

# Where Do We Go From Here: Charting Next Steps



## A Strategic Plan For a Texas Quality Rating and Improvement System

January 2013

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: STRATEGIC AND IMPLEMENTATION PROPOSALS FOR A TEXAS QRIS

## INTRODUCTION

The 2012 map of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) recently released by the QRIS National Learning Network identifies 31 states plus the District of Columbia with statewide QRISs; eight states, including Texas, in the process of planning a QRIS; eight states plus Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands launching or completing a QRIS pilot; two states with regional QRIS; and one state, Missouri, prohibiting QRIS by law. While a growing movement over the past decade, the centrality of QRIS in the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services' Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC), issued in mid-2011, propelled its expansion and development to new heights. In conjunction with states' push for school ready children, growing public and private investments, and calls for increased accountability, expectations for QRISs are surging – as is scrutiny of its effectiveness and eagerness to ferret out the elements associated with success.

## QUALITY RATING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS

QRIS is defined as a systematic approach for assessing, improving, and communicating the level of quality of early care and education (ECE) and school age programs. First developed in Oklahoma in 1998, it typically includes five components: (1) program standards and criteria; (2) program accountability associated with assigned rating levels; (3) workforce and provider support; (4) provider incentives; and (5) parent/consumer education.

RAND researchers Zellman and Karoly (2012) identified three factors to explain the growth of QRIS:

1. Continuing gaps in quality in existing ECE programs;

2. The inability of the present ECE system to promote uniformly high quality; and
3. Features of the ECE market that limit consumption of high quality services.

Early in its development, QRIS was viewed largely as a vehicle for incentivizing improved program quality and offering consumers (a.k.a. parents) a mechanism for informed selection of early learning programs. Investments in these systems have expanded, along with increasing calls for accountability. As a result, QRISs increasingly are being characterized as accountability systems directed toward improving children’s readiness for success in kindergarten, and in the process bringing into question relationships among the system’s component parts.

## THE TEXAS QRIS STRATEGIC PLAN METHODOLOGY

The Texas Early Learning Council’s (Council) RFP (Request for Proposals) for a Quality Rating and Improvement System Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) outlined six Texas QRIS business questions to guide the Strategic Plan’s development:

1. Do teachers have the skills necessary to work with children’s needs?
2. What are the characteristics and standards of quality early childhood programs?
3. How can parents be informed about the quality of early childhood programs?
4. What programs/qualities of programs should the state of Texas incentivize?
5. To what extent are programs preparing children for school?
6. What steps can providers take to improve quality?

Beyond these business questions, the RFP outlined additional questions related to a Texas QRIS’ relationship to available data sources and long and short-term costs, along with options for sustainable funding, feasibility of creating a multi-sector QRIS, and research evidence to support the Council’s Data and QRIS Subcommittee’s (Subcommittee) suggested program quality indicators.

The Strategic Plan addresses these questions as well as those highlighted in *Where Do We Go From Here? Designing a Quality Rating and Improvement System in Texas* (2011 - henceforth

referred to as Council Working Paper). Proposals for the design of a Texas QRIS are organized by eight topics: Scope for a Texas QRIS; Child-Program Assessment; Administration; Structure; Quality Assurance; Effective Data Systems; Implementation; and Costs and Financing.

The Strategic Plan first sets the context for the Council’s deliberations and decision-making by identifying QRIS trends, findings, and questions, and most importantly, by identifying suggested first-order strategic questions needing Council members’ consideration. It then delves into design questions and offers proposals for creating a Texas QRIS.

Proposals for the design of a Texas QRIS respond directly to questions posed in the Council’s Working Paper (2011) and QRIS RFP (2012) and are informed by (1) phone interviews with 23 stakeholders and three statewide electronic surveys; (2) a literature review examining relationships between the Council’s suggested program quality indicators and child outcomes; (3) suggested guiding principles; (4) a review of QRIS-related documents, including QRIS practices across the country; and (5) an “aspirational” logic model. Also, while recognizing that Texas chose not to participate in the federal government’s Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge, the broad response from states suggests that the application’s criteria and the implementation plans of winning states offer insight into the future of QRIS. As a result, examples and perceptions gained from study of these applications often are referenced. Finally, a cost analysis based on the system’s proposed design is provided.

The Council Working Paper (2011) had as its stated purpose “to contextualize the choices facing the Council concerning recommendations for a Texas QRIS system” (p. 2). Proposed as a companion document to *Where Do We Go From Here: Charting Next Steps*, the Council Working Paper (2011) describes the ECE landscape in Texas, including the State’s quality improvement infrastructure and issues that a Texas QRIS design will need to consider. The Strategic Plan lifts up these issues and provides information and guidance to inform the decision-making required to bring a statewide QRIS to fruition.

The Council's charge to its consultants was to create a strategic plan that responds to the directives set forth in the Council's RFP and present the Council with informed options for making choices and decisions. The development process chosen by the Council is one of informed decision-making. The Subcommittee provided input to the plan's working draft, and stakeholders were engaged to inform the plan's development. The Council, however, has ultimate responsibility for deciding upon final recommendations, using the input it has been provided.

The Council has created an exciting but also challenging opportunity. As consultants, we took to heart the Council's charge to provide a plan that enables members to thoughtfully engage in the work of developing a Texas QRIS with the potential to "lead the nation" (Council Working Paper, 2011, p. 20). The comprehensive scope of the research conducted and the plan's careful analysis provide a strong foundation for achieving this outcome.

## THE COUNCIL'S EXPRESSED ASPIRATIONS FOR A TEXAS QRIS

In its application to the federal government for funding under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA), the Council articulated intentions to develop a parent and child focused, high quality integrated system of early childhood education and care, with a focus on collaboration and school readiness. The proposed ECE system is for the purpose of advancing the Council's goal of improving the State's ability to prepare more children for school. This desire is driven, in part, by the fact that Texas has the fastest growing population of children under the age of 5 – a significant proportion of whom are developmentally at risk. In addition, the State has widely varying ECE programs and discouraging statistics documenting high retention levels for kindergarteners and first graders (Texas State Advisory Council for Early Education and Care, 2010; Texas Early Learning Council, 2011).

The Council has expressed five expectations for a Texas QRIS:

1. It should demonstrably improve the school readiness of Texas' youngest citizens.
2. The system's design should unify ECE programs around a shared understanding of program quality.
3. The system should to the extent possible build on the strengths of the State's existing statewide and local quality improvement initiatives.
4. The system's design should be evidence-based to the degree possible.
5. A Texas QRIS should demonstrate child outcomes related to children's school readiness.

The Council also has expressed strong interest in exercising leadership in the nation's movement toward making QRIS a centerpiece of states' integrated ECE systems. As expressed in the Council Working Paper (2011), the Council believes it has the opportunity to "leap ahead of QRIS pioneers" (p. 14) and "lead the nation" (p. 20).

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: QRIS EMERGING TRENDS, QUESTIONS, AND FINDINGS

As the Council Working Paper (2011) reminded readers, QRIS relies on two overarching assumptions: first, that program changes in quality indicators are linked with improved child outcomes, and second, that QRIS is an approach that feasibly can be taken to scale (p. 2). The Council is seeking verification of these assumptions. Yet at this point in its youthful existence, no clear or direct pathway exists for designing a QRIS that fulfills the Council's hopes for a fully evidence-based system.

QRISs are complex systems; their designs and consequences are not independent of states' social, political, and economic contexts, including specific local ECE markets and licensing standards. Further, states' QRIS rating levels and their measurement vary nationwide, resulting in differing conceptualizations of quality and making it difficult to draw generalizations about QRIS

design features and their relationship to program quality and child outcomes (Caronongan, Kirby, Malone, & Boller, 2011).

ECE's scientific knowledge base as a field of practice also is evolving. Further, outcomes achieved by ECE settings, especially child outcomes, are notoriously difficult to determine. Program outcomes are informed by an array of factors not easily teased apart. Fortunately, research is underway to better understand how quality operates to improve child outcomes by (1) deconstructing quality; (2) focusing on the importance of dosage, thresholds, and quality features in promoting improved results; and (3) moving beyond global measures of quality.

Trends are also evident in states' QRISs. States with established QRIS are (1) looking at participation rates in terms of intentional outreach and cross-sector inclusion; (2) refining standards in terms of streamlining them while also setting them higher; (3) including additional measures and addressing cultural competence; (4) reviewing administrative costs that accompany increased participation and more multi-faceted systems, leading to restructuring efforts and new uses of existing state monitoring systems and technology; and (5) seeking evidence of impact by examining participation rates by level and using more validation and school readiness studies. Newly engaged states are (1) using longer developmental periods for their QRIS and being attentive to user concerns; (2) validating and streamlining standards; (3) creating hybrid models; (4) conducting pilots and field tests; (5) validating quality improvement support; and (5) using an incremental roll out approach.

## NAVIGATING STATE COMPLEXITIES: CREATING A TEXAS QRIS

The Council Working Paper (2011) accentuates that crucial decisions await answers. The nature of these decisions, along with information gathered from interviews with individuals from across the State, statewide electronic surveys, and two stakeholder meetings suggest that the Council's QRIS deliberations will involve balancing diverse state interests and priorities.

While perhaps magnified by framing them as contrasts, these diverse interests and priorities include:

- ▶ Statewide consistency in defining and assessing program quality as contrasted with desire to support local decision-making, local initiative, and provider choice.
- ▶ Inclusion of all ECE sectors contrasted with recognition of child care as the sector in greatest need of quality improvement, serving the greatest number of children at-risk, and operating with minimal performance standards.
- ▶ Integration or coordination of the State's diverse quality rating initiatives into one system contrasted with reluctance to undercut vibrant local variations and Texas Rising Star.
- ▶ Desire to target more public investments to program quality as contrasted with program subsidy availability and access.
- ▶ Access for working families to a range of child care choices as contrasted with targeting programs with the strongest probability of achieving program quality levels associated with school readiness.
- ▶ Global definitions of school readiness as contrasted with targeted, measurement-driven measures of school ready children.

Bolstering these different interests are state-specific characteristics:

- ▶ The State's large size and wide cultural, social, and economic differences across regions.
- ▶ Widely shared commitments supporting limited government involvement, which includes the primacy of local control and market-driven enterprise.
- ▶ Co-existing definitions of school readiness.
- ▶ Diverse co-existing local efforts aimed at raising the level of care in communities.
- ▶ Jurisdiction for State-funded ECE programs across multiple state agencies with differing public mandates and accompanying regulations and funding levels.

- ▶ Strong state agency identities and perceived boundaries that lead to siloes around work related to promoting children’s school readiness.
- ▶ Competition between strategies focused on increasing access to ECE programs – especially for children supported by State subsidies – and advancing program quality to levels capable of promoting children’s readiness for success in kindergarten.
- ▶ Presence of an organized for-profit ECE community recognized for its political influence with the state legislature and sensitivity to unfunded mandates.

## A ROLE FOR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This list of individual interests and priorities may seem overwhelming when bundled together. Yet the Council’s primary QRIS documents also identify principles that can be used for choosing among diverse interests and priorities (See Sidebar). Despite the State’s complexities – including its present fiscal circumstances, varying levels of Legislator awareness of QRIS, programmatic and systemic fragmentation, and differing viewpoints – agreement appears to exist among the diverse group of individuals interviewed and those attending the September 20<sup>th</sup> stakeholder meeting around school readiness as an overarching purpose for the State’s ECE programs. Many are eager to bring increased coherence to the State’s programming. A Texas QRIS is seen as a way to facilitate common expectations for ECE programs,

### Potential Guiding Principles for Forming a Texas QRIS

A Texas QRIS should:

- Be family and child focused.
- Be available to all providers and families, with priority outreach to working families.
- Help more children be ready for school, targeting the State’s most vulnerable children.
- Be understandable to families and providers.
- Be accountable.
- Foster increased integration among standards across early childhood education programs.
- Enable parents to be informed consumers when choosing among early care and education options.
- Support a mixed delivery system.
- Foster coordination and increased alignment between and among the State’s quality improvement programs and services.
- Be feasible to operate and monitor.
- Be fiscally responsible and sustainable.

create consistency across programs regardless of sponsorship, provide information to parents and decision makers, and promote school readiness statewide. Even with differences that surfaced in the first statewide survey in terms of purpose for a Texas QRIS, 82% of the 464 respondents<sup>1</sup> agreed that a statewide QRIS should be created.

## THE COUNCIL'S ROLE AS DECISION-MAKER

The information shared thus far highlights the Council's important decision-making role in forming a Texas QRIS. By necessity, this decision-making will sometimes be characterized by uncertainty, demanding deliberate strategic choices infused with political and financial implications.

In her recent book, *The Art of Choosing*, Sheena Iyengar (2010) asserts, "We can't avoid the fact that any choice we make may be considered a statement about who we are, but some choices speak more loudly than others" (p. 203). If the Council chooses, implicit principles that have undergirded its QRIS-related deliberations can be used to inform and guide its decision-making, with a focus on members' shared interests. The State's multiple strengths, including commitment to a different future, form a sturdy base for making progress.

Many reasons exist for creating a statewide QRIS, especially if the Council is willing to coalesce stakeholders around a well-understood purpose, foster an experimental orientation, and move forward with a future orientation. The Council is encouraged to consider an organized, deliberative process for developing its recommendations and planning an ongoing process to monitor the system's progress, ensuring that its multiple parts move forward in a coordinated and synergistic way – not only internally but also in conjunction with the State's other system-building efforts.

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<sup>1</sup>The survey was sent to a nonrandom sample of early childhood advocates and stakeholders.

## An “Aspirational” Logic Model for Texas

Logic models are guides to implementation and also an important first step in planning a QRIS evaluation. Logic models offer a systematic and visual way of presenting the sequence of expected relationships among (1) resources available to a program/initiative, (2) activities or policies that are to be put in place, and (3) outcomes (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004). In essence, a logic model presents a theory of change. To the extent that the Council is entering into an evaluative phase of work, a possible logic model for a Texas QRIS is offered as a way of one, confirming the Council’s expectations for the new system and two, helping steer decision-making.

Logic models rest on a clearly articulated purpose. While not explicitly articulated as its mission, the purpose of a Texas QRIS seems to be creation of an evidence-based, multi-level system capable of demonstrating positive and direct linkages to child development and school readiness, especially for children developmentally at risk. The pioneering leadership role being sought appears expressly tied to moving beyond a QRIS design reliant on what other states are doing or on ideological preferences, and instead designing a statewide QRIS grounded in evidence-based decisions: first, in terms of utilizing the most effective criteria to measure the quality of ECE programs; second, in evaluating the effectiveness of a QRIS in supporting child development and school readiness; third, in crafting a system design conducive to these attributes; and fourth, in assessing the effectiveness and impact of QRIS as a system.

This prototype seemingly represents the “leap ahead” opportunity being sought by the Council. Its achievement would help shepherd one of the Council’s articulated outcomes: data driven decisions by policymakers, providers, and parents that, in turn, could move the bar toward the goal of improved statewide school readiness (Texas Early Learning Council Priorities). And without a doubt, this accomplishment would provide a model of interest to the nation.

The Council has set high standards for a fully evidence-based Texas QRIS, and the descriptor given to the proposed logic model - *aspirational* - acknowledges this fact. Given the absence of clear-

cut guidance from the research literature, however, the Council will be confronted with choices not always firmly grounded in existing research.

### **First-Order Strategic Questions**

The proposals offered by this plan have an acknowledged shortcoming. They are offered in the absence of knowing the Council's strategic choices on behalf of a Texas QRIS – choices that only it can make. To provide a more definitive group of proposals would require the Council to know its thinking on five strategic issues:

1. *Defining Initial Priorities for a Texas QRIS* – Assuming limited funding and operational capacity, what will be the Council's priority/priorities?
2. *Defining School Readiness* – What defines kindergarten readiness in Texas? What child outcomes are most important for preparing children for success in kindergarten and beyond? What does it mean to build a parent-centered early learning system?
3. *Selecting Decision Criteria for Choosing Program Quality Indicators* – In the absence of credible evidence supportive of all but three of the Subcommittee's suggested program quality indicators, what criteria will be used to choose QRIS quality indicators and breakpoints for each of the system's tiers?
4. *Centralization vs. Decentralization of a Statewide QRIS* – Fulfilling the desire to facilitate common expectations for ECE programs, create consistency across programs regardless of sponsorship, provide reliable and valid information to parents and decision makers, and promote school readiness statewide will necessitate moving beyond the State's programmatic fragmentation as it currently exists. What elements of a statewide QRIS can be delegated to regions and/or communities? What functions should be centralized in order to establish statewide coherence and a common direction for improving children's school readiness? Where is there latitude to support local innovation and responsiveness

to family, community, program, and child variation without weakening the system's overall intent?

5. *Sustained Leadership* - Patience, persistence, and fortitude are leadership qualities. How much time and resources is the Council, and ultimately Texas, willing to dedicate to creating and ensuring an evidence-based, outcome-oriented Texas QRIS?

Responding to these highly contextualized issues will be a crucial step in determining the design and implementation of a statewide QRIS.

## DESIGN PROPOSALS FOR A TEXAS QRIS

This section addresses eight categories of questions elevated by the Council Working Paper (2011) and Council QRIS RFP (2012):

1. Scope for a Texas QRIS
2. Child-Program Assessment
3. Administration
4. Structure
5. Quality Assurance
6. Effective Data Practices
7. Implementation
8. Costs and Financing

Since a QRIS is a system, these categories are not independent of one another or of other systems the Council presently is building. This means that overlap among the Strategic Plan's proposals cannot always be avoided and readers may need to cross-reference rationales for some proposals.

By way of reminder, these proposals are provisional. The Council's decision-making process is not yet bound by a clear strategy or articulated outcomes. Nonetheless, the suggested guiding

principle and Aspirational Logic Model steered the plan's proposals. These proposals also are informed by (1) available research; (2) practices in other states; (3) knowledge gained from stakeholder interviews; (4) insights from statewide surveys and stakeholder meetings; and (5) the Texas context. Unless otherwise stated, information on state QRIS practices is derived from the 2010 Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations and individual State Profiles (companion documents to the Compendium) compiled by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE); the 2009 Comparison of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) with Department of Defense Standards of Quality compiled by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA); the 2011 QRIS Resource Guide; and individual state websites.

A total of 17 proposals or options are offered. They are presented below under their organizing header. Three of the eight design sections – Effective Data Practices, Implementation, and Costs and Financing – are addressed differently. These sections provide framing information to focus the Council's considerations, while also linking these considerations to system-building efforts underway or forthcoming (e.g., TOTS, development of Infant-Toddler Guidelines).

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## I. SCOPE OF A TEXAS QRIS – 2 Proposals

### ***1a. Should a Texas QRIS be a birth to five system or birth to 13 to encompass after-school child care programs?***

**Proposal:** Focus a Texas QRIS on programs serving children from birth to the start of kindergarten.

This question basically was answered by the Council's application for federal funds that states the intent to construct a Texas QRIS that is linked to outcomes in kindergarten (Texas State Advisory Council on Childhood Education and Care, 2010, p. 36).

***1b. What sectors should be included in a Texas QRIS?***

**Proposal:** Allow all ECE programs, regardless of sector, to voluntarily participate. In terms of implementation and resource allocation, however, prioritize uptake by those sectors of highest interest to the Council and its stakeholders.

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## **II. CHILD-PROGRAM ASSESSMENT – 2 Proposals**

These proposals warrant additional contextualization because they tie directly to a directive in the Council’s QRIS RFP (2012). Research presently underway related to thresholds, assessing program quality, and relationships between quality and child outcomes has raised the importance of selecting program quality standards and criteria, leading to questions of “What should be included?”; “What’s the right number of standards and criteria?”; and “How should the standards be assessed?” Important to note is that, ultimately, answering the questions of what should be included and of what quantity depend on what Texas wants as the purpose for its QRIS.

In its attempt to respond to the question of what program quality indicators should be included in a Texas QRIS, the Council requested a literature review be conducted on 20 possibilities and their relationship to child outcomes. The findings, presented below, are characterized by the evidence available. This information is followed by two proposals related to Child-Program Assessment.

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**Proposed Texas QRIS Program Quality Indicators & Their Associations  
with Child Outcomes**

[References can be found in Appendix G as part of the full Texas QRIS Strategic Plan]

Indicator	Activity	Population (who's undertaking the activity)	Evidence on Association with Child Outcomes
<b>Accreditation</b>			
National accreditation and SRCS	participation	programs, classrooms	Limited evidence
<b>Assessment</b>			
Assessment, observation, and service planning	written plan of strategies and tools to complete ongoing observation and assessments of children birth to 5	programs, administrators, practitioners	No evidence located
Screenings	implement health and developmental screenings	administrators, practitioners	Mixed evidence
<b>Business and Administration Practices</b>			
Capacity to serve children with special needs; provide an inclusive environment for all children	make programs accessible and accommodating; written inclusion plan, implemented with good faith	administrators	No evidence located
Detailed administrator assessment, consistent management practices, administrator training and qualifications	invest in ongoing improvement for leadership and management	programs, administrators	No evidence located
<b>Family Engagement</b>			
Parent involvement	parent involvement in curriculum, activities, conferences; parent trainings	programs, practitioners	Positive evidence
<b>Process Quality</b> <i>"Refers to children's direct experiences with people and objects in the child care setting... Process quality concerns interactions among individuals (e.g., emotional and instructional)"</i>			
Nationally-recognized, research-based curriculum, or must be inclusive of ITELG and/or Pre-K Guidelines	implement and use	programs	Limited evidence
Standardized curriculum	implementation and observation	administrators/programs	Limited evidence
Teacher behavior	score on ECERS, TBRS, CLASS	administrators, practitioners	Positive evidence
Teacher sensitivity	score on ECERS, TBRS, CLASS	administrators, practitioners	Positive evidence
<b>Program Compliance and Administrative Practices</b>			
No abuse and neglect findings	site visits, records	programs	No evidence located
Program compliance with rules and regulations	site visits, records	programs	No evidence located

**Proposed Texas QRIS Indicators & Their Associations with Child Outcomes (cont.)**

Indicator	Activity	Population (who's undertaking the activity)	Evidence on Association with Child Outcomes
<b>Structural Quality</b> <i>“Concerns those aspects of programs that describe the caregiver’s background, curriculum or other easily observable or reported characteristics of the classroom or program. Structural features of programs are typically quite static... [and] are often viewed as necessary for creating the opportunity for the caregiver to create a high-quality preschool classroom...”</i>			
Group size/ratios	establish reasonable staff-child ratios, by age group	programs	Mixed evidence
Learning environment (that support 5 domains)	create and maintain the environment	programs	Mixed evidence
Materials (that support the 5 domains)	maintain, implement and use	programs	Limited evidence
Nutrition & wellness	well-planned nutritious meals and activities; self-report	programs, practitioners	Limited evidence
<b>Workforce Qualifications</b>			
Continuing education	developing professional development plans with self-assessment	administrators, practitioners	Mixed evidence
Degreed and/or highly-trained teacher	go to school, maintain trainings	administrators, practitioners	Mixed evidence
Facility workforce experience, training, turnover	workforce retention report; staff records	administrators	No evidence located
Knowledge of child ages and stages of development	Received training or demonstrated understanding	administrators, practitioners	Mixed evidence

**2a. What Quality Indicators Should Be Included?**

**Proposal:** In light of limited research evidence to support the Subcommittee’s suggested program quality indicators, this question was identified earlier as a first-order issue for the Council’s consideration. The Council should consider (1) what additional decision criteria address its commitments to what a Texas QRIS should accomplish, using Guiding Principles and the logic model as informants, and/or (2) if some of the suggested program quality indicators, such as evidence of child abuse, might more appropriately be part of the foundation provided by the State’s licensing standards.

By way of an example, in its standards selection process, Massachusetts identified as criteria a strong research base; alignment with research based observational measures; availability of an objective basis for documentation; inclusion in other states’ QRIS; and articulation by

stakeholders that standards reflect best practice (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2012).

### ***2b. How Should QRIS Standards Be Assessed?***

**Proposal:** In support of an evidence-based QRIS associated with school readiness outcomes, a Texas QRIS should consider a portfolio of measures for assessing its standards, relying on availability of current evidence to inform its selection of measures. Given available evidence and QRIS practice across the country, options might include the ECERS, CLASS, TBRS (Teacher Behavior Rating Scale), PAS/BAS (Program Administrator Scale/Business Administration Scale), and Family Strengthening Checklist - though these are not fully inclusive of the components listed as part of the Council's school readiness definition. To ensure valid results, especially given the State's changing demographics, measures' cultural sensitivity should be taken into account.

This proposal comes with limitations, however, including: greater cost implications; increased training for assessors and tracking of individual and inter-rater reliability; a greater administrative burden in terms of operational and time commitments; and possible perception of an overly prescriptive system.

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## **III. ADMINISTRATION – 2 Proposals**

### ***3a. What criteria should be considered in identifying an administrative agency or organization for a Texas QRIS?***

**Proposal:** Given the breadth of opinions and affect associated with them, as well as the politicized context for this decision, the Council should consider identifying objective criteria for selecting an administrative agency. The option of a state agency subcontracting the work to another entity could also be considered.

***3b. How might a Texas QRIS be administered? Do all administrative functions need to be centralized? What functions could be decentralized? Where could responsibility for decentralized functions reside?***

**Proposal:** Finding a way to create a “both-and” - in terms of (1) involving the array of quality-improvement initiatives and responding to regional and local variations, while at the same time (2) bringing increased consistency, cohesion, and comparable competence to the State’s splintered ECE delivery system has been central to this project since its inception. Although still needing the benefit of the Council’s decision-making regarding which functions should be centralized and which should be decentralized, proposed is a state-regional model with a strong, centralized QRIS “spine” that includes features essential to ensuring the system’s credibility, reliability, and validity. These might include functions such as establishing QRIS standards, criteria, and rating levels; training on-site observers/assessors; setting program training requirements; program monitoring; managing the appeals process; serving as a hub for QRIS-related data; overseeing QRIS-related research, and in general overseeing the system’s effective functioning and progress.

Other functions, such as marketing to families and providers, providing training, coaching, and mentoring (aligning these efforts with the new core competencies for coaches and mentors and Early Childhood Workforce Registry – which includes the Texas Trainer Registry) and supporting programs during the application process could be performed regionally by organizations and agencies from across the State selected by an RFP or other process. Based on a regional map of the State, selection could be based on criteria addressing issues such as capacity, content expertise that complements the State’s standards and criteria, and documented ability to perform the functions being requested.

One Interviewee made a distinction between governance and administration – suggesting that a governance body might be created, not unlike the Texas P-20 Council. While the P-20 Council has limited authority, it governs data sharing across traditional P-12 schools and higher education.

Proposed members would be a designee appointed by the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Speaker of the House plus Cabinet representatives from the Texas Workforce Commission, Department of Family and Protective Service, and TEA. Explicit policy decisions would be delegated to this group, which in turn, could be assigned responsibility for selecting an administrative body.

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## IV. STRUCTURE – 10 Proposals

The first three of these design questions – 4a, 4b, and 4c – are strongly linked to one another operationally. While final decisions regarding each of them ultimately are interdependent, each rests on different practical and aspirational priorities that need to be considered. In light of unanswered first-order strategic questions, the three proposals that follow are answered separately. This approach also allows each design element to be considered more in depth.

### ***4a. Should child care licensure be a pre-requisite for participation in a Texas QRIS or be designated as the first tier of the new system?***

**Proposal:** By way of providing context, Texas' child care licensure is broadly inclusive. In terms of its standards for child care centers, it is ranked 16th nationally (while ranked relatively high on program oversight, Texas is 29th on regulations). The State's standards for family home care providers are ranked 43rd, in part because home providers can be licensed and care for children without a prior inspection (NACCRRRA, 2010, 2011).

If all levels of a Texas QRIS are to be focused on preparing school ready children, basing the system on meeting minimal health and safety standards could send a mixed message. At a minimum, though, a Texas QRIS should require licensure as a prerequisite, thereby clearly indicating that basic health and safety standards provide a foundation for program quality.

To some extent, this question confronts the Council with a decision on "access by whom," given that a significant number of children in Texas are served in family, friend, and neighbor care (some state QRIS offer incentives to engage these care settings). Another consideration is that TRS

ranks licensed programs at level 1, and the State legislature historically has not been disposed to setting stricter regulatory standards – although TRS child care teacher and administrator training requirements were increased during the last session (Jones, 2012). Going against these traditions could arouse resistance.

***4b. How many tiers should define a Texas QRIS?***

**Proposal:** Texas Rising Star (TRS) is the State’s only statewide QRIS. As a result, its system is best known, especially by the child care sector. Retaining the same number of quality tiers (4, including level 1 that is assigned to all licensed programs) would provide some degree of continuity with the new system. A decision in this regard will be tied to whether the Council recommends continuing the practice of automatically ranking licensed programs as the first tier, which is addressed in 4a. and moving to a hybrid rating system, as suggested in 4c.

***4c. Should recognition for reaching higher QRIS quality tiers be based on a building block structure, point system, or hybrid model?***

**Proposal:** A hybrid model that uses a block structure for the first three tiers is suggested. To the extent that research exists, these first three tiers should incorporate standards that can improve programs to a level needed to promote school readiness. Relying on a point system for the top two tiers, standards could focus on strengthening programs’ ability to support children’s school readiness, individualize their programs in response to community and program approaches to early learning or accentuate strengths (such as inclusion of young children with disabilities or family engagement), as long as these strengths are associated with evidence-based practices and aligned with the State’s early learning guidelines.

Building on this last idea, the top two tiers could be focused on incorporating the State’s early learning guidelines for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. As QRISs become more focused on facilitating children’s school readiness, attention is being directed to the relationship between QRIS standards and children’s readiness for kindergarten.

This proposal, however, requires revisiting 4b (the number of tiers for a Texas QRIS), which suggested retaining the current tier structure of TRS as a way to facilitate transition to the new system. If, from a pragmatic standpoint, licensure is retained as the first tier - even though its standards seemingly are directed more to basic health and safety standards than to program quality - five, vs. four, tiers will be required to achieve the hybrid model being proposed. If some form of continuity with TRS is desired, the choice being offered here is between keeping the same number of levels or retaining facility licensure as the first tier. In light of stakeholder input regarding the latter and the likely gap between existing licensing standards and the State's school readiness aspirations, a five-tiered, hybrid system would seem preferable as a choice.

***4d. Should participating programs be held accountable to the same standards and/or process?***

**Proposal:** Creating a system that steers all programs to providing a level of quality associated with preparing school ready children suggests all participants should be held accountable to similar standards, with the possible exception of licensed and registered child care homes.

This proposal quickly raises questions about how to address Head Start and publicly funded PreK. Given the wide-range of co-existing program standards in the State, holding all programs accountable to similar standards will necessitate aligning standards across programs. As it relates to Head Start in particular, the Council's forthcoming Crosswalk offers a vehicle for comparing program standards and getting to alignment. Given the lack of standards for publicly funded PreK, however, a different intervention is needed.

Head Start programs already are required to meet the State's licensing standards as well as extensive federal standards. In light of these facts, and based on a Crosswalk of Head Start's standards with the State's QRIS standards, the Council should consider automatically placing Head Start programs - once verified as in compliance with federal standards - at the system's

corresponding/aligned level of quality. This decision would encourage participation by Head Start programs by streamlining the process and reducing duplication of effort while also fostering consistency in program expectations across the State.

The State's public PreK programs, while regulated, are subject to limited standards. This negates the possibility of using an approach similar to what was just proposed for Head Start programs. While acknowledging this next suggestion will be controversial and touch upon issues of mandates and local control, if statewide consistency across ECE programs is a priority, the Council should consider the model offered by Vermont and Pennsylvania, which requires publicly funded PreK programs to be at a designated star level in order to receive public funding. This model, if of interest, could be phased in after the State's QRIS is established and PreK programs have had opportunities to voluntarily engage with the system.

Together, these proposals promote a statewide standard, facilitate consistency across the State's ECE programs, and make the rating system more understandable to parents.

***4e. Should nationally accredited programs be included in the system? If so, how?***

**Proposal:** TRS automatically rates accredited child care programs at level 4 –regardless of the organization offering the accreditation. Because of the wide range in accreditation systems endorsed by TRS, this is potentially problematic since these systems vary considerably in their standards and accountability processes, introducing additional variability into a QRIS.

In determining how it wants to respond to this question, the Council should consider the approach proposed for Head Start programs: cross-walking each accreditation system's program standards with Texas' QRIS standards and awarding the corresponding level to accredited programs. This practice would acknowledge programs' efforts to demonstrate program quality as determined by their national organizations, minimize duplication of effort, and avoid the complexity of adding points for what, in essence, is a variation on a QRIS.

The Council will want to be mindful that participation by Texas programs in national accreditation systems is limited, covering less than 4% of eligible providers in the State (Council Working Paper, 2011, p. 5). Finally, to our knowledge, no research has been conducted with the specific intent of examining the relationship between national accreditation systems and child outcomes.

#### ***4f. Should a Texas QRIS include Technical Assistance?***

**Proposal:** Technical assistance (TA) should be included as part of a Texas QRIS. Going beyond direct assistance to programs, providers, and teaching staff, QRIS Technical Assistance is broadly defined as support activities that promote program quality, including coaching and mentoring, professional development opportunities, and program development incentives. In light of the State’s funding challenges, the Council might want to target resources based on a participating program’s level of quality or a community’s need for more programs of high quality, which could be informed by results from the Statewide Needs Assessment.

As part of their RTT-ELC applications, some states proposed mapping the overlap of availability of 4 and 5 Star programs and communities with large numbers of high-need children. Others proposed targeting community-based programs in low-performing school districts. Still another variation proposed was targeting dollars to “high need” communities (Stoney, 2012).

**Proposal:** Maximize the State’s forthcoming Trainer Registry (1) to organize and publicize training opportunities aligned with the State’s core competencies, early learning guidelines, and definition of school readiness for QRIS participants and (2) to safeguard the quality and consistency of training being provided.

**Proposal:** Expand the availability of Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H) scholarships (which also can function as an incentive), aligning their access to decisions regarding where/how TA dollars are targeted, and coordinating with the State’s ECE career ladder and Council’s Articulation initiative.

**Proposal:** Texas has a diverse array of community-based quality improvement initiatives, many of which have private financing. Consider targeting their efforts toward TA. These efforts, though, should be aligned with the State's QRIS standards and Professional Development system, and private-public partnerships should be created in a way to ensure statewide "coverage." Deserving special mention in this regard is the Texas School Ready!<sup>TM</sup> Project. The State's most developed and evidence-based coaching and mentoring system: it is multi-sector and also has statewide capacity.

**Proposal:** Most states rely on Child Care Development Fund quality-set-aside dollars to fund TA and other system enhancements. Consider the pros and cons of recommending that a proportion of these federal dollars be re-allocated to program quality versus only to child care subsidy.

***4g. Should a Texas QRIS assign a different subsidy rate to each star level?***

**Proposal:** Higher levels of program quality involve higher costs than low quality programs. Programs may be less likely to participate if reasonable correspondence does not exist between the cost of delivering higher quality care and the payment rate per child. This reality especially has consequences for programs serving subsidized, low-income children (an issue raised in multiple interviews). To promote broad participation and support the increased costs of higher program quality, tiered reimbursements should be part of a Texas QRIS.

***4h. Are there incentives beyond Technical Assistance and differential reimbursement that should be considered?***

**Proposal:** States offer a range of incentives. Incentives typically are context specific. In determining incentives of interest, therefore, the Council should examine not only what other states are doing but also glean insights from focus groups conducted by an agency or agencies involved with recruiting provider participation (see Proposal j below), inclusive of cost implications.

***4i. What should be the enrollment process for participating programs?***

**Proposal:** This is a technical question with management and financial implications and should be considered in conjunction with the number of programs across the State likely to participate in the new system. The options are either open year-round enrollment or scheduled entry dates. Generally speaking, year-round enrollment with a rotating assignment schedule or specified entry dates incorporate operational efficiencies. Consequently, although scheduled entry dates can reduce providers' flexibility, we prefer them to an open enrollment process.

In deciding its response to this question, the Council also should engage with Local Work Force Boards and administrators of local QRIS to learn which enrollment process they use, as well as the pros and cons of their experiences. This would provide the Council with community-based "data" to inform its decision-making and also demonstrate respect for others' work in this arena.

***4j. What are approaches for informing parents about the quality of ECE programs? For introducing a Texas QRIS to the public, providers, and policymakers?***

**Proposal:** While numerous examples used by other states could be shared, they tend to be very context specific. The Council's forthcoming School Readiness Campaign is intended to create a new landscape in terms of understanding of and support for helping children come to kindergarten prepared to succeed. This result should help position a statewide QRIS as a vehicle for changing ECE program quality and inform the design and implementation of a QRIS outreach campaign.

A QRIS outreach campaign should also draw on the expertise of communications and marketing agencies to research effective strategies in other states, learn more about barriers and incentives to participation and support, conduct focus groups, develop targeted messages, and implement a differentiated campaign for multiple stakeholders. The strategies chosen should leverage what is learned from the forthcoming School Readiness Campaign and promote aligned messaging.

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## V. QUALITY ASSURANCE – 1 proposal

*5a. What procedures should be considered for Self-Reports?*

*5b. How many classrooms are assessed at each site?*

*5c. How often should programs be monitored and assessed?*

*5d. What are norms for inter-rater reliability?*

*5e. Should random visits be used as part of the process?*

*5f. Should penalties exist for programs not maintaining their star level?*

**Proposal:** Considerable variability exists across states in their practices related to these six questions, and to our knowledge, no research exists on the pros and cons of different approaches. The Council’s decision-making should be informed by practices from state QRISs that align with Texas’ intentions for its Quality Rating and Improvement System. It is important, too, to attend to operational considerations in order to avoid overly complex processes for the system, as well as for providers.

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## VI. EFFECTIVE DATA PRACTICES – FRAMING DECISION-MAKING

TOTS – The On-Track System - is to serve as the data collection component of the State’s QRIS (Texas State Advisory Council on Childhood Education and Care, 2010, p. 37-38). Presently, the Council’s recommendations are under review by Governor Perry (Texas Early Learning Council, 2012).

Almost all of the Council’s current and forthcoming system-building initiatives include a data component, and their integration and synergy rely on the presence of a comprehensive, integrated, and accessible early childhood data system. So does the ability to document (1) the State’s progress toward benchmarks on programs’ capacity to provide higher quality; (2) the operational performance of a Texas QRIS as a system; and (3) the system’s near- and long-term impact on program changes, professionalizing ECE providers, teachers, and administrators, and

success in promoting child outcomes associated with school readiness. Fulfilling these expectations will demand a technology infrastructure such as a data warehouse, unique program and child identifiers, confidentiality rules, memoranda of understanding, and a structure for aligning ECE quality indicators and outcomes with the State’s emerging K-12 longitudinal data system.

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## **VII. IMPLEMENTATION – FRAMING DECISION-MAKING**

Most states have found that full funding for a comprehensive QRIS is difficult to achieve initially, even with the redirection of existing resources. As a result, developers often hone in on cost when considering implementation. Two other considerations should be taken into account, however: implementation science and one’s agreed upon logic model.

A pilot in conjunction with a phased-in approach offers a way to demonstrate the value of QRIS to stakeholders, test the system’s design, and fine-tune implementation issues. This approach, which is recommended, also offers an opportunity for “beta testing.” Additionally, states are increasingly using pilots to test QRIS structural elements. A caution though from another state: In analyzing Missouri’s implementation of its QRIS, Thornburg and Mauzy (2012) noted that like many states, it built its system in response to specific needs or implementation projects based on funding availability. “The result of these piecemeal efforts,” they noted, “although well intended, is a statewide ‘nonsystem’ ” (p. 232).

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## **VIII. COSTS AND FINANCING – FRAMING DECISION-MAKING**

Information about total cost of a statewide QRIS is difficult to obtain. Tools to support states in finding answers are available, however, as well as the opportunity to benefit from considerable state experience in tackling this important task. This section outlines a process for coming to a reasonable projection.

Preparing a cost analysis typically begins with projections of start up, maintenance, and long term costs to meet specified QRIS goals and objectives. Typically, a first step is mapping

current state investments in supports and services – including investments being made by a state’s quality improvement initiatives - with an eye to how these investments might be directed/re-directed so aligned with the new system’s vision and goals. This exercise is facilitated by having an agreed upon logic model accompanied by key assumptions.

Investigating states’ average expenditures on their QRIS found wide variation in how they calculated/reported “overall funding amount for most recent fiscal year.” With this caveat, here is what was learned:

- ▶ For six states plus the District of Columbia, costs ranged from approximately \$1M (New Mexico; Colorado; D.C.; Vermont; Virginia; Mississippi) to \$179M (Oklahoma).
- ▶ More mature QRIS reported: Pennsylvania \$79M; Tennessee \$44M; Oklahoma \$179M

This information begs the question of Texas’ capacity to fund a statewide QRIS. It should come as no surprise that the State’s present fiscal circumstances suggest limited availability of surplus funds. Few Interviewees familiar with the State’s financial status and politics were optimistic about new funding or felt sufficient funding for a sustainable system can be secured in the absence of legislation. Additionally, many State Legislators are in the process of learning more about the importance of quality ECE and becoming familiar with QRIS. Yet taking a QRIS to scale rarely can be achieved without public funding.

Approximately one-half of states with a QRIS implement the program as authorized by a legislative body. In some cases, states have stand-alone statutes with very specific language. In other cases, QRIS language is less explicit and is embedded in rules and/or regulations related to licensing. In states where QRIS is explicitly discussed in statute, administrative agencies responsible for system design, development and implementation typically are included in these authorizations.

Thinking more broadly, though, Texas has a number of large corporations and private funders, offering the opportunity to consider private-public partnerships at a larger scale than

presently seems to exist. There’s even the possibility of creating a fund of sufficient size that could generate ongoing revenue in support of a statewide QRIS as part of the Council’s forthcoming marketing campaign to elevate understanding of school readiness. Though these options tend to be more helpful in launching and/or supplementing versus sustaining a statewide QRIS, we think this is an idea worthy of further consideration.

There is also the option of maximizing existing funds through consolidation, prioritization, reallocation or reduction of redundancies - this presumes, though, that flexibility exists to consider this option. Further it assumes a level of cross-agency collaboration that may not be present.

