choose specific curricula that will define a sequence of integrated experiences, interactions, and activities to help young children reach specific learning goals. Currently, fewer than half of the three- and four-year-old California children attend programs that use a specific curriculum based on child development research (Karoly et al., 2008).

- The *Early Childhood Educator Competencies* describe core knowledge, skills, and dispositions of early educators serving children birth to age five. The *Competencies* define the content of professional preparation and ongoing development, and include the skills to be culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate when working with young children and their families. The *Competencies* address the goal of developing and retaining a competent, diverse, and stable workforce in a variety of program settings. The *Competencies* will provide levels of content (to be determined) for ongoing professional development, and they will be aligned with the *California Preschool Learning Foundations* and the *Infant/Toddler Learning & Development Foundations.*

- *California's Desired Results Developmental Profile-2010 (DRDP–2010)* for typically developing children, and *DRDP-Access* for children with disabilities and other special needs, represent key components of the state's efforts to improve the quality of early learning and care programs by focusing on child outcomes. These observation-based assessments are being aligned with the *Foundations*. The Desired Results system also includes a family-based assessment in the form of an annual family survey and a program-based assessment using the environment rating scale.

- The *DRDP-School Readiness Tool* provides kindergarten teachers with valid and reliable measurements of children's development in key domains of school readiness (English-language development, self and social development, self-regulation, language and literacy development, and mathematics development), and it supports the transition of children from preschool to kindergarten. The *Tool* is being field tested from August 2010 to June 2011. This resource could be included in the QRIS assessment of child outcomes.

These early education resources, training materials and programs, and delivery systems, including Web access, are already available to public and private programs and by license-exempt providers. To encourage more widespread use of the *Foundations, Frameworks*, *DRDP*, and related training materials, the Advisory Committee recommends broad dissemination and training for both public and private early learning and care programs through pre-service and in-service professional development resources and systems.

Workforce Development to Promote Effective Teachers

The primary workforce development challenge is to set up a support system to an already experienced workforce coming from very diverse educational backgrounds. One strength of the existing workforce is that licensed family child care providers and center teachers are ethnically diverse and similar in demographics to the children they serve (Whitebook, 2009). However, the workforce's level of training varies widely from basic health and safety certification to higher education degrees in early learning and care. Currently, the federal Head Start program is the only early learning and care program in California that requires an associate's or bachelor's degree for teaching staff.

California needs timelines with systemic support for an articulation and transfer process within and among colleges and universities, systemwide and college-cohort data, and policies and funding that support student success to improve degree completion. The state needs to build on the efforts of community colleges to align courses and link them with state university courses to create a pathway toward two- and four-year degrees, without creating dead ends for the early learning and care workforce. The extent of the issue is illustrated in a recent analysis indicating that 70 percent of degree-seeking community college students had not completed a certificate or degree, or transferred to another college or university six years after initial enrollment (Moore & Shulock, 2010).

Competencies and Courses: Content of Education and Ongoing Professional Development

The Advisory Committee approved policies and considerations for building on the progress of current quality improvement projects and accelerating statewide accessibility, accountability, and coherence through the following steps:

All members of the higher education community, including the regents, presidents, deans, and faculty, need to ensure the completion of work by the following timeline so that the early learning and care workforce can effectively provide learning opportunities for young children and meet program requirements. These objectives and timelines became more readily achievable with the recent passage of SB 1440 (Padilla) that created a clear pathway for community college students transferring to the California State University system.

1. By 2012, the *Early Childhood Educator Competencies*, which include the *Foundations*, will be developed into a common and comprehensive course of study that is reflected in courses for associate's and bachelor's degrees and delivered statewide. Credit-bearing courses are required for degrees.

2. Using the statewide common and comprehensive course of study based on the *Early Childhood Educator Competencies:*

    a. By 2013, all California community colleges that offer early learning and care programs incorporate the "core eight" classes and additional courses to reflect the designated

lower division *Competencies* into their degree programs. As of December 2010, of the 105 community colleges:

» Nineteen have programs that are currently aligned.

