



# Child Care Helps America Work and Learn



Administration for Children & Families

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## Recovery Act Supports State QRIS Efforts

I am especially pleased to share the Child Care Bureau's latest issue of the *Child Care Helps America Work and Learn* series. This issue focuses on quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS), which represent a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education settings.

Expanding QRIS is a top priority for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), and this issue provides terrific examples of how States across the country are making QRIS advancements through the timely support of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Act). Thanks to the Recovery Act, States are strengthening existing systems and embarking on new ones. States also are focusing on public education and increasing provider participation in QRIS.

ACF acknowledges the positive QRIS movement, and is supporting States by investing in resources to help continue this forward momentum. For example, the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation's new report, *Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations*, describes key programmatic and evaluation elements of QRIS with in-depth profiles of every QRIS in the country. Also, the National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center's new online resource guide and Cost Estimation Model will further help States develop cutting-edge approaches. ACF hopes these resources will assist States as they continue promoting high-quality care for all children.

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## QRIS Quick Facts

- There are 21 statewide QRIS that are composed of five common elements: (1) standards, (2) accountability measures, (3) program and practitioner outreach and support, (4) financial incentives, and (5) parent/consumer education efforts.
- More than 25 additional States are exploring or designing statewide QRIS.

## Recovery Act Strengthens and Expands QRIS Across the Country

Recovery Act funds are providing States with groundbreaking opportunities to strengthen existing QRIS and create new statewide systems.

The **Minnesota** QRIS pilot project, Parent Aware, will continue through June 2011 thanks to the Recovery Act. Before these funds were available, it was scheduled to end in June 2010.



The pilot began in 2007 with funding from the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation in collaboration with other agencies. The State is conducting the pilot in four areas: the cities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, Blue Earth/Nicollet counties, and the Wayzata School District. Those eligible to participate are child care programs licensed by the Department of Human Services and public school-based School Readiness programs and Head Start programs overseen by the State's Department of Education.

**New York** also is stepping up its efforts. Supported both by Recovery Act funds and private philanthropy, the State is conducting an ambitious field test of its emerging QRIS to:

- Evaluate the ease and efficiency of QUALITYstarsNY's application, documentation, and assessment system under a variety of conditions (including geography, program setting, and child demographics);
- Validate the current standards and rating scale;
- Establish a baseline profile of program quality in the 13 field-test communities;
- Gather information about how sites plan to move up the quality ladder;
- Estimate the cost of improving from one star level to another; and
- Estimate the levels of financial incentives needed for a fully implemented system.

In addition, **Washington** is using the Recovery Act to continue its QRIS pilot. The State Legislature allotted \$1 million in Recovery Act funds to the Department of Early Learning (DEL) for continuing the Seeds to Success pilot in five communities. Pilot sites in White Center and East Yakima are assessing QRIS coaching and professional development efforts. Clark County is testing elements of program learning environments and examining provider and child progress using various assessment tools.

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## Investments Boost New Mexico QRIS Participation and Ratings

New Mexico is using the Recovery Act to promote Look for the STARS, the statewide QRIS. The State is working to increase participation, helping providers earn higher ratings, increasing public awareness, and supporting staff conducting all-important site assessments.

To help child care providers participate in QRIS, New Mexico is funding a workforce and cost-of-care study to determine whether providers are close to meeting QRIS standards and whether reimbursement rates are sufficient to help them increase quality. The survey also examines staff qualifications and the cost of care for each age group at each star level, including programs that meet only minimum licensing requirements. With surveys already distributed, final findings are expected in August 2010.

In addition, New Mexico is using Recovery Act funds to provide valuable technical assistance to programs that want to improve their ratings. It is providing rating scale assessors with more training plus laptop computers to document findings.

In recognition of the importance of public knowledge of QRIS, the State also is investing in a public awareness campaign to increase support for and knowledge of the system.



## Pennsylvania Increases Financial Incentives

Pennsylvania's inventive approach involves the use of Recovery Act funds for a tiered reimbursement system for programs in its QRIS, Keystone STARS (Standards, Training/Professional Development, Assistance, Resources, and Support).

Pennsylvania's proven QRIS provides quality standards and financial and career supports to child care programs to earn STAR 1 through STAR 4 ratings. Beginning in July 2007, the State implemented a tiered reimbursement system with programs at STAR 2 and above receiving a subsidy add-on rate for each eligible child.

With the Recovery Act, Pennsylvania has increased its tiered reimbursement by as much as 50 percent. These additional reimbursements provide programs with incentives to maintain and improve their quality, all while serving more children from low-income families.

## Exciting New QRIS Resources

- The **Quality Rating and Improvement System Resource Guide** by the National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (NCCIC) is a Web-based tool for States and communities to help users plan, implement, or revise QRIS. Visit <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/qrisresourceguide/index.html>.
- Since QRIS costs vary by scope and scale, NCCIC's **Cost Estimation Model (CEM)** is a Web-based tool to help project costs. The QRIS CEM is best used in the context of technical assistance as it includes assumptions that need to be customized for each State. This resource is available initially to Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Administrators and ACF Regional Program Managers.
- In a first step to assess QRIS, the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation at the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, recently released the **Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations** report. It includes descriptive analysis of key program and evaluation components plus profiles of all QRIS nationwide. Visit [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/cc/childcare\\_quality/index.html#reports](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/cc/childcare_quality/index.html#reports).

## ABOUT THE RECOVERY ACT

The **Recovery Act** (Public Law 111-5) provided \$2 billion in supplemental funding to CCDF for grants to States, Territories, and Tribes for child care assistance to low-income families and investments for improving the quality and availability of child care. **Section 1512 of the Recovery Act** requires recipients of Recovery Act funds to submit quarterly reports detailing the use and impact of the funds, including jobs created and retained. The reports are available to the public at [www.recovery.gov](http://www.recovery.gov).

## About the Child Care Bureau

The **Child Care Bureau** administers the **CCDF** program, a multibillion-dollar Federal and State partnership to support access to high-quality child care for working families. The Child Care Bureau helps States, Territories, and Tribes administer their CCDF programs through program support, policy guidance, technical assistance, and research.