Given the above considerations, as well as the strategic questions that await the Council’s decisions, projecting a cost for a statewide Texas QRIS at this stage of the QRIS strategic planning process is difficult. As a result, critical assumptions had to be made to develop a Cost Estimation.

In conjunction with these assumptions, the QRIS Cost Estimation Model (CEM) tool, developed by Anne Mitchell of the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance and adapted as a publicly accessible web-based tool by the National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC), was used as a guide to estimate the costs of a statewide Texas QRIS. Immediately following is a summary estimate of the start-up and ongoing costs over 5 years. A much more detailed cost estimate, including assumptions, can be found in Appendix H.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	
	PLANNING	PILOT	TRANSITION	ONGOING	ONGOING	Total 5 year cost
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$870,000</b>	<b>\$929,500</b>	<b>\$29,513,500</b>	<b>\$39,502,500</b>	<b>\$45,174,810</b>	<b>\$115,990,310</b>

## CONCLUSION

In its conclusion, the Council’s Working Paper (2011) reminded readers: “Designing a QRIS for Texas requires patience, research, and significant stakeholder engagement. The Council is well-

positioned to create a system that is inclusive of sectors involved and has the resources to engage significant stakeholders in the development of the system” (p. 21). We couldn’t agree more.

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# Where Do We Go From Here: Charting Next Steps

## A Texas Strategic Plan For a Quality Rating and Improvement System

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ICF International and the Goffin Strategy Group, LLC are grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of this work. This Strategic Plan could not have been written without the assistance of many individuals, however. We want first to express our appreciation and admiration for the many stakeholders from across Texas who responded to requests to participate in interviews, respond to surveys, and attend stakeholder meetings. Alison Landy, ICF Expert Consultant, did a thorough job of researching QRIS practices in other states, and Rebecca Wong, ICF Associate, conducted the careful literature review on the Data and QRIS Subcommittee's suggested program quality indicators. She also assisted us in formatting the multiple versions of the Strategic Plan. Additionally, Michelle Thomas, ICF Early Education Manager, ably served as the Project Manager and constructed the Cost Estimation for a new statewide QRIS. Stacie Goffin of the Goffin Strategy Group played a key role in developing and implementing the project's process design and in writing the Strategic Plan.

Texans Care for Children provided technical support in distributing statewide surveys and collating their responses, as well as attending to logistics for Stakeholder meetings. Finally, we want to thank Donald A. Titcombe, Texas Early Learning Council's very able manager, for his ongoing support and willingness to share his expertise with us. We conclude by acknowledging the commitment of the Texas Early Learning Council's members and their many efforts to foster a strong early learning system for Texas and promote the school readiness of the State's youngest citizens.

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# PART I: STRATEGIC CONTEXT FOR COUNCIL DECISION- MAKING

## INTRODUCTION

The 2012 map of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) released by the QRIS National Learning Network identifies 31 states plus the District of Columbia with statewide QRISs; eight states, including Texas, in the process of planning a QRIS; eight states plus Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands launching or completing a QRIS pilot; two states with regional QRIS; and one state, Missouri, prohibiting QRIS by law. While a growing movement over the past decade, the centrality of QRIS in the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services' Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC), issued in mid-2011, propelled its expansion and development to new heights. In conjunction with states' push for school ready children, growing public and private investments, and calls for increased accountability, expectations for QRISs are surging – as is scrutiny of their effectiveness and eagerness to ferret out the elements associated with success.

In its application to the federal government for funding under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA), the Texas Early Learning Council (henceforth 'Council') articulated intentions to develop a parent and child focused, high quality integrated system of early childhood education, with a focus on collaboration and school readiness. The proposed system is for the purpose of advancing the Council's goal of improving the State's ability to prepare more children for school. This desire is driven, in part, by the fact that Texas has the nation's fastest growing population of children under the age of 5, a significant proportion of whom are developmentally at risk. In addition, the State has widely varying early care and education (ECE) programs and discouraging statistics documenting high retention levels for kindergarteners and first graders (Texas Advisory Council for Early Education and Care, 2010; Texas Early Learning Council, 2011).

To achieve its overarching goals and priority objectives, the Council identified strategies in four intertwined areas:

1. Parental Outreach and Communication
2. Early Childhood Workforce and Professional Development
3. Collaboration and Standards
4. Data Systems

Creating a statewide QRIS is incorporated within the strategy of developing an integrated data system for the State's diverse, mixed sector early childhood related institutions, organizations, and programs. Through a process of rating ECE programs based on their ability to provide increasingly higher levels of quality, a Texas QRIS is seen as a vehicle for driving evidence-based decision-making while at the same time improving children's educational preparation.

QRIS is defined as a systematic approach for assessing, improving, and communicating the level of quality of early care and education and school age programs. First developed in Oklahoma in 1998, it typically has five components: (1) program standards and criteria; (2) program accountability associated with assigned rating levels; (3) workforce and provider support; (4) provider incentives; and (5) parent/consumer education.

The Council's federal application states that Texas' QRIS will build on existing strengths and statewide activities through linkages across existing initiatives so that as the State's data system was developed, Texas would be in a position to build and pilot "one of the nation's most high-quality, parent and child focused, next generation quality rating systems to promote the school readiness of all children and allow for all sectors to participate" (Texas State Advisory Council on Early Education and Care, 2010, p. 36). Although some of the attributes outlined in the federal application seem to have been re-opened for study – such as inclusion of all sectors (RFP744-1204, 2012) – remaining constant is the desire to set direction for the nation's next generation of QRIS. As expressed in *Where Do We Go From Here? Designing a Quality Rating and Improvement System in*

*Texas* (2011 - henceforth referred to as Council Working Paper), the Council believes it has the opportunity to “leap ahead of QRIS pioneers” (p. 14) and “lead the nation” (p. 20).

## THE TEXAS QRIS STRATEGIC PLAN METHODOLOGY

The Council’s RFP (Request for Proposals) for a QRIS Strategic Plan outlined six Texas QRIS business questions to guide the plan’s development:

1. Do teachers have the skills necessary to work with children’s needs?
2. What are the characteristics and standards of quality early childhood programs?
3. How can parents be informed about the quality of early childhood programs?
4. What programs/qualities of programs should the state of Texas incentivize?
5. To what extent are programs preparing children for school?
6. What steps can providers take to improve quality?

Beyond these business questions, the RFP outlined additional questions related to a Texas QRIS’ relationship to available data sources, long and short-term costs and options for sustainable funding, feasibility of creating a multi-sector QRIS, and research evidence to support the Council’s Data and QRIS Subcommittee’s (Subcommittee) initial suggestion of program quality indicators (RFP744-1204, 2012, pg. 13-14).

The Texas QRIS Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) addresses these questions as well as those highlighted in the Council Working Paper (2011). Our proposals are organized by eight topics: Scope for a Texas QRIS; Child-Program Assessment; Administration; Structure; Quality Assurance; Effective Data Practices; Implementation; and Costs and Financing. Prior to pursuing these proposals, however, the Council is encouraged to address five “first-order” strategic questions, which are discussed below under a header of the same name.

The Council Working Paper (2011) provides an in-depth review of the Texas ECE landscape and of the State’s quality improvement infrastructure, obviating the need to repeat that information

here. Drawing heavily from the Council's QRIS RFP (2012) and ongoing conversations with the Council's manager, the Strategic Plan is based on information interviews and statewide electronic surveys, QRIS-related research, and a process for collecting and collating findings on early drafts of the Strategic Plan based on Subcommittee and stakeholder input prior to its submission to the Council as a final document. Specifically,

- ▶ Phone interviews were conducted with 23 stakeholders from across the State (See Appendices C and D for names of interviewees and interview questions). Questions asked of interviewees were derived from the Council Working Paper (2011), the Council's application for ARRA dollars, and questions outlined in the QRIS RFP (2012). To promote willingness to share viewpoints without concern for possible consequences, interviewees were promised confidentiality. When referenced as a resource, they are cited as Interviewee or, when more than one person held similar views, Interviewees;
- ▶ A literature review of program quality indicators was performed (for programs serving children from birth to kindergarten entry), targeting program quality indicator preferences identified by the Subcommittee (See Appendix G);
- ▶ Current QRIS-related research was reviewed on topics such as assessment of child, program, and teacher-child interactions, child outcomes achieved through QRIS, and next generation QRIS practices and trends;
- ▶ QRIS-related practices in other states were investigated, with special focus on design features of interest to the Subcommittee.

Looking forward:

- ▶ Between July and October, three statewide electronic surveys with questions related to a Texas QRIS were sent to stakeholders across the State – the first was distributed early in July 2012, receiving responses from 464 stakeholders. The second was distributed in early September and received responses from 253 stakeholders. The final statewide survey was

launched in October and received responses from 152 individuals.<sup>1</sup> Across the three surveys, respondents who self-identified as ECE Administrators submitted the largest percentage of surveys, ranging from 45.5% to 55.5% of respondents. Self-identified ECE Advocates, whose participation percentages ranged from 31.6% to 39.5%, were followed by ECE Administrators in their level of involvement. (See Appendix E);

- ▶ Two Stakeholder meetings were hosted in Austin by the Council to engage stakeholders with the Strategic Plan’s development (See Appendix F); and
- ▶ Prior to the Strategic Plan’s completion, a final meeting is being held with the full Council.

Woven throughout this draft of the Strategic Plan are insights gained from the 23 stakeholder interviews, the three statewide surveys, the two stakeholder meetings, a national survey of state QRIS practices, a literature review of program quality indicators, and current QRIS-related research. Also, while recognizing that Texas chose not to participate in the federal government’s Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge, the broad response from states suggests that the application’s criteria and the implementation plans of winning states can offer insight into the future of QRIS. As a result, examples and perceptions gained from study of these applications often are referenced. Appendices provide the names of interviewees (Appendix C), questions asked of them (Appendix D), questions and findings from the three statewide surveys (Appendix E), agenda and input from the two stakeholder meetings (Appendix F), the literature review on evidence supporting the Subcommittee’s suggested QRIS indicators (Appendix G), and a cost estimation of the proposed QRIS (Appendix H).

The Council Working Paper (2011) has as its stated purpose “to contextualize the choices facing the Council concerning recommendations for a Texas QRIS system” (p. 2). Proposed as a companion document to *Where Do We Go From Here: Charting Next Steps*, the Council Working Paper (2011) describes the ECE landscape in Texas, including the State’s quality improvement

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<sup>1</sup>The statewide surveys were sent to a nonrandom group of early childhood advocates and stakeholders.

infrastructure and issues that a Texas QRIS design will need to consider. The Strategic Plan lifts up these issues and provides information and guidance to inform the decision-making required to bring a statewide QRIS to fruition.

The charge to us as consultants was to create a strategic plan that responded to the directives set forth in the QRIS RFP (2012) and present the Council with informed options for making choices and decisions. The development process chosen by the Council is one of informed decision-making. The Subcommittee provided input on the plan's working draft, and stakeholders were engaged to inform the plan's continuing development, but the Council has the ultimate responsibility for deciding on final recommendations, using the input it has been provided.

As consultants, we took to heart the Council's Charge to provide a plan that enables members to thoughtfully engage in the work of developing a Texas QRIS with the potential to "lead the nation" (Council Working Paper, 2011, p. 20). As the plan's authors, we feel confident that the comprehensive scope of our research and its careful analysis provide a strong foundation for achieving this outcome.

## LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE: QRIS EMERGING TRENDS, QUESTIONS, AND FINDINGS

RAND researchers Zellman and Karoly (2012) identified three factors to explain the growth of QRIS:

1. Continuing gaps in quality in existing ECE programs;
2. The inability of the present ECE system to promote uniformly high quality; and
3. Features of the ECE market that limit consumption of high quality services.

Early in its development, QRIS was viewed largely as a vehicle for incentivizing improved program quality and offering consumers (a.k.a. parents) a mechanism for informed selection of early learning programs. As investments in these systems have expanded, along with growing calls for accountability, QRISs increasingly are being characterized as accountability systems directed

toward improving children's readiness for success in kindergarten; in the process, questions are surfacing about relationships among the system's component parts.

As the Council Working Paper (2011) reminded readers, QRIS relies on several assumptions: first, that program changes in quality indicators are linked with improved child outcomes, and second, that QRIS is an approach that feasibly can be taken to scale (p. 2). The Council is seeking verification of these assumptions. Yet at this point in its youthful existence, no clear or direct pathway exists for designing a QRIS that fulfills the Council's hopes for a fully evidence-based system.

QRISs are complex systems; their designs and consequences are not independent of states' social, political, and economic contexts, including specific local ECE markets and licensing standards. Further, states' QRIS rating levels and their measurement vary nationwide, resulting in differing conceptualizations of quality and making it difficult to draw generalizations about QRIS design features and their relationship to program quality and child outcomes (Caronongan, Kirby, Malone, & Boller, 2011). While a few states, such as Missouri and Pennsylvania, have demonstrated child outcomes for their QRIS – making their designs useful informants to Texas' efforts – the obligation to attend to what was measured in each state and why, as well as to each state's contextual conditions thwarts easy generalizations.

Additionally, ECE's scientific knowledge base as a field of practice is evolving. Outcomes achieved by ECE settings, especially child outcomes, are notoriously difficult to determine. Program outcomes are informed by an array of factors not easily teased apart. As Zellman and Karoly (2012) noted of the QRIS theory of change, "Yet although improved child outcomes are the ultimate goal, QRISs rarely directly assess children's developmental outcomes to determine if the system itself is improving child functioning, nor do they require child assessments for the purpose of evaluating specific programs. This is largely because it is costly to accurately measure child functioning and

difficult to identify the contribution of any given ECE setting to a particular child's developmental trajectory" (pg. ix).

Fortunately, research is underway to better understand how quality operates to improve child outcomes by (1) deconstructing quality; (2) focusing on the importance of dosage, thresholds, and quality features in promoting improved results and (3) moving beyond reliance on global measures of quality. Toward this end, multiple projects funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, such as the Quality Rating System Assessment Project, Quality Initiatives Research and Evaluation Consortium (INQUIRE), and Child Care and Early Education Quality Features, Thresholds, Dosage, and Child Outcomes (Q-DOT) Study Design Project, are generating new information and also new questions.

What follows is a high level overview of recent, albeit nascent, findings from this work, including outcomes associated with QRIS and questions being raised about relationships between ECE program quality and child outcomes. Previewing this research highlights what is being learned about evidence-based quality indicators and QRIS design elements. This ongoing work underscores the fluidity surrounding QRIS at a point in time when more exacting research is being conducted to answer the kinds of questions the Council is raising.

### **Relation of QRIS to Children's Developmental Outcomes**

Turning now to QRIS-related research that indicates the current status of our QRIS-related knowledge, Kathryn Tout and her colleagues (2012), in a study still in process under the auspice of INQUIRE, reviewed QRIS evaluations conducted by 18 states. They reviewed a total of 33 reports, some conducted on mature QRIS and others included as part of a state's pilot phase. Of five issues being explored by this INQUIRE study, two of them, validation and quality improvement, relate to a driving interest of the Council.

Validation studies can address different questions (Tout, 2012; Zellman & Fiene, 2012). “Validation of a QRIS is a multi-step process that accesses the extent to which design decisions about program quality standards and measurement strategies are resulting in accurate and meaningful ratings” (Zellman & Fiene, 2012, p. 4). Additionally, Tout and her colleagues are examining whether linkages exist between QRIS ratings and children’s developmental outcomes.

To date, they are finding few definitive results in terms of the relationship between QRIS-induced quality improvements, QRIS ratings, and children’s developmental outcomes. Framed by the caveat that child outcome studies are difficult to conduct – and that these studies are not disputing that quality ECE improves child outcomes - initial findings indicate that strong evidence has yet to be found for developmental outcomes consistently associated with QRIS rating levels.

While initial findings found improvements over time, actual changes in developmental scores tended to be modest. Because the nature of support provided to programs varied widely, Tout and her colleagues consider these initial findings tentative, especially since none of the studies under review included a comparison of different quality improvement strategies, making it difficult to isolate which components or indicators demonstrate the greatest effectiveness.

## **Assessing Program Quality**

Given the centrality of measurement to QRIS, it is not surprising that issues associated with assessing quality have risen to the forefront, especially since findings are being used in ways that are increasingly high stakes. Researchers have begun questioning the sufficiency of global measures, such as Environmental Rating Scales (for example, the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, ECERS-R), as stand-alone measures and are calling for more domain-specific measures targeting, for example, language and literacy, math, science, and general cognition, as well as social-emotional development and health, safety, and nutrition (Denny, Hallam, & Homer, 2012; Dickenson, 2006; Forry, Vick, & Halle, 2009; La Paro et al, 2012; Zaslow, Tout, & Martinez-Beck, 2010).

There also are measurement challenges, such as aligning measures to program goals, ensuring reliable measurement, weighting multiple components of quality, and validating measurement across the full range of quality and across types of ECE settings (Zaslow, Tout, & Martinez-Beck, 2012). In combination, elevation of these issues signals that measurement of quality is assuming a more central role in policy and, consequently, requiring more attention by QRIS programmers.

### **Relationships between ECE Quality and Child Outcomes**

Related to questions on measuring program quality are inquiries about how program quality in ECE is linked to stronger child outcomes. Recognizing that to date most research in this area has focused on linear associations stemming from global quality measures, Mathematica Policy Research, in partnership with Child Trends, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and the University of Virginia, is lifting up the relationship between program quality and child outcomes for further examination. Having developed a systematic research plan, they now are exploring whether certain thresholds of quality or dosage levels need to be met or whether particular aspects of quality need to be present before linkages exist between program quality and child outcomes. Also being explored is how a relationship might vary depending on the age of the child and type of setting. Responding to these questions is the focus of Q-DOT (The Child Care and Early Education Quality Features, Thresholds, Dosage, and Child Outcomes initiative).

Using data on teacher-child interactions and instructional quality from an 11-state pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) evaluation, a 2009 study by Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta, & Mashburn found that achieving positive child outcomes required programs to be of higher-quality. Positive child outcomes were not found in programs of low quality. Based on threshold effects, they suggested that quality enhancement programs should focus on improving lower quality programs *only if* the enhancements have demonstrated ability to improve quality to the range where there are active effects on child outcomes.

That same year, with other Q-DOT colleagues, Burchinal reported findings on a study involving a meta-analysis of 20 studies and a secondary analysis of four large studies on ECE. Again looking at the magnitude of the relationship between quality indicators and child outcomes, the authors found positive, yet modest, associations. Evidence also emerged suggesting that larger benefits in children’s development were achieved when quality was in the good to high range.

Two years later, a 2011 presentation by Burchinal and her colleagues at the Society for Research in Child Development shared findings from Q-DOT’s latest research. They looked for associations at lower and higher levels of program quality. Specifically, they examined whether thresholds existed in the association between quality and outcomes to learn if the relationship between the two is stronger in higher quality classrooms.

In summarizing their findings, the researchers concluded that the notion of a “good enough level of quality” was not confirmed – referring to a single cut-off point where a clear relationship exists between a program’s quality and child outcomes. As a result, they suggested two approaches to promoting child outcomes may be needed: (1) bumping lower-quality programs up to a level where a relationship exists with child outcomes and (2) encouraging continuous improvement within programs at the higher range. “Thus crossing a cut-point is not sufficient – it is just the first step.”

Inferences from these studies hint at evidence that can guide development of a more evidence-based design for a Texas QRIS. Simultaneously, they reveal the ambiguity still associated with this much needed research.

## **Trends in States’ QRIS Efforts**

We now turn to trends in states’ efforts that are responding to QRIS’ changing context. During a recent presentation, The National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement (2012) noted that states with established QRIS are looking for ways to improve upon their current QRIS efforts,

while new and implementing states are following a different process than their predecessors – findings echoed by the QRIS National Learning Network (2012).

States with established QRIS are (1) looking at participation rates in terms of intentional outreach and cross-sector inclusion; (2) refining standards in terms of streamlining them while also setting them higher, including additional measures, and addressing cultural competence; (3) reviewing administrative costs that come along with increased participation and more multi-faceted systems, leading to restructuring efforts and new uses of existing state monitoring systems and technology; and (4) seeking evidence of impact by examining participation rates by level and implementing more validation and school readiness studies. Newly engaged states are (1) using longer developmental periods for their QRIS; (2) attending to provider concerns; (3) validating and streamlining standards; (4) creating hybrid rating models; (5) conducting pilots and field tests and validating quality improvement supports; and (6) planning to use incremental roll out approaches.

The QRIS National Learning Network (2012), in its assessment of the status of QRIS, highlighted (1) the addition of higher education requirements at higher star levels, family engagement standards, new curriculum requirements, and licensing as the “floor”; (2) the use of increased automation and streamlining of administration; (3) online resources and materials; and (4) evolution toward automated QRIS supports. Additionally, it identified intensive professional development being provided to programs at higher star levels (perhaps in response to the dosage and threshold issues discussed above), professional development linked to assessment measures, and increased systems alignment efforts, including linkages with PreK through third grade.

In assessing the state of quality, the National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement (2012) concluded:

— States appear to **have done** the most work in:

- ▶ Building and strengthening existing licensing standards.
- ▶ Implementing and aligning Early Learning Standards with other standards.

- ▶ Developing Professional Development systems.
- ▶ Creating supports for programs and practitioners.
- ▶ Establishing quality-based financial incentives.
- ▶ Providing parents and practitioners with Web sites focused on quality.

— States appear to have the most **work to do** when it comes to:

- ▶ Linking program supports to standards (i.e., training/technical assistance).
- ▶ Establishing data systems to support data-driven decision-making.
- ▶ Providing sustainable funding for quality improvement.
- ▶ Providing families with search tools that show program quality information.
- ▶ Linking Professional Development system components to standards.

These status reports tell us that the development and implementation of QRIS is ongoing; that states are learning from one another as well as from their own experiences; and that a high energy level surrounds the confidence current and newly engaged states have in the potential of QRIS.

## NAVIGATING STATE INTRICACIES: CREATING A TEXAS QRIS

Three Council documents are specifically associated with developing a Texas QRIS: its application for federal funds, its Council Working Paper (2011), and its RFP for a Texas QRIS Strategic Plan. Of these, the Council Working Paper (2011) accentuates that crucial decisions await answers. The nature of these decisions, along with information gathered from interviews with individuals from across the State, three statewide surveys, and two Stakeholder meetings, indicate that the Council’s QRIS deliberations will involve balancing diverse State interests and priorities. As expressed by one Interviewee, a major hurdle to creating a statewide QRIS is getting “the whole state to agree on what is quality and what ratings mean. This may be the most challenging to overcome.”

While perhaps magnified by presenting them as contrasts, these diverse interests and priorities include:

- ▶ Statewide consistency in defining and assessing program quality as contrasted with desire to support local decision-making, local initiative, and provider choice.
- ▶ Inclusion of all ECE sectors contrasted with recognition of child care as the sector in greatest need of quality improvement, serving the greatest number of children at-risk, and operating with minimal performance standards.
- ▶ Integration or coordination of the State's diverse quality rating initiatives into one system contrasted with reluctance to undercut vibrant local variations and Texas Rising Star.
- ▶ Desire to target more public investments to program quality as contrasted with program subsidy availability and access.
- ▶ Access for working families to a range of child care choices as contrasted with targeting programs with the strongest probability of achieving program quality levels associated with school readiness.
- ▶ Global definitions of school readiness as contrasted with targeted, measurement-driven measures of school ready children.

Bolstering these different interests are state-specific characteristics:

- ▶ The State's large size and wide cultural, social, and economic differences across regions.
- ▶ Widely shared commitments to limited government involvement, which includes the primacy of local control and market-driven enterprise.
- ▶ Co-existing definitions of school readiness.
- ▶ Diverse co-existing local efforts aimed at raising the level of child care.
- ▶ Jurisdiction for State-funded ECE programs across multiple state agencies with differing public mandates and accompanying regulations and funding levels.

- ▶ Strong state agency identities and perceived boundaries that lead to siloes around work related to promoting children’s school readiness.
- ▶ Competition between resource allocations focused on increased access to ECE programs – especially for children supported by State subsidies – and advancing program quality to levels that promote children’s readiness for success in kindergarten.
- ▶ Presence of an organized for-profit ECE community recognized for its political influence with the State legislature and sensitivity to unfunded mandates.

## A Role for Guiding Principles

This list of individual interests and priorities may appear daunting when bundled together. Yet the Council’s primary QRIS documents also identify principles that can be used for choosing among diverse interests and priorities (See adjacent sidebar<sup>2</sup>). Despite the State’s complexities – including its present fiscal circumstances, varying levels of Legislator awareness of QRIS, systemic and programmatic fragmentation, and differing viewpoints – agreement appears to exist among the diverse group of individuals interviewed and those attending the September 20<sup>th</sup> Stakeholder meeting around school readiness as an overarching purpose for the State’s ECE programs. Many are eager to bring increased coherence to the State’s programming. A

### Potential Guiding Principles for Forming a Texas QRIS

A Texas QRIS should:

- Be family and child focused.
- Be available to all providers and families, with priority outreach to working families.
- Help more children be ready for school, targeting the State’s most vulnerable children.
- Be understandable to families and providers.
- Be accountable.
- Foster increased integration among standards across early childhood education programs.
- Enable parents to be informed consumers when choosing among early care and education options.
- Support a mixed delivery system.
- Foster coordination and increased alignment between and among the State’s quality improvement programs and services.
- Be feasible to operate and monitor.
- Be fiscally responsible and sustainable.

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<sup>2</sup> Participants at the first stakeholder meeting offered edits and additions to this list. See Appendix F.

Texas QRIS is seen as a way to facilitate common expectations for ECE programs, create consistency across programs regardless of sponsorship, provide information to parents and decision makers, and promote school readiness statewide. Even with differences that surfaced in the first statewide survey in terms of purpose for a Texas QRIS, 82% of the 464 respondents agreed that a statewide QRIS should be created<sup>3</sup> - a response matched by participants at the first Stakeholder meeting.

These potential guiding principles will have even greater value if prioritized and weighted in terms of importance. Participants at the first stakeholder meeting and respondents to the second statewide survey were given this opportunity. Each identified “helping more children be ready for school, targeting the State’s most vulnerable” as the most important guiding principle. From the possibilities provided, survey respondents also expressed strong interest in “be family and child focused” as a priority principle. Stakeholders at the September 20<sup>th</sup> meeting, however, varied considerably in how they prioritized other principles. (See Appendices E and F.)

## **An Emerging Texas ECE Infrastructure**

Another favorable factor is the broad scope of Council activities presently underway. Directed toward building a systemic ECE infrastructure, most are scheduled for completion by 2013. If intentionally joined with a Texas QRIS, the rich array of in-process and forthcoming initiatives can bolster the new system’s success and durability.

These efforts, including development of Infant-Toddler early learning guidelines, a cross-walk of standards across the State’s multiple programs, a career lattice for ECE practitioners, an articulated professional development system, and early childhood registry will strengthen the effectiveness of a Texas QRIS and provide a supportive infrastructure for participants; add to this mixture the statewide early childhood needs assessment conducted by the Ray Marshall Center at the University of Texas at Austin. The first such assessment conducted in over 40 years, it provides

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<sup>3</sup> Note: Responses were solicited from a nonrandom pool of early childhood advocates and stakeholders.

a statewide picture of Texas' demographic changes and early childhood supply needs, information the Council can use to inform design and implementation choices for a Texas QRIS. To highlight the opportunity for synergy among the Council's multiple initiatives, Table 1 lists the Council's current and emerging initiatives and their potential linkage with a Texas QRIS.

[Remainder of page intentionally left blank.]

**Table 1: Council Strategies for Improving School Readiness**

Council Initiative	Project Description	Status	Relation to a Texas QRIS
<b>TOTS – THE ON TRACK SYSTEM</b>	Creation of integrated, comprehensive early childhood data collection system for Texas	Discontinued. TELC recommendations submitted to Governor Rick Perry October 2012	Creation of crucial infrastructure for housing QRIS related data
<b>STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT</b>	Will provide a 40-year-state population projection of state’s children; analyses of current supply of and projected demand for early childhood services; & survey of quality of early childhood services available to families	Completed in October 2012	Information to inform TQRIS design & implementation
<b>EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM STANDARDS COMPARISON TOOL A.K.A. CROSSWALK</b>	An online “crosswalk” tool accessible to diverse stakeholders to compare different regulations and standards operating in TX ECE programs	Pilot testing scheduled for Spring 2013	Online tool that can support coordinated decision-making on program quality indicators associated with each tier of a Texas QRIS
<b>EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE REGISTRY</b>	An online interactive hub for all EC practitioners that will store all professional development information	Pilot testing in various communities scheduled for 2013	Online tool that providers and others can use to track training and education associated with TQRIS program quality tiers; will include a Trainer Registry

**Table 1: Council Strategies for Improving School Readiness (cont.)**

Council Initiative	Project Description	Status	Relation to a Texas QRIS
<b>INFANT AND TODDLER EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES</b>	New voluntary infant and toddler guidelines outlining what infants and toddlers should know and be able to do	Upon approval, the Council will distribute the Guidelines in Fall 2012	Can be used to inform a statewide definition of school readiness in conjunction with TEA’s PreK Guidelines; Can be used to establish statewide expectations for the knowledge and skill of infant and toddler caregivers and of trainers and coaches, as well as the content of infant and toddler curricula
<b>NEW CORE COMPETENCIES FOR THE ECE WORKFORCE</b>	Expansion of current Core Knowledge and Skills areas to include coaches and mentors; Expansion of current knowledge and skills for practitioners, administrators, and trainers	Released for public feedback	Can be used to establish statewide expectations for knowledge and skill associated with different roles; Provides framework for setting requirements for coaches and mentors involved with a statewide QRIS; Offers framework for determining TQRIS requirements by tiers of program quality
<b>ECE CAREER LADDER</b>	Career ladder defining relationship between education, work experience, and ongoing professional development from entry level staff to experienced individuals with advanced degrees	Pending final release of Core Competencies	Can assist with design of QRIS levels to ensure that progression of quality tiers are aligned with state’s ECE career ladder

**Table 1: Council Strategies for Improving School Readiness (cont.)**

Council Initiative	Project Description	Status	Relation to a Texas QRIS
<b>COMPENSATION STUDY</b>	Statewide compensation study to explore compensation parity in the state's ECE workforce with intent of recommending a baseline compensation plan	Completion date scheduled for April 2013	Offers baseline for creating proposed tiered compensation levels associated with state's ECE Career Ladder and statewide QRIS
<b>BEECH (Beginning Education: Early Childcare at Home)</b>	2-year experimental intervention with licensed and registered child care home providers that will provide evidence base for web based training modules in English and Spanish	2-year research study completed April 2012; Study being extended to home based Spanish speaking providers	Offers potential training for home providers that can be incorporated into TQRIS expectations for participating home based child care providers; its expansion to Spanish-speaking providers can help expand QRIS-participation.
<b>TX COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN FOR SCHOOL READINESS</b>	Provides funding for 4 communities to implement a cutting-edge, population based school readiness assessment	Funding for four communities to implement a cutting-edge, population based school readiness assessment instrument	Possible laboratory for gathering information on mobilizing parent and provider participation in TQRIS

**Table 1: Council Strategies for Improving School Readiness (cont.)**

Council Initiative	Project Description	Status	Relation to a Texas QRIS
<p><b>NEW PROJECTS BEING LAUNCHED</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Invest in T.E.A.C.H.</li> <li>*Expanded statewide public awareness campaign on school readiness</li> <li>*Development of 5 modules (21 hours) of on-line training for new Texas Core Competencies</li> <li>*ECE Articulation</li> </ul>		<p>T.E.A.C.H.® and proposed modules have potential for direct linkages to a TQRIS in terms of supporting and incentivizing practitioner access to professional development opportunities that support progression to higher levels of program quality; Statewide campaign offers vehicle for reaching out to parents and providers about TQRIS and “marketing” the value of their participation; ECE Articulation agreements, spanning from community based training to community colleges to universities, are to help communities establish working articulation agreements for early care and education degrees, so the process of attaining increased education can become more transparent and manageable.</p>

## THE COUNCIL'S ROLE AS DECISION-MAKER

The information shared thus far highlights the Council's important decision-making role in forming a plan for a Texas QRIS. By necessity, this decision-making will sometimes be characterized by uncertainty, demanding deliberate strategic choices infused with political and financial implications.

In her recent book, *The Art of Choosing*, Sheena Iyengar (2010) asserts, "We can't avoid the fact that any choice we make may be considered a statement about who we are, but some choices speak more loudly than others" (p. 203). If the Council chooses, implicit principles that have undergirded its QRIS-related deliberations can be used to inform and guide its decision-making, with a focus on members' shared interests. The State's multiple strengths, including commitment to a different future, form a sturdy base for making progress.

Many reasons exist for creating a statewide QRIS, especially if the Council is willing to coalesce stakeholders around a well-understood purpose, foster an experimental orientation, and move forward with a future orientation. The Council is encouraged to consider an organized, deliberative, decision-making process for developing its recommendations and planning an ongoing process to monitor the system's progress, ensuring that its multiple parts move forward in a coordinated and synergistic way – not only internally but also in conjunction with the State's other system-building efforts.

## An "Aspirational" Logic Model for a Texas QRIS

Logic models are guides to implementation and also an important first step in planning a QRIS evaluation. Logic models offer a systematic and visual way of presenting the sequence of expected relationships among (1) resources available to a program/initiative; (2) activities or policies that are to be put in place; and (3) outcomes (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004). In essence, a logic model presents a theory of change. To the extent that the Council is entering into an evaluative

phase of work, a possible logic model for a Texas QRIS is offered as a way of one, confirming the Council's expectations for the new system and two, helping steer decision-making.

Logic models rest on a clearly articulated purpose. While not explicitly articulated as its mission, the purpose of a Texas QRIS seems to be creation of an evidence-based, multi-level system capable of demonstrating positive causal linkages to child development and school readiness, especially for children developmentally at risk. The pioneering leadership role being sought appears expressly tied to moving beyond a QRIS design reliant on what other states are doing or on ideological preferences, and instead designing a statewide QRIS grounded in evidence-based decisions: first, in terms of utilizing the most effective criteria to measure the quality of ECE programs; second, in evaluating the effectiveness of a QRIS in supporting child development and school readiness; third, in crafting a system design conducive to these attributes; and fourth, in assessing the effectiveness and impact of QRIS as a system.

This prototype seemingly represents the "leap ahead" opportunity being sought by the Council. Its achievement would shepherd one of the Council's articulated outcomes: data driven decisions by policymakers, providers, and parents that, in turn, could move the bar toward the goal of improved statewide school readiness (Texas Early Learning Council Priorities). And without a doubt, this accomplishment would provide a model of interest to the nation.

As Council members may be aware, this mission aligns with expectations made of RTT-ELC winners. One of four QRIS-related expectations for winning states is that they "Demonstrate the relationship between quality ratings and the learning outcomes of children served by early learning programs, by validating that the tiers in the state's tiered quality rating and improvement system accurately reflect differential levels of quality, are related to progress in learning and development, and build toward school readiness" (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, p. 46).

Notably, this federal grant requirement was put forth as a challenge. Over the next four years, winning states are expected to lead the way in this regard, and Texas, if it chooses, can learn and lead with them.

Creating a school readiness-driven QRIS is not absent controversy, though, the most visible of which is concern for high stakes testing of children and programs. In a paper titled *Moving to Child Outcomes: Approaches to Incorporating Child Assessments into State Early Childhood Quality Rating and Improvement Systems*, RAND researchers Zellman and Karoly (2012) noted that “the use of child assessments to improve programs or assess how well QRISs are working presents many challenges, including young children’s limited attention spans, uneven skills development, and discomfort with strangers and strange situations. One effect of these challenges is that reliability (i.e., consistent measurement) is more difficult to achieve. Validity is also an issue; validity is attached not to measures but to the use of a specific instrument in a specific context. Often, assessments used in QRISs were designed for use in low-stakes settings such as research studies and program self-assessments. But QRISs increasingly represent high-stakes settings, where the outcomes of assessments affect public ratings, reimbursement rates, and the availability of technical assistance” (p. xi).

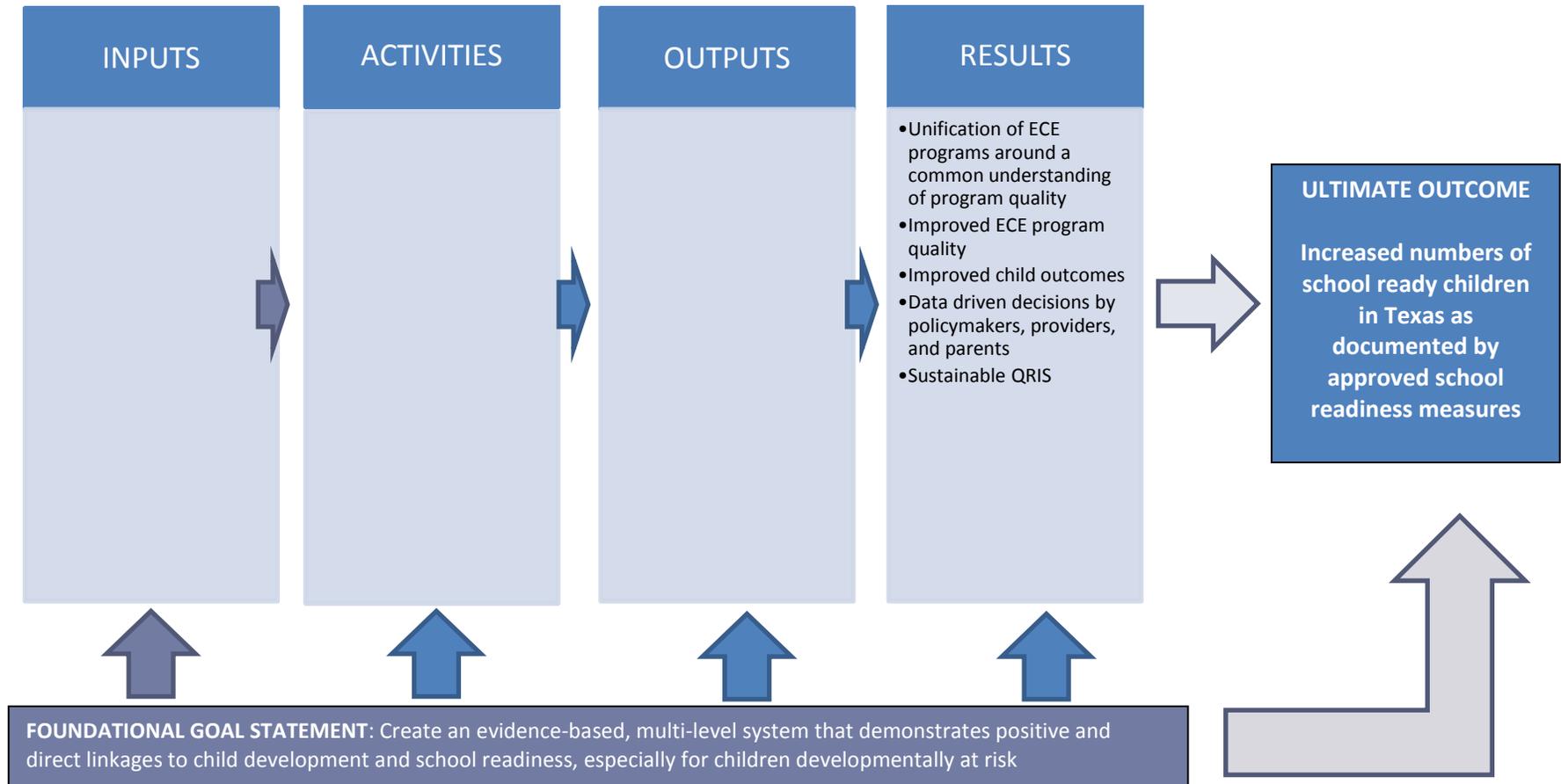
The Council has set high standards for a fully evidence-based Texas QRIS, and the descriptor given to the proposed logic model - *aspirational* - acknowledges this fact. Given the absence of clear-cut guidance from the research literature, the Council will be confronted with choices not always firmly grounded in existing research. There also will be choices necessitated by the State’s contextual circumstances. In conjunction with guiding principles, an aspirational logic model offers the Council a possible roadmap for charting next steps.

Logic models typically identify results, an ultimate outcome, and a foundational goal statement. They can be formatted in a variety of ways. We have chosen a column format for its ease of readability. In addition to the purpose elements, logic models also include the Inputs, Activities,

and Outputs that, “logically,” should generate desired results and an ultimate outcome. Below is our rendition of the Council’s Aspirational Logic Model; it highlights the aspirational components of the Council’s vision for a Texas QRIS – its foundational goal, results, and ultimate outcome. Part II of the Strategic Plan presents 17 proposals and contextual considerations that will fill in the columns labeled Inputs, Activities, and Outputs. The complete Aspirational Logic Model with inclusion of the Strategic Plan’s 17 proposals is presented in the Conclusion to the Strategic Plan (see page 111).

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### Texas QRIS Aspirational Logic Model



TERMS	DEFINITIONS
Inputs	Resources invested in the QRIS
Activities	Actions and processes that are implemented to support QRIS
Outputs	Results of the QRIS activities; typically described in quantitative measures
Results	Consequences of the QRIS activities; typically associated with qualitative measures
Ultimate Outcome	Highest order, desired outcome

## First-Order Strategic Questions

Part II of the Strategic Plan for a Texas QRIS offers 17 proposals related to the design of a statewide QRIS, as well as information related to effective data practices, implementation, and costs. Each proposal responds to questions raised by the Council Working Paper (2011) and the RFP for this work. To the extent possible, they are informed by available evidence. As previously noted, though, supportive evidence is not always available.

As a result, design proposals also look to what other states are doing and how their choices might be customized for a Texas QRIS. States' designs of their QRIS have relied heavily on what other states have done and adapting these choices to their own circumstances, creating commonalities across QRISs (Caronongan, Kirby, Malone, & Boller, 2011). Relying on other states' decisions has limitations, especially for a state wanting its system to be solidly based in research. These limitations include variations in status of states' ECE systems, differing political and economic contexts, and distinctions in designers' decision-making criteria. Nor, unfortunately, are rationales for states' decision-making about their QRIS designs consistently available, making it necessary to draw inferences. Yet to the extent that states are learning from one another about the design and success of each other's QRIS – and in fact being encouraged to do so by groups such as the QRIS National Learning Network and OPRE - a growing practical knowledge base is being created that can inform the Subcommittee and the Council as a whole.

