

How can Minnesota businesses support school readiness child care?

Through the Minnesota Quality Rating System (QRS)

A QRS is a **consumer guide**,
a **benchmark for program improvement**,
and an **accountability measure for funding**.

The Minnesota QRS will:

- Be market-based
- Pay for performance
- Provide clear, agreed-upon measures of quality
- Help parents make quality child care choices
- Increase quality program choices for parents
- Link investment in child care to school-readiness



The Need for a Quality Rating System

Over 520,000 children in Minnesota ages 6 weeks through 12 years attend child care in licensed family based or center settings. The proposed Quality Rating System (QRS) will give parents specific program quality information, will recognize and reward participating providers for their quality, and will link investment in quality with improving children's school readiness.

Minnesota has one of the highest rates of working parents in the country and child care has become an essential resource for families. Working parents as well as the state and federal governments spend millions of dollars for child care and early education programs.

Quality of Child Care Matters for Children's Development and School Readiness

A growing body of research has proven that quality in child care matters for children's school readiness and life trajectory. However, only one-quarter of centers in Minnesota had Total scores indicating Good quality, while 4 percent fell below Minimal quality, as reported in *A Snapshot of Quality in Minnesota's Child Care Centers*, a study released in September, 2005 by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Parents in Minnesota have no "consumer" guide or ratings to help them compare the quality of specific programs. Also, there is no clear path for child care and early education providers to achieve higher levels of quality. Quality rating systems are a new market based strategy currently used in ten states to provide parents' with program quality ratings and to link public and private investments in programs with accountability for children's development and learning.



"Quality Rating Systems improve the quality of early learning and empower parents to become savvy consumers and choose the best early education and care for their children... A QRS can also help policy-makers create policies that will improve quality... A state or community with a QRS is aligned around the best interests of its children and is on track to build successful schools, productive citizens, and a well-trained, well-educated future workforce to support long-term economic development."

—Brian A. Gallagher, President and CEO,
United Way of America,
Stair Steps to Quality, July 2005

What Will the Minnesota QRS Do?

A plan for a Minnesota Quality Rating System (QRS) has been developed by a citizens' task force headed by Ready 4 K and the Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association's Child Care Financing Project. The QRS Plan is a voluntary system of support, recognition and financial incentives for quality for participating licensed family child providers, centers, Head Start and schoolage care programs. The Minnesota QRS will also provide parents with program ratings to help them make informed choices for their children's care and education.

The Minnesota QRS includes voluntary provider participation, agreed upon indicators of quality, easy-to-understand ratings for parents to use when making decisions about their child's care and education program, benchmarks for program improvement, financial support and incentives for providers linked to quality and to improving children's school readiness.

How Will the QRS Benefit Child Care and Early Education Providers?

Child care providers throughout Minnesota are doing the important work of helping parents provide their young children with safe, nurturing environments and opportunities for learning.

For programs, the QRS will provide:

- A clearly defined pathway for achieving quality
- Access to improvement grants
- Annual Performance Awards based on the number of children and the rating level achieved
- Recognition in your community
- Training on using child observation and program environmental rating scales and on school readiness standards

Program Ratings Will Involve:

- Compiling documentation of meeting each indicator.
- Assignment of the rating.
- Monitoring for compliance.

Measuring Child Outcomes

Quality programs use ongoing child observation and assessment in their planning and improvement efforts. Also, child assessment data will be used to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the QRS for improving children's school readiness. However, until the field has more valid and reliable instruments, individual child assessments are not being recommended to raise or lower a program's quality rating.

For more information about the Minnesota QRS, visit the Ready 4 K website: www.ready4k.org or email Nancy.Johnson@gmdca.org