



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, we will provide 6 main recommendations related to the proposed Report Cards.

1. The State Should Create A System That Is Both An Accountability System And A Funded Quality Improvement System if Improved Child Outcomes are to be Achieved

A system measuring quality must include guidance and resources for programs to know and understand how to they can improve their quality. Without this crucial piece of educating and supporting programs, Louisiana will never be able to provide the foundational support needed for children to achieve success at all levels of education as called for in Act 3. There is no argument that effective interactions are a critical component of a high quality program. However, as the CLASS Implementation Guide produced by Teachstone states “the fairness and effectiveness of accountability policies depends on ensuring that demands are aligned with systems that prepare teachers and programs to meet these expectations. Simply receiving a report about the quality of one’s interactions is unlikely to lead to improvements without further information and support.” It is essential that professional development supports, as defined by a quality improvement system, are in place. Thus, Louisiana should

create a system that integrates a funded quality improvement system in conjunction with the accountability system to ensure children are given the opportunity to have a strong foundation for their future school success.

2. Multiple Quality Indicators Should Be Used in the Determination Of the Letter Grade On The Early Childhood Organization/Program Report Card

A quality improvement system should include many indicators in order to accurately portray and communicate the holistic quality of services provided by programs and/or networks and provide the stepping stones to improve quality. In the 2014 QRIS Compendium, an online catalog that compares Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) across the United States, it demonstrates that the average number of quality indicators used by states is roughly five with a range that extends up to ten indicators. Because the letter grade received by programs may impact the level of public funds received, it is crucial that the letter grades include a range of quality indicators to ensure accuracy in the judgment of a program’s quality. Additionally, as stated in the Superintendent’s Early Childhood Policy Blueprint, the report card system must provide clear guidance on steps toward quality

improvements. The proposed drafts do not demonstrate a complete picture of a programs’ quality nor do they provide direction as to how to improve quality. Furthermore, given the potential lack of variance in the CLASS scores to create a 5 level system (i.e. A, B, C, D, and F), additional quality indicators can provide needed distinctions between the various levels.

Structural Features of Quality That Should Be Included

Although process quality features, such as positive and stimulating interactions, are the most important contributors to children’s gains in many areas, research has underscored that structural features, (e.g. small group size, ratios and teacher qualifications) create the right conditions for high quality interactions (Yoshikawa, et al, 2013). This is of particular concern in Louisiana because the child care licensing regulations do not establish quality structural features as a minimum requirement. In the 2013 We Can Do Better Report (Child Care Centers) published by Child Care Aware of America, Louisiana licensing regulations were ranked as 49th. Due to the lack of high quality structural features in current licensing regulations, the following structural features should be added to the early childhood organization/ program report card used for accountability purposes:

- **Staff Qualifications/Credentials and Compensation Levels:** Staff qualifications/credentials indicative of the formal schooling that staff has received related to early childhood education is important to the overall understanding and implementation of quality practices in the classrooms.
- **On-going Professional Development Opportunities for Staff:** Early Childhood professionals need ongoing training, mentoring and coaching related to their practice. While better-compensated, school-based employees might be able to pay for these supports on their own, child care staff (who often earn poverty-level wages and no employee-supported benefits) simply cannot support this cost. Thus, programs that invest in ensuring staff has access to needed professional development should receive credit for these investments on a Report Card.
- **Teacher-Child Ratios and Group Size Limits:** Research has underscored the key link between ratios and group size and effective teaching. It is simply not possible effectively support early learning with only two teachers in a classroom of twenty-two two-year-olds. Indeed, this situation is not even safe. In the event of a fire, how would so few teachers ensure that all of the toddlers get out of the building quickly? (Anyone who has experienced the 'terrible twos' knows that it is often necessary to physically pick up children of this age if quick action is needed.) And if one child was injured or simply needed a diaper change, how could one teacher effectively supervise the remaining 19 toddlers? Ratios this high are unadvised for multiple reasons. Even the noise level of that many toddlers in one room is not conducive to learning.
- **Using Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) assessments for the programs in the lower two levels of quality (D and F):** The ERS is an appropriate tool for programs that serve infants and toddlers, as well as those in the early stages of quality improvement. To this end, the state should implement a system in which a predetermined threshold of quality is attained on the ERS tool prior to the program being assessed using the CLASS assessment. Many states and localities are deciding to use both the ECERS-R and the CLASS as part of evaluation and monitoring efforts, in order to provide a comprehensive assessment of observed quality (CLASS Implementation Guide, 2009). ERS assessments are currently being used as part of the Quality Start system. This recommendation should be considered because of the following reasons:
 - This strategy would provide new or lower quality programs with foundational knowledge and guidance gained through being assessed on ERS tools. After being assessed with the ERS tool, programs would better understand global quality in early education, such as how the environment should be set up, materials needed to be included, health & safety best practices, daily schedules appropriate for young children, and basic strategies for quality teacher-child interaction.
 - This strategy would create an interim step for child development programs that serve infants and toddlers, for whom the CLASS assessment tools are very new and still in the pilot stages.
 - After there is evidence that programs have implemented high quality early care and education best practices related to the environment and appropriateness of the schedule and materials, the CLASS assessment would provide information to programs as to how they can provide sophisticated, effective staff-child interactions that enhance child outcomes.
- Additionally, if ERS scores are used for programs in the lower two levels of quality (D or F), these programs could be expected to use the tools in developing program improvement plans. Programs can use the tools to self-assess their quality in a way that CLASS program assessments do not allow. This recommendation should be considered because it would hold lower quality programs accountable for understanding high quality early care and education environments and developmentally appropriate practice. It would also instruct programs on the importance of creating program improvement plans and constantly working towards higher levels of quality.