The proposals offered by this plan have yet another shortcoming. They are offered in the absence of knowing the Council's strategic choices on behalf of a Texas QRIS – choices that only it can make. To provide a more definitive group of proposals would require knowing the Council's thinking on five strategic issues:

1: Determining Initial Priorities. Assuming limited funding and operational capacity, what will be the Council's priority/priorities? At least three possibilities exist: Does the Council most want a statewide QRIS to lift the floor of program quality across the State in order to improve the

early learning experiences of as many Texas children as possible? Given limited resources and the focus on school readiness, would it be more “strategic” to target resources to programs with the greatest probability of promoting kindergarten readiness? Or is it more feasible in light of the Council’s present system-building activities to focus on constructing a sturdy ECE infrastructure that supports the system’s initial development and provides sustained support on behalf of increased program quality and kindergarten readiness?

Given these three choices, the 40 plus participants at the September 20<sup>th</sup> Stakeholder meeting unanimously selected the option of building a sturdy ECE infrastructure. Participants, who held a variety of roles across multiple sectors, saw this approach as making the best use of limited resources, expanding possibilities for participation, and assisting with sustainability.

2: Defining School Readiness. What defines kindergarten readiness in Texas? What child outcomes are most important for preparing children for success in kindergarten and beyond? What does it mean to build a parent-centered early learning system? The Council’s application for federal funds stated that “our collaborative efforts will hinge on identifying parental needs, how they think about and identify quality in their communities” (Texas State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2010, p.8). How will parent views and differences among Texas’ regions be addressed in crafting a statewide definition for school readiness?

Discussion on this topic at the September 20<sup>th</sup> Stakeholder meeting highlighted the dissension associated with this first-order question. Viewpoints expressed seem to suggest that even though strong support exists for improving children’s readiness for kindergarten through QRIS, using a statewide QRIS to facilitate program improvement is preferred over a QRIS designed to promote school readiness outcomes. Although potentially reflecting concern over how school readiness may ultimately be defined and assessed, the Council aspiration of consistently appraising the status of children’s kindergarten readiness and providing valid and reliable data to stakeholders depends on being able to answer these questions.

Disagreement associated with this topic carried over to the second Stakeholder meeting held on October 18<sup>th</sup>. Participants were asked whether they could support the Aspirational Logic Model presented above. Twelve (12) participants voted “no”; 14 voted “yes,” and two participants did not record their vote.

The close proximity of “yes” and “no” votes on this question and its consistency as a pattern call for further scrutiny. Drawing from participant comments as well as interview conversations, the “no” vote may reflect concerns regarding the high stakes often associated with assessing children’s school readiness. At stake may also be the extent to which ECE as a field of practice could be transformed programmatically by a singular focus on school ready children as documented by State approved school readiness measures, especially in light of limited valid and reliable school readiness measures for the concept as presently defined by the Council.

Responses to the third statewide survey revealed a similar split in opinion. The survey question asked was stated as follows: “A major goal of QRIS nationally is helping children be better prepared for success in kindergarten and beyond. Two viewpoints exist on how this is best achieved. Check the answer below that you most agree with. While both answers may seem to have merit, please check the answer that you think should drive the design of a Texas QRIS.” In response to the two viewpoints presented, 53.8% checked “A QRIS can best help children come to kindergarten prepared to succeed by helping programs improve their quality” and 46.2% checked “A QRIS can best help children come to kindergarten prepared to succeed by identifying and promoting child outcomes associated with school success.” ECE administrators, advocates, and local/state policymakers slightly favored a focus on program quality improvement as a way to promote school readiness. Parents and ECE teachers/providers slightly favored a school readiness approach focused on identifying and promoting child outcomes associated with school success.

At present Texas has two co-existing definitions of school readiness, and until recently, it had three.

*Texas Administrative Code Rule §102.1002(a)(12)* defines school ready or school readiness as a “term that refers to a child being able to function competently in a school environment in the areas of early language and literacy, mathematics, and social skills as objectively measured by state-approved assessment instruments.” The Council’s definition, adopted in March 2012, defines school readiness as “the state of early development that enables an individual child to engage in and benefit from kindergarten learning experiences. Children are “ready” for school when families, schools, and communities work together to ensure their developmentally appropriate, age-level success across a wide variety of domains, including:

- ▶ Health,
- ▶ Social and Emotional Development,
- ▶ Language and Communication,
- ▶ Emergent Literacy – Reading,
- ▶ Emergent Literacy – Writing,
- ▶ Mathematics and Numeracy,
- ▶ Science,
- ▶ Social Studies,
- ▶ Fine Arts (Creativity),
- ▶ Physical Development, and
- ▶ Technology.

Children’s development is influenced by interactions among a complex set of factors including biology, individual traits, family and community relationships, and culture. Since children develop at an individual rate and holistically in response to their environments, they enter school with varied levels of readiness” ([earlylearningtexas.org/school-readiness.aspx](http://earlylearningtexas.org/school-readiness.aspx)).

While overlap exists between the Council and State’s codified definitions, with both inferring what an assessment of school readiness might incorporate, their broad scope challenges

creation of a coherent and focused school readiness agenda. Until recently disassembled, the State's codified definition of school readiness was refined when the State legislature funded the *Texas School Ready!*<sup>™</sup> Certification System (SRCS). Building on the legislature's definition, the SRCS defined school readiness as children being ready to succeed by being able to function competently in a school environment in the areas of early literacy, early math, and social skills as objectively measured by Children's Learning Institute's (CLI) approved assessment (Texas School Ready Certification Standards, n.d., p. 3). Although not without controversy (Interviewees), CLI's school readiness definition provided a clear definition and measure of "ready to succeed."

The Texas Kindergarten Readiness System (KRS), under the auspice of the Texas Education Agency (TEA), recently replaced SRCS, however. As a result of its newness, not everyone is familiar with this new measure. Still, several Interviewees expressed concern about KRS: the system's high stakes, the measure's narrow conceptualization of school readiness, its validity, the "slanted emphasis" on children (vs. classroom focus), and the latitude offered to school districts to rely on multiple assessment measures.

At present, the KRS does not have an operational definition. TEA uses the one adopted in the Commissioner of Education Rule TAC §102.1002: Prekindergarten Early Start Grant Program - School ready or school readiness - a term that refers to a child being able to function competently in a school environment in the areas of early language and literacy, mathematics, and social skills as objectively measured by state-approved assessment instruments ([ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter102/ch102aa.html](http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter102/ch102aa.html)).

Like the former SRCS, KRS describes itself as:

- ▶ Being research-based and fully integrated with PEIMS data information (TEA data standards),
- ▶ Using student-level data collected at the prekindergarten and kindergarten level to identify Pre-K programs "producing" school ready kindergartners, and

- ▶ Being the only early childhood quality rating system in the country linking prekindergarten activities in public school, Head Start, and community-based licensed child care programs to kindergarten outcomes at the student level (tea.state.tx.us).

In the absence of legislative mandate or resources, plans do not currently exist for evaluating the new KRS in terms of its reliability, validity, and predictability. Another possibly complicating factor is the fact that the KRS is for PreK programs serving 4-year olds. Unknown is whether TEA would be open – or permitted in terms of its authorizing legislation – to extend the KRS to include 3-year olds, and infants and toddlers, especially since TEA has indicated disinterest in administering infant and toddler programs. Addressing concerns regarding the KRS’s “narrow” focus may be easier since the Commissioner of Education rule defining school readiness suggests that latitude may exist for expanding what is assessed by the KRS, reforming it into a kindergarten assessment in contrast to serving primarily as a PreK program certification system.

Still a third rarely mentioned definition exists for kindergarten readiness in Texas – TEA’s Prekindergarten Guidelines and the guidelines forthcoming for Infants, Toddlers, and Three-Year-Olds. Defined as what children should know and be able to do, Kagan (2012) contends that Americans are “missing the boat” (p. 69) in terms of how they use early learning and development standards. She argues they are underused as a tool for unifying ECE around shared expectations and providing the basis for improved pedagogy, revised curriculum, teacher preparation, and evaluation and monitoring. If the Council chooses to engage with this issue, these three options provide it with a starting point for deliberating a definition of school readiness that is sufficiently focused to drive a school readiness agenda. Respondents to the third statewide survey, regardless of respondent type, indicated a preference (62.9%) for QRIS standards based on a single, shared definition of school readiness.

3: Selecting Decision Criteria for Program Quality Indicators. In the absence of credible evidence for all but three of the Subcommittee’s suggested quality indicators, what criteria will the

Council use to choose QRIS program quality indicators and breakpoints for each of the system's tiers?

4: Centralization vs. Decentralization. Texas has numerous local QRISs and program improvement supports. The Council Working Paper (2011), along with the State's political culture, make clear that while aligning these efforts in some fashion is important to the viability of a statewide QRIS, so is the desire to support local innovation. Recognizing this reality, the Council's federal application for funds raised the need to incentivize local communities to come together and develop shared approaches to school readiness (Texas State Advisory Council on Early Education and Care, 2010, p. 16).

Fulfilling the desire to facilitate common expectations for ECE programs, create consistency across programs regardless of sponsorship, provide reliable and valid information to parents and decision makers, and promote school readiness statewide will necessitate moving beyond the State's programmatic fragmentation as it currently exists. What elements of a statewide QRIS can be delegated to regions and/or communities? What functions should be centralized in order to establish statewide coherence and a common direction for improving children's school readiness? Where is there latitude to support local innovation and responsiveness to family, community, program, and child variation without weakening the system's overall intent?

5: Sustained Leadership. Patience, persistence, and fortitude are leadership qualities. More than one Interviewee questioned whether sufficient "will" exists to move a Texas QRIS. As one Interviewee noted, this conversation has been going on for two decades, ever since the formation of Texas Rising Star (TRS).

How much time and resources is the Council, and ultimately Texas, willing to dedicate to creating and ensuring an evidence-based, outcome-oriented Texas QRIS? As repeatedly emphasized in the Council Working Paper (2011), financing a statewide QRIS will be challenging in the current

economic climate, and as also noted, “Every attempt to create reliability, validity, and monitoring comes with cost multipliers” (p. 18).

Additionally, while the progression of QRIS as an accountability system presents a strategic opening for Texas to “leap ahead of QRIS pioneers,” the pathway forward is unlikely to be direct. Exciting opportunities lie ahead to join with like-minded researchers and states, but a long-term view will be essential. What detours and trade-offs, if any, is Texas willing to consider in order to move beyond its current “status-quo” by establishing an “initial” Texas QRIS that can form the basis for evolving to a higher level of performance over time, driven by guiding principles and an aspirational logic model?

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## PART II: DESIGN PROPOSALS FOR A TEXAS QRIS

The Texas QRIS Strategic Plan now moves to the level of design. This section addresses eight categories of questions raised by the Council Working Paper (2011) and Council QRIS RFP (2012):

1. Scope of a Texas QRIS
2. Child-Program Assessment
3. Administration
4. Structure
5. Quality Assurance
6. Effective Data Practices
7. Implementation
8. Costs and Financing

Since a QRIS is a system, these categories are not independent of one another or of other systems the Council presently is building (see Table 1). This means that overlap among the Strategic Plan's 17 proposals cannot always be avoided, and that readers may need to cross-reference the rationales for some proposals. A question-and-answer format is used throughout. Appendix B provides a compilation of the 17 proposals as well as suggestions that are considered worthy of the Council's attention.

By way of reminder, these proposals are provisional. The Council's decision-making process is not yet bound by a clear strategy or articulated outcomes. Nonetheless, the suggested Guiding Principles and Aspirational Logic Model steered the plan's proposals. Our proposals also are informed by (1) available research; (2) practices in other states; (3) knowledge gained from stakeholder interviews; (4) insights from three statewide surveys and two stakeholder meetings; and (5) the Texas context. Unless otherwise stated, information on states' QRIS practices is derived from the 2010 Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations compiled by OPRE and

individual State Profiles (companion documents to the Compendium); the 2009 Comparison of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) with Department of Defense Standards of Quality compiled by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA); the 2011 QRIS Resource Guide; and individual state websites (See References for list of website addresses.)

## I. SCOPE OF A TEXAS QRIS- 2 PROPOSALS

Explored below are two questions raised by the Council related to the scope of a Texas QRIS, along with proposals for how they might be addressed.

### ***1a. Should a Texas QRIS be a birth to five system or birth to 13 to encompass after-school child care programs?***

**Proposal:** Focus a Texas QRIS on programs serving children from birth to the start of kindergarten.

This question basically was answered by the Council's application for federal funds that states the intent to construct a Texas QRIS that is linked to outcomes in kindergarten (Texas State Advisory Council on Early Education and Care, 2010, p. 36). This intent is reinforced by the chronological scope of the Council's numerous initiatives. Nonetheless, the question of school age programs is of interest to many because child care funding extends to children in school age care and TRS encompasses school age care.

While a few Interviewees hesitated when asked this question, a majority expressed support for a birth to kindergarten system in keeping with a school readiness focus and the fact that public schools have an oversight system. One Interviewee, though, suggested the system should be from birth *through* kindergarten since kindergarten attendance is voluntary. Another Interviewee supported the inclusion of school age programs but suggested that they be the last to be phased into the system. Finally, highlighting the fact that reducing fragmentation in one system often

produces fragmentation in another, some Interviewees felt school age programs should be incorporated because of their presence in TRS.

Responses from the first statewide survey were more ambiguous: 23.1 % favored a birth *to* Kindergarten system; 24.6% favored a birth *through* Kindergarten system, and 50.8 % favored a birth to 13 system. When the first two categories are combined, the responses represented about a 47/51 split (with the remaining responding, “I don’t know”).

In looking to other states, 17 out of 31 QRIS programs (including local/regional systems) with available information indicate they include school age children (ranging in age from 5-11 to 5-13) as part of their system. However, considerable variability exists in the extent to which school age programs are incorporated into these QRISs, including lack of distinct school age indicators, applying indicators as “appropriate to the age group,” and relying on specific school age quality indicators.

The rationale for individual state’s decisions about including or excluding school age programs is not clear, but it likely is based on three considerations, each of which seems to correspond to the Council’s disposition. First, QRIS for many states is a pathway to improving school readiness. Second, states may choose to exclude school age care due to cost factors. Finally, states may see other systems such as a state department of education as already having jurisdiction/responsibility for ensuring the quality of programs serving school age children.

### ***1b. What sectors should be included in a Texas QRIS?***

**Proposal:** Allow all ECE programs, regardless of sector, to voluntarily participate. In terms of implementation and resource allocation, however, prioritize uptake by those sectors of highest interest to the Council and its stakeholders.

Historically, QRIS has focused on market-based ECE programs – typically licensed child care centers and family child care homes. Although Head Start, PreK and early intervention programs usually can participate, QRIS was not designed to accommodate these programs’ standards or

funding requirements. This is changing rapidly, though, thanks to the RTT-ELC, which encouraged states to include all early learning and development programs in its program standards and to adopt a common, statewide, tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, p. 46). According to Stoney (2012), applicants seem to have embraced this shift. Additionally, “applications suggest that states viewed the TQRIS (here the ‘t’ refers to tiered) priority as an opportunity to raise the bar on program quality rather than align to the lowest common denominator” (Stoney, 2012, p. 2).

Although the Council’s application for federal dollars indicated intentions to develop a multi-sector QRIS (Texas State Advisory Council on Early Education and Care, 2010, p. 36), the Council Working Paper (2011) raised the question of multi-sector participation, noting that TRS experiences problems associated with trying to fit licensed child care homes, registered child care homes, and licensed child care centers into the same system. Also noted was that including Head Start and PreK would add complexity to the QRIS design process because of variations in program standards. At least in partial response, most states have separate QRIS standards for family child care as a way of acknowledging its unique context. To the extent, though, that the Council’s desire is to have all formal ECE programs - including the full range of licensed child care programs - provide learning environments that facilitate children’s school readiness, the disparity in performance expectations, as expressed in part through licensing regulations, needs to be discussed.

This said, the difficulty of meaningfully engaging schools in QRIS is widely acknowledged. About half of the states submitting RTT-ELC applications proposed phasing in some or all school based ECE programs, honing in on publicly funded PreK first. As Stoney (2012) noted, “It is clear, however, that states will need to think strategically about how to craft TQRIS systems, supports and incentives that can successfully engage (ECE) programs sponsored by public schools” (p. 8).

The Council can begin its systematic exploration of the standards gap between and among sectors by looking to both the design and use of the Crosswalk currently under development. This

document should make commonalities and disparities between and among ECE programs more evident. If the Council chooses to facilitate development of a statewide, measureable definition of school readiness, it will have an objective criterion to assist with the task of moving beyond discrete program and funding standards. The early learning guidelines for infants and toddlers and PreK offer another resource for navigating the divide among standards.

Interviewees were conflicted on the question of which sectors to include in a Texas QRIS. On the one hand, the opportunity to create a consistent standard of quality across ECE programs, thereby providing families with an easy to understand rating for distinguishing among programs in their community, was viewed by many as a plus. Of concern to some Interviewees was diluting their priority interest in bolstering the quality of child care programs, which they saw as having the greatest need of improvement because the State's licensing system is not seen as addressing program quality. In addition, Head Start and PreK were seen as already having higher standards and the resources to meet them. Some Interviewees felt strongly about their position on this question.

PreK participation also caused consternation for some Interviewees. Since the State does not require them to be licensed, variation exists across school districts, and considerable disparity exists between child care licensing and PreK regulation in both oversight and minimum requirements. At the same time, though, the KRS is inclusive of public school, Head Start, and community-based licensed child care programs, and the State's advocacy agenda for the past decade has focused on breaking down siloes among these sectors (Interviewees). If collaborating and creating a unified ECE system are priority goals of the Council, and if assessing children's kindergarten readiness is considered as an element of the State's QRIS, conflicting goals will emerge and need to be navigated.

Drilling down a bit further, Texas has multiple forms of child care licensing: licensed centers, licensed child care homes, and registered child care homes. There also is a category for

listed homes that falls outside of licensure. Interviewees were unanimous about including all forms of licensed and registered child care. Since Head Start programs are licensed in Texas, no one openly discouraged their participation. Three Interviewees thought the new system should be open to listed homes, as well as to family, friend, and neighbor care as a way of trying to improve children's early learning experiences regardless of setting. Another Interviewee expressed concern that a statewide system might implicitly imply a preference for "institutionalized" or "government supported" early learning programs.

Responses from the first statewide survey were, in this instance, more definitive. Overall, responses showed clear preference for which sectors should be included, and they followed the same pattern regardless of respondent role: 90% of respondents suggested including licensed center care and PreK; 80% supported inclusion of Head Start and Early Head Start; and 78% supported inclusion of registered homes, whereas only 45% supported inclusion of Listed Homes and Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care.

When asked in the third survey about phasing in programs' participation in a multi-sector, statewide QRIS, respondents indicated the following regarding phasing in programs: 61 respondents indicated that licensed child care centers should be phased in first; 44 respondents thought public school pre-kindergarten programs should be phased in first. Head Start programs were broadly seen as the target for a second phase of implementation (59 respondents).<sup>4</sup>

Stakeholders responding to the same survey expressed more ambiguity when asked whether a multi-sector QRIS should be created by expanding the reach of TRS to include other sectors and incorporate best QRIS practices (44.1%) or by building a new statewide system that incorporated best QRIS practices (35.2%), with 11.7% saying they didn't know. Parents and ECE administrators were almost evenly divided between expanding TRS and creating a new statewide

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<sup>4</sup> Licensed homes inadvertently were omitted as an option to these questions on the first and third surveys.

system. ECE teachers/providers, ECE advocates and ECE local/state policymakers slightly favored TRS expansion as an approach.

Drilling down even deeper, while almost all Interviewees expect a Texas QRIS to be voluntary – and of there being no other option given the State’s cultural and political context – the notion of mandatory participation of the State’s publicly-funded programs was supported by four Interviewees. As two of them expressed almost verbatim of each other, “Want to say mandatory, but voluntary is more realistic.” These four Interviewees saw mandatory participation as critical to driving programs toward higher quality and fulfilling the aspiration of more school ready children. A fifth Interviewee mentioned mandatory participation as an issue some are thinking about, but didn’t think the State was ready to place the issue ‘on the table’ – even though the Interviewee expressed openness to the idea.

In follow up to interviewees’ comments, the third statewide survey asked whether participation by publicly funded ECE programs in a new statewide QRIS should be mandated. Specifically, respondents were asked if a Texas QRIS should move in this direction in order to increase the likelihood that more children will be in higher quality program. In response, 80.8% said “yes”; 11.3% said “no”; and 7.9% responded, “I don’t know.”

While no state mandates participation by all sectors, seven states identified in the Compendium require participation by specified sectors. North Carolina, New Mexico, and Oklahoma implement “rated licenses.” All licensed programs automatically receive a 1 star rating unless they apply for a higher tier. In Maine, participation in QRIS is mandatory for those programs serving children receiving subsidy and is voluntary for other programs. In Pennsylvania and Vermont, programs that apply for the state funded PreK program are statutorily required to participate in the QRIS.

## II. CHILD-PROGRAM ASSESSMENT – 2 PROPOSALS

Research presently underway related to thresholds, assessing program quality, and relationships between quality and child outcomes has raised the importance of selecting quality standards and criteria, leading to questions of “What should be included?”; “What’s the right number of standards and criteria?”; “What’s the right dosage as it relates to quality levels/tiers?”; and “How should standards be assessed?” All four questions are presented here to highlight questions being asked. This section, however, attends to the first and last of these questions and offers two proposals.

The question of quantity – and to some extent the question of what should be included – ultimately depends on what Texas wants as the purpose for its QRIS. The question of dosage (i.e. “how much”) remains ambiguous since this is an emerging area of study, but the research available suggests that as programs move up the quality levels, they should be expected not only to demonstrate new competencies but also increased skills and usage in areas most highly associated with program quality and positive outcomes for children.

### ***2a. What Quality Indicators Should Be Included?***

**Proposal:** In light of limited research evidence to support the Subcommittee’s suggested program quality indicators, this question was identified earlier as a first-order issue for the Council’s consideration. The Council should consider (1) what additional decision criteria address its commitments to what a Texas QRIS should accomplish, using Guiding Principles and the logic model as informants, and/or (2) if some of the suggested indicators, such as evidence of child abuse, might more appropriately be part of the foundation provided by the State’s licensing standards.

By way of an example, in its standards selection process, Massachusetts identified as criteria a strong research base; alignment with research based observational measures; availability

of an objective basis for documentation; inclusion in other states' QRIS; and articulation by stakeholders that standards reflect best practice (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvements, 2012).

Mitchell (2012), a QRIS architect, suggests that QRIS standards should be inclusive of early learning standards, practitioner standards, and program standards. In its attempt to respond to the question of what quality indicators to include in a Texas QRIS, the Council requested a literature review be conducted on 20 possibilities and their relationship to child outcomes. To facilitate the process, the indicators were sorted into seven groups that reflect broader QRIS categories:

1. Assessment
2. Family Engagement
3. National Accreditation
4. Process Quality (referring to children's direct interactions with people and objects in an ECE setting)
5. Program Compliance and Management
6. Structural Quality (referring to what usually are static program components, such as child-staff ratio, group size, teacher background, or other easily observable or reported characteristics. These indicators tend to be understood as creating the conditions necessary for high-quality learning environments)
7. Workforce Qualifications

As requested, the literature review focused on the relationship between the suggested indicators and child outcomes. As previously noted, though, limited research is presently available on this question, affirming that criteria other than research evidence will be needed in responding to the question of "What quality indicators should be included?"

## **Methodology for the Literature Review**

While research has built a convincing case to support investment in ECE programs as a means to improve child outcomes, studies have not identified the specific components that are necessary for reaching the child outcomes achieved by high quality programs. Further, strong evidence is not available for linking developmental child outcomes to either QRIS rating levels or specific quality indicators (Tout, 2012; Zaslow et al., 2010; Pianta et al., 2009). While researchers are moving toward examining the link between quality indicators and child outcomes in more nuanced ways, multiple challenges have limited rigorous analysis of this relationship, including the high cost of experimental and/or longitudinal studies. Yet even when executing randomized control trials, which best identify causal relationships, researchers struggle to compare the outcomes of children in the assigned treatment group (e.g., children that are enrolled in Head Start) to children in the control group (e.g., children that are not enrolled in Head Start). Instead, researchers have found that many children in their control group receive other forms of ECE, making it difficult to isolate the causes of specific child outcomes.

The comprehensive literature review began with conducting keyword searches in academic research databases, using terms related to child outcome and the specific quality indicator. The results from the keyword searches were minimal. Consequently, the next step required reviewing primary literature on ECE and child outcomes, and using this literature and its corresponding references as a foundation for the review. This step encompassed a combination of peer-reviewed articles, state literature reviews of QRIS indicators, and government issued research reports.

Five research resources were identified as providing an especially solid foundation for reviewing current literature (2000 and onward) related to child outcomes. They include literature reviews conducted by Indiana (which is the only state to produce a document tying its QRIS indicators to child outcomes) and Massachusetts (which developed a comprehensive literature review during its QRIS validation process).

Table 2, found below, presents findings for each of the 20 program quality indicators suggested by the Subcommittee. The column headings are those used in the Council’s RFP with the exception of the last column, which was added to present our findings. Findings are ranked in terms of the degree of evidence available as defined below. The complete literature review, along with its references, can be found in Appendix G.

Category of Evidence	Description
<b>No evidence located</b>	No evidence located
<b>Limited evidence</b>	Two or fewer research studies were located
<b>Positive association</b>	Three or more research studies were located and noted a positive association between the quality indicator and child outcomes
<b>No association</b>	Three or more research studies were located and found no association between the quality indicator and child outcomes
<b>Mixed evidence of association</b>	Conflicting research (positive association and no association) was located

As shown in Table 2, only three indicators – parent involvement, teacher behavior, and teacher sensitivity - are associated with “positive evidence” as operationally defined under the Activity header. Six indicators have limited association with child outcomes; six indicators have mixed association with child outcomes; and for six indicators, no evidence could be located that examined the relationship between the indicator and child outcomes.

These findings should be placed in context: the relative newness of research examining relationships between indicators and child outcomes; the methodological challenges of conducting this type of research; the complexity of teasing apart causal variables from those creating the conditions for other variables to produce their effect; the unknown impact of dosage and questions about thresholds; and the possibility that clusters of variables may need to be in place to facilitate child outcomes. One more thought to consider: The National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences just issued *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2012). The committee found that the skills considered necessary for

the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace generally fall into three categories: cognitive, such as critical thinking and analytic reasoning to learn “deeply”; interpersonal such as teamwork and complex communication; and intrapersonal, such as resiliency and conscientiousness.

Finally, from an operational standpoint, Mitchell (2012) notes that the number of quality indicators and the ease or degree of difficulty in verifying them determines the amount of time and effort providers require to document their status and that states need to assess and score each piece of documentation. She offers four functional criteria for selecting quality indicators:

1. *Understandable and significant* – participants and consumers know what the standards mean and that they matter.
2. *Evidence-based* – there is substantial evidence that a standard is related to program quality and/or positive child development, and ultimately to child outcomes such as school readiness.
3. *Measureable and feasible to monitor* – standards can be monitored well considering accuracy, cost and time.
4. *Progressive* – items are not ‘yes/no,’ but rather represent gradations of improving practice from acceptable, good, better to best (p. 3).

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**Table 2:**  
**Proposed Texas QRIS Program Quality Indicators &  
Their Associations with Child Outcomes**

[References are listed in Appendix F]

Indicator	Activity	Population (who's undertaking the activity)	Evidence on Association with Child Outcomes
<b>Accreditation</b>			
National accreditation and SRCS	participation	programs, classrooms	Limited evidence
<b>Assessment</b>			
Assessment, observation, and service planning	written plan of strategies and tools to complete ongoing observation and assessments of children birth to 5	programs, administrators, practitioners	No evidence located
Screenings	implement health and developmental screenings	administrators, practitioners	Mixed evidence
<b>Business and Administration Practices</b>			
Capacity to serve children with special needs; provide an inclusive environment for all children	make programs accessible and accommodating; written inclusion plan, implemented with good faith	administrators	No evidence located
Detailed administrator assessment, consistent management practices, administrator training and qualifications	invest in ongoing improvement for leadership and management	programs, administrators	No evidence located
<b>Family Engagement</b>			
Parent involvement	parent involvement in curriculum, activities, conferences; parent trainings	programs, practitioners	Positive evidence
<b>Process Quality</b> <i>"Refers to children's direct experiences with people and objects in the child care setting... Process quality concerns interactions among individuals (e.g., emotional and instructional)"</i>			
Nationally-recognized, research-based curriculum, or must be inclusive of ITELG and/or Pre-K Guidelines	implement and use	programs	Limited evidence
Standardized curriculum	implementation and observation	administrators/programs	Limited evidence
Teacher behavior	score on ECERS, TBRS, CLASS	administrators, practitioners	Positive evidence
Teacher sensitivity	score on ECERS, TBRS, CLASS	administrators, practitioners	Positive evidence
<b>Program Compliance and Administrative Practices</b>			
No abuse and neglect findings	site visits, records	programs	No evidence located
Program compliance with rules and regulations	site visits, records	programs	No evidence located

**Table 2:**  
**Proposed Texas QRIS Program Quality Indicators &**  
**Their Associations with Child Outcomes (cont.)**

Indicator	Activity	Population (who's undertaking the activity)	Evidence on Association with Child Outcomes
<b>Structural Quality</b> <i>“Concerns those aspects of programs that describe the caregiver’s background, curriculum or other easily observable or reported characteristics of the classroom or program. Structural features of programs are typically quite static... [and] are often viewed as necessary for creating the opportunity for the caregiver to create a high-quality preschool classroom...”</i>			
Group size/ratios	establish reasonable staff-child ratios, by age group	programs	Mixed evidence
Learning environment (that support 5 domains)	create and maintain the environment	programs	Mixed evidence
Materials (that support the 5 domains)	maintain, implement and use	programs	Limited evidence
Nutrition & wellness	well-planned nutritious meals and activities; self-report	programs, practitioners	Limited evidence
<b>Workforce Qualifications</b>			
Continuing education	developing professional development plans with self-assessment	administrators, practitioners	Mixed evidence
Degreed and/or highly-trained teacher	go to school, maintain trainings	administrators, practitioners	Mixed evidence
Facility workforce experience, training, turnover	workforce retention report; staff records	administrators	No evidence located
Knowledge of child ages and stages of development	Received training or demonstrated understanding	administrators, practitioners	Mixed evidence

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Participants attending the second stakeholder meeting on October 18<sup>th</sup> were asked “What criteria/guidelines should be used for selecting program quality standards for a Texas QRIS – i.e., how should program indicators be chosen?” Informed by Anne Mitchell’s functional criteria (see above) and the first Stakeholder Group’s suggested alterations to possible guiding principles (see Appendix F, Stakeholder Meeting Agenda and Input – Meeting #2), a range of answers was offered. When then challenged to select a single criterion of greatest importance, responses were (1) evidence-based and (2) measureable and feasible to monitor. Yet despite this seeming consensus, consternation was expressed regarding the possibility that reliance on evidence-based standards could overly restrict the State’s definition of school readiness, especially if placed within the context of the State’s longitudinal data system.

Content-oriented input regarding QRIS standards comes from the first statewide survey. Stakeholders were asked what program quality indicators they thought had the strongest possibility of producing program effects that promote school readiness. The top six indicators each had greater than a 50% response rate. In descending order, respondents selected:

- ▶ Curriculum - 63.9%
- ▶ Director and Staff Qualifications – 63.7%
- ▶ Training/Continuing Education - 61.9%
- ▶ Program Evaluation and Improvement – 58.4%
- ▶ Ratios – 57.5%
- ▶ Parent involvement - 57.3%

The bottom three indicators were:

- ▶ Health Screenings – 15.3%
- ▶ No abuse or neglect findings – 18.3%
- ▶ Inclusion of children with disabilities – 20.3%

Notably, parents were the only group that listed health and safety in the top six, and advocates' priorities differed from providers. Policymakers ranked the top six still a different way.

## ***2b. How Should QRIS Standards Be Assessed?***

**Proposal:** In support of an evidence-based QRIS associated with school readiness outcomes, a Texas QRIS should consider a portfolio of measures for assessing its standards, relying on availability of current evidence to inform its selection of measures. Given available evidence and QRIS practice across the country, options might include the ECERS, CLASS, TBRS (Teacher Behavior Rating Scale), PAS/BAS (Program Administrator Scale/Business Administration Scale), and Family Strengthening Checklist - though these are not fully inclusive of the components listed as part of the Council's school readiness definition. To ensure valid results, especially given the State's changing demographics, measures' cultural sensitivity should be taken into account.

This proposal comes with limitations, however. There would be cost implications; greater attention would have to be given to training assessors and to ensuring individual and inter-rater reliability; and the system may be made more burdensome in terms of time commitments and potentially tilted toward becoming overly prescriptive.

With questions being raised about (1) the meaningfulness of global measures in relation to measuring child outcomes (La Paro et al, 2012); (2) potential need for more domain- and content-specific measures to assess children's school readiness (Forry, Vick, & Halle, 2009; Smith, Robbins, Stagman, & Kreader, 2012); (3) the challenges of aligning measures to program goals, ensuring reliable measurement, weighting multiple components of quality, and validating measurement across the full range of quality and types of ECE settings (Denny, Hallam, & Homer, 2012; Zaslow, Tout, & Martinez-Beck, 2012); and (4) questions regarding the meaningfulness for QRIS of frequently used quality measures (Denny, Hallam, & Homer, 2012; Gordan, Fujimota, Kaestner, et al, 2012; Tout, Starr, Isner, et al, 2011), we have arrived at the section of this Strategic Plan most confounded by emerging research findings. With global measures – which are widely used by state

QRISs - being challenged for examining classroom quality too broadly, providing limited detail about supports for pre-academic instruction, and only weakly predicting variation in children's acquisition of skills and knowledge critical for school readiness (Burchinal et al, 2009; Denny, Hallam, & Homer, 2012; Dickinson, 2006; Forry, Vick, & Halle, 2009), some researchers are talking about a portfolio of measures – what Dickenson called a tool-kit approach (2006).

This emerging unease may be influencing state QRISs. Acknowledging that stronger links should be established between QRIS and child outcomes and the need to hone in on teacher-child interactions, North Carolina, New Mexico, Washington, and Pennsylvania, as part of their RTT-ELC applications, indicated plans to include child assessments in their systems. Kentucky proposed a competitive “Early Childhood Program of Excellence” award based on child outcomes, population served, and innovative teaching strategies. North Carolina, Delaware, and Kentucky offered to develop and pilot test a new program quality assessment tool specifically designed for use in a tiered QRIS (Stoney, 2012).

Zellman and Karoly (2012) identified five approaches for incorporating child assessments into state ECE quality improvement efforts:

1. Caregiver/Teacher- or Program-Driven Assessments to Improve Practice
2. QRIS-Required Caregiver/Teacher Assessments to Improve Practice
3. Independent Measurement of Child Outcomes to Assess Programs
4. Independent Measurement of Child Outcomes to Assess QRIS Validity
5. Independent Measurement of Child Outcomes to Evaluate Specific ECE Programs or the Broader ECE System (p. xiii).

These approaches differ in terms of purpose, who conducts the assessment, and the design needed to ensure that resulting child assessment data can be meaningfully used. They note that child assessments may be formal or informal and take various forms, including standardized

assessments, home inventories, portfolios, running records, and observation in the course of children's regular activities.

Child assessments are generally understood to have three basic purposes: screening individual children for possible disabilities; supporting and improving teaching and learning; and evaluating interventions. Assessments for improving practice are designed to determine how well children are learning so that interactions with children, curricula, and other interventions can be modified to better meet children's learning needs. Key to these assessments is a plan for using the data collected to improve programs and interventions. Assessments used for evaluation purposes must meet a higher standard. They should be embedded in a rigorous research design that increases the likelihood of finding effects to the greatest extent possible (p. xi).

Zellman and Karoly go so far as to offer a table aligning their five approaches with the focus of each and its relationship to QRIS. (Copyright laws prohibit inclusion of their table in this document.) The last three approaches would seem to be of special interest to the Council.

For the approach labeled *Independent Measurement of Child Outcomes to Assess Programs*, an explicit link is made between the QRIS and child developmental outcomes. The potential appeal of this approach to the Council is that instead of relying solely on measured inputs to capture ECE program quality and calculate ratings, there is the potential to capture the outcome of interest - ECE program effects on child functioning - and to use the results when rating programs. Yet the authors note that using such data from three- and four-year-olds to hold individual caregivers/teachers accountable has been deemed inappropriate because of reliability and validity concerns associated with assessing young children.

Zellman and Karoly also note that while this approach has not been used to date in QRISs, it is used in K-12 education, often as part of high stakes accountability systems with approaches considered highly controversial. "Although the goal of measuring the effect of participating in a specific ECE classroom or program on child developmental outcomes and incorporating the results

into a program's QRIS rating has merit, the available methods—short of an experimental design—are not sufficiently well developed to justify the cost of large-scale implementation or implementation in high-stakes contexts. Moreover, the reduced reliability and validity of measures of the performance of children under age five make this high-stakes use highly questionable” (p. xvii).

For the approach labeled *Independent Measures of Child Outcomes to Assess QRIS Validity* – which shifts the discussion to assessing the system - child assessment data is collected to address macro-level questions, in this case, the validity of the rating portion of the QRIS. Given that QRISs presume that higher quality care will be associated with better child outcomes, an important piece of evidence concerns whether higher program ratings are positively correlated with better child performance. According to Zellman and Karoly, two states (Colorado and Missouri) have conducted such studies with mixed findings,<sup>5</sup> and two other states (Minnesota and Virginia) have plans to implement this approach.

The approach labeled *Independent Measurement of Child Outcomes to Evaluate Specific ECE Programs or the Broader ECE System* requires rigorous methods that enable assessment of causal effects of an ECE program or group of programs on child developmental outcomes. Zellman and Karoly suggested that an evaluation using an experimental design or a quasi-experimental method could be a required QRIS component for determining at one point in time or on an ongoing basis if an ECE program or the ECE system as a whole is achieving its objectives of promoting strong child growth across a range of developmental domains.

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<sup>5</sup> Indiana's study has since been completed, and it, too, found mixed results.

### III. ADMINISTRATION – 2 PROPOSALS

#### ***3a. What criteria should be considered in identifying an administrative agency or organization for a Texas QRIS?***

**Proposal:** Given the breadth of opinions and affect associated with them, as well as the politicized context for this decision, the Council should consider identifying objective criteria for selecting an administrative agency. The option of a state agency subcontracting the work to another entity could also be considered.

The question of who should administer a Texas QRIS most befuddled Interviewees. Multiple possibilities were identified: the Texas Workforce Commission; Texas Education Agency; Department of Family and Protective Services; the Office of Early Childhood Coordination, a sub-agency within the Texas Health and Human Services Agency; the Children’s Learning Institute; and an institution like a university, that is “totally removed from the agency fray.”

No clear “winner” emerged, however. The level of affect associated with the viewpoints expressed provides the rationale for focusing on objective criteria that can be applied to the choice of an administrative agency. Criteria offered by Interviewees, listed in random order, were:

- ▶ Ability to provide unbiased review of program quality
- ▶ “Politically vanilla”
- ▶ Respect and understanding of multiple delivery systems
- ▶ Experienced with and knowledgeable of a wide variety and size of data collections and IT environments, memoranda of understanding, regulations, and requirements
- ▶ Supported by the Offices of the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Speaker of the House
- ▶ Sufficient full time employees, human resources, IT, and contracting capacity and experience to manage a multi-agency, multi-partner project
- ▶ Agency leadership committed to short and long term goals and objectives of the project

- ▶ Agency with proven track record of collaboration with other agencies and other organizations that manage and maintain data
- ▶ A focus on education
- ▶ Understanding of early care and education field
- ▶ Be a connector leader organization
- ▶ Experienced in implementation and scaling
- ▶ Access to a local TA mechanism

Regardless of respondent type, stakeholders responding to the third statewide survey identified as their top three criteria (out of six possibilities): Ability to ensure unbiased review of program quality (50 respondents); Respect and understanding of multiple delivery systems (33 respondents); and Agency or organization with proven track record of collaboration with other agencies and organizations (31 respondents).

Looking now to what can be learned from other states, most often an administrative agency supports the design, implementation, funding, and oversight of a QRIS. However, the vast majority of states (20 of 23 states reported in the Compendium) indicate that the work of QRIS is conducted using formal and informal partnerships. State agencies take the lead most often in QRIS (21 systems reporting), and partnerships are formed with various resource and referral entities, community colleges, universities, and other non-profit agencies.

A partnership approach requires administrative agencies to consider which functions to conduct on their own, if and when functions should be delegated, and which functions can or should be delegated to statewide or regional entities. Twenty QRISs reported partnering with universities and community colleges. Within these partnerships, higher education partners most often conducted site observations (11 states); provided TA or other improvement services (9 states); conducted evaluation (7 states); collected and/or validated rating information and data (7 states);

supported providers to navigate the system (6 states); managed communications and disseminating information (3 states); and provided financial incentives (2 states).

Data collection, entry, and analysis were other cited functions of administrative or partnering agencies, but the specific number of states indicating these functions was not noted.

Other functions to consider include: assignment and posting of ratings; oversight of rating partners; budgeting; managing appeals procedures; and marketing to providers, families, and stakeholders.

***3b. How might a Texas QRIS be administered? Do all administrative functions need to be centralized? What functions could be decentralized? Where could responsibility for decentralized functions reside?***

**Proposal:** Finding a way to create a “both-and”- in terms of (1) involving the array of quality-improvement initiatives and responding to regional and local variations, while at the same time (2) bringing increased consistency, cohesion, and comparable competence to the State’s splintered ECE delivery system has been central to this project since its inception. Although still needing the benefit of the Council’s decision-making regarding which functions should be centralized and which should be decentralized, proposed is a state-regional model with a strong, centralized QRIS “spine” that includes features essential to ensuring the system’s credibility, reliability, and validity. Centralized features might include functions such as: establishing QRIS standards, criteria, and rating levels; training on-site observers/assessors; setting program training requirements; program monitoring; managing the appeals process; serving as a hub for QRIS-related data; overseeing QRIS-related research; and in general overseeing the system’s effective functioning and progress – functions that individually and collectively can contribute to the internal consistency and reliability of a statewide QRIS.

