

Addressing Recognition and Response in Early Childhood Quality Rating Systems: A Policy Brief for the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation

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I. Introduction

The Association for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) is a state-based child advocacy organization that conducts research, policy analysis and advocacy on a wide range of child and family issues. Early care and education is a critical component of ACNJ's policy agenda. In 1997, ACNJ provided leadership to the Early Care and Education Coalition, which developed the preschool standard mandated by the New Jersey Supreme Court for implementation in the 31 poorest school districts of the state. Since 2002, ACNJ has provided leadership to the Build Initiative in New Jersey, part of an eight-state national project to build comprehensive, coordinated systems of early care and education on the state level.

Because of its policy advocacy in early care and education, ACNJ was invited to join the Tremain Foundation's Recognition and Response Project in November 2004. In 2005, ACNJ received funding from the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation to examine the policy opportunities and challenges in incorporating Recognition and Response in two emerging areas: the interest nationally and in New Jersey to provide high-quality preschool for children ages 3 and 4 and the interest in quality improvements in child care through the development of quality rating systems for center-based and family child care.

The paper discusses how Recognition and Response can be incorporated in emerging policy interest in pre-k, quality rating systems and policy interest in general. The current national focus on strengthening the quality of early care and education provides opportunities for Recognition and Response to be included as a component of quality enhancement in many of these areas. This paper will address:

- Background on Recognition and Response
- Policy opportunities related to preschool based on the New Jersey experience
- Policy opportunities related to the development of quality rating systems for child care in New Jersey and several other states
- Recommendations to build capacity for Recognition and Response: opportunities, challenges and implementation lessons

While the introduction of Recognition and Response to these conversations serves to make sure that the Recognition and Response concept is part of the policy agenda, the next question is how to advance Recognition and Response. ACNJ proposes policy recommendations to effect change.

II. Policy Arguments and Opportunities to Advance Recognition and Response

There are a number of opportunities to advance powerful arguments in support of Recognition and Response. Two emerging significant opportunities are the preschool movement and the adoption of quality rating systems. There are common themes and opportunities that are relevant to both discussions.

The policy arguments in support of Recognition and Response are clear and powerful. Strong arguments can be made that:

- The tenets of Recognition and Response are basic to the key elements of quality in:
 - Identification of individualized learning needs
 - Preparation of qualified teachers who are able to observe, recognize and respond to markers of learning difficulty exhibited by young children
 - Provision of support for teachers who may need assistance in the administration and interpretation of assessment information, modification of classroom environments, and communication with parents and community based organizations for service provision
 - Provision of support for parents in decision making
 - Coordination of transitions between programs and service delivery models
- Recognition and Response helps to make pre-k the good investment it is.
- Recognition and Response has the potential to reduce special education needs.
- Recognition and Response can reduce the achievement gap by identifying learning needs early and addressing and preventing potential behavioral overlay.

Policy opportunities currently exist to advance Recognition and Response:

- Incorporate Recognition and Response in national standards that people can look to in planning quality improvements, e.g., NAEYC, ECERS, ITERS.
- Link Recognition and Response to the Pre-K movement. As many more states join the move toward universal pre-k, create a “second wave” advancing that pre-k is quality.
- Get to state school officers as they are developing standards for pre-k. Promote two additional “hooks”- pre-k quality and special education.
- Link Recognition and Response to a specific curriculum (or curricula) such as HighScope.
- Integrate Recognition and Response into state regulations, similar to the way in which many states have adopted regulations for pre-k and QRS.
- Align the pedagogy of Recognition and Response in higher education with P-3 (or similar) certification

III. Overview of “Recognition and Response”

The Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation has engaged national and state participants including researchers from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute¹ (FPG), the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Communications Consortium Media Center, to work on behalf of young children who have, or are at risk for, learning disabilities. The expected outcome is the development and implementation of a systemic approach that can help parents and educators ensure early school readiness for all children.

