

## Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System Validation Study Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant

The North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) is conducting a Validation Study of the state's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS). The overall goal is to ensure that, as the state revises its star-rated license system for early care and education programs, the tiers meaningfully differentiate levels of program quality that correspond to changes in children's progress. This study is being funded by the U.S. Department of Education and the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, through the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant awarded to North Carolina in December 2011.

DCDEE has been a national leader in developing the star-rated licensing system, a statewide TQRIS for early care and education programs. North Carolina has made significant investments in establishing a reliable and valid method for differentiating programs at different levels, or tiers, of quality. All programs meet a set of minimum standards, defined as a rating of one star. As part of a two-component star rating system, programs may earn additional points for Staff Education and Program Standards, leading to ratings from two to five stars. DCDEE seeks to revise this star-rating system to better reflect the improved quality of child care now available in North Carolina and new knowledge about best early childhood practice.

Families can use star ratings to inform their choice of early care and education providers, and programs with more stars receive higher levels of reimbursement for children whose care is subsidized. North Carolina is committed to ensuring that programs rated as higher quality truly do promote young children's learning and development more effectively than programs rated as lower quality. As part of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, North Carolina has also committed to increasing the number of early care and education programs in the top tiers of the TQRIS, and increasing the number of children with high needs who are served in high quality programs. The ultimate goal is better outcomes for all children and families in North Carolina. For all of these reasons, it is essential that TQRIS ratings meaningfully differentiate programs of higher and lower quality.

The QRIS Advisory Committee recommends that North Carolina's revised TQRIS be a hybrid system. This would include some requirements that programs must meet at certain levels, called "Blocks", along with a mechanism for providers to choose among a number of options for additional requirements, called "Points". Providers would advance to higher levels by meeting requirements for both Blocks and Points. The Advisory Committee also recommends that the system include Core Requirements to be met by all licensed child care providers at every level, and the opportunity for programs to earn points in a chosen area of Specialization that can lead to a "Program of Distinction" designation.

The Validation Study is being conducted in two phases. During Phase I, DCDEE will test several alternative models for the revised TQRIS, with different specific requirements. Phase I of the study began in January 2013 and is being conducted by researchers from Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, led by Dr. Iheoma Iruka, in collaboration with Child Trends. During this phase, researchers will interview and survey early care and education providers, families, and other stakeholders, and use data to determine how programs would most likely be rated using different sets of standards.

Information from Phase I will help DCDEE to choose and develop a single model for the revised TQRIS. This model will be thoroughly evaluated during Phase II of the Validation Study and revised if needed before it is implemented. Phase II, planned for 2013-2015, will ensure that programs with higher ratings provide higher quality care and education, leading to better developmental and learning outcomes for young children.