**AFTERSCHOOL
INVESTMENTS**

Using a State Child Care Quality Rating System to Promote Quality in Afterschool Programs

USING A STATE CHILD CARE QUALITY RATING SYSTEM
TO PROMOTE QUALITY IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

September 2007

The Afterschool Investments Project

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) provides federal resources for child care that support both direct services and quality enhancements. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Child Care Bureau awards CCDF grants to states, territories, and tribes. With nearly half of the children receiving services being of school or kindergarten age, CCDF provides significant funding for afterschool care in a variety of settings. The majority of CCDF dollars are used to provide subsidies to eligible low-income children under age 13. A portion of CCDF funding is also used for quality improvement initiatives, such as professional development and technical assistance, with the goal of building the capacity of states to deliver quality services including programs before and after-school, during summers, and on school holidays.

To support state efforts to provide quality afterschool opportunities, the Child Care Bureau awarded a technical assistance contract on out-of-school time to The Finance Project and its partner, The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. The Afterschool Investments project provides technical assistance to Child Care and Development Fund grantees and other state and local leaders who support afterschool efforts. The goals of the project include:

- Identifying ways that states and communities are using Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidy and quality dollars to support out-of-school time programs, and sharing these practices and approaches with other states;

- Identifying administrative and implementation issues related to CCDF investments in out-of-school time programs, and providing information and context (about barriers, problems, opportunities) as well as practical tools that will help CCDF administrators make decisions; and

- Identifying other major programs and sectors that are potential partners for CCDF in supporting out-of-school time programs, and providing models, strategies, and tools for coordination with other programs and sectors.

To meet these goals, the Afterschool Investments project is:

- Regularly updating and maintaining State profiles of afterschool resources, policies and issues;

- Creating tools and materials to support the development and sustainability of afterschool efforts; and

- Providing targeted technical assistance to state child care administrators and other state leaders around building partnerships and developing state policies that promote investments in high-quality afterschool programs.

For more information about the project or to submit a request for technical assistance or information, contact The Finance Project at (202) 587-1000 or by email at afterschool@financeproject.org. All project tools and resources can be found online on the Afterschool Investments Project website: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Child Care Bureau

Introduction

Afterschool programs have grown in number and diversity in recent years. This trend has been driven, in part, by the dramatic rise in the number of working parents who need safe and reliable child care between the end of the school day and the completion of their work day. Also contributing to the increase is growing recognition of the need to make better use of out-of-school time to promote academic success and positive youth development. Afterschool programs now operate in many settings, including schools, community centers, and child care centers. These programs have varied goals and are administered and funded by various public and private entities.[1]

Among the major national investments in afterschool programs are the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, both of which subsidize school-age care for low-income working families. In addition, funding from the U.S. Department of Education, most notably the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC) program, supports largely school-based afterschool programs with the goal of raising student achievement. Other federal, state, and local programs support an array of programs with goals such as prevention of risky behaviors, workforce development, or obesity prevention.[2]

The growth of new programs has heightened concerns among policymakers about the quality of the care children and youth receive during out-of-school time. Although many funders have instituted strategies to monitor the quality of the programs they support, efforts to systematically assess and promote the quality of afterschool care have been limited.

This strategy brief examines one strategy for improving quality—using a state quality rating system (QRS) to assess afterschool programs and the needs of school-age children. Most existing quality rating systems apply to child care programs that serve children of various ages, including school-age children. Since they were often developed with a focus on early care and education, however, many states have not fully considered how to adapt regulations to support school-age care programs. The brief explores how states can use their existing or newly emerging rating system to more strategically promote afterschool program quality. It also shares state strategies for aligning the rating system with broader afterschool professional development efforts.

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[1] For more information on the growth and types of afterschool programs, see the Child Care Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Making Smart Investments in Afterschool: A Policy Primer for State and Local Leaders* (Washington, D.C., 2006), available at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/policyprimer.pdf.

[2] *Making Smart Investments in Afterschool*, op cit.