The proposed “Recognition and Response” system is based on the premise that parents and teachers can learn to recognize critical early warning signs that a young child may not be learning in an expected manner and to respond in ways that positively affect the child’s early school success. The system emphasizes a universal approach to responding to early learning difficulties. This is accomplished by assessing overall quality of early learning experiences for all children, making program modifications, tailoring instructional strategies, and providing appropriate support for individual children who struggle to learn.

In early childhood education across the nation, significant efforts are currently underway to integrate quality enhancements, effective practices and state by state development of quality standards. Using quality pre-K education as a platform for ensuring early learning success for all children may additionally provide special help for children who struggle to learn, or who may be at risk for having learning disabilities. This paper explores the policy opportunities and challenges of embedding the components of Recognition and Response within quality rating systems (QRS).

A. Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute Research

In keeping with the fundamental tenet of early intervention, the earlier the need for intervention is determined and delivered, the more likely the potential for improving the negative consequences of disabilities on child and family outcomes. The research of FPG suggests that it is logical to assume that earlier intervention with children who may be at risk for learning disabilities will result in support for subsequent development and learning and prevention of later occurrence of learning difficulties. The researchers recommend that an emphasis be placed on collaborating with parents and specialists, as well as on planning for transitions and supporting systemic change.

The FPG research suggests that the application of the conceptual framework adopted from the K-12 Response to Intervention (RTI) model² can be used to assist very young learners. The four steps incorporate:

- An intervention hierarchy in which increasing levels of intensity of instruction and intervention correspond directly to children’s needs for support.

- Screening, assessment and progress monitoring in which the assessment plan relies on multiple methods and sources of information through a tiered approach. It creates a dynamic link between the Recognition and Response components.
- Development of a research based curriculum, instruction and focused interventions.
- A collaborative problem-solving process for decision-making which pairs parents, teachers and community specialists.

The adaptation of this model, for use with younger children, is the development of a system entitled “Recognition and Response”. By using a screening process to identify possible areas of learning difficulty, specifically those related to reading readiness, altering the learning environment and instruction to match the child’s level of need, engaging parents in the planning for their child’s learning, and engaging external professionals when necessary to assist in meeting the child’s needs, the Recognition and Response system aims to avoid later school difficulties often associated with the label of learning disability. Recognition and Response should be coordinated with existing prevention and early intervention services and focus specifically on factors that place children at risk for learning disabilities.

B. Work of the National Center for Learning Disabilities Related to Pre-K, Reading, and Screening

NCLD has spearheaded the development and marketing of the *Get Ready to Read!* screening tool. It is a reliable, research-based series of questions to be given to children in the year before they enter kindergarten, to determine whether they have the early literacy skills they need to become readers. The 20-question tool for 4-year-olds is intended to be quick and easy to use online³. It was designed to show where a child is on the path to developing pre-reading skills.

Developed by Grover J. Whitehurst, Ph.D., Director of the Institute of Educational Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, the screening tool focuses on the specific skills needed to read: print knowledge, emergent writing, and linguistic awareness. By pointing to pictures in a series of questions, children can demonstrate skills in these areas.

Administration of the screening instrument points out any disruption in the developmental sequence necessary for emerging reading skills. Problems that surface can be used to inform parents and teachers that the child may need help, and possibly a professional consultation. Parents can also use the results to lobby for their preschool to do a better job of teaching reading readiness.

IV. Policy Opportunities Related to Preschool – the New Jersey Experience

In 1997, the New Jersey Supreme Court ordered the state to provide “high-quality, well-planned” preschool programs for three and four-year-old children in the 31 poorest school districts of the state. The Court highlighted preschool as one of the key remedies in a more than 25-year-old class action lawsuit on educational equity, Abbott v. Burke.

The court viewed high-quality preschool as an important way to ensure that disadvantaged children can start school ready and able to learn and on an equal footing with their peers in wealthier districts.