» Another 22 are finalizing their alignment.

» An additional 53 are working toward submitting their documents.

» Eleven colleges have not yet agreed to participate.

b. By 2014, all California State University, University of California, and private higher education institutions that offer early childhood education programs align these courses to a common and comprehensive course of study across the two- and four-year degree system.

3. By 2015, a clear and accessible system of demonstrating the *Early Childhood Educator Competencies* equivalency for courses will be developed and publicized, including clear criteria and deliverables. This system includes courses taken from out-of-state, foreign, and non-regionally accredited institutions, as well as competencies developed through professional practice.

Strategies to Encourage Family and Community Involvement

The QRIS pilot projects provide an opportunity to further plan and test the broad outreach and communication needed for QRIS success. The information provided here reflects the draft plan from the Advisory Committee's Engagement Subcommittee (see Appendix I).

The draft communication plan is organized by three target groups: (1) families; (2) programs and providers; and (3) stakeholders and the general public. For each group, the plan provides implementation strategies, sample messages, ideas for templates, and systems and groups that can provide outreach and information. Local agencies and organizations need to have open access to information through a state agency Web-linked platform that will also encourage and reward participation by early leaders in the pilot phase and throughout QRIS implementation. A sample of the ideas for outreach and communication include:

- Establish a brand for the QRIS that informs and promotes quality early learning and care programs. For

example, some states use keys or stars. Templates could be developed for common QRIS messages that could be individualized to the needs of local agencies to distribute to various target groups. Templates could be provided for Web sites; flyers; posters; brochures; video presentations; public service announcements; advertisements; and scripts for phone tree messages, twitters, e-mail blasts, text messages, and social networks.

- Ask state, county, and local agencies and organizations currently working with families to assist with disseminating information to families, stakeholders, and the community and with collecting feedback. This involvement could include training spokespersons or obtaining trainers from local organizations. It is particularly important to include messengers who speak the families' language and are trusted sources of information.
- Seek corporate and agency sponsors and secure expert assistance to develop branding, templates, and a public outreach plan. Partnering with marketing classes through colleges and universities via practicum projects and putting QRIS information into the First 5 "Kit for New Parents" could be explored.

Data Systems to Track Progress

A QRIS has great potential to help provide the data on the effectiveness of early learning and care programs in improving child outcomes and reducing the achievement gap. The Advisory Committee's vision is as follows:

> The California Early Childhood Education (ECE) data information system, as a component of the QRIS, will provide timely, accessible, and appropriate birth to age five data regarding children, families, teachers/providers, and programs, and data about funding to support continuous program improvement leading to increased articulation and better outcomes for children in California. To ensure a high-caliber California QRIS, the ECE data information system will provide data to policymakers, consumers, and the public for purposes of strategic planning, resource management, research, and improved accountability. Major focus will be placed on leveraging existing data systems to eliminate duplicative reporting and collection and improve data quality to:
>
> - Measure school readiness.
> - Establish more efficient program management and administrative functions.
> - Improve teacher and provider effectiveness.

The Advisory Committee identified nine key principles for an early learning and care data system: (1) confidential; (2) useable and practical; (3) accessible and inter-operable; (4) respects current databases and builds on them; (5) transparent; (6) includes and connects child, family, teacher and provider, and program data; (7) provider-friendly; (8) easily adaptable and can grow and change over time; and (9) dynamic.

The first steps in developing the data information system are to develop a unique child identifier and assess current data collection processes used by programs serving young children. The unique identifier is essential to following children's progress in kindergarten through grade twelve, and to seeing if enrollment in early learning and care programs appears to be associated with improved school readiness and student achievement. The Advisory Committee approved a method that would use the birth certificate's registration number to provide a unique student identifier for children in early learning and care programs that would use the birth certificate's registration number. This low-technology solution would also enable providers to go back to the common source to identify a child. Almost all children have birth certificates with a unique number, including children born outside of the United States, so very few children would need to receive an alternate unique number.