Background: Quality Rating Systems

Quality rating systems were first developed by leaders in the early care and education field in the late 1990s. As of June 2006, 12 states—**Colorado**, **Iowa**, **Kentucky**, **Maryland**, **Montana**, **New Hampshire**, **New Mexico**, **North Carolina**, **Oklahoma**, **Pennsylvania**, **Tennessee**, and **Vermont**—and the **District of Columbia** have implemented a statewide QRS with multiple tiers. Several other states are developing a QRS.[3] (For state-by-state information on existing and emerging rating systems, see the map in Appendix A.)

Typically administered by a state child care agency, a QRS enables child care providers to voluntarily meet quality standards and earn a designation, such as a "star rating," that helps consumers identify high-quality programs. A QRS also usually offers providers incentives and supports to encourage them to meet higher levels of quality.[4]

The scope of quality rating systems varies across states in terms of geographic area and the types of providers who may participate. In some cases, a QRS has begun with a pilot in select cities or counties or with select program types. Once the system is tested, it is then expanded to reach a broader geographic area or a wider range of programs. Rating systems typically apply to different types of early care providers, including center-based programs, family child care providers, Head Start programs, and public pre-kindergarten programs. Most quality rating systems apply to programs serving school-age children.[5]

Although many states offer programs and policies that support providers in their efforts to improve quality, the National Child Care Information Center classifies a QRS as a system with these key elements:[6]

- Standards above licensing regulations. In most quality rating systems, licensing regulations serve as the first tier. Providers that have been accredited by national organizations, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children or the National AfterSchool Association, automatically qualify for the highest quality tier or, in some states, receive a set amount of quality points toward a higher tier. States develop their own benchmarks for quality at the mid-level quality tiers. The quality standards that guide a QRS vary considerably, but they generally cover topics such as administrative policies and procedures, learning environment, parent involvement, staff qualifications and training requirements, program evaluation, and staff compensation.[7]

- Accountability through assessment and monitoring. Assessment systems, usually based on nationally recognized research-based environmental rating scales, ensure that rated

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[3] National Child Care Information Center, "Quick Facts: Quality Rating Systems" (Fairfax, Va.: National Child Care Information Center, July 2005).

[4] Anne W. Mitchell, *Stair Steps to Quality: A Guide for State and Communities Developing Quality Rating Systems for Early Care and Education* (Alexandria, Va.: United Way Success by Six, 2005).

[5] Mitchell, 2005; op cit.

[6] This brief discusses adaptations to quality rating systems that have all these key elements, but the strategies highlighted may also be applicable to states with other quality strategies.

[7] National Child Care Information Center, "Common Categories of Criteria used in State Quality Rating Systems" (Fairfax, Va.: National Child Care Information Center, 2005), available at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/qrs-comcat.pdf.

programs comply with quality standards. Programs typically are monitored on a regular basis by the state child care licensing or subsidy agency or by a private entity contracted by the state.

- **Program and practitioner outreach and support.** States typically engage in outreach to raise providers' awareness about a QRS. Strategies include distributing materials, holding public orientation sessions, or hiring outreach staff to work with programs. States also use program supports and incentives to help eligible programs meet quality standards. Supports, such as professional development opportunities and technical assistance or program improvement strategies can help programs improve the quality of care and meet higher standards of quality.

- **Financing incentives specifically linked to compliance with quality standards.** Financial incentives, such as compensation awards, quality bonuses, and tiered subsidy reimbursement policies, encourage eligible providers to participate in a QRS. Tiered reimbursement is the most common financial incentive, and it has been implemented in several states that lack the other elements of a QRS.

- **Parent education on how to understand and use the QRS.** States use different strategies to educate parents on how to use a quality rating system to inform their child care decisions. Strategies include informational brochures and websites, public education campaigns, and partnerships with business and community leaders.[8]

Key Resources on QRS

Access these resources to learn more about quality rating systems.