Today there are almost 40,000 three and four-year-old children enrolled in full-day, full-year preschool. The New Jersey experience in implementing this program provides a relevant context for development of Recognition and Response. The preschool standard mandated by the court, the preschool delivery model and the significant impact on professional development are all relevant to policy opportunities for Recognition and Response.

A. Preschool Standard and Delivery Model

In the year following the Court's order to provide well-planned, high-quality preschool, it became apparent immediately that the state's definition of the preschool standard did not match the vision of the Court. Concerned that a significant opportunity for children would be lost, ACNJ convened a coalition of early education stakeholders – education, child care, Head Start and the higher education community – to identify the components of a high quality standard. The Coalition's standard, adopted by the Court in a subsequent decision in March 2000, defines well-planned, high quality as:

- Small class size, no more than 15 children with a teacher and a classroom aide
- Certified teacher, with a BA degree and preschool endorsement
- Developmentally appropriate curriculum
- Attention to the child's health and social service needs
- Under the authority and responsibility of the Department of Education and local districts
- Community child care could be utilized, so long as the programs met the Court's standard.

The Court set a very short timeframe, requiring the standard to be implemented by the 2000-2001 school year. Due to the short timeframe and inability of school districts to house so many children so quickly, the majority of school districts contracted with community child care programs to provide the classes. Then, as now, almost 70% of children are attending classes in community programs.

The impact on the community programs was monumental. Prior to the Court's decision, community child care centers were required to meet minimal licensing standards through the Department of Human Services. These standards focused on life-safety issues, rather than program. More significant, the vast majority of teachers did not have a college degree. In recognition of this, the Court gave teachers four years to attain a college degree and preschool certification. This was the most significant aspect of the decision and is most relevant to Recognition and Response.

B. Impact on Professional Development

In looking back over the last seven years at the process to get programs to the required standard, the impact on professional development was the most important. Analysis of the process to develop qualified teachers and support them on an ongoing basis provides some guideposts to how Recognition and Response can be incorporated as investments in preschool expand. The steps that New Jersey took to develop and support its workforce provide opportunities to include Recognition and Response:

- **Establishing a P-3 certification.** The first action was for the state to re-establish a P-3 endorsement, which had been abolished many years earlier in favor of a P-8 endorsement. The discussion of what constitutes that endorsement is a place to include Recognition and Response.
- **Expanding programs in higher education.** Colleges and universities had to gear up overnight to design courses to meet the P-3 endorsement and to meet the demand of the almost 3000 teachers in child care programs under the four-year deadline to attain a degree and certification. Although problems still exist in this infrastructure, especially in articulation between the 2-year and 4-year colleges, the changes in higher education to meet the demand for preschool teachers is a place to incorporate response and recognition.
- **Creating an infrastructure to support teachers.** Part of preschool program implementation was the recognition that a new infrastructure was needed to ensure quality instruction. School districts established the position of early childhood supervisor to oversee the in-district and community programs. Master teachers were hired to work with teachers. A regional university consortium was developed to evaluate programs and to provide additional support and professional development. Training for teachers and classroom aides expanded. All offer opportunities to incorporate Recognition and Response.

C. Other Opportunities to Include Recognition and Response in Preschool Policy

The preschool experience in New Jersey also highlights some other areas in which Recognition and Response can be incorporated as programs are being designed and implemented.

- **Parent engagement and support.** Since the Supreme Court included attention to health and social service needs as part of a high-quality preschool, the state created the position of family worker to act as a home-school liaison. Each family worker is responsible for 40 families and was trained in the Parents as Teachers model. The family worker can be a critical link between the parents and the preschool program, including working with parents on their child's special needs.
- **Stronger linkages to the school district.** The fact that school districts are responsible for the preschool programs provides an opportunity to establish stronger linkages between the district and the community programs. These linkages are important in addressing special needs of children once they have

been identified, giving programs access to the evaluation and support services available in the schools. Being required to meet the needs of a child with learning difficulties, sometimes expressed as behavioral difficulties, is a new requirement for child care programs and school district linkages are critical. This is an issue that is not yet resolved in New Jersey, but provides an important way to address Recognition and Response.