Other functions, such as marketing to families and providers, providing training, coaching, and mentoring (aligning these efforts with the new core competencies for coaches and mentors and Early Childhood Workforce Registry – which includes the Texas Trainer Registry) and supporting programs during the application process could be performed regionally by organizations and

agencies from across the state. Based on a regional map of the State, selection could occur through an RFP or similar process and be based on criteria addressing issues such as capacity, content expertise that complements the State's standards and criteria, and documented ability to perform the functions being requested. Depending on the level of statewide consistency desired, these decentralized functions could be unified by criteria established at the state level, an approach favored by 34.1% of respondents to the second statewide survey.

Survey respondents also heavily favored a centralized administration as outlined in the proposal above: 44.2% preferred a centralized system and 28.1% preferred that the system establish a minimum number of core functions. Additionally, the option to carve the State into regions and replicate a model that is working well in another state was offered; this option was selected by 20.9% of respondents.

Also provided with the opportunity to engage with this issue, participants at the September 20<sup>th</sup> Stakeholder meeting agreed that standards, accountability and monitoring functions, data collection, and the system's validation and evaluation should be centralized functions. Participants favored a hybrid state-local approach for provision of incentives and provider supports.

One Interviewee made a distinction between governance and administration – suggesting that a governance body might be created, not unlike the Texas P-20 Council. While the P-20 Council has limited authority, it governs data sharing across traditional P-12 schools and higher education. Proposed members would be a designee appointed by the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Speaker of the House plus Cabinet representatives from the Texas Workforce Commission, Department of Family and Protective Service, and TEA. Explicit policy decisions would be delegated to this group, which in turn, could be assigned responsibility for selecting an administrative body.

When asked “Should there be a role/contribution to a multi-sector Texas QRIS from the State's two statewide quality improvement initiatives: Texas Rising Star and the Texas School Ready!<sup>TM</sup> Project?” stakeholders at the October 18<sup>th</sup> Stakeholder meeting provided input relevant to

this question. Most participants thought TRS should in some fashion be included in the design of the new system. Some participants suggested that TRS serve as the “spine” or “backbone” of the new system, proposing that TRS be assigned responsibilities for administrating the program, overseeing quality improvement activities, and ensuring system reliability. This suggestion was based on the assumption that TRS would be expanded to include ECE programs serving children from birth to three and aligned with new QRIS standards. Perhaps indicating less willingness to fully embrace TRS as the new system’s “spine,” other individuals suggested that specific TRS elements be incorporated: financial incentives, infant-toddler services, tiered levels, a holistic view of centers/programs, and statewide operation through local boards.

Other participants, spoke more to the role of Texas School Ready!<sup>TM</sup>, suggesting that (1) the established standards of TSR and its academic outcomes be retained, and (2) that the program’s mentoring/coaching component be part of a new QRIS, but not its evaluation component. Finally, one grouping of participants suggested merging TRS and TSR, and in a related vein, another proposed de-branding TRS and TSR and incorporating them both into the new system.

In terms of statewide QRIS administration, the vast majority are statewide systems in terms of their rating criteria and process. Florida and California are examples of states where no statewide QRIS exists, relying on regionally designed and implemented systems instead. When a state oversees (either through a state agency or other organizational entity), designs, and implements a QRIS, it typically does not allow for regional adaptations of the overall administration or assessments used for the purpose of ranking programs.

A few states (for example, Virginia, North Carolina, and Arizona) provide for regionally designed and implemented program quality improvement activities dependent on locally available resources. Honing in on Arizona’s governance and administrative structure, the Arizona Early Childhood Development and Health Board, also known as First Things First (a bipartisan board established by a voter initiative and appointed by the Governor) disseminates funding collected

from a tobacco tax to 31 regions that it formed. For the purposes of budgeting, First Things First determines a per provider cost for participation in QRIS (i.e. the receipt of assessment, coaching, child care health consultation, and rating) that the regions can use to decide how many QRIS participants they would like to support in their communities. Regions then "buy in" to the system for their local area, and First Things First then centralizes the contracting and/or the administration of the system components.<sup>6</sup>

Resources from regions' QRIS buy-in support access to financial improvement grants, T.E.A.C.H.® ARIZONA, assessment for rating, coaching activities and child care health consultation. Notably, all ECE-related benefits funded by First Things First (such as PreK scholarships for children) are soon to be tied to QRIS participation - and there is intent to tie these benefits to specific quality levels. So, by way of a hypothetical example, if a program falls below a 3 star, it may no longer be able to serve children with a PreK scholarship.

As the local-state relationship has evolved, however, and the costs associated with implementing QRIS have become more evident, pressure to bring the QRIS to scale has created competing priorities for the local councils' limited funding allocations (e.g. should a council fund more QRIS providers or continue to fund home visitation services?), which is generating tensions between state and local leadership as difficult funding decisions are faced in light of a tightening economy (personal communication). Also important to note: First Things First diverges from the Council's expressed priorities in at least one important way: Arizona's model tilts toward a focus on program quality improvement and to make this point identifies its system as a QIRS, which could potentially influence the appropriateness of this approach for Texas.

Whereas Arizona has both a regional and centralized system, Florida and California's regional models are more decentralized. In the absence of a statewide, uniform QRIS in Florida,

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<sup>6</sup> A graphic of the state's funding approach can be found at [azftf.gov/WhoWeAre/Documents/Funding\\_At\\_A\\_Glance.pdf](http://azftf.gov/WhoWeAre/Documents/Funding_At_A_Glance.pdf)

several local, ECE collaboratives banded together to develop a statewide system. While their proposal achieved legislative support, it passed without a budget appropriation. As of July 2012, 11 of the 31 Early Learning Coalitions were working together as members of the Quality Rating and Improvement System Multi-County Collaboration Workgroup. They have coalesced around the use of common standards and seek ways to build commonalities across their quality improvement efforts. At this point, though, beyond the use of common program standards, each coalition establishes its own priorities, professional development system, subsidy rates, and more, resulting in considerable variation in QRIS across their communities. In the meantime, the state's Office of Early Learning is engaged with other system-building activities that it hopes will eventually lead to a statewide QRIS model (Child Care State Systems Specialist Network, personal communication).

California's efforts are based on its winning RTT-ELC application. Noting that the key to positive change in early learning was finding the appropriate balance of local and central control, California is relying on a voluntary 17-member network/consortia of core districts – creating the possibility of 17 QRISs across the state. Because of California's present fiscal crisis, its proposal was especially attentive to fiscal implications, focusing on one-time investments and local capacity-building activities that could be sustained once the grant concludes.

With these tenets in mind, California will be developing a quality improvement process that encourages regional assessment, goal setting, and progress monitoring, which allows for regional variation. Their approach will build on local networks and leadership, and align and coordinate state-level activities in support of these local networks and leaders. They hope to build on the best of the state's existing local efforts and help guide, connect, and support them. These consortia, in turn, will reach out and mentor other areas of the state that can benefit from their experiences (State of California Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Application, 2012).

Since being recognized as a RTT-ELC winning state, consortia leaders have begun meeting to consider next steps. In response to federal demands for some degree of commonality across the

regional systems, at least two rating tiers will be held in common. Additionally, several regional leadership consortia are considering some degree of cooperation and exploring the possibility of joint efforts. Not surprisingly, it's a fluid moment in time for California's QRIS (Child Care State Systems Specialist Network, personal communication).

## IV. STRUCTURE – 10 PROPOSALS

This section responds to 10 questions raised by the Council about a possible design structure for a Texas QRIS. These questions get to the particulars of a QRIS, making this section detail-oriented in its specificity. Ten QRIS design features are addressed: number of QRIS tiers or levels and their relationship to child care licensing and national accreditation; whether quality tiers should be determined by a block structure or point system and whether all programs should be held to the same standards and processes; the inclusion of technical assistance; differential subsidy rates; other incentives; program enrollment; and stakeholder awareness and engagement. Structural issues related to program assessment and quality assurance are discussed under the headings of *Child-Program Assessment* and *Quality Assurance*.

The first three design questions – 4a, 4b, and 4c – are strongly linked to one another operationally. While final decisions regarding each of them ultimately are interdependent, each rests on different practical and aspirational priorities that need to be considered. In light of unanswered first-order strategic questions, the three proposals that follow are answered separately. This approach also allows each design element to be considered more in depth.

### ***4a. Should child care licensure be a pre-requisite for participation in a Texas QRIS or be designated as the first tier of the new system?***

**Proposal:** By way of providing some context, Texas' child care licensure is broadly inclusive. In terms of its standards for child care centers, it is ranked 16th nationally (while ranked relatively high on program oversight, Texas is 29th on regulations). The State's standards for family

home care providers are ranked 43rd, in part because home providers can be licensed and care for children without a prior inspection (NACCRRA, 2010, 2011).

If all levels of a Texas QRIS are to be focused on preparing school ready children, basing the system on minimal health and safety standards could send a mixed message. At a minimum, though, a Texas QRIS should require licensure as a prerequisite, thereby clearly indicating that basic health and safety standards provide a foundation for program quality.

To some extent, this question confronts the Council with a decision on “access by whom” given that a significant number of children in Texas are served in family, friend, and neighbor care (some state QRIS offer incentives to engage these care settings). Another aspect is that TRS ranks licensed programs at level 1, and the State legislature historically has not been disposed to setting stricter regulatory standards – although TRS child care teacher and administrator training requirements were increased during the last session (Jones, 2012). Going against these traditions could arouse resistance.

Again looking to RTT-ELC as a forecast of QRISs’ possible future, the federal application explicitly expressed the expectation that applicants’ QRIS would be linked to their states’ licensing systems. Looking to existing practices in states:

- ▶ Fourteen (slightly more than half) of the QRIS systems described in the Compendium indicate that licensing is the first tier for their rating. However, at least two of these systems – New Mexico and North Carolina - have a tiered licensing system. When star ratings act as a component of licensing (licensed programs are automatically recognized as having 1 star), programs typically are considered to be *participating* in the QRIS when they apply for the second tier or two star rating.
- ▶ The remaining QRISs typically include licensure and specific levels of compliance (from 75% to 100%) with licensure over an extended period of time (6 months to 1 year) as one of the necessary criteria for receiving a 1 star rating or higher.

Determining whether licensure should be the first tier – versus as a prerequisite or as only one of the necessary criteria - should include analysis of Texas’ child care licensing requirements. States that choose to have licensing as a first tier do so either because rating is a requirement of licensure or because the regulatory system is seen as a strong floor of quality. For example, if a state has strong structural requirements such as ratios, group size requirements, and staff qualifications, licensing may be seen as representing a viable first tier.

If a state’s regulatory system includes limited requirements typically associated with program quality, then licensing as a first tier might be less appropriate – which is implied by the rankings of the State’s licensing regulations for center- and home-based child care programs. Interestingly, New Mexico, which has incorporated level 1 *and* 2 standards into minimum licensing requirements as a way of “raising” the floor for its state licensing standards, proposed in its RTT-ELC application to continue raising the licensing floor when 70% of providers reach a star level (Stoney, 2012).

In the context of the Aspirational Logic Model, the question to be asking is “Does the State’s licensing system include quality indicators, or does it primarily address minimum health and safety standards?” Then the Council would want to consider, “What will its rating levels actually mean?” Pros and cons exist on both sides of the question.

Pros include:

- ▶ All licensed programs are automatically included in the state’s QRIS, thereby expanding participation and also increasing parents’ access to programs with rating information.
- ▶ Licensure is messaged as a standard of quality within the total system, facilitating parents’ understanding of the system.

Cons include:

- ▶ Requiring licensure for entry might be seen as a barrier to participation in QRIS.

- ▶ The message to parents might be confusing if licensure implies quality in a state with minimal standards.
- ▶ Automatically ranking licensed programs on the first level may counter the message that participating in a state's QRIS is about going beyond a state's minimal health and safety standards and entering into a process of continuous and incremental progress.
- ▶ Automatically ranking licensed programs on the first level might limit the number of incremental levels available to programs as they advance to the highest levels.

Interviewees did not appear to pick up on the nuance of licensing as a “pre-existing” requirement. Of those asked, the question of whether programs should be licensed in order to participate or whether licensed programs should automatically be placed in the first tier, the great majority thought that licensing should represent the first level of quality. One Interviewee, though, questioned the need for tiers if the system was going to be outcomes based, suggesting that focusing on desired child outcomes versus incremental improvements should be the system's focus.

Respondents to the first statewide survey indicated a clear, overall preference for programs to at least be regulated in order to participate, with 48.6 % expressing a preference for licensing; 42.7 % expressing support for either licensed or regulated; 6.1% expressing a preference for neither licensed nor regulation; and 2.6% expressing no opinion.

Slight variations in survey responses existed depending on the respondent's role. Parents and Administrators were slightly more likely to say that only licensed programs should qualify. Advocates and policymakers were slightly more likely to say either licensed or regulated programs could qualify.

#### ***4b. How many tiers should define a Texas QRIS?***

**Proposal:** Texas Rising Star (TRS) is the State's only statewide QRIS. As a result, its system is best known, especially by the child care sector. Retaining the same number of quality tiers (4, including level 1 that is assigned to all licensed programs) would provide some degree of continuity

with the new system. A decision on this question, though, should be tied to whether the Council recommends continuing the practice of automatically ranking licensed programs as the first tier, which is addressed in 4a, and with the question of the system's rating structure, discussed in 4c.

The QRIS Resource Guide states that the number of rating levels in a QRIS often depends on the gap between the criteria in licensing requirements and those in the most rigorous set of standards currently in place (e.g., national accreditation or prekindergarten standards). If the difference is great – as suggested by the Aspirational Logic Model - then more steps may be needed to allow programs to experience incremental success as they move toward higher quality. The extent of this gap is dependent on the level of program competence reflected in the system's highest tier.

Every state QRIS includes at least three levels, with five levels being most common (Mitchell, 2012). Additionally, the RTT-ELC application has raised the bar for this exercise: Winning states are to have measureable QRIS standards that meaningfully differentiate quality levels and reflect high expectations of program excellence commensurate with nationally recognized standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, p. 46).

***4c. Should recognition for reaching higher QRIS quality tiers be based on a building block structure, point system, or hybrid model?***

**Proposal:** A hybrid model that uses a block structure for the first three tiers is suggested. To the extent that research exists, these first three tiers should incorporate standards that can improve programs to a level needed to promote school readiness. Relying on a point system for the top two tiers, standards could focus on strengthening programs' ability to support children's school readiness, individualize their programs in response to community and program approaches to early learning or accentuate strengths (such as inclusion of young children with disabilities<sup>7</sup> or family

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<sup>7</sup> Note: A new tool for measuring the quality of inclusion has just been piloted in N.C.

engagement), as long as these strengths are associated with evidence-based practices and aligned with the State's early learning guidelines.

Building on this last idea, the top two tiers could focus on incorporating the State's early learning guidelines for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. As QRISs become more focused on facilitating children's school readiness, attention is being directed to the relationship between QRIS standards and children's readiness for kindergarten. Towards this end, Smith, Robbins, Stagman, and Kneader (2012) argue that QRIS standards should move beyond merely referencing early learning standards to incorporating specific practices that can promote children's learning and development. Additionally, four participants at the October 18<sup>th</sup> stakeholder meeting put forward the idea of KRS serving as a "plus element" at the highest QRIS tier in recognition of children's literacy and longitudinal development.

Similarly, Smith et al (2012) suggest that research on practices demonstrating positive impact on early learning outcomes should be mined for incorporation into QRIS standards. They highlight key practices associated with active teaching and caregiving, the curriculum, use of child progress monitoring to individualize learning supports, and parent involvement. As a potential benefit of specifying concrete practices in QRIS standards, they highlight that this approach may give these practices prominence in both the process of assessing programs and in quality improvement efforts designed to help a program attain a higher rating.

Proposal 4c, however, requires revisiting 4b (the number of tiers for a Texas QRIS), which suggested retaining the current tier structure of TRS as a way to facilitate transition to the new system. If, from a pragmatic standpoint, licensure is retained as the first tier – even though its standards seemingly are directed more to basic health and safety standards than to program quality – five, vs. four, tiers are required to achieve the hybrid model being proposed.

If some form of continuity with TRS is desired – as input from the second Stakeholder meeting seemed to endorse – the choice being offered here is between keeping the same number of

levels or retaining facility licensure as the first tier. In light of stakeholder input regarding the latter and the likely gap between existing licensing standards and the State's school readiness aspirations, a five-tiered, hybrid system would seem preferable as a choice.

In a building block approach, all of the standards associated with a particular level must be met for programs to move to the next tier. A point system assigns points to each standard, producing a combined score that is used to determine a program's quality rating. A hybrid model uses a combination approach, typically using the building block approach for the first levels, with higher levels being earned through a point system (QRIS Resource Guide).

The *building block* approach appears to be the easiest structure for providers and families to understand and for QRIS managers to administer. It also clearly identifies those criteria that the QRIS designers believe to be essential for all programs to meet. On the other hand, some providers see the building block approach as too rigid and unresponsive to variations in how program operate or view their strengths.

Point systems require clear and explicit marketing so parents can better recognize the varied strengths that are represented among programs that may have the same rating. A point system works well as a program improvement strategy. Programs can easily see what is needed to improve in each category (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, July 2012, personal communication; QRIS Standards, Levels, and Rating Systems) and have more options for moving to a higher level, which in turn, allows programs to pursue individualized interests.

Implicit in this latter point is an assumption that diverse pathways exist for achieving quality. Based on the preferences of some Interviewees, this approach also acknowledges differences in access to resources – although some countered that this response raises the issue of geographical inequity. The hybrid or combination approach tries to merge the benefits of the two approaches. North Carolina is currently exploring a combination approach in which Levels 1, 3, and 5 are blocks but points can be earned for Levels 2 and 4 (North Carolina Division of Child

Development and Early Education, 2012). It may also be recalled that states newly engaged with QRIS are turning to hybrid rating models.

***4d. Should participating programs be held accountable to the same standards and/or process?***

**Proposal:** Creating a system that steers all programs to providing a level of quality associated with preparing school ready children suggests all participants should be held accountable to similar standards, with the possible exception of licensed and registered child care homes.

This proposal quickly raises questions about how to address Head Start and publicly funded PreK. Given the wide-range of co-existing program standards in the State, holding all programs accountable to similar standards necessitates aligning standards across programs. As it relates to Head Start in particular, the Council's forthcoming Crosswalk offers a vehicle for comparing program standards and getting to alignment. Given the lack of standards for publicly funded PreK, however, a different intervention is needed.

Head Start programs already are required to meet the State's licensing standards as well as extensive federal standards. In light of these facts, and based on a Crosswalk of Head Start's standards with the State's QRIS standards, the Council should consider automatically placing Head Start programs – once verified as in compliance with federal standards - at the system's corresponding/aligned level of quality. This decision would encourage participation by Head Start programs by streamlining the process and reducing duplication of effort while also fostering consistency in program expectations across the State.

The State's public PreK programs, while regulated, are subject to limited standards. This negates the possibility of using an approach similar to what was just proposed for Head Start programs. While acknowledging this next suggestion will be controversial and touch upon the issues of mandates and local control, if statewide consistency across ECE programs is a priority, the

Council should consider the model offered by Vermont and Pennsylvania, which requires publicly funded PreK programs to be at a designated star level in order to receive public funding. This model, if of interest, could be phased in after the State's QRIS is established and PreK programs have had opportunities to voluntarily engage with the system.

Together, these proposals promote a statewide standard, facilitate consistency across the State's ECE programs, and make the rating system more understandable to parents.

Respondents to the first statewide survey had a point of view on this question. Overall, responses showed a clear preference, with 74.1% of respondents answering question 4d "yes"; 21.8% answering "no"; and 4.1% having no opinion. Interestingly, the responses followed the same general pattern, regardless of role of respondent, except that advocates were significantly less likely to say "yes."

Looking to how other states address Head Start, Pennsylvania and Maine use different indicators for Head Start programs, while Vermont, Minnesota, and Delaware allow Head Start programs to apply for a streamlined process to receive the highest star rating (which is verified before assigning the tier rating) – a suggestion also put forward during the second Stakeholder meeting. Other QRIS systems do not automatically assign a higher rating to Head Start programs.

A recent review of ways in which Head Start is integrated into QRIS in 26 states identified only six states as making adaptations or direct connections that benefitted Head Start, such as use of the CLASS (the Classroom Assessment Scoring System), which is used by the Office of Head Start as an assessment tool (Weisenfeld, 2012).

Only one state, Delaware, allows its state PreK programs to automatically receive a higher rating (4 out of 5 stars). Pennsylvania requires PreK programs to be at level 3 in its system in order to receive public funding and for teachers to have an ECE teaching certificate. This latter expectation soon will apply to all publicly funded PreK programs, regardless of setting.

Vermont requires PreK programs to be licensed and to participate in QRIS. Like Pennsylvania, it requires PreK programs to be at level 3 to receive public funds and then gives these programs three years to reach level 4 or become nationally accredited. North Carolina requires its publicly funded PreK, More at Four, to be either a 4 or 5 in its tiered licensing system.

As noted earlier, RTT-ELC applicants recognized an opportunity to raise the bar on program quality by shifting from a tendency to organize around their state's lowest common denominator, typically states' child care licensing standards. With this in mind, the pros for a single standard for all programs would include:

- ▶ A single set of standards facilitates consistency across programs.
- ▶ Consistency across programs reduces confusion or misperceptions by families when selecting a particular level of quality.
- ▶ A single set of standards implies a single procedure for assessing and rating, creating a system less complicated in its implementation.

Cons would include:

- ▶ Programs with fewer regulations, such as home-based providers and Texas PreK programs, are starting the process of improvement from a lower level of quality and may find the "gap" overwhelming to cross.
- ▶ Child care providers often have fewer resources, such as access to professional development opportunities, which can hinder their ability to improve at the same pace as programs with other sources of funding.
- ▶ Different instruments typically are used by center based programs and home-based programs to measure quality. For example, the ECERS-R cannot be used in a family care setting and remain a reliable and valid quality measurement.

***4e. Should nationally accredited programs be included in the system? If so, how?***

**Proposal:** TRS automatically rates accredited child care programs at level 4 – regardless of the organization offering the accreditation. Because of the wide range in accreditation systems endorsed by TRS, this is potentially problematic since these systems vary considerably in their standards and accountability processes, introducing additional variability into a QRIS.

In determining how it wants to respond to this question, the Council should consider the approach proposed for Head Start programs: cross-walking each accreditation system’s program standards with Texas’ QRIS standards and awarding the corresponding level to accredited programs. This practice would acknowledge programs’ efforts to demonstrate program quality as determined by their national organizations, minimize duplication of effort, and avoid the complexity of adding points for what, in essence, is a variation on a QRIS.

To our knowledge, no research has been conducted with the specific intent of examining the relationship between national accreditation systems and child outcomes. Additionally, the Council will want to be mindful of the fact that participation by Texas programs in national accreditation systems is limited, covering less than 4% of eligible providers in the State (Council Working Paper, 2011, p. 5).

Still, participants at the October 18<sup>th</sup> Stakeholder meeting overwhelming thought national accreditation systems should be included as part of a new statewide QRIS: 18 voted “yes” to their inclusion; nine were undecided; and one was “unconvinced.” Respondents to the second statewide survey held similar views: 58.6% of respondents said “yes” regarding their inclusion; 24.5% said “no”; and 16.9% were not sure. When asked, however, if all nationally accredited programs, regardless of sponsor, should be placed at the highest quality level as is the case with TRS, responses were decidedly mixed: 41.5% said “no”; 36.6% said “yes”; and 22% indicated they were not sure.

Participants at the second stakeholder meeting were more unified in their views in this regard. They indicated that accreditation should not automatically place a program at the highest level of a new statewide QRIS; nor should national accreditation be recognized as the sole way to rank a program's quality level. Suggesting alignment with Proposal 4e, participants appeared to agree that national accreditation systems are not equivalent, which needs to be taken into account if they are to be recognized as part of a new system.

In terms of states' approaches to accreditation, some include accreditation as a criterion for determining a program's rating. Other states (Delaware, D.C., Indiana, Minnesota) allow programs with national accreditation to enter the rating system at a high quality level, usually the highest or second to highest quality tier. In D.C., New Hampshire, Montana, and Maine, programs are required to be accredited in order to reach the top tier. A few states, such as Vermont, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Tennessee, use accreditation to streamline the process for programs but do not consider accreditation as an automatic high quality rating. Of the 26 QRIS programs described in the Compendium, 14 include no differences in rating, applications or procedures for accredited programs; one state considers NAEYC Accreditation at a higher tier of quality than other national accrediting systems (5 stars vs. 4 stars). By way of addressing variation among accreditation systems, states such as Colorado, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania have developed criteria for identifying which systems to recognize as part of their QRIS and for assigning them to one of their quality levels.

One Interviewee, it should be noted, expressed concern about including accreditation as part of a Texas QRIS because these systems are beyond the State's control. This lifts up the issue of looking beyond standards alignment to consider monitoring issues when programs are automatically ranked by the system based on alternative criteria and processes assessed by a non-state entity. Some stakeholders at the October 18<sup>th</sup> meeting spoke to this issue as well (See Appendix F: Stakeholder Meeting Agenda and Input – Meeting #2). Additionally, a RAND study of

Colorado's QRIS recommended against including accreditation in QRISs because of expense and added complexity, including time delays and the additional processes required by the accrediting body (Zellman, Perlman, Le, & Setodji, 2008).

#### ***4f. Should a Texas QRIS include Technical Assistance?***

**Proposal:** Technical assistance (TA) should be included as part of a Texas QRIS. Going beyond direct assistance to programs, providers, and teaching staff, QRIS Technical Assistance is broadly defined as support activities that promote program quality, including coaching and mentoring, professional development opportunities, and program development incentives. In light of the State's funding challenges, the Council might want to consider an approach that targets resources based on a participating program's level of quality or a community's need for more programs of high quality, which could be informed by results from the Statewide Needs Assessment.

As part of their RTT-ELC applications, some states proposed mapping the overlap of availability of 4 and 5 Star programs and communities with large numbers of high-need children. Others proposed targeting community-based programs in low-performing school districts. Still another variation proposed was targeting dollars to "high need" communities (Stoney, 2012).

**Proposal:** Maximize the State's forthcoming Trainer Registry (1) to organize and publicize training opportunities aligned with the State's core competencies, early learning guidelines, and definition of school readiness for QRIS participants and (2) to safeguard the quality and consistency of the training being provided.

**Proposal:** Expand the availability of Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) scholarships (which also can function as an incentive), aligning their access to decisions regarding where/how TA dollars are targeted, and coordinating with the State's ECE career ladder and Council's Articulation initiative.

**Proposal:** Texas has a diverse array of community-based quality improvement initiatives, many of which have private financing. Consider targeting their efforts toward TA. These efforts, though, should be aligned with the State’s QRIS standards and Professional Development system, and private-public partnerships should be created in a way to ensure statewide “coverage.” Deserving special mention in this regard is the Texas School Ready!<sup>TM</sup> Project. The State’s most developed and evidence-based coaching and mentoring system: it is multi-sector and also has statewide capacity. As noted earlier, participants at the second stakeholder meeting offered specific suggestions regarding TSR’s inclusion in a new system.

**Proposal:** Most states rely on Child Care Development Fund quality-set-aside dollars to fund TA and other system enhancements. Consider the pros and cons of recommending that a proportion of these federal dollars be re-allocated to program quality versus only to child care subsidy.

Technical assistance (TA) is considered a crucial QRIS component – it is the heart of the “I” in QRIS and is part of what characterizes it as a system. Additionally, its absence would likely dampen participation and could possibly even be perceived as punitive given the stakes for programs in terms of visibility and funding.

The Council Working Paper (2011) raised the possibility of creating a statewide Quality Rating System (QRS) that does not include quality improvement services or provide incentives or quality improvement resources, speculating that local communities might step in to provide these resources given the State’s current rich mix of local initiatives (p. 9). This approach comes with challenges, however. One, these supports tend to be found primarily in the State’s urban areas and, as a result, omit much of the State’s geography. Yet it should also be noted that the State’s young child population increasingly lives in or around urban centers.

Additionally, interviewees often noted lack of access to improvement opportunities as an equity issue. This approach, Interviewees argued, may unduly affect the child care sector since it

has the fewest flexible resources available for quality improvement. Further, to the extent that only portions of the State's providers may have access to development opportunities, increasing the quantity of programs statewide that are lifted to a threshold associated with school readiness outcomes could be placed in jeopardy.

All 26 QRISs identified in the Compendium provided some type of technical assistance, most often through coaching, workshops, and/or tuition support. States support program improvement through multiple methods, using a combination of any or all of the following: professional development scholarships; wage enhancements; financial awards for improving quality; financial awards to assist in making improvements (e.g. purchase materials, pay for workshops, make safety repairs); child care health and/or mental health consultation; and coaching and/or mentoring. Along with TA for improvement, 14 states reporting their information to the Compendium indicated that they conduct TA related to navigating the system (filling out paperwork, assisting in understanding the assessment tools or the rating system, etc.). In conjunction with this approach, ten states require programs to attend an orientation session prior to enrollment to address questions and allay anxieties.

States view Technical Assistance in some form as an inherent element of QRIS, which ensure supports are available for improving program quality. The State's most evidence-based school readiness model, the Texas School Ready!<sup>TM</sup> Project, also lifts up the importance of technical assistance, including teaching and learning resources, effective communication strategies, and professional development (Gasko, Waxley, & the Texas School Ready!<sup>TM</sup> Project Management Team, 2009, p.3). Interviewee responses to this question suggest they have similar expectations for the inclusion of TA.

In response to limited resources and embellishing Proposal 4f, approaches to be considered include:

- ▶ Adjusting frequency and duration of TA based on identified “need” by the program. For example, an initial assessment identifies low quality; therefore, the program receives more intensive TA. Or, need could be determined by the star rating attained, a pre-assessment score, a self-assessment, and/or program demographics such as a high percentage of low income children attending a program.
- ▶ Adjusting intensity of TA based on population served by the program (e.g., providing more intensive services for programs that serve mostly children receiving child care subsidy or children with special needs).

Since the provision of TA often provides programs with an incentive for participation, unintended consequences of creating a differentiated approach have to be carefully considered. By way of an example, targeting high-need populations to receive TA could cause perceptions of unfairness among providers who receive low ratings but don’t serve a high-need population.

TA often is coupled with financial grants that can be used for improvement. Of the 26 QRISs listed in the Compendium, 18 use improvement grants to support and incentivize quality improvement. Grants are funded through a number of different methods. In Colorado, grants are funded by Child Care and Development Fund dollars. In Maine, participants have the opportunity to apply for tax credits for expenses associated with facility improvements. In Arizona, funding comes from a voter tax initiative. In light of the Council’s interests, the State’s quality improvement efforts should target and align with quality indicators that support children’s school readiness, creating aligned support for high quality by connecting inputs with outcomes (Pianta, 2011).

#### ***4g. Should a Texas QRIS assign a different subsidy rate to each star level?***

**Proposal:** Higher levels of program quality involve higher costs than low quality programs. Programs may be less likely to participate if reasonable correspondence does not exist between the

cost of delivering higher quality care and the payment rate per child. This reality especially has consequences for programs serving subsidized, low-income children (an issue raised in multiple interviews). To promote broad participation and support the increased cost of higher program quality, tiered reimbursements should be part of a Texas QRIS.

Tiered reimbursement is one of several strategies used by states to incentivize participation and encourage improvement efforts – and at present, the most common. Under TRS, Local Work Force Boards have the option of providing higher reimbursement rates, but this option is reportedly implemented unevenly – an inconsistency Interviewees hope will be addressed by the new system.

At least 18 state QRISs include tiered reimbursement as part of their systems. However, three of these 18 programs only award a bonus reimbursement for the highest level of quality rather than differential reimbursement between quality levels. The remaining programs use one of two methods of reimbursement. Seven states use a “flat rate” per child increase, with payments varying as the quality rating increases. These states also take into account factors such as age of child and number of subsidized children attending a program.

Eight programs use a percentage strategy. As quality levels increase, a percentage of the maximum subsidy is awarded to the program. Variation in subsidy rate tends to range from 3% - 5% at the lowest quality levels to as much as 15% - 25% for higher quality levels.<sup>8</sup>

As part of its RTT-ELC application, Illinois proposed an innovative approach worth watching if implemented. They proposed analyzing the cost of providing services at each level of their QRIS. Based on their analysis, they would develop a series of funding models aimed at incorporating a range of funding streams and revising reimbursement levels so they are more attuned to operating costs (Stoney, 2012).

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<sup>8</sup> Pages 181-182 of the Compendium offer detailed explanations.

States are primarily using ARRA dollars or funding through CCDF to fund tiered reimbursement rates. Maryland and Ohio, both RTT-ELC recipients, are planning to also address the family side of subsidy. These two states are piloting different ways to drive families to higher quality programs by changing the family co-pay structure. Ohio plans to eliminate co-payments for families choosing higher quality centers/homes while Maryland intends to implement a differential co-pay program. Co-payment will be reduced dependent on the quality level of the chosen child care option. As part of its application, Mississippi proposed college savings accounts for income-eligible families who enroll children in higher quality programs (Stoney, 2012). As part of their award, winning states are expected to find ways to sustain financial incentives once their RTT-ELC dollars are spent.

All interviewees asked this question thought differential reimbursement was an essential element of a statewide QRIS. Several Interviewees noted a system with differential reimbursement would be important – if not essential - to luring participation by private programs. The issue for all was a desire for subsidy levels to better align with the costs associated with providing higher quality programs.

The private sector's awareness of this issue recently was highlighted by a report from the American Enterprise Institute (Grindal, 2012), a strong advocate for private enterprise. It argued that private providers fill essential gaps for families and communities and that the market driven framework of QRIS, in conjunction with adequate tiered reimbursement, would encourage providers of all types to focus on the aspects of program quality of most importance to children's learning and development.

Some states make QRIS a requirement not only for PreK public funding, but also for participation in the child care subsidy system. A Policy Interpretation Question (CCDF-ACF-PIQ-2011-01) issued by the federal Office of Child Care clarifies that parental choice provisions do not preclude establishing policies that require child care providers serving subsidized children to meet

certain quality requirements or standards, such as a specified rating level within a QRIS. However, parents receiving subsidies must be allowed to choose from a range of child care provider categories (center-based, group home, family child care, and in-home care) and types of care (non-profit, for-profit, sectarian providers, and relatives who provide care). In states that link public funding to QRIS level, private sector funders, such as United Way, sometimes follow suit and require the providers that they fund to participate as well. In this case, participation is technically voluntary, but it is required if the program wants to receive third-party funding.

***4h. Are there incentives beyond Technical Assistance and differential reimbursement that should be considered?***

**Proposal:** States offer a range of incentives. Incentives typically are context specific. In determining incentives of interest, therefore, the Council should examine not only what other states are doing but also glean insights from focus groups conducted by an agency or agencies involved with recruiting provider participation (see Proposal j below), inclusive of cost implications.

Eighteen of 23 states listed in the Compendium reported providing cash improvement grants to QRIS participants; 11 of these states indicated that they provide additional cash awards based on participation and merit. States provide financial incentives beyond tiered reimbursement to improve program quality for all children in formal ECE settings, rather than only for children identified as at-risk or receiving child care subsidies. Twenty-one states included in the compendium reported offering incentives such as: support for startup costs, scholarship funds for staff to attend college courses, wage enhancements, staff retention bonuses, and support for accreditation costs.<sup>9</sup>

Some states also support non-QRIS participants with financial aid. The exact number and types of improvement services are unclear, but an example of a state using funds for participants

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<sup>9</sup> A list of examples of ways states use incentives can be found at: [acf.hhs.gov/resource/wwwroot/index.cfm?do=question&sid=5&qid=315](http://acf.hhs.gov/resource/wwwroot/index.cfm?do=question&sid=5&qid=315)

and non-participants is Montana. Montana offers programs a variety of mini-grants to assist with startup and/or expansion costs. While these grants do not require participation in the state's quality rating system, they do require participation in the state's professional development registry. The connection to the registry is presumably a strategy for encouraging participation in staff development and improving staff qualifications. Illinois provides grants for non-QRIS participants, as well, as does Vermont. In Vermont, all providers may apply for grants, but QRIS participants receive priority when making awards.

States are being encouraged to align incentives with their quality indicators. For example, if a state intends to focus on improved staff qualifications, supports aimed at improving staff quality might facilitate stakeholder buy-in. In this example, incentives might include grants, scholarships, pay for substitutes while staff attend class, and assistance with purchasing text books. Child care providers, in particular, however, often become concerned that increasing staff qualifications will lead to increased compensation. So with an eye toward aligning incentives, a state might also want to consider wage enhancements or bonuses to support programs that hire higher qualified staff. The Council's forthcoming Compensation Study might be a useful resource in considering an idea like this.

#### ***4i. What should be the enrollment process for participating programs?***

**Proposal:** This is a technical question with management and financial implications and should be considered in conjunction with the number of programs across the State likely to participate in the new system. The options are either year-round open enrollment or scheduled entry dates. Generally speaking, year-round enrollment with a rotating assignment schedule or specified entry dates incorporate operational efficiencies. Consequently, although scheduled entry dates can reduce providers' flexibility, we prefer them to an open enrollment process.

In deciding its response to this question, the Council should engage with Local Work Force Boards and administrators of local QRIS to learn which enrollment process they use, as well as the

pros and cons of their experiences. This would provide the Council with community-based “data” to inform its decision-making and also demonstrate respect for others’ work in this arena.

Specified entry dates assist an administrative agency in managing financial and personnel resources because it supports increased predictability in terms of anticipating the timing of new applications as well as planning for administrative time to process applications. (The section on Costs and Financing speaks more to cost implications.) Be aware that cycling enrollment may mean programs will have to plan for extended wait periods between time of application and actual time of enrollment, depending on the system’s design. Since program changes such as teacher turnover, director changes, or accreditation expiration can affect a rating level, this approach places responsibility on the system’s administrator to ensure programs are aware of opening and closing periods of enrollment.

Offering an alternative approach, Arizona allows for year-round application submission, but programs are selected for participation on a rotating schedule by region, approximately every 8-10 weeks. This allows for rotating assignment of coaches and assessors to conduct initial TA and obtain baseline assessment data and incorporates the operational efficiencies associated with scheduled entry dates.

***4j. What are approaches for informing parents about the quality of ECE programs? For introducing a Texas QRIS to the public, providers, and policymakers?***

**Proposal:** While numerous examples used by other states could be shared, they tend to be very context specific. The Council’s forthcoming School Readiness Campaign is intended to create a new landscape in terms of understanding of and support for helping children come to kindergarten prepared to succeed. This result should help position a statewide QRIS as a vehicle for changing ECE program quality and inform the design and implementation of a QRIS outreach campaign.

A QRIS outreach campaign should also draw on the expertise of communications and marketing agencies to research effective strategies in other states – including Minnesota, whose

QRIS is heavily parent driven, learn more about barriers and incentives to participation and support, conduct focus groups, develop targeted messages, and implement a differentiated campaign for multiple stakeholders. The strategies chosen should leverage what is learned from the forthcoming School Readiness Campaign and involve aligned messaging in order to facilitate synergy between the two campaigns.

## V. QUALITY ASSURANCE – 1 PROPOSAL

This section examines questions related to the integrity of a QRIS. Answers rely heavily on practices used by other states. Strong accreditation systems (not limited to those within the ECE field) also can provide guidance. Because of operational considerations, it should be noted that quality assurance practices often vary based on the size and complexity of a system.

Six typical QRIS quality assurance questions are addressed below. Responsibility for ensuring the system's reliable measurement of program quality usually falls to the agency conducting assessments, which often is a contract provider such as a university or community based organization.

***5a. What procedures should be considered for Self-Reports?***

***5b. How many classrooms are assessed at each site?***

***5c. How often should programs be monitored and assessed?***

***5d. What are norms for inter-rater reliability?***

***5e. Should random visits be used as part of the process?***

***5f. Should penalties exist for programs not maintaining their star level?***

**Proposal:** Considerable variability exists across states in their practices related to these six questions, and to our knowledge, no research exists on the pros and cons of different approaches. The Council's decision-making should be informed by practices from state QRISs that align with Texas' intentions for its Quality Rating and Improvement System. It is important, too, to attend to

operational considerations in order to avoid overly complex processes for the system, as well as for providers.

## Procedures for Self-Reports

Most QRISs include some form of self-certification. Programs conduct self-assessments using Environmental Rating Scales or submit online information regarding ratios and group sizes, staff qualifications, or administrative related information – so basically indicators related to structural quality. In cases where programs self-submit, the information typically is later verified by either a licensing specialist or other type of program assessor.

In reviewing possible options, no systems were identified with having a process that was 100% self-report.<sup>10</sup> Such a system, especially if differential reimbursement or other stakes were involved, would likely invite challenges about the QRIS' reliability and credibility.

By way of example, Arizona put together a system using a state checklist to earn points combined with observation scores to achieve a rating. The state checklist addresses items identified by stakeholders as important elements of quality but were not addressed in observational tools, such as curriculum aligned with state standards and use of appropriate child assessment to guide instruction. The checklist also includes items not addressed within licensing yet considered contributors to program quality, such as ratios, group sizes, and staff qualifications. Arizona's checklist creates a relationship between licensing standards as the floor for quality and quality indicators that are aligned with the system's standards. It explains required documentation, who is responsible for providing the information, and who will verify the information as applicable.<sup>11</sup> In Oklahoma, the provider completes a checklist on her/his own. It then is reviewed and approved by

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<sup>10</sup> Qualifind includes only structural indicators. It relies on programs' self-reports and has found the process to be reliable. If resources permitted, it would prefer to include process variables as well, believing the system would be stronger as a result (Interviewees).

<sup>11</sup> To see the Arizona checklist, go to: [azftf.gov/WhatWeDo/Programs/QualityFirst/Documents/Quality%20First%20Points%20Scale.pdf](http://azftf.gov/WhatWeDo/Programs/QualityFirst/Documents/Quality%20First%20Points%20Scale.pdf). To see how the state checklist is incorporated into rating see: [azftf.gov/WhatWeDo/Programs/QualityFirst/Documents/Quality%20First%20Rating%20Scale.pdf](http://azftf.gov/WhatWeDo/Programs/QualityFirst/Documents/Quality%20First%20Rating%20Scale.pdf).

a specialist. Providers decide which star level they are seeking and complete the checklist accordingly.