National Child Care Information Center
http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/index.html#qrs
The National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC) provides a clearinghouse of resources on QRS, including information on the planning process, the development of quality indicators, and research studies exploring the impact of QRS.

Stair Steps to Quality: A Guide for States and Communities Developing Quality Rating Systems for Early Care and Education
www.unitedway.org/sb6/upload/StairStepstoQualityGuidebook_FINALforWEB.pdf
This resource, developed by United Way's Success by Six®, provides detailed information on how to develop a QRS in a state.

State Quality Rating System Websites
http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/qrs-criteria-websites.html
Visit state QRS websites to learn more about existing state quality rating systems.

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[8] Mitchell, 2005; op cit.

Applying a Quality Rating System to Different Care Settings

Since, in a typical scenario, a QRS was developed primarily by leaders in the early care and education field and later applied to school-age programs, standards do not always reflect the unique needs or circumstances of school-age programs. While at the most basic level, the core components of quality in early care and school-age care are very similar, several important differences exist that should be taken into account when developing a QRS for school-age care programs. (See "Factors Associated with School-Age Care Quality" on page 8.)

Similarities between Early Care and School-Age Care Programs

- Age-appropriate health and safety standards are important for both early care and school-age care programs.

- Appropriate ratios of staff to students and small group sizes are key indicators of program quality, though these components will vary with the children's ages.

- Children of all ages benefit when they are cared for by nurturing adults with appropriate training and when they have access to a stimulating and engaging environment.

- Parental involvement is important for programs serving all children.

- Regular assessment can help monitor and promote quality in both early care and school-age care settings.

Differences between Early Care and School-Age Care Programs

- School-age children have very different developmental needs than younger children and benefit when programming supports their social development and complements their school-day learning.

- School-age programs are more diverse than early care programs, taking place in a range of settings and utilizing different program goals and approaches.

- Highly qualified afterschool program staff may have different professional backgrounds than early care providers. For example, an afterschool program provider may have training in elementary education, youth development, or arts education, rather than in early child development.

- Many afterschool program providers work part-time schedules and can find it difficult to meet quality standards developed for full-time professionals.

- Afterschool programs may face greater sustainability challenges because many funding sources, including 21CCLC, are short-term grants.

Factors Associated with School-Age Care Quality

Research on the program elements associated with quality afterschool programming can inform the development of state quality standards.* Two recent reports from the RAND Corporation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation synthesize an extensive body of literature on afterschool program quality indicators.

The RAND Corporation conducted a literature review across multiple fields to identify key program elements associated with quality. *Making Out-of-School Time Matter* speaks about a "convergence" of quality factors across disciplines, such as:

- a clear mission;

- high expectations and positive social norms;

- a safe and healthy environment;

- a supportive emotional climate;

- a small total enrollment;

- stable, trained personnel;

- appropriate content and pedagogy relative to the children's needs and the program's mission, with opportunities to engage;

- integrated family and community partners; and

- frequent assessment.

In *Moving Towards Success*, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation provides recommendations and guidelines to afterschool program staff and others on using a concrete framework to develop and sustain an effective program. Underlying the recommendations and guidelines is an understanding of the operational conditions that research and practice have found to be essential to high-quality afterschool programs. These conditions include:

- effective partnerships to promote learning and community engagement;

- strong program management, including adequate compensation of qualified staff;

- qualified afterschool program staff and volunteers with regular opportunities for professional development and career advancement;

- enriching learning opportunities that are provided by well-trained staff and volunteers and that complement school-day learning and use project-based learning and exploration to impart new skills and knowledge;

- intentional linkages between school-day and afterschool staff, including coordinating and maximizing the use of resources and facilities;

- appropriate attention to safety, health, and nutrition issues;

- strong family involvement in participants' learning and development;

- adequate and sustainable funding; and

- evaluation for continuous improvement and assessment of program effectiveness.