Initial Work to Develop a Funding Model for California's QRIS

Establishing a QRIS involves multiple financial issues. The tasks of developing a funding model aligned with the QRIS and recommending how resources can be utilized to complement that model are outlined here, but they will need to be fully developed. The Advisory Committee developed a document that describes: (1) an analysis of costs for the proposed QRIS; (2) possible incentives to motivate provider and staff participation in the system, as well as to provide resources for quality improvements; (3) possible sources of financial and non-financial resources to implement a QRIS; and (4) a funding model that matches QRIS costs with possible funding streams. In addition, the CDE prepared a matrix of existing state and federal resources for early learning and care. These resources are included in Appendixes G and J.

- **Cost analysis**: The Advisory Committee recommends that the cost analysis continue, using the Office of Child Care's National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center cost calculator and other tools. This cost calculator can be "populated" with California-specific data. It then estimates costs in several broad areas, producing an annual cost for each area and a total statewide annual estimated cost.

- **Incentives**: Financial and non-financial incentives need to be part of the "portfolio" of systems to support continuous program improvement. Incentives need to reimburse providers for the added costs to participate in a QRIS; motivate providers to participate; provide funds to affect specific quality improvements identified in the QRIS plans; and motivate child development center teachers, assistant teachers, directors, and other staff members to seek professional development to improve outcomes for children, expand skills, and achieve higher quality tiers. Further study needs to be conducted, including focus groups and pilot testing of: (1) the most effective type of incentives for various outcomes; (2) the optimal and most cost-effective dollar level of financial

incentives; and (3) the most effective frequency of payments.

- **A funding model with progressive build-out:** Potential finance mechanisms for the QRIS include existing funding streams that most closely match probable QRIS costs; partnerships with local entities that can provide both financial and non-financial resources; and using state and federal early learning and care projects and programs as cost-effective vehicles to support quality improvement among licensed family child care providers and centers.

The Advisory Committee identified state, local, and federal funding streams, as well as opportunities to develop partnerships with First 5 state and county commissions, foundations and businesses, professional associations and networks, and state and federally funded projects (see Appendix J). It will be important to examine how to: (1) adapt and incorporate, when possible, existing funding streams to support the QRIS pilot and implementation phases; and (2) partner and collaborate on pilot projects for funding, services, relationships, and local expertise.

How the QRIS Will Work

Pilot Projects to Field Test the QRIS

Implementing a QRIS is complex. Among the 23 states that have already implemented such systems, many strongly recommend that it is vital to conduct a field test or pilot prior to implementing the system statewide. The Advisory Committee recommends a three-year pilot before embarking on statewide implementation.

The pilot projects will provide an opportunity to: (1) explore the efficacy of various methods for recruiting early learning and care programs to volunteer to participate in the rating process; (2) assess the costs and benefits of various approaches to conducting the program quality reviews and providing technical assistance; and (3) establish statewide data parameters for ongoing research and evaluations that inform continuous program improvement efforts and link the QRIS to child outcomes. Other factors to study for QRIS participation include investigating phase-in timelines for public and private early learning and care programs; checking the effectiveness of communication with programs, providers, and families; and studying the length of time programs stay on or move up tiers given the standards for each tier and varying levels of incentives and support. Strong evaluation will be central to the success of pilot projects and to the QRIS when fully implemented.

The Advisory Committee's initial ideas for pilot projects are to encourage a range of counties (or regions) to participate by providing support for a balanced distribution of program and provider characteristics, such as public and private, urban and rural, infant-toddler and preschool, and established and new to QRIS. As explained in Appendix C, California already has a number of models for quality rating and improvement systems that have been established at the county level as well as other regional quality improvement initiatives.