Validation of state checklists, much like validation of state QRISs in general, is a new process. Some states included validation of their systems as part of evaluation studies. This has included all processes of the rating system, however, not just a state's approved checklist. Five states recently deciding to validate their systems are Colorado, Indiana, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania.

### **Number of Classrooms Assessed**

Aside from Mississippi, which assesses two classrooms per location, states usually assess a percentage of classrooms in a center and typically ensure at least one classroom of each age group is included (i.e. infant/toddler, preschool, school age). Four states listed in the Compendium assess 100% of classrooms; five states assess 50% of classrooms; and 10 states assess 33% of classrooms. In 2011, Kansas reduced the number of classrooms being assessed to 50% (original number assumed to be 100%), citing national trends in quality assessment and the state's fiscal climate as the driving forces for change, along with research-based assurances that reducing the number of classrooms assessed would not substantially affect quality ratings.

### **Assessor Training and Inter-Reliability**

Nine QRISs utilize a tool's author(s) to ensure assessors are initially trained to reliability – meaning newly trained assessors are tested for inter-rater reliability against an author's performance. Other programs use specially trained state “anchors” (tool experts) or master assessors identified regionally.

In accordance with assessment practice recommendations, a majority of programs require a minimum of 85% inter-rater reliability for assessors. One state allows assessors to be considered reliable at 80%, and one QRIS uses a Kappa statistic (.70) instead of a percent agreement. Achieving

this level of reliability, of course, depends on the caliber of the assessor training program, including opportunities for trainees to practice their newly learned skills. Similar to the process for testing assessor reliability, states sometimes rely on a measure's author(s) and other times rely on specially trained state "anchors" (tool experts) or regionally identified master assessors, which is a more cost effective approach. Both the Early Childhood Environmental Childhood Rating System (ECERS) and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) provide training-of-trainer sessions for this purpose. Reinforcing a caution expressed in the Council's Working Paper (2011), in light of real and/or perceived conflicts of interest, the role of assessors should be independent of and performed by individuals different from those who provide quality improvement supports to participating programs such as coaching, mentoring, or training.

Typically, assessors are checked for reliability every 10<sup>th</sup> visit. Some states make concessions for assessors who consistently demonstrate inter-rater reliability. In Iowa, for example, after an assessor maintains 85% reliability for 3 years, they are checked for reliability on an annual basis. Louisiana doubles the number of visits an assessor conducts from six to 12 after maintaining 85% reliability for 1 year.

### **Frequency of Assessment Visits**

Frequency of assessment visits varies by QRIS as well. Twenty-three of 26 QRIS in the Compendium use Environmental Rating System tools as part of their rating process. However, in some of the 23 programs, the Environmental Rating System tools are optional and used either for self-assessment or in an effort to earn quality points toward a rating level. States increasingly are attending to teacher-child interactions and incorporating the CLASS in their QRIS. The Office of Head Start now includes the CLASS as part of its program monitoring system. In terms of frequency, program assessments vary between one and three years.

## Random Visits

Information regarding states' use of announced vs. unannounced visits is not readily accessible. Tennessee annually conducts unannounced visits for its lowest level programs and varies the number of visits by rating level. Looking outside of QRIS, NAEYC's Early Childhood Program Accreditation System includes unannounced visits, a feature instituted as part of its "reinvention" in response to demands for greater reliability and accountability in accreditation decisions (NAEYC, 2002).

Arizona and New Mexico do an initial, announced visit to gather data for improvement purposes but then come unannounced when the visit is conducted for the purpose of rating the program. Still other states have providers perform their own initial assessment and then identify their readiness for a rating visit.

Most states conduct monitoring visits to check continuing compliance with their QRIS standards. Frequency of visits can range from annually to every three years, and a few states report a frequency outside of this range. Kentucky implements a unique design, varying the frequency of visits by the program's level of quality. Lower quality programs receive a higher frequency of visits (annually), while programs of higher quality are visited less frequently (every four years).

The pros for incorporating unannounced/random visits include:

- ▶ Unannounced visits increase credibility of the system. When a program rating is seen as high stakes, incidences of providers attempting to "cheat" the assessment have been documented. Providers are less able to make adjustments to classrooms, staffing patterns, and attendance when visits are unplanned.
- ▶ Unannounced visits increase the probability that assessors will observe an authentic day in classrooms and programs.
- ▶ Unannounced visits increase the system's credibility with stakeholders.

Cons of unannounced visits include:

- ▶ Challenges arise when the assessor arrives during highly unusual events. For example, if children are scheduled for a field trip, the assessor cannot observe that group. This can be avoided, however, by allowing programs to indicate a limited number of “block out” dates when unannounced visits should be avoided.

### **Penalties If Programs Fall Below an Assigned Rating or Are In Other Ways Fall Out of Compliance**

Programs typically receive increases or decreases in star levels when reassessed for some reason. In addition to renewal timelines, reassessment triggers include: licensing violations, change in ownership or director, change of location, or high teacher turnover (if that indicator is tracked). System reliability and validity issues make policies that address these kinds of changes an important feature of a QRIS design.

In Delaware, programs that no longer meet a particular standard are required to write a plan for correcting non-compliance with a standard. The provider is given six months to take corrective action, during which time assistance from the state may be requested. If not successful, the program’s star rating is reduced.

Pennsylvania has a written policy to review the status of programs and outlines actions from suspension to removal from the QRIS. It also implements policies that address corrective action plans. These policies are used in cases where there is noncompliance with licensing, noncompliance with QRIS standards, or loss of accreditation.

The Council’s Working Paper (2011) raises the issue of noncompliance with QRIS standards when a monitoring visit occurs: “What happens to programs that decline from their first to second monitoring”? (p. 17). In addition to options already identified, the procedure used by TRS can be considered. TRS requires programs to enter into a Service Improvement Agreement (SIA) if found

to no longer be performing at the awarded level, a process that includes remediation actions and a timeline for correction.

## VI. EFFECTIVE DATA PRACTICES – FRAMING DECISION-MAKING

This section is the first of three design sections that comes without specific proposals. The information presented below is intended to focus the Council's considerations, while also linking these considerations to system-building efforts underway or forthcoming.

Attention to effective data practices already is well underway. Obviously, the Council's recent attempts to construct a comprehensive early childhood data system means the conversation on this QRIS design feature has progressed to a different level.

TOTS – The On Track System - is to serve as the data collection component of the State's QRIS (Texas State Advisory Council on Childhood Education and Care, 2010, p. 37-38). Presently, the Council's recommendations are under review by Governor Perry (Texas Early Learning Council, 2012).

The hope is that when in place, TOTS will bring together the State's varied data collection systems and in-house pertinent early childhood data into one accessible and useable location (The OnTrack System (TOTS) Strategic Plan, n.d.). Since QRISs frequently are seen as an ECE systems integrator, this hope is well aligned with goals associated with a QRIS.

Almost all of the Council's current and forthcoming system-building initiatives include a data component, and their integration and synergy rely on the presence of a comprehensive, integrated, and accessible early childhood data system. So does the ability to document (1) the State's progress toward benchmarks on programs' capacity to provide higher quality; (2) the operational performance of a Texas QRIS as a system at different points in its development from pilot to early operation (first two to five years), and as a mature operation (more than five years old) (Boller et al, 2011); and (3) the system's near- and long-term impact on program changes,

professionalizing ECE providers, teachers and administrators, and child outcomes associated with school readiness.

All statewide QRIS collect data and report information in some way. Determining the needed technology requires analyzing existing structures and databases. Also, an accurate inventory of existing data systems, their accessibility, accuracy, and reliability can be useful in formulating a QRIS system design (QRIS Resource Guide, 2011) – information that likely can be found in the TOTS strategic plan or its supportive documents. These documents also likely present a well-developed overview of the technology infrastructure that will be needed, such as a data warehouse, unique program and child identifiers, confidentiality rules, memoranda of understanding, and the structure needed for aligning ECE quality indicators and outcomes with the State’s K-12 longitudinal data system.

As a Texas QRIS is designed, the data it will need and/or want to collect should be identified, anticipating future evaluation (determining what is working and what is not; managing and improving the system; and meeting accountability requirements [Boller et al, 2011]), consumer education, public will building, and legislative requests. Not to be forgotten is what teachers might find useful in their efforts to promote children’s learning and development. During an interactive plenary session at the 2011 Texas Early Childhood Leadership Summit, close to 1000 respondents identified as three top data needs: assessment data (25%), historical data (24%); and classroom data (21%) ([earlylearningtexas.org/plenary.aspx](http://earlylearningtexas.org/plenary.aspx)).

Drawing from information found in the QRIS Resource Guide, the QRIS data systems of Tennessee and Pennsylvania offer examples for organizing and using QRIS data and aligning it with related systems such as subsidy, licensing, scholarships, professional development, and program grants. While not being suggested as models for Texas to consider, they may be informative.

Tennessee uses the State Regulated Adult & Child Care System (RACCS) to maintain QRIS data. The system includes the provider’s *Star-Quality Child Care Program* rating and *Child Care*

*Report Card System* component scores by program year. Users can request provider QRIS information for the entire State or by specific geographic region. The data system automatically generates monthly reports on ratings by provider type and county. The RACCS system also includes various provider-specific program data, updated annually, that can be queried by accreditation, curriculum, enrollment, environment, fees, meals, program, rates, rate policy, schedule, staff, and transportation.<sup>12</sup>

Pennsylvania is recognized for its early childhood data system, and its success in providing advocates with information to document the effectiveness of early learning programs and increase public expenditures. Pennsylvania Enterprise to Link Information for Children Across Networks (PELICAN) is an integrated child care and early learning information management system. In addition to automating and centralizing many of the functions required to administer the subsidized child care program (Child Care Works), it automates the inspection and certification (licensing) processes of child care providers, the administrative processes and data collection efforts for the PA Pre-K Counts and Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality (Keystone STARS – the state’s QRIS) initiatives, and the data collection and analytics to support the Early Learning Network (ELN),<sup>13</sup> which is a longitudinal database and tracking system for children in Pennsylvania early learning programs. PELICAN users include Child Care Information Service agencies, County Assistance Offices, Regional Keys (administrators of the Keystone STARS program), PA Pre-K Counts grantees, as well as teachers and administrators for Head Start State supplemental programs, school districts that provide prekindergarten, providers of child care, and others. Families are also able to screen themselves for potential eligibility for child care subsidies, search for providers, and apply for services online. This initiative allows the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) and the Regional Keys to track providers, manage STARS, identify

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<sup>12</sup> Additional information is available at [tennessee.gov/humanserv/adfam/ccrcsq.html](http://tennessee.gov/humanserv/adfam/ccrcsq.html).

<sup>13</sup> An overview of the ELN is available at [ncl.org/portals/1/documents/Educ/PAEarlyChild-Stedron.pdf](http://ncl.org/portals/1/documents/Educ/PAEarlyChild-Stedron.pdf).

resources deployed to a program, and manage STARS grant information in the Keystone STARS rating system. A next phase of development will focus on how to integrate the existing trainer and training registry, the Pennsylvania Quality Assurance System, into PELICAN and make it accessible from the PA Key web site.

## VII. IMPLEMENTATION – FRAMING DECISION-MAKING

This section is the second of three design sections that comes without specific proposals. Given the number of unknown variables related to implementation, offering proposals that lack sufficient context would be unhelpful. However, the information below clearly articulates what Council members will want to consider when ready to enter into a discussion on implementation. Also included is a suggestion that we want to highlight for you.

Most states have found that full funding for a comprehensive QRIS is difficult to achieve initially, even with the redirection of existing resources. As a result, developers often hone in on cost when anticipating implementation, when, in fact, there are two additional considerations: implementation science and one's agreed upon logic model. The first two – cost-informed implementation and implementation science – are discussed in this section. An aspirational logic model for the Council's consideration was discussed earlier. Once agreed upon, a logic model should be regularly visited during implementation to review the extent that it still portrays current thinking and to utilize its direction setting guidance.

A pilot in conjunction with a phased-in approach offers a way to demonstrate the value of QRIS to stakeholders, test the system's design, and fine-tune implementation issues. This approach, which is recommended, also offers an opportunity for beta testing. Additionally, states are increasingly using pilots to test QRIS structural elements (QRIS Resource Compendium). In analyzing Missouri's implementation of its QRIS, Thornburg and Mauzy (2012) noted that it, like many states, built its system in response to specific needs or implementation projects based on

funding availability. “The result of these piecemeal efforts,” they noted, “although well intended, is a statewide ‘nonsystem’ ” (p. 232). After 5 years into the process, they concluded, “The most significant insight we have to offer is to strongly urge others to include pilots and demonstration periods in the QRS development” (p. 233).

Thornburg and Mauzy (2012) offer two rationales for their conclusion. First, even though planning efforts are important for the development of a model(s) based on the state’s unique infrastructure, a pilot allows for extensive data collection to test the model and measures included in the system. They saw a pilot as offering stakeholders the opportunity to review the data and balance expectation for higher performance levels with the reality of current expectations, as well as to identify how variations in ECE programs (such as program size) interact with the system design.

The Council, and ultimately the State, will need to choose between a system design customized to the ECE field’s program variations *and* a system design with operational simplicity. While a customized system may promote greater participation by programs, a system based on operational simplicity not only has the potential to lower costs, but more importantly, fosters consistency in implementation – a crucial consideration when high stakes are involved. It might be added that another crucial contribution of a pilot is the chance it offers to test the system’s implementation process in order to revise and/or refine processes and procedures that potentially made sense in theory but not in practice.

Allowing states to prepare for large-scale recruitment and implementation is Thornburg and Mauzy’s second rationale for piloting, followed by a demonstration project. This approach also creates time and “space” for building out the operational infrastructure that the system needs to be manageable and cost effective.

Missouri’s pilot and demonstration phases highlighted infrastructure issues that had to be addressed to ensure the system’s success: (1) consistency, competence, and the systems’ awareness

of participants in its coaching system; (2) development of a reliable, statewide assessor system – so beyond the issue of inter-rater reliability; and (3) resolving issues regarding licensure requirements and documentation of noncompliance (Thornburg & Mauzy, 2012, p. 236). It's not reasonable, however, to think that every issue associated with a statewide QRIS can be identified and rectified prior to going statewide, a factor to keep in mind when considering administration of a Texas QRIS. Implementation of a statewide system takes time. Halle (2012) suggests that a two to four-year timeframe should be expected.

### **Incremental Strategies When Finances Are Limited**

When an incremental strategy is being taken primarily due to limited funding, staff resources or a lack of broad support – versus as part of a larger change strategy - careful consideration needs to be given to which approaches to administration, monitoring, provider enrollment cycles, provider supports, and incentives are most likely to be cost-effective while still systematically improving quality, ensuring accountability, and increasing participation. It also is important to remember that a limited implementation strategy is only a first step toward a comprehensive, statewide QRIS (QRIS Resource Guide).

The cost projection process can guide cost-based decisions on how and when to phase in a QRIS. Developed by Anne Mitchell, and adapted as a publicly accessible web-based tool by the National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC), the Cost Estimation Model (CEM), can help a state with projecting QRIS costs at scale and guide decisions regarding where and when to reduce costs, if necessary. The CEM is used as the basis for the Texas QRIS Cost Estimation that can be found in Appendix H. It is possible to develop multiple cost projections for a statewide program using the CEM. Projections can be made for strategies, such as:

- ▶ A comprehensive plan that anticipates full funding for 5 years for each component of a fully implemented QRIS.

- ▶ A midrange or scaled back plan to get started and build support for future expansion, e.g., limited participation, reduced provider incentives.
- ▶ A basic program with fewer provider supports and incentives and fewer accountability measures.

A phased-in approach can take several forms:

- ▶ *Limiting initial participation*, e.g., implementing with child care centers and not family child care homes. Pennsylvania and Virginia took this approach.
- ▶ Implementing *fewer than the anticipated number of levels*, e.g., levels 1–3 of a 5-level system.
- ▶ Beginning with a *limited number of provider resources and incentives*. North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, and Vermont initially took this approach – even though, it should be noted, this approach apparently did not work well for Missouri’s QRIS leaders, as cited earlier (Thornburg & Mauzy, 2012). Oklahoma had quality improvement grants and scholarships available when it launched its Reaching for the Stars initiative. Over the next 10 years, in response to demonstrated need, the state added a wage supplement program, onsite technical assistance, specialized consultation, a director’s leadership academy, and training on the environment rating scales.
- ▶ Targeting provider outreach, incentives, and supports to particular communities or providers, such as those serving large numbers of low-income children. Colorado's Qualistar QRIS took this approach.
- ▶ Relying on administrative data (e.g., links to data from licensing or a professional development registry or another third-party source) and self-assessments, rather than requiring the collection of new data, or limiting time spent onsite (e.g., conducting Environmental Rating Scale classroom assessments only when providers apply for higher quality levels). When Pennsylvania’s process evaluation revealed that making technical

assistance "responsive" rather than automatic was a wiser use of resources, taking their pilot statewide became more feasible.

## Strategies Based on Implementation Science

Implementation science also should be taken into account, especially when the focus is on evidence-based and evidence-informed innovations. Implementation is defined as *a specified set of activities* designed to put into practice an activity or program of *known dimensions*. According to Metz and Halle (2001), this framework asks us to consider:

### The "What"

- ▶ Identify effective strategies that will improve child outcomes in ECE.
  - What are the needs of your population?
  - What interventions are available to address those needs?
  - What is the strength of the evidence of those interventions?
  - Which interventions are a good fit for your community?
  - Do we have what is required to fully and effectively implement these interventions?

### The "How"

- ▶ Install the Implementation Drivers that result in competence and sustainability.
- ▶ Conduct 'stage-related' work necessary for successful service and system change.
- ▶ Institute "improvement cycles," align systems, and scale-up implementation capacity.
  - Is this the right approach for this community? For our needs?
  - Is this approach ready for replication?
  - Has the approach been clearly described and operationalized? Are there fidelity measures or ways to assess performance?
  - Do we have what is required to fully and effectively implement this approach?

### *The “Who”*

- ▶ Understand the roles and responsibilities of program developers, purveyors, technical assistance providers, and implementation teams.

To move a Texas QRIS from conceptualization to practice will require a cadre of individuals. In the process of taking a statewide QRIS to scale, individuals, organizations, and systems will each need support. Implementation science emphasizes putting together people with the right skill sets for this phase of creating a viable and effective QRIS (Metz & Halle, 2010) and notes the importance of also remembering to scale up one’s implementation infrastructure (Halle, 2012). Minnesota, a RTT-ELC state, is using implementation science as part of its QRIS expansion in tandem with other project management tools. Specifically, they are using implementation science to identify stages of implementation and provide a framework for planning and reflection (Swenson-Klatt, 2012).

The point being underscored here is that implementation decisions should not solely be driven by money - or its lack.

## VIII. COSTS AND FINANCING – FRAMING DECISION-MAKING

Information about total cost of a statewide QRIS is difficult to obtain. Tools to support states in finding answers are available, however, and there also is considerable state experience that can be called upon when tackling this important task. Similar to the design sections on Effective Data Practices and Implementation, this section does not propose specific options, but rather outlines the process for coming to a reasonable projection- although a suggestion we think worthy of the Council’s attention is offered under the header “State Capacity to Fund a Texas QRIS.”. As previously highlighted, the Cost Estimation Model (CEM) offers a guide for estimating key elements and eventual cost of a QRIS in a given state. Additionally, work is underway by Mitchell to develop a cost projection model for estimating the cost to providers at each level of a QRIS.

Preparing a cost analysis typically begins with projections of start up, maintenance, and long term costs to meet specified QRIS goals and objectives. Typically, a first step is mapping current state investments in supports and services – including investments being made by a state’s multiple quality improvement initiatives - with an eye to how these investments might be directed/re-directed so aligned with the new system’s vision and goals. This exercise is facilitated by having an agreed upon logic model accompanied by key assumptions.

Nonetheless, available and projected funding often force states to make decisions about the approach it wants to take for the system’s major components (e.g., standards, monitoring, provider supports, incentives, consumer education). One approach is taking the funding that is known to be available, defining “must have” investments, and prioritizing remaining investments. Another approach is estimating total cost, assuming all investments are “must have,” and seeking additional funding sources.

Rarely do states have a QRIS “line item.” Reported expenditures often are embedded in the overall child care system, such as the licensing or subsidy program, professional development and technical assistance systems, and other services and supports (Compendium State Profiles, 2010; QRIS Resource Guide). Texas will also want to look at the expenditures of local initiatives, and when tied to TRS, the additional private funds that are being brought to bear.

Investigating states’ average expenditures on their QRIS found wide variation in how they calculated/reported “overall funding amount for most recent fiscal year.” The variance seems related to how a state approached the question. Some states seemed to respond with information about additional funds that were allocated for activities not financially supported prior to the onset of the QRIS, such as additional technical assistance, incentives, and consumer education. Other states (seemingly the more “mature QRIS states”) appeared to total all funds used to support their ECE system. With these caveats, here is what was learned:

- ▶ For six states plus the District of Columbia, costs ranged from approximately \$1M (New Mexico; Colorado; D.C.; Vermont; Virginia; Mississippi) to \$179M (Oklahoma).
- ▶ More mature QRIS reported: Pennsylvania \$79M; Tennessee \$44M; Oklahoma \$179M

## State Capacity to Fund a Texas QRIS

Before identifying the catalog of cost and financing questions, with which many Council members and staff are likely to be familiar, the issue of Texas' current capacity to fund a statewide QRIS needs to be addressed. It should come as no surprise that the State's present fiscal circumstances suggest limited availability of surplus funds. Few Interviewees familiar with the State's financial status and politics were optimistic about new funding. Additionally, many State Legislators are learning about the importance of quality ECE programs and becoming familiar with QRIS. Yet taking a QRIS to scale can rarely be achieved without public funding.

Approximately one-half of states with a QRIS implement it as authorized by a legislative body. In these instances, implementation language typically is limited so program standards and specific QRIS policies can change over time.

In some cases, states have stand-alone statutes, such as the very specific language of Delaware. Delaware outlines each QRIS component, including elements of quality that the system should measure. In other cases, QRIS language is less explicit and is embedded in rules and/or regulations related to licensing. New Mexico and Michigan are two such states. New Hampshire does not have a state statute tied to QRIS implementation, but the state QRIS is recognized in a statute related to the Tiered Reimbursement system that the state implements.

In states where QRIS is explicitly discussed in statute, administrative agencies responsible for system design, development, and implementation typically are included in these authorizations. In Kentucky, the statute identifies the state's Early Childhood Development Authority. In Delaware, the statute identifies the state department of education as the lead agency.

The role of advocacy and public will surfaced in numerous interviews, especially as it relates to the apparent struggle between access and quality, as reflected in the use of the State's Child Care Development Fund quality set-aside dollars. Few Interviewees felt sufficient funding for a sustainable system can be secured in the absence of legislation.

Thinking more broadly, though, Texas has a number of large corporations and private funders, offering the opportunity to consider private-public partnerships on a larger scale than presently seems to exist. There's even the possibility of creating a fund of sufficient size that it would generate ongoing revenue in support of a statewide QRIS as part of the Council's forthcoming marketing campaign to elevate understanding of school readiness – an idea we think worthy of further exploration.

There also is the option of maximizing existing funds through consolidation, prioritization, reallocation or reduction of redundancies - this presumes, though, that flexibility exists to consider this option. Further, it assumes a level of cross-agency collaboration that may not be present.

Most states use a variety of state and federal funding streams to support QRIS. While the majority of funds are allocated through agencies overseeing child care, other funding comes through sources such as license plate fees (Vermont) or taxes on tobacco (Arizona). In these instances, new revenue streams dedicated to the development and/or sustainability of a QRIS were created by engaging stakeholders and developing long-range plans to create new revenue through ballot initiatives, special fees, or taxes (QRIS Resource Guide).

Delaware uses both public and private dollars to support the funding of its QRIS. In the Delaware system, Child Care Development Fund dollars finance the QRIS infrastructure and personnel. Private donations assist in implementation of improvement grants, quality awards, and provider stipends. While Texas has indicated sensitivity to uneven availability of funds outside of the State's urban areas, many QRIS rely on locally driven supports within their statewide QRIS. For example, in Virginia, one of the pilot sites uses private sector dollars to support implementation at

the local level. A community foundation provides financing for staff scholarships in participating QRIS programs. Leveraging of additional dollars is being attempted through an “Adopt a Center” program marketed to local businesses. While this approach is energizing to some, it also is a less reliable source of income for a system needing stability to be effective. It also can create tensions with communities that have fewer financial resources (confidential personal communication).

If this approach were to be considered, the use of private dollars should be deliberated as the QRIS is being designed. When asked, Interviewees didn’t identify the presence of business champions, an approach used in other states, especially for building public and legislative support for PreK (Pew Center on the States, 2011), but this might be something the Council would want to consider. Early childhood business champions seem to exist as evidenced by San Antonio’s Mayor Julián Castro’s Brainpower Initiative Task Force chaired by USAA CEO Joe Robles and H-E-B Chairman and CEO Charles Butt, which proposed a sales tax to fund PreK (Blaugh, 2012; Express News Editorial Board, 2012). On August 9<sup>th</sup>, San Antonio’s City Council unanimously approved the Mayor’s Pre-K 4 SA ballot initiative (Thomas, 2012) and voters endorsed the initiative on November 6, 2012 (Baugh & Cesar, 2012).

## **QRIS Components that Require Funding**

The QRIS Resource Guide identifies seven design, implementation, and evaluation elements that should be considered to develop a realistic estimation of the funding that will be needed to develop and sustain a QRIS, each of which is explored in turn.

1. Strategic Planning and Design
2. Development of Quality Standards
3. Implementation Approach
4. Accountability and Monitoring
5. Provider Supports and Incentives
6. Consumer Education and Marketing

## 7. Data Collection and Evaluation

### Strategic Planning and Design

Stakeholder engagement in a strategic planning process establishes common understanding and support for a QRIS. The planning process, which presently is underway in Texas, should result in a shared vision and logic model, as well as establish recommendations for all major QRIS components. Beyond funding for the process to arrive at recommendations, funding may be needed to support:

- ▶ Data collection and analysis to establish a baseline of the quality and overall demographics of the early childhood workforce, some of which may be answered by the Statewide Needs Assessment recently completed.
- ▶ Staff/consultant time to develop RFP's that may be needed to support future QRIS development and implementation activities.

### *Quality Standards*

QRIS standards provide the basis for measuring and assessing the quality level awarded to individual programs. Their content drives costs for monitoring, provider supports, data collection, and evaluation. Given their centrality, the standards development process tends to require significant amounts of time and resources. Funding may be needed to support:

- ▶ An expert consultant to develop QRIS standards and facilitate stakeholder engagement activities.
- ▶ Staff time and travel to participate in QRIS standards development and stakeholder engagement activities.
- ▶ Stakeholder engagement activities, including meetings, parent and provider focus groups, plus website and other electronic communication methods.

- ▶ A QRIS validation study to assess whether the QRIS standards are accurate indicators of program quality (Zellman & Fiene, 2012).

### *Implementation Approach*

Implementation decisions directly impact initial and ongoing costs, and the Cost Estimation Model (CEM) can be used for testing the impact of these decisions. When projecting costs, the Council will want to consider:

- ▶ Will the QRIS be initially launched as a pilot? If so, how long will the pilot last, and how many and what type providers will participate?
- ▶ Will an evaluation study be conducted of the pilot? Will the revised design be further field-tested (e.g., via a demonstration project) prior to the system's launch?
- ▶ Will the statewide launch be phased (options include phasing in by region or by type of provider)?
- ▶ What goals are associated with each phase of the QRIS launch?
- ▶ What is the annual goal for percentage of providers who move to the next higher level of quality?
- ▶ Will providers be able to enroll in the QRIS at any time, or will specific enrollment cycles be established?

### *Accountability and Monitoring*

Significant funding implications are associated with decisions related to measuring and documenting compliance with QRIS standards and criteria. When developing its funding strategy for this function, the Council will want to consider:

- ▶ How will providers apply to and be approved for participation in the State's QRIS?
- ▶ What state agency or private entity will be responsible for receiving and approving QRIS applications and what costs will be associated with performing this function?

- ▶ Will there be on-site observations? If so, who will be responsible for conducting these visits?
- ▶ How much training will be needed to bring assessors to a designated level of reliability? How often do assessors need to demonstrate their reliability and by what process?
- ▶ What percentage of classrooms (for center-based programs) will be assessed and/or monitored following award of a rating?
- ▶ How frequently will monitoring occur?
- ▶ What monitoring tools will be used? Is special training required for their use?
- ▶ What administrative involvement is needed to support this QRIS function (e.g. how will provider appeals be handled)?

Depending on the Council's recommendations, funding may be needed to support:

- ▶ Staff time to develop, process, and approve QRIS applications.
- ▶ Staff time to develop and maintain QRIS monitoring tools.
- ▶ Assessor training and on-going reliability checks.
- ▶ Staff time to conduct and document QRIS monitoring.
- ▶ Staff/consultant time to conduct on-site program assessment (e.g., ECERS, CLASS, TBRS, and so forth).
- ▶ Training and supervision of assessors and/or monitors.
- ▶ Administrative costs associated with tracking and reporting QRIS monitoring activities and provider compliance.

### *Provider Supports and Incentives*

As previously highlighted, states vary considerably in their approach to provider supports and incentive investments. Depending on the Council's recommendations in this regard, funding may be needed to support:

- ▶ Professional Development, including scholarships/financial assistance for higher education and credentialing.
- ▶ Technical Assistance (TA), including onsite coaching/mentoring (the amount of funding for this activity will vary widely based on intensity and duration of TA); onsite and/or remote assistance with the QRIS application and rating process; QRIS provider orientation sessions.
- ▶ Training, including development of training curricula aligned with QRIS standards; ongoing training sessions aligned to QRIS standards.
- ▶ Incentives, including the possibility of program/facility improvement grants; higher subsidy reimbursement rates; one time or annual cash incentives for increasing or maintaining a quality level; wage supplements.

### *Consumer Education and Marketing*

QRIS consumer education and marketing campaigns are developed to educate parents and consumers, recruit providers, and build support among policymakers, state and community leaders, and funders. Given the Council's forthcoming campaign to promote statewide awareness of school readiness, some of these questions may already be under consideration.

Funding may be needed to support:

- ▶ An expert communications/marketing group to develop a communications strategy and QRIS marketing strategy, logo, messaging, materials – which the Council already has indicated its intent to do.
- ▶ Parent and provider focus groups.
- ▶ Materials printing and distribution.
- ▶ Community outreach and engagement activities.
- ▶ Website development and maintenance.
- ▶ Provider marketing tool-kits.

### *Data Collection and Evaluation*

Data collection efforts can support all of the elements discussed above, as well as provide information that informs evaluation and continuous quality improvement of a QRIS, both in terms of its operational effectiveness and systems impact. It is important to consider how data collection and evaluation will be funded during the initial QRIS planning stage and not assume this aspect can be addressed at a later time. This was part of the Council's intent in developing TOTS - so this may not be a new insight for Council members.

For Data Collection, funding may be needed to support:

- ▶ Assessment and data mapping of current early childhood data systems – much, if not all of which, the Council did as part of TOTS.
- ▶ Enhancement and integration of current data systems (or develop and integrate new data systems) – a task being addressed by the Council's recommendations to Governor Perry regarding development of a comprehensive data system for ECE (Texas Early Learning Council, 2012).
- ▶ Administrative costs associated with ongoing maintenance, support and enhancement of data systems.
- ▶ User training and ongoing user support.
- ▶ Data reporting and analysis.
- ▶ Policy and other briefs to inform policymakers and others of progress and results from the state's QRIS.

For Evaluation, decisions about how and when to evaluate the State's QRIS will directly impact initial and ongoing costs (Lugo-Gil, Sattar, Ross, Boller, & Kirby, 2011). When developing a funding strategy for a QRIS evaluation, the following questions need to be considered:

- ▶ Will a QRIS validation study be completed?
- ▶ Will a QRIS pilot study be completed?

- ▶ Will a formative evaluation (an evaluation designed to monitor QRIS program implementation and inform continuous quality improvement) be conducted?
- ▶ Will an evaluation be conducted on the system's impact (Coffman, 2012)?
- ▶ At what point(s) will evaluation take place? Is there existing data that can be used? What new data has to be collected and how will it be collected – through interviews, observations, and/or surveys?
- ▶ Will a summative evaluation (an evaluation designed to assess QRIS outcomes) be completed? If so, at what point(s) will evaluation(s) take place? Is existing data available? Are there additional data needs? If so, how will it be collected?
  - Large, representative sample?
  - Multiple data collection waves?
  - Direct child assessments?

Given the above considerations, as well as the strategic questions that await the Council's decisions, projecting a cost for a statewide Texas QRIS at this stage of QRIS strategic planning process is difficult. Most notably, agreement on and commitment to a logic model is needed to finalize a more definitive cost estimate for a new, statewide Texas QRIS. Logic models highlight the activities that will be major cost drivers of a state's QRIS.

The major cost drivers of a QRIS tend to be provider supports/incentives and monitoring/accountability efforts. For example, should the Council chose to use a "portfolio of measures" (as proposed in Part II, Section II) instead of relying on a single assessment measure, a significant cost increase would be expected. As another example, decisions about which programs receive technical assistance, how the technical assistance is delivered, and how often it is provided will each have significant impact on the cost of a Texas QRIS. Additionally, decisions regarding which early childhood sectors are included, the priority assigned to each sector in the rollout, and

anticipated participation levels from each sector will each have significant impact on the potential costs. The importance of these decisions as they relate to a cost analysis cannot be overstated.

In order to offer a cost estimate, critical assumptions had to be made. In conjunction with these assumptions, the QRIS Cost Estimation Model (CEM) tool, developed by Anne Mitchell of the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance and adapted as a publicly accessible web-based tool by the National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC), was used to estimate the costs of a statewide Texas QRIS.

Immediately following is a summary estimate of the start-up and ongoing costs over 5 years. A much more detailed cost estimate, including assumptions, can be found in Appendix H.

	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>	<b>Year 5</b>	
	<b>PLANNING</b>	<b>PILOT</b>	<b>TRANSITION</b>	<b>ONGOING</b>	<b>ONGOING</b>	<b>Total 5 year cost</b>
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$870,000</b>	<b>\$929,500</b>	<b>\$29,513,500</b>	<b>\$39,502,500</b>	<b>\$45,174,810</b>	<b>\$115,990,310</b>

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## CONCLUSION

The Council has expressed five expectations for a Texas QRIS:

1. It should demonstrably improve the school readiness of Texas' youngest citizens.
2. The system's design should unify ECE programs around a shared understanding of program quality.
3. The system, to the extent possible, should build on the strengths of the State's statewide and local quality improvement initiatives.
4. The system's design should be evidence-based to the degree possible.
5. A Texas QRIS should demonstrate child outcomes related to children's school readiness.

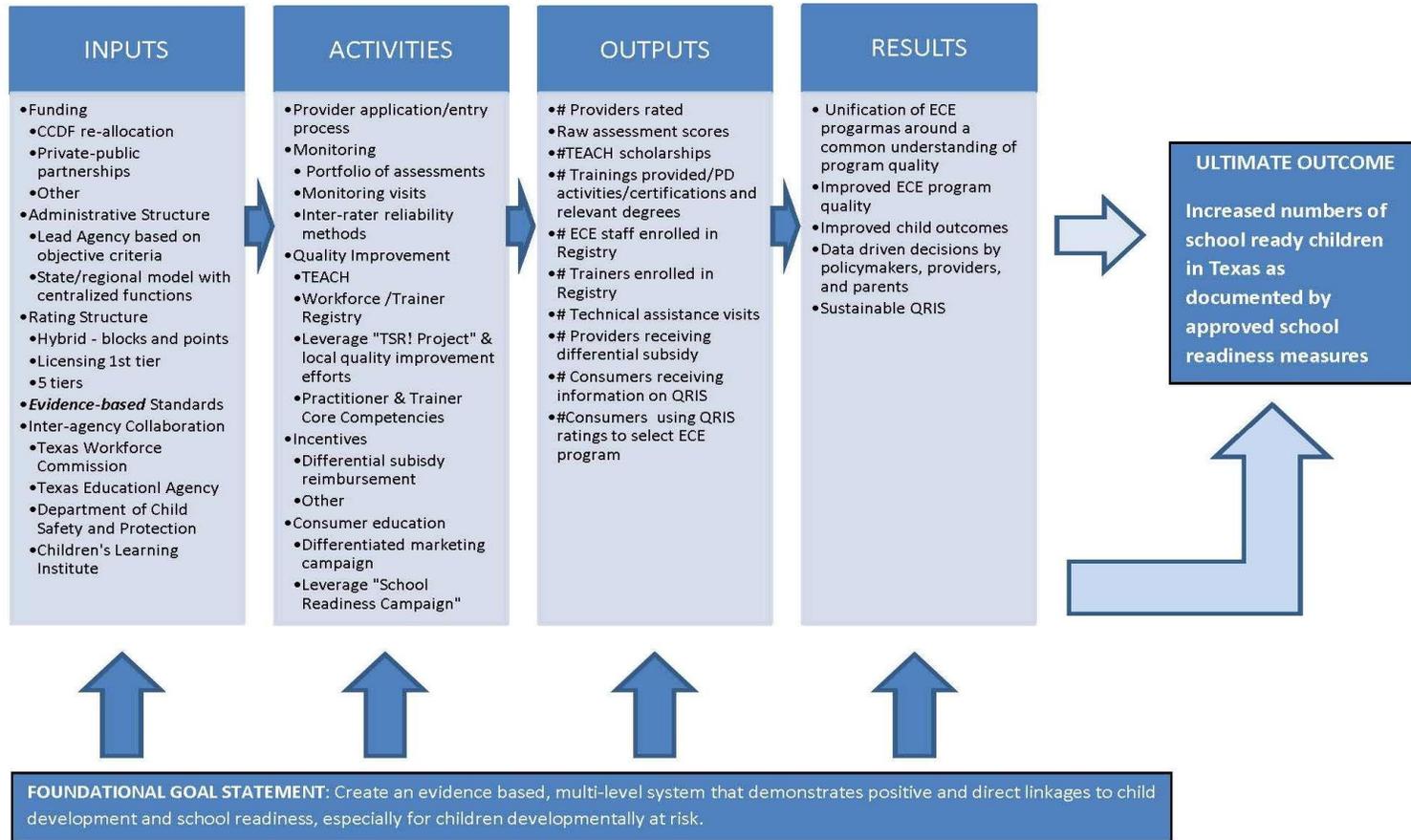
The Council also has expressed strong interest in exercising leadership in the nation's movement toward making QRIS a centerpiece of states' integrated ECE systems.

Preparing a Strategic Plan is one step toward this vision, along with an ambitious Council agenda intended to move forward the State's system-building efforts. Organized by questions posed in the Council's Working Paper (2011) and its QRIS RFP (2012) and informed by phone interviews with stakeholders, statewide electronic surveys and stakeholder meetings, a literature review examining the relationship between the Council's suggested quality indicators and child outcomes, a review of QRIS-related documents, including QRIS practices across the country, the Strategic Plan first set the context for the Council's deliberations and decision-making, identified QRIS trends, findings, and questions, and most importantly, identified first-order strategic issues needing Council members' deliberation. It then delved into design questions, offering 17 proposals and context for creating a Texas QRIS. Specifically, these proposals responded to the Council's questions about the system's potential (1) scope; (2) child-program assessment; (3) administration; (4) structure; (5) quality assurance; (6) effective data practices; (7) implementation; and (8) costs and financing.

As discussed in Part I of the Strategic Plan, the Council's desired results and highest order desired outcome is aspirational in the context of what presently is known about effective QRIS design and evidence-based outcomes. This reality requires the Council to step into its decision-making role with vision, innovative thinking, and persistence. In service to the Council's decision-making, a potential logic model that captures the Strategic Plan's proposals is presented on the following page.

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### Texas QRIS Aspirational Logic Model with Strategic Plan's 17 Proposals



TERMS	DEFINITIONS
Inputs	Resources invested in the QRIS
Activities	Actions and processes that are implemented to support QRIS
Outputs	Results of the QRIS activities; typically described in quantitative measures
Results	Consequences of the QRIS activities; typically associated with qualitative measures
Ultimate Outcome	Highest order, desired outcome

The Council has created an exciting but also challenging opportunity. In its conclusion, the Council Working Paper (2011) reminded readers: “Designing a QRIS for Texas requires patience, research, and significant stakeholder engagement. The Council is well-positioned to create a system that is inclusive of sectors involved and has the resources to engage significant stakeholders in the development of the system” (p. 21). We couldn’t agree more.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: TEXAS QRIS STRATEGIC PLAN REFERENCES

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## APPENDIX B: TEXAS QRIS STRATEGIC PLAN PROPOSALS

A total of 17 proposals or options are offered. They are presented below under their organizing headers: I. Scope of a Texas QRIS; II. Child-Program Assessment; III. Administration; IV. Structure; and V. Quality Assurance. Three of the eight design sections – Effective Data Practices, Implementation, and Costs and Financing – are addressed differently. These three sections provide framing information to focus the Council’s considerations, while also linking these considerations to system-building efforts underway or forthcoming (e.g., TOTS, TEXAS Community Campaign for School Readiness). As a result, they are not included as part of this compilation. However, suggestions from these sections or from stakeholders that we think worthy of the Council’s consideration are listed following the last proposal under “QRIS Suggestions of Interest.”

### I. SCOPE OF A TEXAS QRIS – 2 Proposals

#### ***1a. Should a Texas QRIS be a birth to five system or birth to 13 to encompass after-school child care programs?***

**Proposal:** Focus a Texas QRIS on programs serving children from birth to the start of kindergarten.

This question basically was answered by the Council’s application for federal funds that states the intent to construct a Texas QRIS that is linked to outcomes in kindergarten (Texas State Advisory Council on Childhood Education and Care, 2010, p. 36).

#### ***1b. What sectors should be included in a Texas QRIS?***

**Proposal:** Allow all ECE programs, regardless of sector, to voluntarily participate. In terms of implementation and resource allocation, however, prioritize uptake by those sectors of highest interest to the Council and its stakeholders.