- **Better transition practices from preschool to 3rd grade.** It is only in the last two years that the Department of Education and school districts are discussing transition from preschool to 3rd grade. ACNJ is examining what is now required in planning and what actually happens in practice. As this issue develops, it also provides an opportunity to include Recognition and Response.

V. QRS as a Policy Opportunity for Recognition and Response

A number of recent studies have proven that high quality early childhood experiences are a major factor in children's development and ability to succeed once they reach school and even later in life. Many states have initiated comprehensive, voluntary early care and education improvement systems, often referred to as quality rating systems (QRS), which seek to enhance the quality of child care so that children from birth to age five will be healthy and ready to learn when they enter school. These QRS are also intended to help families look for and demand high quality care.

QRS are a method to assess, improve and communicate on the level of quality in early care and education settings. QRS are systemic, addressing multiple aspects of early care and education through a uniform approach that is available throughout a specific area, often a state.

In the development of a QRS, a state examines the quality criteria on which it wants to focus. Although the categories and requirements are typically based on research, there is considerable variance in the organization and requirements of quality criteria from one state to the next. Common categories of criteria often include:

- Administrative Policies and Procedures
- Learning Environment
- Parent/Family Involvement
- Professional Development of Staff and/or Director Qualifications/Training
- Program Evaluation
- Staff Compensation
- Licensing Status/Compliance
- Staff: Child Ratios and Group Size
- Accreditation

A. Scan of the states developing/implementing QRS

Currently there are 11 states that have formally adopted and are operating statewide quality rating systems for early care and education (District of Columbia, Kentucky,

Maryland, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Tennessee, and Vermont). The majority of the adopted QRS rely on evaluations conducted by independent assessors utilizing the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)⁴ or Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS)⁵ to determine the level or tier of quality of a program. The top tier on the scale is often linked to program accreditation in some way. The highest quality rating is usually the achievement of accreditation standards incorporated in the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria⁶ although states will also accept accreditation from other national accrediting bodies. ECERS, ITERS and NAEYC standards incorporate child identification activities and the adjustment of learning environments to meet the needs of all children, as mandated in Parts B and C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). States utilizing these scales as the sole criteria for quality rating are, therefore, incorporating at least some of the components of Recognition and Response in their systems.

Both the ECERS and ITERS address components of the Recognition and Response system within the quality indicators at various levels. Activities to encourage the development of language, fine motor, gross motor and social-emotional skills are included on the seven point rating scale, as is the need to modify the learning environment to meet the special needs of children. Professional development and the regular exchange of information with families are given scores indicative of higher quality performance.

The NAEYC accreditation standards promote the components of Recognition and Response even further than the ECERS and ITERS. Standards for teachers emphasize the need for professional development training in the accurate utilization of assessment of child progress and course work to provide knowledge and skills relevant to special circumstance or specific needs of the children they teach. Additionally, families standards address parental engagement in understanding children's needs, open communication, and sharing knowledge of community resources.

Several statewide QRS incorporate specific indicators for addressing the needs of at risk learners.

- Pennsylvania and New Mexico include child observation results and learning standards for planning classroom activities, sharing results with parents, and community referral.
- Oklahoma reviews the appropriateness of lesson plans for matching the developmental needs of all groups of children.
- New Hampshire requires staff to make reasonable accommodation of children with special needs and provides professional development support to staff.
- Pennsylvania incorporates transition planning from classrooms and schools as a quality component that may be used to assure that the needs of children with differing learning styles are being followed from one group experience to the next.

An additional 31 states (including Delaware, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, South Dakota, Iowa, Kansas, and Oregon) are considering a statewide QRS. These are at various stages of development, from beginning planning to piloting rating scales.

