

Contra Costa's Quality Rating and Improvement System



What is the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge?

The Early Learning Challenge is a federal grant to help states set up systems to assess and improve the quality of child care and early learning.

In 2011, California received a 4-year, \$75 million Early Learning Challenge grant. Sixteen counties in California received funding to develop a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), including the Bay Area counties Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz and San Francisco. First 5 commissions in the Bay Area, along with their partners, are collaborating to implement the grant locally. First 5 Contra Costa will receive \$2 million through December 2015.

What is a Quality Rating and Improvement System?

Nearly every state in the nation is engaged in improving the quality of early education programs through statewide Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). QRISs rate child care programs using consistent criteria and provide ongoing support to help child care programs improve their quality. QRISs can also help families easily identify high-quality child care for their children.

In California, the QRIS employs a five-tiered rating system. A higher rating earns sites a higher tier. California counties implementing the grant have agreed to use the same rating requirements and criteria for Tiers 1, 3, and 4. Tiers 2 and 5 have been determined locally.



How does a QRIS help young children?

Research shows that children learn best in stimulating environments with well-trained and well-educated teachers. Because the first five years are the most important time in a child's development, the higher quality of early care and education children receive, the more children benefit.

A QRIS can help families identify high-quality child care for their child and creates a system to continually improve the overall quality of child care available.

Which First 5 Contra Costa programs does the QRIS build on?

For over a decade, First 5 Contra Costa has funded programs designed to improve the quality of child care in our county by training and educating the child care workforce and making overall improvements at child care sites serving low-income children. These programs include:

- **Community College Support:** We fund academic advisors at Contra Costa's community colleges to help child care providers earn AA degrees in Early Childhood Education (ECE). These providers receive textbook loans, tutoring, and participate in cohort classes tailored for English language learners or Math students. Providers receive financial Incentives when they reach academic milestones. Last year alone, 1,200 providers received support.
- **Trainings:** Individual providers receive incentives and support to help them improve their teaching practices, with particular emphasis on the classroom environment, teacher-child interactions, and developmental screenings.
- **Preschool Makes a Difference (PMD):** PMD provides scholarships to low-income children to attend quality preschool – but only at approved and rated preschools. Once in the PMD program, preschools receive ongoing technical assistance and training to provide even higher quality care. Currently, all PMD providers are participating in QRIS.

What has First 5 Contra Costa done so far to pilot a QRIS?

Currently, First 5 Contra Costa has recruited 62 sites to pilot Contra Costa's QRIS. Each site has conducted a self-assessment tied to the QRIS tiers and produced a portfolio and quality improvement plan, which outlines the training and improvements sites will make. External assessments and ratings will be completed over the next two years. On-site coaching, technical assistance, professional development opportunities, and financial incentives are provided. We aim to engage 100 sites by December 2015, when the grant concludes.

Which sites can participate in Contra Costa's QRIS?

Private child care centers, family child care homes, state preschool programs, and Head Start sites are eligible to participate. Per the grant, these sites are located in low-income communities and must serve infants and toddlers, dual language learners, children with special needs, or children eligible for state and federally subsidized programs. Our Preschool Makes a Difference sites receive priority for participation.

How are sites rated?

External raters evaluate sites according to three areas:

- **Child development and school readiness** – reviews how providers assess children's development and use of developmental or health screenings
- **Teachers and teaching** – reviews qualifications for teachers (degrees, ECE units earned) and how teachers interact with children (using the CLASS tool)
- **Program and environment** – reviews ratio size, program environment, and qualifications of the program director (centers only)

What kind of support do QRIS sites receive to improve quality?

Participating QRIS sites receive :

- Onsite coaching to set and meet improvement goals
- Access to in-person and online trainings
- Participation and improvement incentives to support continued quality improvement
- Technical assistance to understand and meet QRIS participation requirements

Who are our partners implementing the program?

- **Contra Costa County Office of Education** - implements the rating system and provides training and professional development coordination
- **Contra Costa Community College, Diablo Valley College, and Los Medanos College** - provide advising, cohort classes, and tutoring to individual providers and technical assistance to family child care providers
- **Contra Costa Child Care Council** - provides site coaching for child care centers
- **Head Start** - provides site coaching for their organization

What is the long-term vision for taking the QRIS to scale?

The pilot QRIS will provide important information for determining the eventual implementation of a full-scale QRIS. Ultimately, we hope that all early learning programs will participate in QRIS so that the level of quality is raised statewide and families will have more information in choosing a provider.



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