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## II. CHILD-PROGRAM ASSESSMENT – 2 Proposals

### ***2a. What Quality Indicators Should Be Included?***

**Proposal:** In light of limited research evidence to support the Subcommittee’s suggested program quality indicators, this question was identified earlier as a first-order issue for the Council’s consideration. The Council should consider (1) what additional decision criteria address its commitments to what a Texas QRIS should accomplish, using Guiding Principles and the logic model as informants, and/or (2) if some of the suggested program quality indicators, such as evidence of child abuse, might more appropriately be part of the foundation provided by the State’s licensing standards.

By way of an example, in its standards selection process, Massachusetts identified as criteria a strong research base; alignment with research based observational measures; availability of an objective basis for documentation; inclusion in other states’ QRIS; and articulation by stakeholders that standards reflect best practice (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2012).

### ***2b. How Should QRIS Standards Be Assessed?***

**Proposal:** In support of an evidence-based QRIS associated with school readiness outcomes, a Texas QRIS should consider a portfolio of measures for assessing its standards, relying on availability of current evidence to inform its selection of measures. Given available evidence and QRIS practice across the country, options might include the ECERS, CLASS, TBRIS (Teacher Behavior Rating Scale), PAS/BAS (Program Administrator Scale/Business Administration Scale), and Family Strengthening Checklist - though these are not fully inclusive of the components listed as part of the Council’s school readiness definition. To ensure valid results, especially given the State’s changing demographics, measures’ cultural sensitivity should be taken into account.

This proposal comes with limitations, however, including: greater cost implications; increased training for assessors and tracking of individual and inter-rater reliability; a greater administrative burden in terms of operational and time commitments; and possible perception of an overly prescriptive system.

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### III. ADMINISTRATION – 2 Proposals

#### ***3a. What criteria should be considered in identifying an administrative agency or organization for a Texas QRIS?***

**Proposal:** Given the breadth of opinions and affect associated with them, as well as the politicized context for this decision, the Council should consider identifying objective criteria for selecting an administrative agency. The option of a state agency subcontracting the work to another entity could also be considered.

#### ***3b. How might a Texas QRIS be administered? Do all administrative functions need to be centralized? What functions could be decentralized? Where could responsibility for decentralized functions reside?***

**Proposal:** Finding a way to create a “both-and”- in terms of (1) involving the array of quality-improvement initiatives and responding to regional and local variations, while at the same time (2) bringing increased consistency, cohesion, and comparable competence to the State’s splintered ECE delivery system has been central to this project since its inception. Although still needing the benefit of the Council’s decision-making regarding which functions should be centralized and which should be decentralized, proposed is a state-regional model with a strong, centralized QRIS “spine” that includes features essential to ensuring the system’s credibility, reliability, and validity. These might include functions such as establishing QRIS standards, criteria, and rating levels; training on-site observers/assessors; setting program training requirements; program monitoring; managing the appeals process; serving as a hub for QRIS-related data;

overseeing QRIS-related research, and in general overseeing the system's effective functioning and progress.

Other functions, such as marketing to families and providers, providing training, coaching, and mentoring (aligning these efforts with the new core competencies for coaches and mentors and Early Childhood Workforce Registry – which includes the Texas Trainer Registry) and supporting programs during the application process could be performed regionally by organizations and agencies from across the State selected by an RFP or other process. Based on a regional map of the State, selection could be based on criteria addressing issues such as capacity, content expertise that complements the State's standards and criteria, and documented ability to perform the functions being requested.

One Interviewee made a distinction between governance and administration – suggesting that a governance body might be created, not unlike the Texas P-20 Council. While the P-20 Council has limited authority, it governs data sharing across traditional P-12 schools and higher education. Proposed members would be a designee appointed by the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Speaker of the House plus Cabinet representatives from the Texas Workforce Commission, Department of Family and Protective Service, and TEA. Explicit policy decisions would be delegated to this group, which in turn, could be assigned responsibility for selecting an administrative body.

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## IV. STRUCTURE – 10 Proposals

### ***4a. Should child care licensure be a pre-requisite for participation in a Texas QRIS or be designated as the first tier of the new system?***

**Proposal:** By way of providing context, Texas' child care licensure is broadly inclusive. In terms of its standards for child care centers, it is ranked 16th nationally (while ranked relatively high on program oversight, Texas is 29th on regulations). The State's standards for family home care providers are ranked 43rd, in part because home providers can be licensed and care for children without a prior inspection (NACCRRA, 2010, 2011).

If all levels of a Texas QRIS are to be focused on preparing school ready children, basing the system on meeting minimal health and safety standards could send a mixed message. At a minimum, though, a Texas QRIS should require licensure as a prerequisite, thereby clearly indicating that basic health and safety standards provide a foundation for program quality.

To some extent, this question confronts the Council with a decision on “access by whom,” given that a significant number of children in Texas are served in family, friend, and neighbor care (some state QRIS offer incentives to engage these care settings). Another consideration is that TRS ranks licensed programs at level 1, and the State legislature historically has not been disposed to setting stricter regulatory standards – although TRS child care teacher and administrator training requirements were increased during the last session (Jones, 2012). Going against these traditions could arouse resistance.

#### ***4b. How many tiers should define a Texas QRIS?***

**Proposal:** Texas Rising Star (TRS) is the State’s only statewide QRIS. As a result, its system is best known, especially by the child care sector. Retaining the same number of quality tiers (4, including level 1 that is assigned to all licensed programs) would provide some degree of continuity with the new system. A decision in this regard will be tied to whether the Council recommends continuing the practice of automatically ranking licensed programs as the first tier, which is addressed in 4a. and moving to a hybrid rating system, as suggested in 4c.

#### ***4c. Should recognition for reaching higher QRIS quality tiers be based on a building block structure, point system, or hybrid model?***

**Proposal:** A hybrid model that uses a block structure for the first three tiers is suggested. To the extent that research exists, these first three tiers should incorporate standards that can improve programs to a level needed to promote school readiness. Relying on a point system for the top two tiers, standards could focus on strengthening programs’ ability to support children’s school readiness, individualize their programs in response to community and program approaches to early

learning or accentuate strengths (such as inclusion of young children with disabilities or family engagement), as long as these strengths are associated with evidence-based practices and aligned with the State's early learning guidelines.

Building on this last idea, the top two tiers could be focused on incorporating the State's early learning guidelines for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. As QRISs become more focused on facilitating children's school readiness, attention is being directed to the relationship between QRIS standards and children's readiness for kindergarten.

This proposal, however, requires revisiting 4b (the number of tiers for a Texas QRIS), which suggested retaining the current tier structure of TRS as a way to facilitate transition to the new system. If, from a pragmatic standpoint, licensure is retained as the first tier - even though its standards seemingly are directed more to basic health and safety standards than to program quality - five, vs. four, tiers will be required to achieve the hybrid model being proposed. If some form of continuity with TRS is desired, the choice being offered here is between keeping the same number of levels or retaining facility licensure as the first tier. In light of stakeholder input regarding the latter and the likely gap between existing licensing standards and the State's school readiness aspirations, a five-tiered, hybrid system would seem preferable as a choice.

***4d. Should participating programs be held accountable to the same standards and/or process?***

**Proposal:** Creating a system that steers all programs to providing a level of quality associated with preparing school ready children suggests all participants should be held accountable to similar standards, with the possible exception of licensed and registered child care homes.

This proposal quickly raises questions about how to address Head Start and publicly funded PreK. Given the wide-range of co-existing program standards in the State, holding all programs accountable to similar standards will necessitate aligning standards across programs. As it relates

to Head Start in particular, the Council's forthcoming Crosswalk offers a vehicle for comparing program standards and getting to alignment. Given the lack of standards for publicly funded PreK, however, a different intervention is needed.

Head Start programs already are required to meet the State's licensing standards as well as extensive federal standards. In light of these facts, and based on a Crosswalk of Head Start's standards with the State's QRIS standards, the Council should consider automatically placing Head Start programs – once verified as in compliance with federal standards - at the system's corresponding/aligned level of quality. This decision would encourage participation by Head Start programs by streamlining the process and reducing duplication of effort while also fostering consistency in program expectations across the State.

The State's public PreK programs, while regulated, are subject to limited standards. This negates the possibility of using an approach similar to what was just proposed for Head Start programs. While acknowledging this next suggestion will be controversial and touch upon issues of mandates and local control, if statewide consistency across ECE programs is a priority, the Council should consider the model offered by Vermont and Pennsylvania, which requires publicly funded PreK programs to be at a designated star level in order to receive public funding. This model, if of interest, could be phased in after the State's QRIS is established and PreK programs have had opportunities to voluntarily engage with the system.

Together, these proposals promote a statewide standard, facilitate consistency across the State's ECE programs, and make the rating system more understandable to parents.

***4e. Should nationally accredited programs be included in the system? If so, how?***

**Proposal:** TRS automatically rates accredited child care programs at level 4 –regardless of the organization offering the accreditation. Because of the wide range in accreditation systems

endorsed by TRS, this is potentially problematic since these systems vary considerably in their standards and accountability processes, introducing additional variability into a QRIS.

In determining how it wants to respond to this question, the Council should consider the approach proposed for Head Start programs: cross-walking each accreditation system's program standards with Texas' QRIS standards and awarding the corresponding level to accredited programs. This practice would acknowledge programs' efforts to demonstrate program quality as determined by their national organizations, minimize duplication of effort, and avoid the complexity of adding points for what, in essence, is a variation on a QRIS.

The Council will want to be mindful that participation by Texas programs in national accreditation systems is limited, covering less than 4% of eligible providers in the State (Council Working Paper, 2011, p. 5). Finally, to our knowledge, no research has been conducted with the specific intent of examining the relationship between national accreditation systems and child outcomes.

#### ***4f. Should a Texas QRIS include Technical Assistance?***

**Proposal:** Technical assistance (TA) should be included as part of a Texas QRIS. Going beyond direct assistance to programs, providers, and teaching staff, QRIS Technical Assistance is broadly defined as support activities that promote program quality, including coaching and mentoring, professional development opportunities, and program development incentives. In light of the State's funding challenges, the Council might want to target resources based on a participating program's level of quality or a community's need for more programs of high quality, which could be informed by results from the Statewide Needs Assessment.

As part of their RTT-ELC applications, some states proposed mapping the overlap of availability of 4 and 5 Star programs and communities with large numbers of high-need children. Others proposed targeting community-based programs in low-performing school districts. Still another variation proposed was targeting dollars to "high need" communities (Stoney, 2012).

**Proposal:** Maximize the State’s forthcoming Trainer Registry (1) to organize and publicize training opportunities aligned with the State’s core competencies, early learning guidelines, and definition of school readiness for QRIS participants and (2) to safeguard the quality and consistency of training being provided.

**Proposal:** Expand the availability of Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H) scholarships (which also can function as an incentive), aligning their access to decisions regarding where/how TA dollars are targeted, and coordinating with the State’s ECE career ladder and Council’s Articulation initiative.

**Proposal:** Texas has a diverse array of community-based quality improvement initiatives, many of which have private financing. Consider targeting their efforts toward TA. These efforts, though, should be aligned with the State’s QRIS standards and Professional Development system, and private-public partnerships should be created in a way to ensure statewide “coverage.” Deserving special mention in this regard is the Texas School Ready!™ Project. The State’s most developed and evidence based coaching and mentoring system: it is multi-sector and also has statewide capacity.

**Proposal:** Most states rely on Child Care Development Fund quality-set-aside dollars to fund TA and other system enhancements. Consider the pros and cons of recommending that a proportion of these federal dollars be re- allocated to program quality versus only to child care subsidy.

***4g. Should a Texas QRIS assign a different subsidy rate to each star level?***

**Proposal:** Higher levels of program quality involve higher costs than low quality programs. Programs may be less likely to participate if reasonable correspondence does not exist between the cost of delivering higher quality care and the payment rate per child. This reality especially has consequences for programs serving subsidized, low-income children (an issue raised in multiple

interviews). To promote broad participation and support the increased costs of higher program quality, tiered reimbursements should be part of a Texas QRIS.

***4h. Are there incentives beyond Technical Assistance and differential reimbursement that should be considered?***

**Proposal:** States offer a range of incentives. Incentives typically are context specific. In determining incentives of interest, therefore, the Council should examine not only what other states are doing but also glean insights from focus groups conducted by an agency or agencies involved with recruiting provider participation (see Proposal j below), inclusive of cost implications.

***4i. What should be the enrollment process for participating programs?***

**Proposal:** This is a technical question with management and financial implications and should be considered in conjunction with the number of programs across the State likely to participate in the new system. The options are either open year-round enrollment or scheduled entry dates. Generally speaking, year-round enrollment with a rotating assignment schedule or specified entry dates incorporate operational efficiencies. Consequently, although scheduled entry dates can reduce providers' flexibility, we prefer them to an open enrollment process.

In deciding its response to this question, the Council also should engage with Local Work Force Boards and administrators of local QRIS to learn which enrollment process they use, as well as the pros and cons of their experiences. This would provide the Council with community-based "data" to inform its decision-making and also demonstrate respect for others' work in this arena.

***4j. What are approaches for informing parents about the quality of ECE programs? For introducing a Texas QRIS to the public, providers, and policymakers?***

**Proposal:** While numerous examples used by other states could be shared, they tend to be very context specific. The Council's forthcoming School Readiness Campaign is intended to create a new landscape in terms of understanding of and support for helping children come to kindergarten

prepared to succeed. This result should help position a statewide QRIS as a vehicle for changing ECE program quality and inform the design and implementation of a QRIS outreach campaign.

A QRIS outreach campaign should also draw on the expertise of communications and marketing agencies to research effective strategies in other states, learn more about barriers and incentives to participation and support, conduct focus groups, develop targeted messages, and implement a differentiated campaign for multiple stakeholders. The strategies chosen should leverage what is learned from the forthcoming School Readiness Campaign and promote aligned messaging.

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## V. QUALITY ASSURANCE – 1 proposal

***5a. What procedures should be considered for Self-Reports?***

***5b. How many classrooms are assessed at each site?***

***5c. How often should programs be monitored and assessed?***

***5d. What are norms for inter-rater reliability?***

***5e. Should random visits be used as part of the process?***

***5f. Should penalties exist for programs not maintaining their star level?***

**Proposal:** Considerable variability exists across states in their practices related to these six questions, and to our knowledge, no research exists on the pros and cons of different approaches. The Council's decision-making should be informed by practices from state QRISs that align with Texas' intentions for its Quality Rating and Improvement System. It is important, too, to attend to operational considerations in order to avoid overly complex processes for the system, as well as for providers.

## QRIS SUGGESTIONS OF INTEREST

### **From an Interviewee**

One Interviewee made a distinction between governance and administration – suggesting that a governance body might be created, not unlike the Texas P-20 Council. While the P-20 Council has limited authority, it governs data sharing across traditional P-12 schools and higher education. Proposed members would be a designee appointed by the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Speaker of the House plus Cabinet representatives from the Texas Workforce Commission, Department of Family and Protective Service, and TEA. Explicit policy decisions would be delegated to this group, which in turn, could be assigned responsibility for selecting an administrative body.

### **From VII. Implementation – Framing Decision-Making**

A pilot in conjunction with a phased-in approach offers a way to demonstrate the value of QRIS to stakeholders, test the system’s design, and fine-tune implementation issues. This approach, which is recommended, also offers an opportunity for beta testing. Additionally, states also are increasingly using pilots to test QRIS structural elements (QRIS Resource Compendium).

### **From VIII. Costs and Financing – Framing Decision-Making**

Thinking more broadly, though, Texas has a number of large corporations and private funders, offering the opportunity to consider private-public partnerships on a larger scale than presently seems to exist. There’s even the possibility of creating a fund of sufficient size that it would generate ongoing revenue in support of a statewide QRIS as part of the Council’s forthcoming marketing campaign to elevate understanding of school readiness – an idea we think worthy of further exploration.

## APPENDIX C: PHONE CALL INTERVIEWEES

### Interviewees' Names and Affiliations

**Barbara Alspaugh**, Contracts and Compliance Officer  
YWCA El Paso Del Norte Region

El Paso Workforce Development Board Contractee

**Shari Anderson**, Vice President of Child Care Assistance

ChildCareGroup

Houston, TX

**LaShonda Brown**, Director

Head Start State Collaboration Office

The Children's Learning Institute

Houston, TX

**April Canetto**, Vice President

Community Impact

North Texas Area United Way

Wichita Falls, TX

**David Fincher**, President

National Child Care Coalition of Texas

**Cynthia Gamez**, Acting Program Director

Workforce Solutions - Child Care Services

Workforce Solutions Capital Area

Austin, TX

**Michelle Crawford**, Director Mentor Services

Workforce Solutions – Child Care Services

Workforce Solutions Capital Area

Austin, TX

**Gina Day**, Deputy Associate Commissioner

Texas Education Agency

Austin, TX

**John Gasko**, Statewide Initiatives Director

The Children's Learning Institute

Houston, TX

**Elsa Cardenas Hagan**, President

Valley Speech & Language Learning Center

Brownsville, TX

**Kara Johnson**, President and CEO

Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition

Austin, TX

### Interviewees' Names and Affiliations

**Patricia Gonzales**, Director of Workforce Policy & Program Assistance  
Texas Workforce Commission  
Austin, TX

**Phil Warner**, Manager  
Child Care  
Texas Workforce Commission  
Austin, TX

**Regan Dobbs**, Policy Analyst  
Texas Workforce Commission  
Austin, TX

**Reagan Miller**, Deputy Division Director  
Workforce Policy & Service Delivery Branch  
Workforce Development Director  
Texas Workforce Commission  
Austin, TX

**Sasha Rasco**, Assistant Commissioner  
TX Department of Family and Protective Services  
Austin, TX

**Carol Shattuck**, President and CEO  
Collaboration for Children  
Houston, TX

**Sul Ross**, Vice President of Programs and Collaboration Development  
Collaboration for Children  
Houston, TX

**Andrea Francis**, Assistant Vice-President  
Collaboration for Children  
Houston, TX

**Jackie Taylor**, Executive Director  
Texas Association for the Education of Young Children  
Austin, TX

**Mary Throop**, Chief of Staff  
For Representative Mark Strama  
Austin, TX

**Layne Waxley**, Director  
Texas School Ready Projects  
The Texas Children's Learning Institute  
Houston, TX

**John Whitcamp**, President/CEO  
Child Care Associates  
Fort Worth, TX

**Total Number of Interviewees = 23**

## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions asked of interviewees were customized to their roles. Not every interviewee responded to the same questions. Questions listed below are a compilation of all the questions asked. They are clustered by topic; their order within each is random.

### Context

- ▶ What role, if any, does early childhood education play in the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) state agenda? Do you see a role for the TEA in a statewide QRIS?
- ▶ What 1-2 Texas-specific issues/circumstances would you identify for me as needing to be addressed by the strategic plan under consideration. In organizing your response, take into account that the strategic plan will address the QRIS program design and propose an implementation plan.
- ▶ The stated outcome of the TQRIS is 'school readiness'/'readiness to succeed in kindergarten.' How is this being defined? For example: Is it defined by KRS (formerly the SRCS! Certification system) outcomes? The early learning outcomes outlined in the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines (2008) and new Infant Toddler Early Learning Guidelines? Or, is this still an open question?
- ▶ To what extent do you think I should rely on *The Texas Plan* as an informant for the Strategic Plan?
- ▶ What is important for me to understand about Texas' for-profit child care sector as it relates to a TQRIS?
- ▶ Is anything "off the table" in terms of the Strategic Plan's recommendations? Are there any QRIS elements that the Data and QRIS Subcommittee and/or TELC strongly want to see included?

- ▶ So, now tell me about the approach to QRIS in Austin. What was the catalyst for its development? What have you learned from your design and implementation experiences? Are there features you think should be considered for inclusion in a TQRIS?
- ▶ What else do you think I should be asking you? Is there anything else you would like to bring to my attention?
- ▶ What precipitated the renaming of SRCS? Are there differences beyond a name change?
- ▶ What are the most important things for me to understand about the Texas School Ready!™ Project and the new Kindergarten Readiness System (formerly SRCS)? Do you see a role for either of these in a TQRIS?
- ▶ What role, if any, do you see for Texas Rising Star in a statewide TQRIS? What role, if any, would you see for the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment?
- ▶ This is an “out-of-the-box” question: Could you envision the Texas School Ready!™ Project expanding to provide TA to programs participating in a TQRIS?
- ▶ How familiar are legislators with QRIS? Do you think policy interest exists in improving the quality of the State’s early learning programs?
- ▶ How optimistic are you that a TQRIS could transform children’s early learning experiences, resulting in better outcomes for children?
- ▶ Many States are instituting their QRIS in legislation. Do you think the Texas legislature would be open to this possibility? What do you anticipate would be the “hot buttons” if such a request were to be made?
- ▶ What do you see as the primary policy incentives for and/or hurdles to legislative and/or gubernatorial support for a TQRIS?
- ▶ I understand that TWC is up for sunset review in 2013. Does that create implications for the conversation we’re in?

- ▶ From the Agency’s point of view, what considerations would you see as crucial for inclusion in the TQRIS Strategic Plan being submitted to TELC?
- ▶ Are there related-advocacy and/or policy discussions underway that could provide an “opening” for consideration of a TQRIS?

### **First-Order Strategic Questions**

- ▶ As evident in “Where Do We Go From Here” and the RFP, creating a statewide TQRIS will involve making hard choices. What would you identify as the most important choices that have to be made? Which of these do you anticipate as being most difficult to make? Which, if any, could be avoided in the near-term?
- ▶ What are your aspirations for Texas QRIS (TQRIS)? If forced to make a choice, what do you see as TQRIS’ primary purpose? After 5 years of implementation, what changes would you expect to see?
- ▶ In terms of change, what do you see as most important *initially*: “Lifting the floor” for program quality across the state; “raising the ceiling” for program quality across the state”; or systems change?
- ▶ In “Where Do We Go From Here?” the aspiration of “leaping ahead of QRIS pioneers” was mentioned on at least two occasions. As you envision a future TQRIS, what might “leaping ahead” look like?

### **Scope of a Texas QRIS**

- ▶ To start off, are there advantages to creating a statewide, unified Texas QRIS? Are there any disadvantages?
- ▶ What early care and education sectors/programs would you include in the TQRIS? Would you immediately include all that you’ve identified or would you phase in some sectors? In contemplating your answers, consider the various forms of home-based child care: licensed child care home; licensed child care center, and registered child care homes.

- ▶ Do you think all participating programs should be held accountable to the same standards or should the QRIS encompass multiple sets of standards, with each set associated with a different sector (e.g., licensed child care home; licensed child care center; Pre-K).
- ▶ As you're probably aware, a big question for QRISs across the country is whether programs should be required to be licensed to participate and, additionally, whether licensing should be the first level of the tiered system. Do you have thoughts on this issue?
- ▶ Do you think the 6 national accreditation systems recognized by TRS should be part of a Texas QRIS? If so, what would you recommend in terms of how participation in and/or achievement of accreditation is recognized? Given the variability across these accreditation systems, if incorporated, should they be treated equally in a TQRIS?
- ▶ A question being asked is whether a TQRIS should focus on programs serving children from birth to kindergarten – which would exclude school age programs. Thoughts?
- ▶ What in particular should I be considering as it relates to the inclusion of school-based early learning programs? How likely is it that public school early learning programs will be interested in a TQRIS? How important would incentives be and what specifically would you suggest as incentives?

### **Program Assessment**

- ▶ It's my understanding that Texas Rising Star is currently revising its criteria. Can you tell me more about this effort and if you see it fitting into the strategic planning for a TQRIS – or are these the changes presented in the May 2012 Revised Guidelines?
- ▶ What would you see as obstacles to program participation in a TQRIS? Will incentives be needed to promote participation? If so, what incentives would you propose?

### **Administration**

- ▶ What agency and/or organization would you recommend for administering TQRIS? What is the rationale for your choice? What would you identify as the strengths and weaknesses of

your recommendation? Would the administering agency need to make any changes before it could accept the responsibility?

- ▶ Do you think a Texas QRIS should be a centralized system or decentralized, utilizing the local TWC boards and local QRIS presently in place? What would you see as the pros and cons of your answer?
- ▶ So, now tell me about QualFind. What was the catalyst for its development? What have you learned from your design and implementation experiences? Are there features that you think should be included in a TQRIS?
- ▶ Do you have thoughts on how a TQRIS could address local variability while still attending to its intent to be a system that facilitates increased consistency in program quality across the State?
- ▶ Could there be a QRIS system for infants toddlers and one for PreK?
- ▶ What criteria do you think should be used for selecting an agency/organization to administer a TQRIS?
- ▶ Texas Rising Star receives mixed reviews. Can you help me understand why this might be the case?
- ▶ Could you envision a role for the Kindergarten Readiness System in a TQRIS and a partnership of some sort with TEA?
- ▶ Based on your experiences, what do you think would be the response of the Department of Families and Protective Services to a statewide TQRIS? Do you think the Department has an interest in playing a role in the system's development and/or implementation?
- ▶ There appear to be an interesting policy relationship between the Department of Families and Protective Services and the Texas Workforce Commission. How might this relationship influence the development and/or implementation of a TQRIS?

### **Structure**

- ▶ Tell me about Race for the Stars. What was the catalyst for its development? Are there features you'd recommend for a statewide TQRIS? What have you learned from your design and implementation experiences?
- ▶ What sensitivities do you think need to be brought to bear to ensure that a TQRIS is inclusive of children with special needs?

### **Implementation**

- ▶ What would you see as possible risks, barriers, and challenges that might hinder implementation?

### **Costs & Financing**

- ▶ What appears to be the state's present capacity to fund a QRIS? What appears to be the will of policymakers to endorse and implement a QRIS?
- ▶ A major hurdle for building a sustainable TQRIS is financing, especially given the current political climate. How likely do you think it is that public financial support could be secured for a statewide QRIS? Would a public-private partnership help change the equation?
- ▶ The Texas legislature, as I understand it, sets the target for number of children who receive subsidy. At one point, more dollars were available for quality improvement. Do you think there's an opportunity to revisit this issue?

## APPENDIX E: STATEWIDE SURVEY #1 QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

### Statewide Survey #1 Questions

The Texas Early Learning Council is tasked with developing recommendations for creating a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for the state of Texas.

The National Child Care and Technical Assistance Center defines QRIS as a “systematic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-aged care and education programs.” Twenty-three states currently implement some type of QRIS. These systems have grown in popularity among early care and education stakeholders in recent years.

Typically, a QRIS assigns rankings to participating child care programs that describe their level of quality (1 star, 2 star, 3 star, etc.). Parents can use this rating system to inform them in their search for early care and education programs; in some states, policymakers use this information to make funding decisions and reward programs that provide children and families higher levels of program quality; and providers can use a QRIS to drive quality improvement in their programs.

As part of developing recommendations for a Texas QRIS, the Council would like to know your thoughts on several important aspects of a QRIS. Your answers will help inform the content of the recommendations and the Council’s decision-making. We hope you will take the time to participate in this brief survey, which is one of three (3) that will be coming your way over the next six (6) months.

Thank you for sharing your time and thoughts on this important work. **Please respond to this survey by no later than Friday, July 13.**

Survey #1 Questions

**1. What is your connection to early care and education in Texas?**

Check all that apply.

- I am a parent.
- I am an early care and education teacher/provider.
- I work in early care and education administration.
- I am an early care and education advocate.
- I work in early care and education local or state policy.
- I don't know
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**2. QRIS are created to meet multiple purposes. Three are listed below. Which of these do you see as the most important reason for creating a Texas QRIS? What would you rank 2nd and 3rd?**

- Helping parents find high quality early care and education programs for their young children.
- Helping Texas early care and education providers know what steps they can take to improve quality in their program.
- Helping Texas policy makers know what early care and education programs produce the strongest outcomes for Texas children.

**3. What early care and education sectors/programs would you include in a Texas QRIS? Check all of the possibilities that you think should be included in a Texas QRIS.**

- Public and private preschool/Pre-K programs
- Head Start
- Early Head Start
- Licensed Center-based Child Care
- Registered Child Care Homes
- Listed Homes
- Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care
- I don't know

**Should all programs checked be expected to meet the same standards?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**4. An important question for QRISs across the country is whether state licensing should be identified as a minimum criterion for participating programs. The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services licenses many child care operations in the state; however, some child care homes are not required to be licensed. Additionally, while Texas public Pre-K programs are regulated by the state, they are not licensed.**

Please select the statement that best describes your opinion related to QRIS and licensed or regulated programs.

- All programs participating in a Texas QRIS should be licensed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.
- All programs participating in a Texas QRIS should be either licensed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services OR regulated by state government.
- Programs participating in a Texas QRIS should not be required to be licensed by the Department of Family and Protective Services or regulated by state government.
- I don't know

**5. Texas, like many states, must tackle many issues as it attempts to improve the quality of early care and education programs and increase children's readiness for school. What problem or challenge do you think a QRIS is MOST LIKELY to solve?**

Check only one of the possibilities listed below.

- Child outcomes
- Program development
- Parent knowledge
- Funding decisions
- Unifying standards and regulations
- I don't know

- 6. Traditionally, QRIS are designed for programs serving early childhood populations. However, some states include programs that serve children in afterschool care as well, up to age 13. What programs should a Texas QRIS include?**

Check only one of the options presented below.

- Programs that serve children birth to Kindergarten
- Programs that serve children birth through Kindergarten
- Programs that serve children birth to Age 13
- I don't know

- 7. The Texas Early Learning Council Subcommittee on Data and QRIS identified possible indicators for a Texas QRIS. Choose 8 Program Indicators that you think have the strongest possibility of producing program effects that promote children's school readiness (Please select 8 Program Indicators)**

- Group size
- Ratios
- Qualifications, certification, and degree requirements for administrators and teachers
- Facility workforce experience, training, turnover
- On-going or specialized training/continuing education
- Pay scales for employees
- Assessment
- Curriculum
- Alignment with Infant-Toddler Early Learning Guidelines and Pre-K Guidelines
- Health Screenings
- Ethnic and cultural sensitivity
- Inclusion of children with disabilities
- Program evaluation and improvement
- No abuse or neglect findings
- Nutrition
- Health and safety
- Parent involvement
- Detailed administrator assessment, consistent management practices, administrator training, & qualifications

- National accreditation
- I don't know

**8. In general, do you support creation of a statewide QRIS in Texas?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

**We appreciate you taking the time to fill out our survey. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Kara Johnson at [kjohnson@txchildren.org](mailto:kjohnson@txchildren.org). If you have questions about the Texas Early Learning Council or their work on the QRIS, you can Contact Don Titcombe at [Donald.a.titcombe@uth.tmc.edu](mailto:Donald.a.titcombe@uth.tmc.edu).**

**If you would like to be entered into the drawing for a \$50 Amazon gift card, please enter name and email address below.**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Statewide Survey #1 Responses

TX QRIS – Public Survey #1 Summary	
<b>Overall Response</b>	<p><b>SAMPLE</b></p> <p>464 surveys were returned</p> <p><b>BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ ECE Administrators: 45.5%</li><li>➤ Advocates: 31.9%</li><li>➤ Parents: 27.2%</li><li>➤ ECE Teacher/Provider: 25.9%</li><li>➤ ECE State/Local Policymakers: 14.4%</li></ul>
<b>Which of these do you see as the most important reason for creating a Texas QRIS?</b>	<p><b>OVERALL SUMMARY</b></p> <p>Overall, the responses were distributed fairly evenly across each priority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Rank 1: <b>Help parents find quality care</b></li><li>➤ Rank 2: <b>Help providers improve their programs</b></li><li>➤ Rank 3: <b>Help policy makers understand how to improve outcomes for children</b></li></ul> <p><b>SUMMARY BY RESPONDENT TYPE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ ECE Administrators ranked “helping policy makers” #1 .</li><li>➤ Advocates ranked “helping providers” as #1.</li></ul>
<b>What early care and education sectors/programs would you include in a Texas QRIS?</b>	<p><b>OVERALL SUMMARY</b></p> <p>Overall, the responses show clear preference for what sectors should be included.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>Licensed Center, PreK &gt; 90%</b></li><li>➤ <b>Head Start, Early Head Start &gt;80%</b></li><li>➤ <b>Registered Homes &gt; 78%</b></li><li>➤ <b>Listed Homes and FFN &lt; 45%</b></li></ul> <p><b>BY ROLE</b></p> <p>The responses followed the same general pattern, regardless of role of respondent.</p>

TX QRIS – Public Survey #1 Summary

Should all programs checked be expected to meet the same standards?

**OVERALL SUMMARY**

Overall, the responses showed clear preference.

- **Yes** – 74.1%
- **No** – 21.8%
- **IDK** – 4.1%

**BY ROLE**

The responses followed the same general pattern, regardless of role of respondent, with the *exception* of Advocate. They were significantly less likely to say “yes.”

Should state licensing and/or state regulation be required as a minimum criterion for participating programs?

**OVERALL SUMMARY**

Overall, the responses showed clear preference that programs must be at least regulated in order to participate. Respondents were split on whether licensing or basic regulation should be required.

- **Licensed** – 48.6%
- **Licensed OR regulated** – 42.7%
- **Neither licensed or regulated** – 6.1%
- **IDK** – 2.6%

**BY ROLE**

There were slight variations in responses depending upon role of the respondent:

- Parents and Administrators were slightly more likely to say licensed only should qualify.
- Advocates and Policy makers were slightly more likely to say licensed or regulated could qualify.

What problem or challenge do you think a QRIS is MOST LIKELY to solve?

**OVERALL RESPONSE**

- **Unifying Standards and regulations** – 39.3%
- **Child Outcomes** – 24.7%
- **Program Development** – 17.4%
- **Parent knowledge and Funding decisions** <8% each

**BY ROLE**

The responses followed same general pattern, regardless of role, with the following exceptions:

- Administrators were more likely to respond with Unifying Standards.
- Parents were more likely to respond with Child Outcomes.

TX QRIS – Public Survey #1 Summary

What programs should a Texas QRIS include?

OVERALL RESPONSE

- **Birth to K** – 23.1%
- **Birth *through* K** – 24.6%
- **Birth – 13** – 50.8%

When you combine the first two categories, it is about 47/51 split.

BY ROLE

The responses followed the same general pattern, regardless of role of respondent, with the *exceptions* that Parents and Administrators were less likely to say Birth-13.

### TX QRIS – Public Survey #1 Summary

**Choose 8 Program Indicators that you think have the strongest possibility of producing program effects that promote children’s school readiness.**

#### OVERALL RESPONSE

The top 6 indicators chosen all had >50% response rate (in descending order):

- **Curriculum** – 63.9%
- **Director and Staff Qualifications** – 63.7%
- **Training/Continuing Ed** – 61.9%
- **Program Evaluation and Improvement** – 58.4%
- **Ratios** – 57.5%
- **Parent Involvement** – 57.3%

Bottom 3 indicators chosen:

- **Health Screenings** – 15.3%
- **No abuse or neglect findings** – 18.3%
- **Inclusion of children with disabilities** – 20.3%

#### BY ROLE

- Parents were the only group that listed health and safety in top 8 and had response rate of >50%
- Teachers/Providers reported qualifications as slightly more important than curriculum
- Advocate ranked the top 4 in a different order
  - Rank 1: **Director/Staff qualifications**
  - Rank 2: **Training**
  - Rank 3: **Program Evaluation and Quality Improvement**
  - Rank 4: **Curriculum**
- Policymakers ranked the Top 6 in different order
  - Rank 1: **Director/Staff qualifications**
  - Rank 2: **Program Evaluation and Quality Improvement**
  - Rank 3: **Ratios**
  - Rank 4: **Training**
  - Rank 5: **Group Size**
  - Rank 6: **Curriculum**

**In general, do you support creation of a statewide QRIS in Texas?**

#### OVERALL RESPONSE

- **Yes** – 82%
- **No** – 5%
- **Not sure** – 13%

The responses followed the same general pattern, with Advocates and Policymakers slightly more likely to say “yes”

## STATEWIDE SURVEY #2 QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

### Statewide Survey #2 Questions

The Texas Early Learning Council is tasked with developing recommendations for creating a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for the state of Texas.

The National Child Care and Technical Assistance Center defined QRIS as a “systematic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-aged care and education programs.” Thirty-one (31) states plus the District of Columbia currently implement some type of QRIS, demonstrating the growing popularity among early care and education (ECE) stakeholders in recent years.

Typically, a QRIS assigns rankings to participating child care programs – and often to other ECE programs - that describe their level of quality (1 star, 2 star, 3 star, etc.). Parents can use this rating system to inform their search for ECE programs. In some states, policymakers use this information to make funding decisions and reward programs that provide children and families with higher levels of program quality; providers often use a QRIS to drive quality improvement in their programs.

As part of developing recommendations for a Texas QRIS, the Council would like to know your thoughts on several important aspects of a QRIS. Your answers will help inform the content of the recommendations and the Council’s decision-making. We hope you will take the time to participate in this brief survey, which is the second of three (3) coming your way between now and early October.

Thank you for sharing your time and thoughts on this important work. **Please respond to this survey by no later than Tuesday, September 18.**

Survey #2 Questions

**1. What is your connection to early care and education in Texas?**

Check all that apply.

- I am a parent.
- I am an early care and education teacher/provider.
- I work in early care and education administration.
- I am an early care and education advocate.
- I work in early care and education local or state policy.
- I don't know
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**2. The draft Texas QRIS Strategic Plan suggests 11 guiding principles for steering the Texas Early Learning Council's recommendations.**

Please review the list below and identify your top three (3) priorities. Rank them 1 through 5, with 5 representing your highest priority.

A Texas QRIS should

- Be family and child focused.
- Be available to all providers and families, with priority outreach to working families.
- Help more children be ready for school, targeting the State's most vulnerable children.
- Be understandable to families and providers.
- Be accountable.
- Foster increased integration among standards across early childhood education programs.
- Enable parents to be informed consumers when choosing among early care and education options.
- Support a mixed delivery system.
- Foster coordination and increased alignment between and among the State's quality improvement programs and services.
- Be feasible to operate and monitor.
- Be fiscally responsible and sustainable.

- 3. Texas is a large and diverse state that highly values local innovation and autonomy. At the same time, a strong desire exists to bring increased consistency to the State's diverse array of programs in terms on their quality and ability to promote school readiness.**

**Several options, listed below, have been identified for creating a QRIS structure that includes both centralized and decentralized components. Please indicate the option that you like best.**

Of the options listed below, check only one (1).

- Create a centralized administration for a Texas QRIS that is responsible for the system's effective functioning, including the functions of establishing QRIS standards and criteria and rating levels; training on-site observers/assessors; setting program training requirements; and program monitoring. Local and regional entities would be responsible for marketing to families and providers, providing training, coaching, and mentoring, and supporting programs during the application process
  - Carve the State into regions, identify a QRIS model working well in another state, and identify an agency or organization responsible for implementing the chosen model in each of the regions. A state agency would be responsible for monitoring consistent implementation across regions.
  - Identify a minimum number of core functions that a QRIS should provide and support communities and regions across the State in developing systems appropriate for their communities.
  - I don't have a preference.
- 4. Texas presently has multiple ways in which higher program quality is acknowledged. One of them is national accreditation.**

**Do you think national accreditation should be part of a Texas QRIS?**

- Yes
  - No
  - Not sure
- 5. Texas Rising Star recognizes six (6) accreditation systems and places early childhood programs with these accreditations at the highest level of the system (level 4).**

**These six (6) systems are:**

- 1. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**
- 2. National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)**
- 3. National Early Childhood Program Accreditation**
- 4. Association of Christian Schools International**

**5. National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs**

**6. National AfterSchool Association**

**If accredited programs automatically are placed at a higher level in a Texas QRIS, do you think all accredited programs should be placed at the highest level of the system?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

**6. Texas currently has several local quality improvement efforts. They are an important resource to the State's efforts to improve the quality of ECE programs. What would you suggest as the best way to involve them in a statewide QRIS?**

Of the options listed below, check only one (1).

- Don't make any changes. Encourage local and regional quality improvement initiatives to innovate as they think most appropriate for their communities based on the resources available to them.
- Facilitate consistency in support services across the Stat by identifying core functions that local and regional quality improvement initiatives should be encouraged to implement such as marketing to families and providers, providing training, coaching and mentoring, and supporting programs during the application process.
- Ensure consistency across the State by identifying core functions that every local and regional quality improvement initiatives should perform and designate the providers of these services through an open Request for Proposals (RFP).
- I'm not sure.

**We appreciate you taking the time to fill out our survey. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Kara Johnson at [kjohnson@txchildren.org](mailto:kjohnson@txchildren.org). If you have questions about the Texas Early Learning Council or their work on the QRIS, you can Contact Don Titcombe at [Donald.a.titcombe@uth.tmc.edu](mailto:Donald.a.titcombe@uth.tmc.edu).**

**If you would like to be entered into the drawing for a \$50 Amazon gift card, please enter name and email address below.**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Statewide Survey #2 Responses

### TX QRIS – PUBLIC SURVEY #2 SUMMARY

#### Overall Response

##### SAMPLE

253 surveys were returned

##### BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENT TYPE

- ECE Administrators: 50.2%
- Advocates: 39.5%
- Parents: 26.9%
- ECE Teacher/Providers: 26.5%
- ECE State/Local Policymakers: 11.1%
- Other / Don't Know: 12.3%

**The draft Texas QRIS Strategic Plan suggests 11 guiding principles for steering the Texas Early Learning Council's recommendations. Please review the list below and identify your top three (3) priorities.**

##### OVERALL SUMMARY

The top four guiding principles (indicated as a first priority) were:

- Rank 1: **Help more children be ready for school, targeting the State's most vulnerable children (n = 71)**
- Rank 2: **Be family- and child-focused (n = 58)**
- Rank 3: **Enable parents to be informed consumers when choosing among early care and education options (n = 20)**
- Rank 4: **Be available to all providers and families, with priority outreach to working families (n = 20)**

Of the remaining guiding principles, each was selected as a first priority by respondents (ranging from 2 to 16 respondents).

The two guiding principles that were most commonly listed as a top three priority were:

- Rank 1: **Help more children be ready for school, targeting the State's most vulnerable children (n = 130)**
- Rank 2: **Be family- and child-focused (n = 99)**

Of the remaining guiding principles, 62 respondents on average listed the principle as a top three priority. The only guiding principle that received minimal priority preference was "Support a mixed delivery system" (n = 23).