B. Development of QRS in New Jersey

In an effort to enhance quality and entice center-based programs receiving child care subsidies to achieve accreditation, New Jersey currently provides a 5% subsidy differential to nationally accredited centers. As an outcome of the recommendations from the BUILD initiative, New Jersey's QRS is currently in development and is designed to assist programs in achieving higher levels of quality culminating in the attainment of accreditation. A potential scale has been developed and is being vetted among key stakeholders. The next phase will include piloting the scale in two or three urban communities where other quality enhancement initiatives have been occurring, in order to compare the reliability of the QRS scale with existing assessments.

New Jersey is also seeking to embed components of the Recognition and Response system directly within the QRS scale. Quality indicators will include ongoing child assessment, identification of children with alternative learning styles and adjustment of learning activities to address the learning needs of all children. It will also include indicators for the inclusion of parents in the identification of and planning for young children's varying learning needs, as well for the identification of additional supports for children and families if and when classroom modification is not sufficient to manage the range of problems which may be apparent.

C. QRS of states Supported by Emily Hall Tremain Foundation

Interviews were conducted with a variety of individuals connected to Recognition and Response efforts funded by the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation. Representatives working in Connecticut, Maryland and Florida were interviewed. Where possible, the information provided about Recognition and Response initiatives was linked with quality rating projects within those states.

Connecticut

Although the state of Connecticut does not presently have a statewide QRS, the state is funding a preschool initiative. Approximately \$56 million in state funds are going into 19 priority districts and an additional \$4.8 million is directed to fringe towns where poverty levels are high. State law requires accreditation of all programs serving the 8500 preschoolers. The most prevalent accreditation standards utilized are NAEYC, Head Start Program Review, American Montessori and New England Association of Schools and Colleges. In order to reconcile differences between the systems, programs using an accreditation standard other than NAEYC must additionally meet the so-called "Connecticut Plus" standards. Programs also need to assure that they are adhering to the 80 performance indicators outlined in the Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework.

With the assistance of funding from Tremain, the Connecticut Department of Education has consolidated the performance indicators down to 31, covering four developmental

domains. Through this Preschool Assessment Framework teachers create daily plans, review instruction, and must perform periodic recording of where children are functioning. The Assessment Framework presents benchmarks so that teachers will know that children are learning if they progress from one benchmark to the next.

The recording of performance against benchmarks creates a “passport”. This is a child profile that is available as a vehicle for communicating with parents. It permits the teacher and the child’s parents to anticipate areas that may predict learning disabilities. Used with the screening tool “Get Ready to Read”, there is an opportunity to be more precise in the teaching, instruction and understanding of problems in a particular developmental domain.

An important component of the quality building aspect of Connecticut’s system is an infrastructure of coaches to work with preschool teachers. Connecticut is concerned about the quality level of teachers in this system. Preschool teachers are not required to be college degreed or early childhood certified. They may lack specific child development knowledge and judgment about children’s learning abilities. By working with small groups of staff in intensive workshop sessions, the independent consultant coaches are able to move teachers through a learning continuum and suggest appropriate professional development opportunities.

Maryland

The state of Maryland utilizes a tiered reimbursement system for programs providing services to children receiving child care subsidy. The four tiers rely on accreditation and/or ECERS assessment to determine the level of reimbursement. Accreditation for center based programs can come from NAEYC, National Early Childhood Program Accreditation, or the Maryland State Department of Education. The Maryland Child Care Credential fits with the tiered reimbursement system by requiring various clock hours of training, years of experience and professional development activities. Accomplishment of these different levels leads to an annual bonus provided to individual staff. Up to \$1000/year may be provided as incentives to staff members as they improve their skills.