For the QRIS pilot projects, criteria for selection should also include:

- Willingness to implement and assess the QRIS rating scale and systems of support with fidelity
- Agreement to participate in the evaluation
- Capacity to leverage local resources, including expertise and funding
- Demonstrated partnerships across a range of programs and providers and support systems

Participation and Phase–In

The Advisory Committee proposes a three-year pilot of the QRIS, including sufficient time for planning and evaluation, followed by a phased-in implementation over five or more years. The vision is that the participation in the QRIS will initially be voluntary, then be required for publicly funded programs, and ultimately be required for all licensed programs, with appropriate funding and incentives provided. The vision is that participation in the quality rating structure will be open to licensed center-based programs, a small category of license-exempt centers meeting specific requirements, and licensed family child care homes. (See the Glossary for definitions.) License-exempt providers will have access to technical assistance, professional development, and support to obtain licensure, although they will not be eligible to obtain ratings. When fully implemented, the plan is for ratings to be linked to both financial and non-financial incentives for improvement.

Prior to statewide implementation, the Advisory Committee proposes that all early learning and care programs be encouraged to implement as many of the proposed QRIS recommendations as possible, although limited public financial resources are available to support participation initially. Programs, associations, and communities can work to improve program quality in some, or all, of the quality rating structure elements and support systems while building on local improvement efforts, commitments, and resources. The proposed phase-in plan is a guide for statewide testing and implementation and is not intended to limit local leadership and momentum for early learning quality improvement.

Oversight and Conduct of Ratings and Reviews

Partnerships among multiple federal, state, and local agencies are essential to successfully implement California's QRIS. The Advisory Committee envisions that the QRIS would use a combination of local and state oversight to maximize expertise and resources. The QRIS ratings would be done at the county level (or regional consortium). The CDE would provide oversight and assurance of statewide consistency (e.g., inter-rater reliability). In addition, state oversight functions would need to safeguard against conflicts of interest between the entities conducting ERS assessments and program reviews to establish ratings and those providing technical assistance designed to help improve ratings. State oversight also would include establishing an appeals process for technical issues, such as administrative errors. The qualitative aspects of the QRIS program reviews (i.e., ERS and CLASS or PARS) would not be subject to appeal. When assessing a classroom using an ERS, the Advisory Committee recommends that the independent assessors have knowledge of, and experience with, the type of setting being reviewed (infant/toddler care versus family child care or preschool center-based care).

Annual program reviews involving independent ERS, CLASS, or PARS assessments are expensive, and it is important to give programs sufficient time to institute improvements between assessments. Thus, initial ideas for QRIS oversight suggest conducting the assessments every two to three years. Some programs, such as those with Title 22 licensing violations and key staff turnover, might trigger more frequent QRIS ratings. If possible, it would be advisable to use the pilot projects to check the cost and relative impact on program quality improvement of conducting QRIS ratings at one- versus two- or three-year intervals.

Next Steps for Quality Improvement Through the QRIS

The next steps to develop California's QRIS are to progressively implement, and continuously improve, a strategic framework that builds on the strengths of California's existing early learning and care infrastructure; is informed by evidence-based practices; and makes the best use of existing, as well as new, resources. This report concludes the Advisory Committee's official role, and its work will continue under the auspices of the Califonia State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care (Early Learning Advisory Council—ELAC). The Governor's Executive Order (S-23-09) in November 2009 established ELAC as the first step in making California eligible for federal funds available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to support improvements in early learning and care. The Council's membership includes the 13 members of the CAEL QIS Advisory Committee, plus additional members. ELAC's first success was to develop an application, approved in September 2010, for federal funds to support improvements in early learning and care. Projects include a statewide strategic plan, QRIS pilot projects, an early learning and care data system assessment and analysis, and *Early Childhood Educator Competencies* implementation projects.

The federal government recently issued policy directions that support California's QRIS, including stronger health and safety standards for early learning and care settings, implementation of a statewide QRIS, effective professional development for the adults working with young children, and strengthened program integrity. California is well-positioned for additional resources. Success will depend upon our public leaders' commitment and our own dedication to garnering the public support necessary to champion the phased implementation and continuous improvement of the QRIS to ensure optimal early learning outcomes for all California children.

Dream BIG

for our youngest children