**TX QRIS – PUBLIC SURVEY #2 SUMMARY**

**(continued)**

**SUMMARY BY RESPONDENT TYPE**

Regardless of the respondent type, the responses followed the same general pattern with the first priority being one of the top four guiding principles listed above. The only exception is for ECE local/state policymakers who selected “help more children be ready for school” as the most commonly listed first priority but then had wide variance on the remaining principles. Note that this sub-group had the smallest number of respondents for this question (n = 28).

**Texas is a large and diverse state that highly values local innovation and autonomy. At the same time, a strong desire exists to bring increased consistency to the State’s diverse array of programs in terms of their quality and ability to promote school readiness. Several options, listed below, have been identified for creating a QRIS structure that includes both centralized and decentralized components. Please indicate the option that you like best. Of the options listed below, check only one (1).**

**OVERALL SUMMARY**

The responses demonstrated clear preference for a QRIS structure.

- Rank 1: **Create a centralized administration for a Texas QRIS (44.2%)**
- Rank 2: **Identify a minimum number of core functions (28.1%)**
- Rank 3: **Carve the State into regions (20.9%)**

**SUMMARY BY RESPONDENT TYPE**

Regardless of the respondent type, the responses followed the same general pattern except for ECE teachers/providers. ECE teachers/providers indicated first preference for the identification of a minimum number of core functions (34.8%) and second preference for a centralized administration (33.3%). All other respondent sub-groups preferred the creation of a centralized administration.

**Texas presently has multiple ways in which higher program quality is acknowledged. One of them is national accreditation.**

**OVERALL SUMMARY**

The responses demonstrated clear preference for the inclusion of national accreditation.

**Do you think national accreditation should be part of a Texas QRIS?**

- Rank 1: **Yes (58.6%)**
- Rank 2: **No (24.5%)**
- Rank 3: **Not sure (16.9%)**

**SUMMARY BY RESPONDENT TYPE**

Regardless of the respondent type, the responses followed the same general pattern with preference for the national accreditation as part of the Texas QRIS.

## TX QRIS – PUBLIC SURVEY #2 SUMMARY

Texas Rising Star recognizes six (6) accreditation systems and places early childhood programs with these accreditations at the highest level of the system (level 4). These six (6) systems are:

- The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) National Early Childhood Program Accreditation
- Association of Christian Schools International
- National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs
- National AfterSchool Association

If accredited programs automatically are placed at a higher level in a Texas QRIS, do you think all accredited programs should be placed at the highest level of the system?

### OVERALL SUMMARY

The responses did not indicate consensus on the placement of accredited programs in the highest level of Texas QRIS.

- Rank 1: **No (41.5%)**
- Rank 2: **Yes (36.6%)**
- Rank 3: **Not sure (22.0%)**

### SUMMARY BY RESPONDENT TYPE

The pattern of split responses was found in the analysis by respondent type as well. ECE teachers/providers were equally divided between Yes (35.9%) and No (35.9%). In addition, ECE administrators were evenly divided between No (42.3%) and Yes (37.4%). Parents, ECE advocates and ECE state policymakers showed a slightly greater preference for **not** placing accredited programs in the highest level of Texas QRIS.

Texas currently has several local quality improvement efforts. They are an important resource to the State's efforts to improve the quality of ECE programs.

What would you suggest as the best way to involve them in a statewide QRIS? Of the options listed below, check only one (1).

### OVERALL SUMMARY

The responses demonstrated clear preference for involvement of local quality improvement efforts.

- Rank 1: **Facilitate consistency in support services (50.0%)**
- Rank 2: **Ensure consistency across the State (34.1%)**
- Rank 3: **Don't make changes (9.3%)**
- Rank 4: **I'm not sure (6.5%)**

### SUMMARY BY RESPONDENT TYPE

Regardless of the respondent type, the responses followed the same general pattern with preference for the facilitation of consistency in support services.

## STATEWIDE SURVEY #3 QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

### Statewide Survey #3 Questions

The Texas Early Learning Council is tasked with developing recommendations for creating a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for the state of Texas.

The National Child Care and Technical Assistance Center defined QRIS as a “systematic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-aged care and education programs.” Thirty-one (31) states plus the District of Columbia currently implement some type of QRIS, demonstrating the growing popularity among early care and education (ECE) stakeholders in recent years.

Typically, a QRIS assigns rankings to participating child care programs – and often to other ECE programs - that describe their level of quality (1 star, 2 star, 3 star, etc.). Parents can use this rating system to inform their search for ECE programs. In some states, policymakers use this information to make funding decisions and reward programs that provide children and families with higher levels of program quality; providers often use a QRIS to drive quality improvement in their programs.

As part of developing recommendations for a Texas QRIS, the Council would like to know your thoughts on several important aspects of a QRIS. Your answers will help inform the content of the recommendations and the Council’s decision-making.

This is third and final statewide survey. We very much appreciate your responding to the first two surveys and hope you will take the time, once again, to share your thoughts. A summary of your responses have been cited as the strategic plan continues to develop and a summary of your responses will also be included in the final strategic plan submitted to the Council. Please know that your responses already are influencing the plan’s content.

Thank you for sharing your time and thoughts on this important work. **Please respond to this survey by no later than Monday, October 22nd.**

Survey #3 Questions

**1. What is your connection to early care and education in Texas?**

Check all that apply.

- I am a parent.
- I am an early care and education teacher/provider.
- I work in early care and education administration.
- I am an early care and education advocate.
- I work in early care and education local or state policy.
- I don't know
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**2. The process of creating a statewide QRIS will likely involve implementation in phases. One consideration in this regard is how to phase in programs' participation.**

**Responses to the first survey indicated that more than 75% of respondents thought the programs listed below should be part of a Texas QRIS.**

Please insert a 1, 2, 3 and so forth to indicate the order in which you'd phase programs into a new statewide system.

- Early Head Start programs
- Head Start programs
- Licensed child care centers
- Registered Child Care Homes
- School based prekindergarten programs

**3. Some states mandate that publicly funded early education and care programs participate in their statewide QRIS in order to receive public funding. This approach increases the likelihood that more children will be in higher quality programs.**

**Would you support a Texas QRIS move in this direction?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**4. Texas early education and care programs presently can choose among several definitions of school readiness. Do you think the standards for a Texas QRIS should be based on a single, shared definition of school readiness?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**5. A major goal of QRIS nationally is helping children be better prepared for success in kindergarten and beyond. Two viewpoints exist on how this is best achieved.**

Check the answer below that you most agree with. While both answers may seem to have merit, please check the answer that you think should drive the design of a Texas QRIS.

- A QRIS can best help children come to kindergarten prepared to succeed by helping programs improve their quality.
- A QRIS can best help children come to kindergarten prepared to succeed by identifying and promoting child outcomes associated with school success.

**6. Presently, Texas Rising Star (TRS) is the State's only statewide QRIS, serving only child care programs offering subsidized child care. If a Texas QRIS is created, serving ALL sectors of early childhood, the future of TRS must be considered.**

Listed below are a few possibilities. Check the one box that you would most support.

- Expand the reach of TRS to include other early childhood sectors like Head Start and Prekindergarten
- Expand the reach of TRS to include other early childhood sectors like Head Start and Prekindergarten and revise to incorporate best QRIS practices.
- Build a new statewide system that incorporates best QRIS practices and phase out TRS.
- I don't know.

**7. Listed below are possible selection criteria for a Texas QRIS administrative agency or organization.**

Please review the list below. They are listed in random order. Then please identify your top three (3) priorities. Rank them 1 through 3, with 3 representing your highest priority.

- Ability to ensure unbiased review of program quality.
- Respect and understanding of multiple delivery systems.
- Experienced with and knowledgeable of a wide variety and size of data collections, IT environments, regulations, and requirements.
- Sufficient capacity to manage a multi-agency, multi-partner project.
- Agency or organization with proven track record of collaboration with other agencies and organizations.
- Experienced in implementation and scaling.

**We appreciate you taking the time to fill out our survey. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Kara Johnson at [kjohnson@txchildren.org](mailto:kjohnson@txchildren.org). If you have questions about the Texas Early Learning Council or their work on the QRIS, you can Contact Don Titcombe at [Donald.a.titcombe@uth.tmc.edu](mailto:Donald.a.titcombe@uth.tmc.edu).**

**If you would like to be entered into the drawing for a \$50 Amazon gift card, please enter name and email address below.**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**TX QRIS – PUBLIC SURVEY #3 SUMMARY**

**Overall Response**

**SAMPLE**

152 surveys were returned<sup>1</sup>

**BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENT TYPE**

- ECE Administrators: 55.3%
- Advocates: 31.6%
- Parents: 26.3%
- ECE Teacher/Providers: 22.4%
- ECE State/Local Policymakers: 11.2%
- Other / Don't Know: 9.2%<sup>2</sup>

**The process of creating a statewide QRIS will likely involve implementation in phases. One consideration in this regard is how to phase in programs' participation.**

**Responses to the first survey indicated that more than 75% of respondents thought the programs listed below should be part of a Texas QRIS.**

**Please insert a 1, 2, 3 and so forth to indicate the order in which you'd phase programs into a new statewide system.**

**OVERALL SUMMARY**

The responses indicated relative consensus on the order for phasing programs into a QRIS.

Responses indicated that licensed child care centers and school-based pre-kindergartens should be considered for the first implementation phase (as respondents indicated by inserting 1 on the survey). Results below indicate the priority choice for implementation during a first phase.

- Rank 1: **Licensed child care centers (n = 61)**
- Rank 2: **School-based pre-kindergarten (n = 44)**
- Rank 3: **Early Head Start programs (n = 17)**
- Rank 4: **Head Start programs (n = 15)**
- Rank 5: **Registered child care homes (n = 11)**

In addition, responses indicated that Head Start programs should be part of the second phase of implementation (n = 59 as respondents indicated by inserting 2 on the survey). Similarly, responses report that registered child care homes should be part of the final implementation phase (n = 62 as respondents indicated by inserting 5 on the survey).

**SUMMARY BY RESPONDENT TYPE**

The pattern of having licensed child care centers and then school based pre-kindergarten programs participate in the first phase of implementation was found in the analysis by respondent type as well.

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<sup>1</sup> 178 total surveys were submitted, but n = 39 (21.9%) of respondents selected "other" as their respondent type. In order to analyze the data by respondent type, these surveys were not included in the analysis.

<sup>2</sup> The respondent type "other" listed is included as respondents were able to select more than 1 respondent type; if the respondent selected other and another respondent type, his/her response was included in the data analysis.

**TX QRIS – PUBLIC SURVEY #3 SUMMARY**

**Some states mandate that publicly funded early education and care programs participate in their statewide QRIS in order to receive public funding. This approach increases the likelihood that more children will be in higher quality programs.**

**OVERALL SUMMARY**

The responses indicated a strong preference for mandating the participation of publicly funded programs.

- Rank 1: **Yes (80.8%)**
- Rank 2: **No (11.3%)**
- Rank 3: **I don't know (7.9%)**

**Would you support a Texas QRIS move in this direction?**

**SUMMARY BY RESPONDENT TYPE**

All respondent types demonstrated a strong preference for mandating participation of publicly-funded programs.

**Texas early education and care programs presently can choose among several definitions of school readiness. Do you think the standards for a Texas QRIS should be based on a single, shared definition of school readiness?**

**OVERALL SUMMARY**

The responses indicated preference for standards based on a single, shared definition of school readiness.

- Rank 1: **Yes (62.9%)**
- Rank 2: **No (27.2%)**
- Rank 3: **I don't know (9.9%)**

**SUMMARY BY RESPONDENT TYPE**

The pattern of responses was found in the analysis by respondent type with all respondent types indicating preference for standards based on a single, shared definition.

**A major goal of QRIS nationally is helping children be better prepared for success in kindergarten and beyond. Two viewpoints exist on how this is best achieved.**

**OVERALL SUMMARY**

The responses indicated division between the two viewpoints.

- Rank 1: **A QRIS can best help children come to kindergarten prepared to succeed by helping programs improve their quality (53.8%)**
- Rank 2: **A QRIS can best help children come to kindergarten prepared to succeed by identifying and promoting child outcomes associated with school success (46.2%)**

**Check the answer below that you most agree with. While both answers may seem to have merit, please check the answer that you think should drive the design of a Texas QRIS.**

**SUMMARY BY RESPONDENT TYPE**

ECE administrators, ECE advocates and ECE local/state policymakers slightly favored a focus on quality improvement, while parents and ECE teachers/providers slightly favored child outcomes.

### TX QRIS – PUBLIC SURVEY #3 SUMMARY

Presently, Texas Rising Star (TRS) is the State's only statewide QRIS, serving only child care programs offering subsidized child care. If a Texas QRIS is created, serving ALL sectors of early childhood, the future of TRS must be considered.

Listed below are a few possibilities. Check the one box that you would most support.

#### OVERALL SUMMARY

The responses did not indicate consensus on the programs served in a Texas QRIS with two leading possibilities below.

- Rank 1: **Expand the reach of TRS to include other early childhood sectors like Head Start and Prekindergarten and revise to incorporate best QRIS practices (44.1%)**
- Rank 2: **Build a new statewide system that incorporates best QRIS practices and phase out TRS (35.2%)**
- Rank 3: **I don't know (11.7%)**

#### SUMMARY BY RESPONDENT TYPE

Parents and ECE administrators were almost equally divided between TRS expansion and a new statewide system. ECE teachers/providers, ECE advocates and ECE local/state policymakers slightly favored TRS expansion.

Listed below are possible selection criteria for a Texas QRIS administrative agency or organization.

Please review the list below. They are listed in random order. Then please identify your top three (3) priorities. Rank them 1 through 3, with 3 representing your highest priority.

#### OVERALL SUMMARY

The top three criteria as indicated by highest priority were:

- Rank 1: **Ability to ensure unbiased review of program quality (n = 50)**
- Rank 2: **Respect and understanding of multiple delivery systems (n = 33)**
- Rank 3: **Agency or organization with proven track record of collaboration with other agencies and organizations (n = 31)**

#### SUMMARY BY RESPONDENT TYPE

The overall pattern of priorities was consistent when analyzed by respondent type; the three priorities outlined above were the three most common top priorities across all respondent types.

## APPENDIX F: STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

### STAKEHOLDER MEETING ATTENDEES

#### September 2012 Meeting

<b>Shari Anderson</b> ChildCareGroup	<b>Gwendolyn Jones</b> DHHS/ACF/Office of Child Care
<b>Albert Black (represented by Denise Edmondson)</b> Child Inc.	<b>Kathy Kramer</b> Health and Human Services Commission/Office of Early Childhood Coordination
<b>John Breitfeller (represented by Kym Shaw)</b> Educational First Steps	<b>Jennifer Lindley</b>
<b>Sue Carpenter</b> United Way for Greater Austin	<b>Terri Marini</b> Dallas AfterSchool Network
<b>Sebrina Carroll</b> SPCAA Head Start and Early Head Start	<b>Casey McCreary</b> Texas Association of School Administrators
<b>Eva Carter</b> ICF International	<b>Mary Munger</b> Amarillo College
<b>Isabel Casas</b> Office of Senator Judith Zaffirini	<b>Sasha Rasco</b> Early Childhood Intervention
<b>Stacey Cochran</b> ChildCareGroup	<b>Melanie Rubin</b>
<b>Sarah Crockett</b> Texas Association for Infant Mental Health	<b>Carol Shattuck</b> Collaborative for Children
<b>Regan Dobbs</b> Texas Workforce Commission	<b>Elisa Shepherd</b> Kids R Kids International
<b>Cynthia Gamez</b> Workforce Solutions CCS/TMC	<b>Mark Slavin</b> Lovejoy ISD
<b>Eileen Garcia</b> Texans Care	<b>Jackie Taylor</b> Texas AEYC
<b>Earlene Gonzales</b> UTSA Child Development Center	<b>Mark Throop</b> Representative Mark Strama's Office
<b>Patricia Gonzalez</b> Texas Workforce Commission	<b>Don Titcombe</b> TELC
<b>Lonnie Hutson</b> Kids R Kids Private Pre School	<b>Phil Warner</b> Texas Workforce Commission
<b>Kara Johnson</b> Texans Care for Children/Texas Early Education Alliance	<b>John Whitcamp</b> TELC
<b>Norma Johnson</b> Community Action Inc of Central Texas	

**October 2012 Meeting**

Note: The list of registrants below does not include names of all attendees, which totaled 28.

<b>Shari Anderson</b> ChildCareGroup	<b>Shannon Hendricks</b> Educational First Steps
<b>LeShonda Brown</b> THSSCO	<b>Lonnie Hutson</b> Kids R Kids Sugar Land
<b>Sue Carpenter</b> United Way for Greater Austin	<b>Kara Johnson</b> Texans Care for Children
<b>Eva Carter</b> ICF International	<b>Kathy Kramer</b> Texas Health and Human Services Commission
<b>Gina Day</b> TEA	<b>Melanie Rubin</b>
<b>Regan Dobbs</b> Texas Workforce Commission	<b>Carol Shattuck</b> Collaborative for Children
<b>Denise Edmondson</b> Child Inc.	<b>Donald Titcombe</b> TELC
<b>Eileen Garcia</b>	<b>Phil Warner</b> Texas Workforce Commission
<b>Earlene Gonzales</b> UTSA Child Development Center	<b>Racquel Washington</b> Care First Consulting
<b>Patricia Gonzalez</b> Texas Workforce Commission	

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## STAKEHOLDER MEETING AGENDA AND INPUT – MEETING #1

### A Strategic Plan for a Texas QRIS



An Open Exchange with QRIS Stakeholders  
Held on September 20, 2012

#### FEEDBACK REPORT

Facilitator: Stacie Goffin, Goffin Strategy Group  
Report Writer: Michelle Thomas, ICF International

<b>Background and Purpose</b>	<p>The Texas Early Learning Council (Council) is tasked with making recommendations to the Governor regarding the possibility of developing and implementing a statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The Council contracted with consultants to develop a Strategic Plan that will guide the Council in making these recommendations. The strategic planning process includes engagement of a broad representation of Texas QRIS stakeholders through the use of three electronic, statewide surveys and two facilitated meetings.</p> <p>To prepare participants for a facilitated discussion on September 20, 2012, a first draft of the Strategic Plan was sent to all participants on September 11, 2012. Hard copies of the Strategic Plan were also provided at the meeting. The data collected during this exchange will be used to inform the next draft of the Strategic Plan and this “Feedback Report” will be included as an appendix to the final Strategic Plan. A second meeting of QRIS Stakeholders is planned for October 18, 2012.</p> <p>The agenda that guided the interactions of TX QRIS stakeholder participants follows this report.</p>
<b>Overview of Strategic Planning Process &amp; Proposals</b>	<p>The consultants presented the strategic planning process and methodology used to construct the draft Strategic Plan (the power point follows this report). The following questions, followed by their answers, were asked by participants immediately following the presentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do any of the stakeholders who participated in individual interviews conducted prior to this meeting work with children over the age of 5? Answer: Yes</li> <li>• How many statewide stakeholders received the electronic survey? Answer: 464 stakeholders responded</li> </ul>

	<p>to the first survey. The listserv used to send the electronic survey contains between 5,000 and 7,000 email addresses. The listserv may contain duplicates and is not a randomized sample.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How was today’s stakeholder invitee list determined? Answer: Multiple emails were sent by the Texas Early Learning Council asking for individual interested in attending to submit their names. Those who responded were invited to the meeting. In addition, other stakeholders were invited based on their positions as state decision makers.</li> </ul> <p>When asked for initial reactions to the Strategic Plan draft, the following was noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Much discussion revolved around defining and approving a tool(s) to measure/assess school readiness. Comments included:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Measuring/assessing school readiness is a difficult process. It may be hard to determine causality, given the fact that children may attend multiple settings before entering school.</li> <li>○ Measuring/assessing school readiness is high stakes and may put pressure on the child.</li> <li>○ Relying on one tool to determine school readiness may be flawed. There may be multiple ways to measure, including looking at retention rates.</li> <li>○ Which should be the priority: program improvement outcomes or child learning outcomes?</li> <li>○ Should the goal be school readiness, or school success (in order to include school age children)</li> <li>○ The important contribution of children’s healthy social-emotional development should be prioritized.</li> <li>○ Despite the above concerns, more and more pressure is being put on states to demonstrate child outcomes.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Participants agreed that choices made about a statewide QRIS will be highly infused with political and financial implications.</li> <li>• There was discussion about the need for collective stakeholder agreement as a way to better ensure support from state policymakers and legislators. To reach collective stakeholder agreement, any proposed QRIS must be valid, viable, and reasonable for all participating sectors. Texas has made progress in early childhood systems building through collective, small steps.</li> <li>• Participants agreed that the draft Strategic Plan is a good framework to get Texas started. It asks the right questions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Possible Guiding Principles</b></p>	<p>Organized as six small workgroups, participants were given a task to review 11 Possible Guiding Principles for a QRIS and prioritize the two most important principles. The option to add or delete a principle also was extended.</p> <p>The 11 Principles proposed by the Draft Strategic Plan were: Be family and child focused.</p>

	<p>Be available to all providers and families, with priority outreach to working families.                  Help more children be ready for school, targeting the State’s most vulnerable children.                  Be understandable to families and providers.                  Be accountable.                  Foster increased integration among standards across early childhood education programs.                  Enable parents to be informed consumers when choosing among early care and education options.                  Support a mixed delivery system.                  Foster coordination and increased alignment between and among the State’s quality improvement programs and services.                  Be feasible to operate and monitor.                  Be fiscally responsible and sustainable.</p> <p><b>Priorities proposed by participants are listed below. No additional principles were proposed or presented for removal.</b></p> <p><b>“Help more children be ready for school, targeting the State’s most vulnerable children.”</b>                  Despite expressed concerns about measuring/assessing school readiness as noted above, half of the groups (three) reached concluded that this should be one of the two most important guiding principles.</p> <p><b>“Be fiscally responsible and sustainable”</b>                  Two groups reached consensus that this is one of the two most important guiding principles.</p> <p><b>“Enable Parents to be informed consumers when choosing among early care and education options”</b>                  One group reached consensus that this is one of the two most important guiding principles. One group listed this as one of the two most important principles, but did not reach full consensus.</p> <p><b>“Be family and child focused”</b>                  One group reached consensus that this is one of the two most important guiding principles. One group listed this as one of the two most important principles, but did not reach full consensus. This group also recommended that “provider” be added as a necessary focus.</p> <p><b>“Be available to all providers and families, with priority outreach to working families”</b>                  One group reached consensus that this is one of the two most important guiding principles.</p>
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	<p><b>“Be understandable to families and providers”</b>                  One group reached consensus that this is one of the two most important guiding principles. However, they recommended that “understandable” be replaced with “user friendly.”</p> <p><b>“Be feasible to operate and monitor”</b>                  One group reached consensus that this is one of the two most important guiding principles.</p>
<p><b>First -Order Strategic Questions</b></p>	<p><b><u>Determining Initial Priorities</u></b>                  Stakeholders were asked to discuss 3 competing priorities in small groups and decide which is the most important.</p> <p><b>Priority #1</b> - Does the Council most want a statewide QRIS to lift the floor of program quality across the State in order to improve the early learning experiences of as many Texas children as possible?</p> <p><b>Priority #2</b> - Given limited resources and the focus on school readiness, would it be more “strategic” to target resources to programs with the greatest probability of promoting kindergarten readiness?</p> <p><b>Priority #3</b> - Is it more feasible in light of the Council’s present system- building activities to focus on building a sturdy ECE infrastructure that can support the system’s initial development and provide sustained support on behalf of increased program quality and kindergarten readiness?</p> <p>The entire room reached consensus that Priority #3 is the most important priority in planning for and launching a statewide QRIS. Specific comments included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We must address both quality and quantity of resources that need to be made available to programs. Intentional alignment of program resources with the QRIS should be a thoughtful process.</li> <li>• Infrastructure building will encourage sustainability and create a level playing field for all early care and education providers.</li> <li>• Benchmarks and success metrics should be established up front. These should include measures that track both individual program improvements and overall all system success.</li> <li>• Infrastructure building is the most responsible thing to do with investments in early care and education, especially given current fiscal realities.</li> <li>• Infrastructure building can increase collaboration and can raise community awareness.</li> </ul> <p>Stakeholders also commented that Texas has already attempted Priority #1 and Priority #2 to some degree, and have not found demonstrable success with these approaches.</p>

**Administrative Centralization vs. Decentralization**

Stakeholders were asked to have small group discussion regarding which functions of a QRIS could be centralized/decentralized. To assist with answering the question, participants were reminded of the five QRIS components: Standards; Accountability/Monitoring; Provider Supports; Incentives and Consumer Ed/Marketing.

One group recommended that all five components be centralized functions. Discussion ensued about the possibility of centralizing all functions for 3-5 years, and then assigning authority for some of the functions to local agencies.

Standards – All six groups agreed that the QRIS standards should be centralized.

Accountability/Monitoring – All six groups agreed that this function should be centralized. However, there was one group that recommended that some sort of a hybrid centralized/decentralized model for this function could be explored.

Provider Supports – Two of the groups recommended that this function be centralized. Three groups recommended a decentralized provider support function. One group recommended a hybrid be considered.

Incentives – With the exception of the group that thought everything should be centralized, the groups encouraged use of a hybrid model.

Consumer Ed/Marketing - With the exception of the groups that thought everything should be centralized, the groups recommended a hybrid model.

Groups also made recommendation regarding functions that reside outside of QRIS components, including

- Funding stream – centralized function
- Evaluation and validation of the QRIS – centralized function
- Data collection – centralized function

A suggestion was made to dive deeper into this question through the use of a follow up electronic survey to stakeholders. The survey should be designed to test the strength of stakeholder recommendations in each area (e.g. very strong, strong, neutral)

	<p><b><u>Should Texas Have a Statewide Definition of Kindergarten Readiness?</u></b></p> <p>Stimulating discussion regarding the question of centralization/decentralization resulted in less time available for discussion on this question.</p> <p>Stakeholders were asked to briefly discuss the above question in small groups reframed as whether a statewide QRIS should have a definition for kindergarten readiness and to offer an answer of either “yes” or “no” in response to the question. When asked of the entire group, more than half of the stakeholders responded in the affirmative. Five stakeholders responded that a statewide definition is not necessary. Following this show of hands, the original question, which is broader in scope, was asked. No hands were raised in response.</p> <p>A suggestion was made to further explore this question in the next stakeholder meeting.</p>
<p><b>Follow up for next Stakeholder meeting</b></p>	<p>Stakeholders were strongly urged to read the entire Strategic Plan draft before the next half-day Stakeholder meeting, to be held on October 18, 2012.</p>

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**A Strategic Plan for a Texas QRIS  
An Open Exchange with QRIS Stakeholders  
September 20, 2012  
9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

**Continental Breakfast at 8:30 a.m.**

- 9:00 a.m.           **Welcome, Introductions, & Meeting Purpose**  
Texas Early Learning Council
- 9:15 a.m.           **Overview of Strategic Planning Process & Proposals**  
Stacie Goffin
- Discussion
    - What is your initial reaction?
    - What is your response to the “first-order” strategic issues? Do they resonate? Is something missing?
- 10:30 a.m.           BREAK
- 10:45 a.m.           **Possible Guiding Principles**  
Small and Whole Group
- Are the right Principles identified?
  - What’s missing? Should anything be removed?
  - Do priorities exist among principles? If so, what would be your first and second priorities?
- 11:15 a.m.           **First -Order Strategic Questions**  
**Starting at the Beginning: Determining Initial Priorities**  
Small & Whole Group Work
- 12:30 p.m.           LUNCH
- 1:00 p.m.           **First-Order Strategic Question: Administrative Centralization vs. Decentralization**  
Small & Whole Group Work
- 2:15 p.m.           **First-Order Strategic Question: Should Texas Have a Statewide Definition of Kindergarten Readiness?**
- 2:45 p.m.           **Final Questions & Next Steps**  
Don Titcombe, TELC Manager
- 3:00 p.m.           **Adjournment**

## STAKEHOLDER MEETING AGENDA AND INPUT – MEETING #2

### A Strategic Plan for a Texas QRIS



An Open Exchange with QRIS Stakeholders  
Held on October 18, 2012

#### FEEDBACK REPORT

Facilitator: Stacie Goffin, Goffin Strategy Group  
Report Writer: Michelle Thomas, ICF International

#### Background and Purpose

The Texas Early Learning Council (Council) is tasked with making recommendations to the Governor regarding the possibility of developing and implementing a statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The Council contracted with consultants to develop a Strategic Plan that will guide the Council in making these recommendations. The strategic planning process includes engagement of a broad representation of Texas QRIS stakeholders through the use of three electronic, statewide surveys and two facilitated meetings.

To prepare participants, a first draft of the Strategic Plan was sent to all participants on September 11, 2012. Feedback received during the Stakeholder Meeting held on September 20, 2012, was incorporated into the next iteration of the Strategic Plan. Other changes incorporated into the next version of the Strategic Plan included: new QRIS research; results from the second statewide survey; and refinements to the proposals. This updated version of the Strategic Plan was sent in advance of the October 18, 2012 meeting and also made available in hard copy at the meeting.

The data collected during this October 18, 2012 exchange will be used to inform the next and final draft of the Strategic Plan and will be presented to the full Council on December 5, 2012. Following the full Council meeting, the Strategic Plan will be finalized and used as the basis for the Council’s recommendations to Governor Perry.

This “Feedback Report” will be included as an appendix to the Strategic Plan. It is organized by the questions explored by participant on October 18, 2012. The agenda that guided these interactions follows this report.

<p><b>Question 1: Texas presently has multiple ways in which higher program quality is acknowledged. One of them is national accreditation.</b></p>	<p><b>Do you think national accreditation should be part of a Texas QRIS?</b></p> <p>When asked to respond with a show of hands, the following responses were given:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes – 18</li> <li>• Not convinced – 1</li> <li>• Undecided - 9</li> </ul>
	<p><b>(2) Texas Rising Star (TRS) recognizes six (6) accreditation systems and places early childhood programs with these accreditations at the highest level of its system.</b></p> <p>The five (5) ECE systems are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)</li> <li>2. National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)</li> <li>3. National Early Childhood Program Accreditation</li> <li>4. Association of Christian Schools International</li> <li>5. National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs</li> </ol> <p><b>If accreditation is part of a Texas QRIS, should accredited programs automatically be placed at the highest level of a Texas QRIS?</b></p> <p>When asked this question, there appeared to be overall agreement that accreditation should <u>not</u> automatically place a program at the highest level of a new statewide QRIS. While general agreement existed for including national accreditation as part of a new QRIS, participants did not think it should be recognized as a way to solely demonstrate the quality level of a program.</p> <p>In addition, the group appeared to agree that national accreditation systems are not equivalent, and these differences should be considered, potentially by way of a crosswalk between and accreditation system’s standards and those of the State’s QRIS. One participant expressed concern about whether including national accreditation is known to support a goal of school ready children.</p> <p>One group suggested that accredited programs should be automatically “eligible” for the highest level, but made the caveat that the state should still validate compliance with other measures of quality that are used in the new QRIS.</p>

**(3) If accreditation is included as part of a Texas QRIS, do you think all accredited programs should be placed at the system’s highest level? If not, what would you recommend?**

As noted above, Stakeholder participants agreed that national accreditation systems are not equivalent, and these differences should be considered if accreditation is part of a new QRIS.

Recommendations for operational design when making decisions about national accreditation systems included:

- The state should audit participating national accreditation systems every three years to verify continued alignment with the state’s QRIS standards;
- National accreditation systems recognized by the state’s new QRIS should be required to report any changes to the administering agency.
- Affordability of accreditation is an issue for many programs. The state should find a way to support interested programs with the costs of accreditation.
- Accreditation status should be considered as additional information about a program, but not integrated into the QRIS rating.
- Consider assigning a different number of points based on the accreditation system’s alignment with the state’s QRIS.
- The state could identify areas for reciprocity within each recognized national accreditation system (i.e., pull out pieces of accreditation that would not need to be monitored by QRIS state monitors if they are already shown to have been met by national accreditor).
- Additional national accreditation systems should be considered:
  - Southern Association of Colleges and Schools ( Advanced Ed)
  - NACCP – National Association of Child Care Professionals (NAC) – Pathways to Excellence

<p><b>Question 2: What criteria/guidelines should be used for selecting program quality standards for a Texas QRIS – i.e., how should program indicators be chosen?</b></p>	<p>In light of limited research to support program quality indicators proposed by the Council’s Data and QRIS Subcommittee, participating stakeholders were divided into 6 groups and asked to propose up to 5 concrete criteria that the Council could use when selecting program quality indicators for a TX QRIS. Participants were given Anne Mitchell’s (2012) suggested criteria, cited in the Strategic Plan, and also reminded of the Guiding Principles proposed in the Strategic Plan, along with additions proposed by Stakeholders on September 20, 2012. Mitchell’s suggested criteria were routinely incorporated into participants’ answer to this question.</p> <p>The 6 groups were then combined into 3 groups and asked to discuss and report their proposals for criteria the Council might use to guide their selection of program quality indicators. Below are the highlights of recommendations from each of the 3 groups.</p> <p><b>Group 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understandable and significant (it should be yes/no) – use research to make clear statements about what is important in quality; clarity is important – understandable by consumers and participants (simple, simple, simple)</li><li>• Evidence based – a preponderance of the evidence</li><li>• Measureable and feasible to monitor – possible to collect data on indicator</li><li>• Fiscally responsible for provider – evaluations should be paired with reciprocal training and development</li><li>• Indicator must be reasonable for quality improvement to be provided and lend itself to CQI (continuous quality improvement)</li></ul> <p>Contention surfaced around the criterion of “measurable and progressive.” Discussion centered on the fact that programs predominately serving low income families may find it more difficult to meet standards associated with this criterion. Discussion ensued on how to accommodate program, economic and cultural variability and some suggested that consideration should be given to using the same standard, but measuring it differently based on these variables.</p> <p><b>Group 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accessible and significant (in conveying value of the indicators/standards)</li><li>• Measurable and progressive</li><li>• Sustainable, feasible and attractive to the field</li><li>• Evidence based and longitudinal - differentiated for different populations</li></ul>
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	<p>Contention surfaced within the group related to a criterion with a longitudinal focus. The discussion centered around whether longitudinal measures would be viewed as inputs or would be results focused, and if so how outcomes would be defined.</p> <p><b>Group 3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understandable and significant – significant = has proxy power</li> <li>• Research based – broaden research base – ALL domains of child development; national early childhood expertise</li> <li>• Measureable and feasible to monitor</li> <li>• Progressive – gradations of improving practice from acceptable – good better to best. Clearly defined</li> <li>• High quality program criteria – based on programmatic models (eg. home based vs. center based)</li> </ul> <p>Contention within the group was noted about how the criteria for selecting program quality standards should address the role of licensing and exemptions to licensing requirements.</p> <p>Finally, when the 6 groups were asked to select the one criteria that they considered as most important in selecting program quality indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 groups recommended “evidence based”</li> <li>• 1 group recommended “measurable and feasible to monitor”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Question 3: Should there be a role/contribution to a multi-sector Texas QRIS from the State’s two statewide quality improvement initiatives: Texas Rising Star and the Texas School Ready!™ Project? If so, what should they be?</b></p>	<p>The stakeholders were divided into groups to discuss Question 3 and asked to organize their discussion into a concrete proposal(s) for the Council. Below are the highlights of the proposals shared by each group.</p> <p><b>Group 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TRS should be the basis for administration of a QRIS and the agent to ensure reliability (the system’s “spine”).</li> <li>• The QRIS should start with subsidy-based programs and expand outward.</li> <li>• TSR should be aligned to QRIS standards and be the quality improvement agent (All ages, not just 3-4 year olds).</li> <li>• KRS should serve as the “plus piece” for literacy and longitudinal development (eg – a program with 4 stars and KRS).</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Group 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TRS should provide contribution and role re: - financial incentive, infant-toddler services, and statewide operation through local boards.</li> <li>• TSR should provide specific contribution to inform the process.</li> </ul> <p><b>Group 3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserve the financial incentives of Texas School Ready (TSR).</li> <li>• Preserve the professional development and assessment pieces of TSR.</li> <li>• De-brand the two and have them become a part of QRIS.</li> </ul> <p><b>Group 4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Merge systems to avoid splintering of resources, duplication of efforts and confusion to providers and consumers.</li> <li>• Retain financial incentives, tiered levels, holistic view of center/program and established standards of TSR.</li> <li>• Retain academic outcomes and mentoring of TSR.</li> </ul> <p><b>Group 5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TRS should be the backbone for the QRIS.</li> <li>• Embed standards/practices within the tiers; utilize program crosswalk to determine where standards/practices fall with within the tiers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Group 6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Merge TRS and TSR systems together.</li> <li>• Keep key TRS system aspects such as tiered system and financial incentives, but do away with lack of progressivity (yes/no questions).</li> <li>• Keep TSR mentoring/coaching component; but do not include the evaluation part.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Question #4: What do you want a Texas QRIS to achieve? What differences do you want to see a statewide QRIS create for Texas? Can you support the Aspirational Logic Model?</b></p>	<p>Participants were asked to show hands in response to “Can you support the Aspirational Logic Model?”</p> <p>14 respondents replied “Yes”  12 respondents replied “No”  2 responses were unaccounted.</p>

	<p>For those who voted “No”, concerns largely centered around the ultimate outcome of “approved school readiness measures,” as well as uncertainty regarding what definition of “school readiness” would be used. Discussion ensued about how the system’s effectiveness would be measured if the results/outcomes for children were not assessed. Concern also was raised how this type of outcome would be measured and used. Several participants agreed that they would be likely to change their “vote” to yes, if they were assured that the Council’s current definition of school readiness would be used, because it addresses the “whole child,” not just children’s academic achievements.</p> <p>One participant suggested that an “even more aspirational” model should be considered so that ALL developmental domains are measured for outcomes. However, it was acknowledged that this could be very difficult and expensive.</p>
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**A Strategic Plan for a Texas QRIS  
An Open Exchange with QRIS Stakeholders  
October 18, 2012**

**8:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
Breakfast at 8:30 a.m.**

**Omni Hotel, Lonestar Meeting Room**

9:00 a.m.

**Welcome, Introductions, & Meeting Purpose**  
Texas Early Learning Council

9:10 a.m.

**Agenda Review**  
Stacie Goffin

9:15 a.m.

**Question 1: Texas presently has multiple ways in which higher program quality is acknowledged. One of them is national accreditation.**

Small and Whole Group Interaction

**(1) Do you think national accreditation should be part of a Texas QRIS?**

**(2) Texas Rising Star recognizes six (6) accreditation systems and places early childhood programs with these accreditations at the highest level of its system.**

The five (5) ECE systems are:

1. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
2. National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
3. National Early Childhood Program Accreditation
4. Association of Christian Schools International
5. National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs

**If accreditation is part of a Texas QRIS, should accredited programs automatically be placed at the highest level of a Texas QRIS?**

**(3) If accreditation is included as part of a Texas QRIS, do you think all accredited programs should be placed at the system's highest level? If not, what would you recommend?**

9:50 a.m.

**Question #2: What criteria/guidelines should be used for selecting program quality standards for a Texas QRIS – i.e., how should program indicators be chosen?**

11:00

**Break**

11:15 a.m.

**Question #3: Should there be a role/contribution to a multi-sector Texas QRIS from the State's two statewide quality improvement initiatives: Texas Rising Star and the Texas School Ready! Project?**

**If so, what should they be?**

Small & Whole Group Interaction

Noon

**Question #4: What do you want a Texas QRIS to achieve? What differences do you want to see a statewide QRIS create for Texas?**

**Can you support the Aspirational Logic Model?**

Small and Whole Group Interaction

12:55 p.m.

**Final Questions & Next Steps**  
Don Titcombe, TELC Manager

1:00 p.m.

**Adjournment**

## MEETING #2: GUIDING PRINCIPLES HANDOUT

### 11 Guiding Principles for Decision-Making – As Proposed by Texas Strategic Plan

- Be family and child focused.
- Be available to all providers and families, with priority outreach to working families.
- Help more children be ready for school, targeting the State’s most vulnerable children.
- Be understandable to families and providers.
- Be accountable.
- Foster increased integration among standards across early childhood education programs.
- Enable parents to be informed consumers when choosing among early care and education options.
- Support a mixed delivery system.
- Foster coordination and increased alignment between and among the State’s quality improvement programs and services.
- Be feasible to operate and monitor.
- Be fiscally responsible and sustainable.

### Stakeholder Suggested Changes to Proposed Guiding Principles – Offered on September 20, 2012

**Approximately 40 participants organized into six (6) offered the following input when asked to prioritize the proposed Guiding Principles:**

**Participants had a range of suggestions regarding which guiding principles should be prioritized as the two most important:**

- (1) Help more children be ready for school, targeting the State’s most vulnerable children
- (2) Be fiscally responsible and sustainable
- (3) Enable parents to be informed consumers when choosing among early care and education options
- (4) Be family and child focused
- (5) Be available to all providers and families, with priority outreach given to working families.
- (6) Be understandable to families and providers

**When asked about possible additions, the following were offered:**

- (1) Add “provider” to “Be family and child focused.
- (2) Replace “understandable” with “user friendly” in “Be understandable to families and providers.”
- (3) Include “teacher accountability” – with accountability broadly defined.
- (4) Target all families, not just those that are vulnerable.
- (5) Increase resources to providers who serve vulnerable families.
- (6) Increase the supply of options available to families.
- (7) Attend to children’s current interests and needs.
- (8) Engage parents in the QRIS process.
- (9) System should be based on evidence/best practices.
- (10) Inclusive of all early childhood programs.
- (11) Focus on the “I” in QRIS.
- (12) The system should focus on growth and improvement over compliance.

## APPENDIX G: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Associations between Program Quality Indicators and Child Outcomes A Review of the Evidence

#### I. Executive Summary

As the nation moves toward strengthening its early care and education system, there has been a growing emphasis on quality care, which is evident in states' adoption of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). Driven by an assumption that improved quality care will lead to better child outcomes, 49 states and the District of Columbia are in the process of planning the launch or implementing statewide and/or regional QRIS (Cobb, 2012). However, the question remains – does improved quality care result in better outcomes? If so, what are the quality indicators that are the critical components that together better prepare young children?