The recent relocation of child care services to the Maryland Department of Education was prompted by the desire for a more seamless approach to early care and education. Services have been consolidated and training made more reliable. The Work Sampling System of the Maryland Model for School Readiness has been selected as the assessment format to help teachers document and assess children’s skills, knowledge, behavior and accomplishments. Teachers gain a better understanding of children’s strengths and weaknesses through observing, recording and evaluation of daily classroom experiences. This information is also shared with parents.

The Emily Hall Tremain Foundation has partnered with the Maryland Committee for Children to pilot a training program that will assist licensed care givers in meeting the needs of all children. The small scale model that will work with fifty programs will predominantly address learning issues that children are exhibiting before they get into the

formal school system. The trainings for teachers of 4 year olds is expected to aide teachers in high quality programs learn to observe young children, identify those who may be struggling and make modifications in the classrooms to better meet children's needs.

The training model expects to establish a quality baseline and, through intervention, raise program quality. More specialized trainers and resources will be brought in to assist in achieving program goals where necessary. These goals include imbuing teaching staff with confidence in their own skills, providing services to children that will prevent early labeling of children who may be at risk for learning difficulties and, approaching parents to be fully engaged in the planning process.

Miami Dade/Florida

The early care community in Miami-Dade has spent a great deal of time developing a potential QRS for use within the region's early learning coalition. Recently, the Lieutenant Governor put together a statewide group to discuss the development of a quality rating improvement system that could be used across the entire state. The work of the locally based effort has been put on hold until the state decides where QRS system recommendations are heading. Whether a regional or a statewide system are adopted, when launched, the quality rating improvement system will provide parents with a tool to aide in the selection of best-quality early education, and give child care providers significant incentives, including financial, to be able to afford to provide higher quality care.

In Miami-Dade Florida, the Early Childhood Initiative Foundation has been awarded a grant from the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation. The grant focuses on integrating early childhood education with effective practices on behalf of young children who have, or are at risk for, learning disabilities.

The principles of Recognition and Response are being applied through the Early Childhood Initiative Foundation's partner, the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe and the efforts of the Natural Environment Educational Development (NEED) program. Through the premise of preparing classrooms so that all children can fit in, educational training and mentoring is provided to twelve centers serving three and four year olds throughout Dade County. Assessment screenings, including vision and hearing are provided to children, need for further evaluation is identified, and discussions with families regarding their children's learning styles are facilitated. Linkages are made to community services, and training is provided for community child care staff. The critical training component assists child care workers who may have minimal levels of education with adapting activities for children with differing ability levels. The training emphasizes the incorporation of literacy activities in daily teaching. Speech/language, literacy and parenting activities are an especially important component in a county where many children are identified with speech and language delays.

Factors that significantly hinder progress in this initiative are staff turnover and the need to build trust in order to deliver staff training. Many center staff are wary of outsiders. They are fearful that the trainers will find them lacking and they will lose their jobs.

In 2002, Miami-Dade voters approved the Children's Trust, a dedicated source of funding for children's services. Miami-Dade became the eighth county in Florida with such a funding source for children. The Trust board is an independent and diverse group of members from the public and private sector. They decide how The Trust will invest up to \$72 million a year from property taxes to fund high-quality programs and initiatives for children in health, development and safety, and to increase parental and community responsibility for children. The Trust targets early intervention and prevention services to the most vulnerable children, families and neighborhoods and also pushes for increased availability of needed services for all children and families. The Trust spends about half of available dollars in services for children ages birth to 5 and their families, where they believe the greatest impact can be made; that includes, for one major example, high-quality child care.

VI. Building Capacity for Recognition and Response

To date, few states have made a targeted effort to incorporate the principles of a Recognition and Response system into their QRS. Some states, however, do incorporate components of a tiered response model within their QRS partially to comply with federal regulations of identification of children with special needs and referral to appropriate service delivery systems. The inclusion of opportunities for assessment within the QRS guarantees that those children with significant enough developmental delays to be picked up during a screening process will be referred for evaluation. Development of a plan for service delivery and the modification of the learning environment will enable programs to meet the particularized needs of young participants.