Curriculum and Formative Child Assessment:

The effective use of curricula can play a crucial role in ensuring children have the opportunity to acquire school readiness skills during the preschool years. Recent studies suggest that intensive, developmentally focused curricula with integrated professional development and monitoring of children's progress offers the strongest hope for improving classroom quality as well as child outcomes (Yoshikawa, et al, 2013). Therefore, it is imperative that the state ensure that appropriate curriculum and child assessment are used in the early care and education programs. Detailed recommendations related to curriculum and child assessment are as follows:

- **Curriculum** must meet the following criteria:
 - Research-based curriculum
 - Aligned with the Louisiana Birth to Five Early Learning Development & Standards (ELDS)
 - Evidence that teachers have been properly trained in the implementation of the curriculum and are provided ongoing professional development opportunities
 - Evidence that assessment information is informing curriculum planning

- **Formative Child Assessments** must meet the following criteria:
 - Evidence-based tool that aligns with the curriculum
 - Aligned with the Louisiana Birth to Five Early Learning Development & Standards (ELDS)
 - Must have an online repository that the LDOE can access to validate usage and determine progress of children
 - Teachers using the tool must be trained by a trainer, who has been both trained by the publishers of the tool and has received accreditation as a trainer
 - Tool must include a measure of reliability for those using it and evidence that users are reliable
 - Must be capable of demonstrating the level of child progress a minimum of 3 times each school year

3. The CLASS Should be Implemented in a Way that Ensures the Accountability System is Fair and Has Integrity

Because of the high stakes that the CLASS scores will be for all programs, the state should include the following requirements for the implementation of CLASS assessments:

- All CLASS scores used for accountability must be done by **third party, unbiased assessors**
- In determining a program's letter grade, **every classroom should**

be assessed to provide the most accurate representation of the overall quality in the program.

4. The New Accountability System Should Be Based on Existing Louisiana's Quality Start System, which Factors in Multiple Quality Indicators such as Teacher-Child Ratios, Staff Credentials and Compensation, Program Quality Improvement Plans, and Staff Professional Development

Louisiana currently has in place a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), called Quality Start that is positively impacting the quality of programming in child care programs across the state. This system already includes many of the additional quality indicators for a grade recommended in this document, such as teacher-child ratios, staff credentials and compensation, program quality improvement plans, and staff professional development expectations. We recommend that the state **build the new accountability system upon the framework of this existing QRIS**. This makes sense because the current system has proven effectiveness; it is well-known and understood throughout the state; and using it as a framework for a new system would save time and resources compared to creating a whole new accountability and improvement system.

5. The Early Childhood Network Report Card should include Additional Factors in the Grade

We support the concept of accountability at the Network level but the current approach has several areas that need to be addressed, and we recommend that the State take the time to develop the core principles about the role and responsibility of the Network and the measurement of accountability before implementing a Network

Report Card. We recommend a working group that brings together participating providers, Networks, and other stakeholders to meet with the State to inform these core principles and the Network Report Card strategy. We further recommend consideration of the following:

- The Network Report Card should include **factors related to both individual program performance of programs in the Network as well as Network activities around funded quality improvement activities** and supports that are evidence-based and known to contribute to improved program quality. The current Early Childhood Network rubric developed by LDOE and used by Cohort 1 Networks could be a starting point for determining factors that should be included.
- The state must provide the **funds and resources required to provide the level of quality improvement support and guidance needed by programs**—most especially child care settings that serve children of all ages. This could be accomplished by providing funds based on a “per child” amount as well as the state providing quality supports, such as the current Child Care Mental Health Consultation.

6. An External Evaluation of the New Accountability System Should be Conducted

It is recommended that an external evaluation be conducted to assess the effectiveness of the report card system in meeting the four part vision as defined in the Early Childhood Policy Blueprint. This must be completed by an unbiased party and, therefore, it is recommended that it be completed by a national expert on Early Childhood Education accountability systems and be presented to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).