As Texas considers the adoption of a statewide QRIS, this literature review addresses the above questions with a focus on identifying evidence for children ranging from birth to five years old that demonstrates an association between specific quality indicators and better child outcomes. Overall, the research reveals that limited, mixed or no evidence could be located to conclusively support the QRIS quality indicators that were proposed by the Texas Early Learning Council's Data and QRIS Subcommittee. Only three quality indicators were categorized as having a positive – albeit limited – association with child outcomes: (1) teacher behavior (reviewed jointly with teacher sensitivity), (2) teacher sensitivity (reviewed jointly with teacher behavior), and (3) family engagement. Although the evidence at present is limited, new and ongoing research focused on issues of quality indicators, dosage, thresholds and their links to improved child outcomes is an emerging field of study striving to better understand how best to improve the early care and education systems that support young children.

## **II. Introduction**

As part of the Texas Early Learning Council's consideration of a statewide QRIS, this literature review reports available research on the specific quality indicators proposed by its Data and QRIS Subcommittee. Unlike most literature reviews conducted by states during the QRIS adoption process, this literature review does not focus on how quality indicators may impact quality of care but instead reviews how quality indicators may be linked to improved child outcomes (Elicker, Langill, Ruprecht, & Kwon, 2007; Schilder, Young, Anastasopoulos, Kimura, & Rivera, 2011). A focus on child outcomes partially stems from the local, state, and national emphasis on accountability and school readiness, which is driving demand for evidence-based programs and policies.

The early childhood education field has received significant public attention in the past few decades. As the field has expanded, in part due to increased public investment, so has the demand for research to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of early childhood investments. Research ranging from staple experimental studies such as the Perry Preschool project, Abecedarian project, and Chicago's Child-Parent Center Education program, as well as analysis of the federal Head Start program and public pre-kindergarten programs, have provided compelling evidence that these early childhood programs, when of high quality, can result in long-term and short-term positive benefits for children, their families and the public (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002; Gormley & Phillips, 2003; Gormley, Phillips, & Gayer, 2008; Ludwig & Miller, 2007; Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2002; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). These findings are found across populations, including low income and middle income groups – although the latter to a lesser extent - and across different demographic populations (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006). With a focused lens on child outcomes, these studies have demonstrated that high quality early childhood education programs have lasting positive impacts on areas including children's cognitive skills, socio-emotional development, school readiness (e.g.,

in mathematics, language and literacy assessments), health, academic achievement (e.g., higher standardized test scores, increased likelihood to attend college, increased high school graduation rates, reduction in grade retention), likelihood of adult employment, and arrest rates (Campbell, 2012; Gormley et al., 2008; Karoly, Kilburn & Cannon, 2005; Nelson, Westhues, & MacLeod, 2003; Schweinhart et al., 2005).

While research has built a convincing case supporting investment in early childhood education programs as a means for improving child outcomes, studies have not deconstructed the specific and critical components necessary for reaching the child outcomes achieved by these high quality programs. Instead, the body of research that examines specific program components (e.g., adult-child ratios, teacher education level) demonstrates at best an improved level of quality that is **assumed** to then lead to improved child outcomes (Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg, 2009; Zaslow et al., 2010). However, as being noted by a cadre of leading researchers, this assumption may need to be revisited. Strong evidence is not currently available for linking developmental child outcomes to either QRIS rating levels or specific quality indicators (Pianta et al., 2009; Tout, 2012; Zaslow et al., 2010). While researchers are moving toward examining links between quality indicators and child outcomes in more nuanced ways, multiple challenges have limited rigorous analysis of this relationship, including the high cost and implementation challenges of experimental and/or longitudinal studies. Even when able to execute randomized control trials, which best identify causal relationships, researchers are unable to compare the outcomes of children in an assigned treatment group (e.g., children that are enrolled in Head Start) to children in a control group (e.g., children that are not enrolled in Head Start). This is because children in the control group often attend other forms of early care and education, making it is difficult to isolate the causes of specific child outcomes.

Building on this Introduction, the remainder of the literature review is structured as followed: (III) discussion of the review's methodology, (IV) limitations of the review (V) examination of specific quality indicators, (VI) areas for future consideration, and (VII) conclusion.

### **III. Discussion of the Methodology**

This section discusses the methodological approach employed to respond to the overarching question: *What is the evidence that the [quality] indicator is tied to improved outcomes for children?* In responding to this question, the literature review focuses on evidence related to the 20 quality indicators identified by the Texas Early Learning Council's Subcommittee on Data and QRIS. The Consultant Team clustered these 20 indicators into categories that reflect broader QRIS categorizations. Each QRIS category and the associated quality indicators are presented in each sub-section of the literature review section that follows.

In order to carry out a comprehensive review, the initial step entailed conducting keyword searches in academic research databases using terms related to child outcome and the specific quality indicator. Results of keyword searches were minimal. As a result, the next step required reviewing primary literature on early care and education and child outcomes, and using this literature and their corresponding references as a foundation for the review. The primary literature encompassed a combination of peer-reviewed articles, state literature reviews of QRIS indicators, and government issued research reports.

Additionally, five research resources were identified as providing a solid foundation for reviewing the current literature (2000 and onward) related to child outcomes. They include literature reviews conducted by Indiana (which is the only state to produce a document tying its QRIS indicators to child outcomes) and Massachusetts (which developed a comprehensive literature review during its QRIS validation process). These five research resources provide an overview of the compelling evidence that ties early childhood education to improved child outcomes, and also serve as a guide to other studies. The five research resources are:

- Elicker, J., Langill, C.C., Ruprecht, K., & Kwon, K. (2007). *A child care Quality Rating System for Indiana. What is its scientific basis?* Purdue University: Center for Families and Department of Child Development and Family Studies.
- Pianta, R. C., Barnett, W. S., Burchinal, M., & Thornburg, K. R. (2009). The Effects of Preschool Education: What We Know, How Public Policy Is or Is Not Aligned With the Evidence Base, and What We Need to Know. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 10(2), 49-88.
- Schilder, D., Young, J., Anastasopoulos, L., Kimura, S., & Rivera, B. (2011). *Massachusetts Quality Rating and Improvement System Provisional Standards Study: Final Report*. Boston, MA: Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care.
- Tout, K., Starr, R., Soli, M., Moodie, S., Kirby, G., & Boller, K. (2010). *Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations*. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Zaslow, M., Anderson, R., Redd, Z., Wessel, J., Tarullo, L., & Burchinal, M. (2010). *Quality Dosage, Thresholds, and Features in Early Childhood Settings: A Review of the Literature*, OPRE 2011-5. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Of the over 30 studies reviewed related to specific QRIS indicators, three use experimental designs with the remainder using quasi-experimental designs and secondary analysis. Note that in the absence of numerous experimental designs, the research indicates associations, not causality, with child outcomes. Furthermore, the studies analyze different program types with 12 focused on child care settings, three on Head Start, nine on pre-kindergarten, six on general early care and education settings. The remainder do not clearly specify the program type.

The child outcome research identified was then assessed using the following categories:

Category of Evidence	Description
<b>No evidence located</b>	No evidence located
<b>Limited evidence</b>	Two or fewer research studies were located
<b>Positive association</b>	Three or more research studies were located and noted a positive association between the quality indicator and child outcomes
<b>No association</b>	Three or more research studies were located and found no association between the quality indicator and child outcomes
<b>Mixed evidence of association</b>	Conflicting research (positive association and no association) was located

#### IV. Limitations of the Review

Although literature is identified for suggested quality indicators, the evidence generally shows small and at best moderate impacts on child outcomes, which does not surprising given the

nominal number of studies on child outcomes and quality indicators (Pianta et al., 2009). Such limited availability of evidence is expected as prior research has examined the relationship of quality indicators to program quality, in contrast to quality indicators and child outcomes. This shift in focus from program quality to child outcomes is relatively new, resulting in a limited number of available studies on the quality indicators of interest to the Subcommittee.

Moreover, interventions that are associated with improved child outcomes have mostly been conducted with small sample sizes (which limit analysis) in terms of children evaluated. In addition, these studies have been implemented with a high degree of fidelity given the involvement of researchers who designed the intervention, which is an opportunity that is not widely available when interventions are scaled up. It has been found that that when such interventions are scaled up, the effects originally seen on child outcomes may not be found (Pianta et al., 2009).

In presenting the evidence, this literature review does not categorize the evidence according to program setting (e.g., Head Start, child development center, child development home, pre-kindergarten), which impacts generalizability of the identified outcomes. For example, it is unclear if a program that showed positive child outcomes for children in a public pre-kindergarten program will translate into better outcomes for children in a licensed child care program. The issue of generalizability warrants consideration given significant variation in the early care and education field in regards to program type, purpose, available resources, funding levels, and regulation.

Additionally, the literature on specific quality indicators and child outcomes that is highlighted primarily identifies associations, and not a cause and effect relationship. This distinction is of critical importance. It points to the need for caution in interpreting results and the importance of continued research to establish a solid evidence-based foundation for choosing among specific quality indicators. As previously discussed, researchers are only beginning to address methodological challenges that arise when attempting to design studies that are able to

deconstruct and evaluate the effects of specific quality indicators on child outcomes – either in isolation or as part of a cluster of indicators.

## V. Examination of Specific Quality Indicators

### A. Workforce Qualifications

Indicator	Activity	Population
<b>Degreed and/or highly-trained teacher</b>	go to school, maintain trainings	administrators, practitioners
<b>Knowledge of child ages and stages of development</b>	Received training or demonstrated understanding	administrators, practitioners
<b>Continuing education</b>	developing professional development plans with self-assessment	administrators, practitioners
<b>Facility workforce experience, training, turnover</b>	workforce retention report; staff records	administrators

Workforce qualifications refer to formal and informal education and training, and this category focuses on lead teachers and teacher assistants unless otherwise specified (workforce qualifications for directors/administrators are noted under Business Administration and Practices, reflecting the indicator as presented by the Data and QRIS Subcommittee). These particular indicators are undergirded by a generally accepted understanding that they will contribute to a workforce that can provide high quality care and education (including positive teacher-child relationships, well-designed instruction, and effective behavior management) that will contribute to improved child outcomes (Burchinal et al., 2000; Rhodes & Huston, 2012; Whitebrook, 2003).

Educational levels and qualifications can be evaluated in multiple ways, including but not limited to the type of degrees attained, credentials received, professional development through workshops and trainings, coaching and mentoring, and annual hours of teacher training (Elicker et al., 2007; Pianta et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). Given the multiple measures of workforce qualifications, teacher quality is complex, with studies rarely

isolating specific indicators of workforce qualifications and identifying associations with child outcomes.

### **Degreed and/or Highly-Trained Teachers & Knowledge of Child Ages and Stages of Development**

**Mixed evidence** is identified related to child outcomes as linked to degreed and/or highly trained teachers and knowledge of child ages and stages of development (as addressed by early childhood education and/or child development degrees). These indicators initially presented as separate in the Subcommittee's proposed QRIS indicators are discussed jointly here given that most studies address both in their analysis.

#### *Literature identifying positive associations*

- Higher language and cognitive test scores are associated with children whose family child care provider has more formal education (Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, Burchinal, O'Brien, & McCartney, 2002).
- Teachers' education, specifically earning a Bachelor's degree, is linked to gains in mathematics skills for pre-kindergarteners. In addition, the CDA credential is associated with children's gains in basic skills (Early et al., 2006).
- Higher language scores among preschool children is associated with having a teacher with a college degree in early childhood or who had attended a training workshop in the community (Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford, & Howes, 2002).
- Better cognitive skills are correlated with teachers with Bachelor degrees and specialized early childhood education training (Barnett, 2003; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Vandell, 2004).
- In center-based infant classrooms led by teachers with Bachelor degrees, girls demonstrate improved cognitive and receptive language scores (Burchinal et al., 2000).

*Literature identifying no associations*

- Education and credentialing are not consistently related to children's academic outcomes as examined for pre-kindergarteners (Early et al., 2006; Howes et al., 2008). Specifically, teachers' years of education and credentialing are not linked to child outcomes although teachers with Bachelor's degrees are associated with children's greater gains in mathematics skills.
- A review of seven preschool program studies examining the level of teacher education and major, including specializations in early childhood education or child development found no association between the highest teacher degree and children's receptive language skills (Early et al, 2007).

## Continuing Education

**Mixed evidence** is identified related to child outcomes as linked to continuing education for providers, which encompasses professional development inclusive of workshops and trainings. In addition, coaching and mentoring is reviewed here as a professional development activity that also supports continuing education.

*Literature identifying positive associations*

- Providers who received informal or formal training are linked to children with more advanced language skills (Burchinal et al., 2002).
- Teachers who received coaching in a literacy curriculum are linked to improved literacy outcomes for their pre-kindergarten children (Mohler, Yun, Carter, & Kasak, 2009).
- Well-integrated, comprehensive professional development with components including online professional development, classroom mentoring, research-based curriculum, and progress monitoring is correlated with improved child language and literacy outcomes (Landry, Swank, Anthony, & Assel, 2011; Landry, Anthony, Swank, & Monseque-Bailey, 2009).

- Teachers who receive targeted, personalized supports including consultations are linked to improved language and literacy outcomes for children based on My Teaching Partner (Hamre et al., 2010).
- Children with more educated and trained caregivers in a family child care home had higher tests scores for cognitive and language development (Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, Burchinal, O'Brien & McCartney, 2002).

*Literature identifying no associations*

- No association is identified between attending workshops and improved child outcomes (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2004; Pianta et al., 2009).

**Workforce Experience and Turnover**

**No evidence is located** related to child outcomes and their links to workforce experience and turnover. However, when there is greater workforce experience and stability of teachers and directors, this indicator may serve as an intermediary for promoting better child outcomes because of its influences on improving quality of care. Research indicates that high turnover rates are associated with conditions of lower quality care (Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney, & Abbott-Shim, 2000; Whitebrook & Sakai, 2003;).

**B. Process Quality**

Indicator	Activity	Population
<b>Teacher sensitivity</b>	score on ECERS, TBRS, CLASS	administrators, practitioners
<b>Teacher behavior</b>	core on ECERS, TBRS, CLASS	administrators, practitioners
<b>Standardized curriculum</b>	implementation and observation	administrators/programs
<b>Nationally-recognized, research-based curriculum, or must be inclusive of ITELG and/or Pre-K Guidelines</b>	implement and use	programs

Process quality refers to children’s direct and immediate experiences with individuals and instructional materials in an early childhood education setting (Pianta et al., 2009; Zaslow et al.,

2010). It focuses on dynamic relationships and interactions among individuals (e.g., teacher-child interactions) and also encompasses developmentally appropriate activities (Elicker et al., 2007). Some studies have suggested that process features of quality matter more than structural features for academic, language, and social child outcomes, especially for English-speaking pre-kindergarten students (Mashburn et al., 2008).

### Teacher Sensitivity & Teacher Behavior

**Positive evidence** is found for child outcomes linked to teacher sensitivity and teacher behavior, which are reviewed as a single construct as the literature commonly discusses the degree of sensitivity found in teachers' behavior. Sensitive teacher behavior is "consistent, positive, and warm toward children, and appropriately responsive to children's cues" (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2002, p. 454). More specifically, teacher sensitivity refers to the degree to which teachers "provide comfort, reassurance, and encouragement" (Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta, & Mashburn, 2010, p. 169). Beyond scores on standard classroom assessments for this construct, the review examines the role of teacher-child relationships on child outcomes. This approach builds upon the concept that teachers' relationships can be considered "a conduit through which the educational and developmental resources offered by the programs reach the young children enrolled" (Howes et al., 2008, p. 30).

- Academic and social outcomes for low-income, pre-kindergarten children are predicted by the quality of teacher-child interactions. In addition, higher quality teacher-child interactions are linked to higher social competence and less behavior problems in higher quality classrooms (Burchinal et al., 2010).
- Teacher reports of closer relationships with a child are correlated with gains in language-related academic skills (Howes et al., 2008).
- Teacher-child relationships and teacher sensitivity indicators, as related to global quality metrics such as CLASS, are associated with improved social skills, language skills, and

achievement outcomes (Burchinal et al., 2008; Mashburn et al., 2008; Pianta & Sthulman, 2004).

- Teachers with higher scores on the Teacher Behavior Rating Scale’s measurements of teacher behavior and sensitivity, as related to language and literacy, are associated with children who perform better on assessments of print knowledge and identification of letter and sounds (Assel, Landry, & Swank, 2007).

### **Standardized Curriculum & Nationally Recognized, Research-Based Curriculum**

**Limited (and mixed) evidence** is identified relating child outcomes to standardized curriculum or nationally recognized, research-based curriculum or curriculum inclusive of Infant-Toddler Early Learning Guidelines (ELGs) or Pre-Kindergarten ELGs. Because of the shared focus on curriculum, these two indicators identified by the Subcommittee are reviewed jointly. Effective curriculum is a written plan that is developmentally appropriate and comprehensive (Elicker et al., 2007; The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, 2011). It is believed to have the capacity to “contribute significantly to positive outcomes for all children” though research has yet to establish this as a causal relationship (Elicker et al., 2007, p. 37; Fantuzzo, Gadsden, & McDermott, 2011; NAEYC, 2003; Pianta et al., 2009).

Though evidence on stand-alone curriculum’s effectiveness is minimal, an emerging body of research suggests that when evidence-based curriculum is implemented with aligned assessment and integrated professional development, it is more effective at promoting improved quality and outcomes than the isolated implementation of curriculum (Clements & Sarama, 2008; Domitrovich, Gest, Gill, Jones, & DeRousie, 2009; Raver et al., 2009; Wasik & Hindman, 2011).

The source of limited evidence related to curriculum and child outcomes comes from the Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research Consortium 2008 report, which conducted research studies at 14 sites implementing different curricula.

*Literature identifying positive associations*

- Two of the 14 preschool curricula studies conducted by the Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research Consortium (*DLM Early Childhood Express* supplemented with *Open Court Reading Pre-K* and *Pre-K Mathematics* supplemented with *DLM Early Childhood Express Math*) report impacts on student-level outcomes for the pre-kindergarten year. Within this same set of 14 preschool curricula interventions, four report impacts on child outcomes during kindergarten. Improved child outcomes are found in reading, phonological awareness, language, and mathematics (Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research Consortium, 2008).

*Literature identifying no associations*

- Nine of the 14 preschool curricula studies conducted by the Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research Consortium do not demonstrate measured impact on child outcomes in either pre-kindergarten or kindergarten. Additionally, the study on the *Project Approach* curriculum reports a negative impact on kindergarten behavior (Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research Consortium, 2008).

**C. Structural Quality**

Indicator	Activity	Population
<b>Group size/ratios</b>	establish reasonable staff-child ratios, by age group	programs
<b>Learning environment (that support 5 domains)<sup>1</sup></b>	create and maintain the environment	programs
<b>Nutrition &amp; wellness</b>	well-planned nutritious meals and activities; self-report	programs, practitioners
<b>Materials (that support the 5 domains)<sup>2</sup></b>	maintain, implement and use	programs

Structural quality refers to program components that are regulated and easily observable (Zaslow et al., 2010). Structural quality indicators, while considered static, are also considered

<sup>1</sup>The five domains are cognitive, language/literacy, health and safety, social emotional and approaches to learning.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

necessary as they can serve as moderators of process quality (children's direct and immediate experiences with individuals and instructional materials) and as mediators to child outcomes (specifically, structural features can impact process quality variables that impact child outcomes) (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2002; Pianta et al., 2009). However, research is inconclusive on this last point as some studies have demonstrated that structural indicators are not related to child outcomes (Mashburn et al., 2008).

### Group Size and Adult-Child Ratios

**Mixed evidence** is identified related to child outcomes as linked to group size and adult-child ratios, which address the number of children and teachers in a setting. Notably, the adult-child ratio is a consistent predictor of quality of teacher instruction and interaction with children (Pianta et al., 2009).

#### *Literature identifying positive associations*

- Improved cognitive and school competence outcomes are correlated with adult-child ratios when examined with other indicators including provider training (NICHD ECCRN, 2002).
- Reduction in group size is associated with very modest improvements in preschool children's mathematics and language skills (Blau, 1999).

#### *Literature identifying no associations*

- Based on two studies, no association is identified between improved child outcomes as related to the child-adult ratio –when examined in isolation as a single indicator and when examined jointly with teacher's level of education and program type (Blau, 1999; Howes et al., 2008).

### Learning Environments

**Mixed evidence** is identified related to child outcomes as linked to learning environments, which refers to a spectrum of categories including activities, teacher practices, materials that are necessary to support learning and school readiness (Tout, Starr, Soli, Moodie, Kirby, & Boller,

2010). The quality of learning environments is commonly assessed using observational measurement tools such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R) (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005), the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS-R) (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2007), the Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ITERS-R) (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2006), and the Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS) (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008).

*Literature identifying positive associations*

- Focusing on the indoor structure and physical layout, centers with high ratios of children to activity areas (more children per activity area) are associated with having children who spent more time off-task (Kantrowitz & Evans, 2004).
- Children's gains in language, literacy, and social domains can be primarily attributed to classroom instructional climate and secondarily to teacher–child relationships and amount of exposure to instruction (Howes et al., 2008).

*Literature identifying no associations*

- When observations of learning environments are examined with a focus on teacher practices, they do not consistently predict child outcomes. Specifically, the CLASS emotional support subscale is not associated with improved child outcomes, but quality of instructional interactions measured in CLASS are associated with academic and language development (Mashburn et al., 2008).

## **Nutrition and Wellness**

**Limited evidence** is identified related to child outcomes as linked to nutrition and wellness, which refers to the nutrition plans and wellness activities implemented in programs (Benjamin & Brady, 2011). The evidence identified below show the role of health training programs as a means to improve child outcomes. Generally, early health is considered a factor in school readiness and a key predictor of later health outcomes (Guyer, 2011).

- The implementation of a staff and parent focused health literacy program is associated with changes in children’s body mass index and improved health literacy knowledge by the children; however parents and staff training may be a mediating factor (Herman, 2011; Herman & Jackson, 2010).
- For preschoolers whose providers received training on healthy eating and physical activity, there are associated improved child outcomes including a decrease in the percent of obese children as well as less time spent in sedentary behaviors (Crowley, 2012).

### Materials

**Limited evidence** was identified related to child outcomes as linked to materials that support the five domains (cognitive, language/literacy, health and safety, social emotional and approaches to learning). Developmentally appropriate materials can range from manipulatives such as blocks to books to dramatic play props. While materials do not appear to have been evaluated in isolation as an indicator of child outcomes, they are a common component of early childhood education interventions that are associated with better child outcomes (Howes et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 2009).

- Attending a center with a variety of stimulating materials that are organized in an orderly fashion is associated with better cognitive and social skills (Clarke-Stewart et al., 2002).

### D. Assessment

Indicator	Activity	Population
<b>Screenings</b>	implement health and developmental screenings	administrators, practitioners
<b>Assessments, Observations, and Service Planning</b>	written plan of strategies and tools to complete ongoing observation and assessments of children birth to 5	programs, administrators, practitioners

## Screenings

**Mixed evidence** was identified related to child outcomes as linked to screenings, which primarily serve to identify children who may be in need of referral for developmental delays (Tout et al., 2010).

### *Literature identifying positive associations*

- Earlier hearing screenings (newborn hearing screening within two weeks of birth compared to distraction hearing screening at nine months) are associated with better developmental outcomes for young children with permanent childhood hearing impairments (Kover et al., 2010).
- Early identification and intervention for children with or at risk of disability is related to child outcomes (Jones & Meisels, 1987).

### *Literature identifying no associations*

- This single study found no evidence that comprehensive health screening of children will benefit a child's health (Nathanson, Lee & Tzioumi, 2009).

## Child Assessments, Observations, and Service Planning

**No evidence is located** related to child outcomes as linked to child assessments.<sup>3</sup> Child assessments can be formal or informal and are used on an ongoing basis to track individual children's progress. Assessments can include portfolios, structured observations, interviews, tests, anecdotal notes, and checklists (Early Learning Standards Task Force and Kindergarten Assessment Work Group, 2005; Elicker et al., 2007). Child assessments are used to inform and improve teachers' instructional practice so teachers can tailor instruction and design a learning environment that maximizes each child's potential growth (Schilder et al., 2011; Tout et al., 2010).

While no research was located that clearly identifies and isolates a relationship between conducting child assessments and improved child outcomes, a robust academic literature contends

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<sup>3</sup> Observation and service planning were addressed either as activities that occur during a child assessment or as follow-up and therefore were not examined independently of child assessment.

that high-quality, validated assessments, when systematically and intentionally linked to curriculum and professional development, can improve program quality and child outcomes (Grisham-Brown, Hallam, & Brookshire, 2006; Hebbeler & Rooney, 2009; National Research Council, 2008).

### E. Program Compliance and Administrative Practices

Indicator	Activity	Population
<b>Program compliance with rules and regulations</b>	site visits, records	programs
<b>No abuse and neglect findings</b>	site visits, records	programs

#### Program Compliance with Rules and Regulations & No Abuse and Neglect Findings

**No evidence is located** related to child outcomes as linked to both program compliance with rules and regulations and no abuse and neglect findings. While no studies are identified specific to child outcomes, research points to a relationship between program quality and states' regulatory standards, as well as toxic environments that stem from the accumulation of multiple risk factors including abuse and neglect (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

### F. Business and Administration Practices

Indicator	Activity	Population
<b>Capacity to serve children with special needs; provide an inclusive environment for all children</b>	make programs accessible and accommodating; written inclusion plan, implemented with good faith	administrators
<b>Detailed administrator assessment, consistent management practices, administrator training and qualifications</b>	invest in ongoing improvement for leadership and management	programs, administrators

#### Program's Capacity to Serve Children with Special Needs & Provide an Inclusive Environment

**No evidence is located** related to child outcomes as linked to a program's capacity to serve children with special needs, which stems in part from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that together ensure the civil and

educational rights of disabled individuals (Elicker et al., 2007). To facilitate a welcoming and inclusive environment for children who are disabled, programs may choose to require specialized training for staff, may want to ensure the classroom environment is responsive to children with special needs, and are required to develop individualized plans that are sensitive to each child’s needs.

### Management Practices and Administrator Qualifications

**No evidence is located** related to child outcomes as linked to management practices, such as program assessments and work environment, and administrator qualifications, including level of education and on-going professional development (Elicker et al., 2007; Schilder et al., 2011). While a link with child outcomes is not identified, studies have found a positive relationship between these indicators and program quality. Most specifically, studies using the Program Administration Scale (PAS) have suggested there is a significant relationship among program administration, organizational climate, and improved classroom quality (Lower & Cassidy, 2007; the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, 2007; the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, 2010; Talan & Bloom, 2004).

### G. Family Engagement

Indicator	Activity	Population
Parent involvement	parent involvement curriculum, activities, conferences; parent trainings	programs, practitioners

**Positive evidence** is identified related to child outcomes as linked to family engagement, which refers to how programs involve and engage families through a variety of activities and strategies. However, available research has yet to identify which family engagement activities are most highly associated with improved child outcomes. Such engagement takes place when there is “on-going, reciprocal, strengths-based partnership between families and their children’s early childhood education programs” (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark, & Moodie, 2009, p. 3). Family

engagement encompasses scheduling regular conferences between the program and families, developing a written family handbook, establishing regular communication through newsletters and via bulletin boards, soliciting parent feedback through surveys, creating a parent advisory board, establishing a parent resource center, and providing families with opportunities to participate in classroom and program activities (Elicker et al., 2007; Tout et al., 2010).

- Parents’ involvement at school, especially for socially and economically disadvantaged families, may be related to improved literacy skills at the end of the kindergarten year (Lin, 2003).
- Although directed to an older age population, parent involvement in school is associated with lower rates of high school dropout, increased on-time high school completion and highest grade completed (Barnard, 2004).
- Parental involvement is a predictor of children’s academic achievement and social skills among young children ranging in ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds (England, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Henrich & Gadaire, 2008; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004; Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006).

## H. Accreditation

Indicator	Activity	Population
National accreditation and SRCS	participation	programs, classrooms

**Limited evidence** is identified related to child outcomes as linked to national accreditation, which is a voluntary process in which programs are assessed by a professional organization that has identified program quality standards that are typically above the mandatory requirements of government-supervised licensing or registration (Tout et al., 2010; Elicker et al., 2007). In order to achieve accreditation status, early childhood education programs volunteer to be assessed on the identified quality benchmarks that include, but are not limited to, learning environment, health,

safety, and workforce qualifications. The most well-known national accreditation programs are from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for child care centers and from the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) for family child care homes.

In addition to national accreditation programs, the Subcommittee identified the Texas School Readiness Certification System (SRCS) as a proposed quality indicator. No research on the association of SRCS and child outcomes is identified; however there is a review on the efficacy and utility of the program as identified by local stakeholders (Zajano et al., 2011). SRCS is no longer in operation, however, and the State now relies on the Texas Kindergarten Readiness System (KRS), which is a different system than SRCS in terms of what is measured. KRS assesses the kindergarten readiness of children as measured by a literacy-based assessment. The assessment results are then applied to a formula that recognizes pre-kindergarten programs that prepare a certain percentage of kindergarten-ready children from each cohort; KRS data is not used to directly evaluate programs (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

- Children who attend accredited child care centers have better outcomes in cognitive, language and gross motor skills (Dinehart, Manfra, Katz, & Hartman, 2012).

## **VI. Areas for Consideration**

As this literature review suggests, the evidence addressing the association between child outcomes and specific quality indicators appears to be limited at best. As the research field moves forward in refining its approaches to examining the relationship between quality indicators and child outcomes, it has begun to highlight the impact that thresholds and dosage may have on achieving program quality and child outcomes. The Child Care and Early Education Quality Features, Thresholds and Dosage and Child Outcomes (Q-DOT) project discusses *dosage* “as the amount or timing of current participation in early care and education (ECE), and as the amount or timing of cumulative participation in ECE” (Zaslow et al., 2010, p. 11). Furthermore, the research on dosage suggests that an increase in dosage, specifically attendance in high quality ECE programs, is

linked to an increase in positive child outcomes, including narrowing the achievement gap of low income and higher income children (Zaslow et al., 2010). In its consideration of *thresholds*, the Q-DOT project is examining if children benefit from ECE programs that are at or above a specific level of quality; and from the emerging research available, there is suggestive though not conclusive evidence that there may be improved child outcomes when quality care is in a higher range opposed to low quality range (Burchinal et al., 2010; Goffin, 2010; Zaslow et al., 2010).

The roles of thresholds and dosage should be considered as they address additional factors (other than linear relationships between quality indicators and child outcomes) that may play an integral role in improving child outcomes. As potential predictors of quality care, they are possibly intertwined with child outcome research. Moreover, future research may shed light on the interconnectedness of quality indicators; for example, if impacts on child outcomes occur with the implementation of single quality indicators at a specific threshold or the implementation of a cluster of quality indicators.

## **VII. Conclusion**

In response to increasing scrutiny of the relationship between quality indicators and child outcomes, this literature review focuses on identifying evidence that addresses associations between child outcomes and quality indicators as proposed by the Texas Early Learning Council's Data and QRIS Subcommittee. Given the limited body of available studies on this emerging research topic, the literature review identifies little conclusive evidence to support the Subcommittee's proposed QRIS quality indicators. Teacher behavior and teacher sensitivity, and parent engagement are the only quality indicators where research suggests there is a positive relationship with improved child outcomes.

The absence of compelling evidence for the majority of the quality indicators helps explain concerns raised by leading researchers who have noted lack of evidence tying specific quality indicators to improved child outcomes. In response to this research gap, research is continually

evolving and improving methodologically to respond to the need to identify the specific components necessary to improve both quality care and education and child outcomes.

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## APPENDIX H: TEXAS QRIS COST ESTIMATION

The Texas QRIS cost estimation that follows provides the Council with a general estimate of the start-up and long term costs of a new, statewide Texas QRIS. As noted in the Strategic Plan, the QRIS Cost Estimation Model (CEM) tool was developed by Anne Mitchell of the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance and was adapted as a publicly accessible web-based tool by the National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC). The CEM was used as a guide to estimate the cost of each of the key QRIS components that require funding. The components that require funding as noted in the QRIS Resource Guide (as noted in Part II, Section VIII of the Strategic Plan), include the following:

- ▶ Strategic Planning and Design
- ▶ Development of Quality Standards
- ▶ Accountability and Monitoring
- ▶ Provider Supports and Incentives
- ▶ Consumer Education and Marketing
- ▶ Data Collection and Evaluation

Even though the QRIS Resource Guide includes “Implementation Approach” as a component requiring funding, a specific cost estimation line item for this component is not included in what follows. Instead, the costs related to the chosen implementation approach are incorporated into those QRIS line items where implementation approach is most relevant: provider supports and incentives, accountability and monitoring, data collection, and evaluation.

Given the above considerations and the strategic questions that await the Council’s decisions, projecting a cost for a statewide Texas QRIS at this stage of QRIS strategic planning process is difficult. Most notably, agreement on and commitment to a logic model is needed to finalize a more definitive cost estimate for a new, statewide Texas QRIS. Logic models highlight the activities that will be major cost drivers of a state’s QRIS.

The major cost drivers of a QRIS tend to be provider supports/incentives and monitoring/accountability efforts. For example, should the Council chose to use a “portfolio of measures” (as proposed in Part II, Section II) instead of relying on a single assessment measure, a significant cost increase would be expected. As another example, decisions about which programs receive technical assistance, how the technical assistance is delivered, and how often it is provided will each have significant impact on the cost of a Texas QRIS. Additionally, decisions regarding which early childhood sectors are included, the priority assigned to each sector in the rollout, and anticipated participation levels from each sector will each have significant impact on the potential costs. The importance of these decisions as they relate to a cost analysis cannot be overstated.

In order to offer a cost estimate, critical assumptions had to be made. Assumptions were made based on the Strategic Plan’s 17 proposals, and also informed by insights gained from the engagement process with the Data and QRIS Subcommittee and Texas stakeholders. These nine assumptions are listed below.

<b>Major Assumptions of a Texas QRIS Cost Estimation</b>	
Assumption 1	The TX QRIS will be a 5 tier system, with licensing as the first level of entry.
Assumption 2	The TX QRIS will be a Birth to Kindergarten system.
Assumption 3	Programs currently participating in the TRS, and regulated programs (licensed centers, licensed homes and registered homes) are priorities for initial rollout, followed by Head Start programs next. We recognize that this assumption is not completely aligned with feedback received from Survey #3. However, given that TRS is currently reimbursing licensed centers, licensed homes and registered homes, we anticipate the need to roll these providers into a new QRIS first.
Assumption 4	As a conservative estimate, it is assumed that the current subsidy reimbursement for Texas Rising Star (TRS) will be increased by 3% at each tier. They number of subsidy children currently being served will remain the same over 5 years. Current annual subsidy payments are estimated at \$400M.
Assumption 5	The TX QRIS will make a significant investment in scholarships that support the ECE workforce’s professional development.
Assumption 6	The TX QRIS will make a significant investment in direct technical assistance services to 75-95% of participating programs.

Assumption 7	The TX QRIS will rely on online training as the major training resource for programs and the ECE workforce. This assumption should not be interpreted to mean that online training is the most effective training method.																																													
Assumption 8	The TX QRIS will use CLASS as the preferred assessment tool. The Strategic Plan proposes that a “portfolio of measures” be used in the QRIS. However, the CEM limits choices for assessment tools to CLASS and ECERS. Given the results of the literature review, it is assumed CLASS would be desired over ECERS in the new QRIS. As discussed in the Strategic Plan, the cost of the QRIS will increase with the number of assessment measures chosen.																																													
Assumption 9	<p>The TX QRIS will adopt the following Implementation Approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Year 1</b> – Planning and developing standards</li> <li>➤ <b>Year 2</b> – Pilot with 100 programs (The number 100 was chosen to ensure that programs represent a variety of demographics and sectors, and should not be interpreted as a statistically valid sample)</li> <li>➤ <b>Year 3</b> – Focus is on transitioning current Texas Rising Start programs and fidelity of system implementation</li> <li>➤ <b>Year 4-5</b> – Focus is on increasing participation of licensed programs, adding Head Start programs and strengthening the fidelity of system implementation. Registered homes will likely see a decline in participation as the system rolls out and stabilizes.</li> </ul> <p>The following program participation levels are projected for Years 3-5.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="5">Projected QRIS participation % rates</th> </tr> <tr> <th></th> <th>Program count</th> <th>Year 3</th> <th>Year 4</th> <th>Year 5</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><b>Licensed Centers*</b></td> <td>9519**</td> <td>25%</td> <td>35%</td> <td>45%</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Licensed Homes (7-12 children)*</b></td> <td>1743</td> <td>20%</td> <td>30%</td> <td>40%</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Registered Homes (up to 6 children)*</b></td> <td>6302</td> <td>20%</td> <td>15%</td> <td>10%</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Licensed Head Start***(excludes HS operating under license exemption)</b></td> <td>800</td> <td></td> <td>100%</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="5">*Source - 2011 TX Licensing Report</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="5">**Count includes Licensed Head Starts, but participation projections for Licensed Head Start are calculated separately</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="5">***Source – Personal Communication with HS Collaboration Director</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Projected QRIS participation % rates						Program count	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	<b>Licensed Centers*</b>	9519**	25%	35%	45%	<b>Licensed Homes (7-12 children)*</b>	1743	20%	30%	40%	<b>Registered Homes (up to 6 children)*</b>	6302	20%	15%	10%	<b>Licensed Head Start***(excludes HS operating under license exemption)</b>	800		100%	100%	*Source - 2011 TX Licensing Report					**Count includes Licensed Head Starts, but participation projections for Licensed Head Start are calculated separately					***Source – Personal Communication with HS Collaboration Director				
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In addition to the nine major assumptions listed above, additional detailed assumptions are made about each line item, and are highlighted directly in the cost estimation budget that follows.

Immediately following is the detailed cost estimation over 5 years (start-up planning, pilot and implementation) for a new, statewide QRIS.

Where Do We Go From Here: Charting Next Steps | January 2013

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total 5 year cost	Assumptions
	PLANNING	PILOT	TRANSITION	ONGOING	ONGOING		
<b>Strategic Planning</b>							
Stakeholder engagement meetings/travel	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	100,000	Meetings facilitated by QRIS Project Director; 12 meetings in Austin and 12 meetings throughout state each year
QRIS Project Director	100,000	100,000	105,000	105,000	110,000	520,000	Staffed by a government employee to oversee entire project
<b>Development of Standards</b>							
Quality baseline data collection and analysis	75,000					75,000	Data needed to support development of standards.
Expert consultant to develop standards	100,000	30,000				130,000	Year 1 -development of pilot standards. Year 2 - revisions to standards based out pilot evaluation.
Lit review of standards	25,000					25,000	
<b>Accountability and Monitoring</b>							
CLASS assessor training		4,500	8,500	17,000	21,000	51,000	\$670 for assessors; \$2,100 for master observers/trainers; \$1100 travel for each trainee
CLASS assessments		50,000	457,000	884,000	1,013,000	2,404,000	Performed every two years in 50% of classrooms for programs at levels 2,3,4, 5; avg number of CLASS assessments completed each week by each assessor = 5; annual reliability checks completed through use of video

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	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total 5 year cost	Assumptions
	PLANNING	PILOT	TRANSITION	ONGOING	ONGOING		
QRIS administration	100,000	100,000	203,000	337,500	375,000	1,115,500	Infrastructure needed to support things such as: policy development, coordination of QRIS operations, appeals process, and data analysis and reporting administrative tasks
QRIS app review process		20,000	480,000	720,000	945,000	2,165,000	Salaries of QRIS application reviewers = 40K for year 2,3,4; increase to 45K for year 5; Reviewers will complete 10 applications/week at set schedule during scheduled enrollment periods
<b>Provider Supports and Incentives</b>							
PD scholarships for center practitioners			5,693,000	9,421,000	10,651,000		Scholarships will remain at current level until Year 3, so are not factored into the additional cost of a QRIS until Year 3. Avg scholarship amount = \$1,000; between 10-25% of practitioners will receive scholarships
PD scholarships for home practitioners			350,000	434,000	523,810		Scholarships will remain at current level until Year 3, so are not factored into the additional cost of a QRIS until Year 3. Avg scholarship amount = \$1,000; between 10-25% of practitioners will receive scholarships

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total 5 year cost	Assumptions
	PLANNING	PILOT	TRANSITION	ONGOING	ONGOING		
Technical assistance for center programs			5,651,000	9,726,000	11,743,000	27,120,000	Between 80-95% of programs will receive technical assistance; est \$2500/year/program
Technical assistance for home programs			3,821,000	4,928,000	6,353,000	15,102,000	Between 80-95% of programs will receive technical assistance; est \$2500/year/program
Online training modules	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	1,250,000	Core competency online modules - annual support and enhancements
Tiered reimbursement			12,000,000	12,000,000	12,000,000	36,000,000	3% increase from current TRS rates across each tier based on est \$400M total payments/year; number of children in the subsidy program will remain at current level
<b>Consumer Education and Marketing</b>							
Program recruitment/marketing			250,000	250,000	150,000	650,000	Efforts designed to transition and recruit programs - greatest effort will be immediately following pilot; efforts are reduced as the system becomes fully operational and program participation increases
Consumer education, marketing					500,000	500,000	Marketing to parents is not recommended until system is fully operational

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total 5 year cost	Assumptions
	PLANNING	PILOT	TRANSITION	ONGOING	ONGOING		
<b>Data Collection and Evaluation</b>							
QRIS Data System	200,000	250,000	120,000	140,000	160,000	870,000	Data system is developed across Years 1 and 2, by enhancing a currently existing system; Year 2-5 are support and maintenance costs that increase as participation and end users increase
QRIS hardware (tablets)		80,000	30,000	20,000	10,000	140,000	Tablet cost is 2,000/user; hardware costs increase as program participation increase and new users are added
Pilot Evaluation		25,000	75,000			100,000	Pilot evaluation will cross over years 2 and 3
QRIS Validation Study				250,000			Formative study (process fidelity)
QRIS System Study					350,000	350,000	Summative study (system outcomes)
<b>Total Annual Cost</b>	<b>870,000</b>	<b>929,500</b>	<b>29,513,500</b>	<b>39,502,500</b>	<b>45,174,810</b>		
<b>Total Five Year Cost</b>						<b>115,990,310</b>	