The concern remains as to how to appropriately identify and respond to those children who may be at risk for learning difficulties. Because learning disabilities generally are not diagnosed until the child begins attending elementary school, intervention may not occur during the preschool years without the incorporation of these components in QRS.

A. Mechanism for Including Recognition and Response in State's QRS

Professional Development

In trying to promote the incorporation of a Recognition and Response system into a quality rating system, the most significant area of concern is teacher quality. Many states still maintain minimum education levels for their teaching staff, even in those states that have implemented an early learning standard for their early childhood programs. Because of these minimal levels of teacher preparation, there is a question as to the level of teacher knowledge and judgment in screening children for possible learning difficulties, communicating concerns with parents and the ability to adapt classroom activities to appropriately match child learning styles. Linking levels on a career path to quality standards in the QRS will provide incentive for staff to improve their skills and

enhance the success of children, including children who may be at risk for learning difficulties, participating in these programs.

Transition

When a child is moving to a new classroom or a new school, or if family changes are occurring, appropriate planning can ease the process. It is important to begin working with the school team as early as possible so that everyone, especially the child, feels comfortable with all the changes that will occur. Communication between teachers and parents is an important aspect of successful transition. If a child has special needs, families may have decisions to make about different school sites or program types. The transfer of accumulated assessment data may be especially useful in designing a successful, new learning environment for the child.

Parental Engagement

Information regarding children's strengths and weaknesses needs to be shared with parents in a manner that is honest and sensitive. Parents need to be able to make informed choices regarding options for intervention when concerns are raised regarding a child's ability to develop appropriate developmental skills. Meaningful family involvement needs to be encouraged by early childhood teaching staff.

Raising the Level of Care

Participation in the change process to build higher quality learning environments requires a significant paradigm shift. Currently there is little incentive in most states for providers to raise the level of care beyond minimum licensing standards. Additionally, infrastructure and financial resources may be lacking to implement quality changes. Parent, provider, tax-payer and private support will need to be generated for quality standards and Recognition and Response to be implemented successfully.

Accountability

Quality rating systems must use valid and reliable methods of assessment to monitor compliance with standards and assign quality ratings. These ratings provide a benchmark for measuring improvement in quality of care and education. There must be common understanding of the terms and definitions, especially when addressing Recognition and Response components. The ongoing screening of young children and modification of classroom activities to match child abilities must be monitored by external evaluators who may be objective about the success with which these components are incorporated into programs.

B. Policy Recommendations to effect change

- Create a sense of urgency that now is the time to move forward and be accountable. A campaign to build public will will be needed to promote the importance of quality experiences for young children. The early care and education field will need to be encouraged to participate in QRS. Parents must be encouraged to look for and demand high quality care and to recognize that they

- can request alternative teaching and interventions for children who may be at risk for learning disabilities.
- Invest in professional development opportunities that will build upon knowledge of child development and the use of developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood programs. Practitioners need access to education that leads to qualifications and credentials specified in the QRS. These include the skills necessary to appropriately assess young children, to modify the learning environment to meet the needs of all participants regardless of learning ability, and to communicate honestly and sensitively with parents about children's skills and weaknesses.
 - Offer incentives to programs for the incorporation of Recognition and Response as they attain higher levels of quality through participation in a quality-rating program. Financial incentives will address the gap between the cost of producing higher quality programs and the tuition price charged to families or the reimbursement rate for subsidized services.
 - Provide technical assistance to programs to help them assess their current quality status and create improvement plans. Programs need help to conduct an initial assessment and to develop a quality improvement plan. Resources need to be provided separate from compliance and monitoring to enable programs and staffs to expand their thinking and change the customary way of providing services and professional development. Staff must be allowed time to develop trust in the technical assistance providers so that they do not feel that their positions are in immediate jeopardy.

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