Sources: Susan Bodilly and Megan K. Beckett, *Making Out-of-School Time Matter: Evidence for an Action Agenda* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2005), available at: www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND_MG242.pdf; and Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Committee on After-School Research and Practice, *Moving Towards Success: Framework for After-School Programs* (Washington, D.C.: Collaborative Communications Group, 2005), available at: www.publicengagement.com/Framework.

Making a QRS Work for Afterschool Programs

Given the differences between early care programs and afterschool programs, a quality rating system may need flexible or supplemental standards that specifically address school-age quality concerns. State child care and afterschool program leaders recommend four strategies to make a QRS work successfully for afterschool programs:

- involve afterschool program leaders in the planning process;

- use standards that address the developmental needs of older children;

- address the unique qualifications and circumstances of afterschool program staff; and

- reduce the barriers for diverse afterschool programs to participate in the system.

Several states have worked with the school-age care community to develop and implement QRS standards appropriate for school-age care providers. Appendix B details the key school-age adaptations made by three states—**Missouri**, **Ohio**, and **Pennsylvania**—in their ongoing or pilot QRS.

Home-Based School-Age Child Care Providers

While family child care is one of the less commonly cited settings where school-age children spend their out-of-school time, many school-age children spend their time in the care of licensed family child care providers.[9] States may consider how to effectively incorporate home-based providers serving mixed age or school-age children into a quality rating system. In **Missouri**, for example, the pilot QRS program includes distinct sets of standards for school-age care programs and family child care programs. The state is currently deciding which set of standards is better suited for family child care providers serving school-age children. In other states, QRS standards for school-age children currently only apply to center or school-based programs.

Involve Afterschool Program Leaders in the Planning Process

States that have developed a quality rating system have undertaken an extensive planning process before implementing the system in the state. Stakeholders participating in this process usually include key state agencies, resource and referral networks, parent representatives from various types of child care programs, and other key leaders in the state. Often, a steering committee guides the planning process and seeks input from parents and providers through focus group meetings held statewide.[10]

Involving the afterschool program community in the planning process helps ensure that the unique needs of afterschool programs are well represented in discussions about the scope of a QRS, the quality standards, and the implementation of these standards. To accommodate the diversity in afterschool programs and settings, stakeholders should reflect different fields, including education, child care, and youth development. Those chosen to represent afterschool programs in a planning process could include:

- leaders of statewide afterschool networks;

- state affiliates of the National AfterSchool Association;

- state department of education staff, particularly those overseeing the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program;

- school-age child care providers;

- parks and recreation department afterschool program providers;

- community-based afterschool program providers; and

- parents of school-age children.

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[9] For more information, see Child Care Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *A Look at School-Age Children in Regulated Family Child Care Settings.* (Washington, D.C., September 2007).

[10] Mitchell, 2005; op cit.

In several states with a quality rating system, representatives from the afterschool program community have been part of the planning process. In **Pennsylvania**, the state child care agency relied on a committee composed of afterschool program providers and technical assistance providers to generate feedback on how the Keystone STARS program would affect school-age programs. Afterschool program providers in **North Carolina** were involved in focus groups that informed the development of the star-rated license system. In states where planning for a new quality rating system has happened or is underway, such as **Ohio** and **Washington**, statewide afterschool networks have actively represented the afterschool program community in the planning process and coordinated feedback from the state afterschool program community (see "Statewide Afterschool Networks: Potential Forums to Discuss QRS Issues" below). Finally, in **Missouri**, QRS leaders sought input from both the state afterschool network and the National AfterSchool Association affiliate in developing a separate school-age model of the quality rating system; the model is now being piloted in the state.

Statewide Afterschool Networks: Potential Forums to Discuss QRS Issues

To support the infrastructure needed to improve and sustain existing afterschool programs, many states are organizing statewide afterschool networks. Networks bring together different stakeholders—from top policymakers to grassroots advocates—to consider ways to improve the quality, quantity, and sustainability of afterschool programs in their state. Networks are a critical resource to state policymakers in devising and implementing action steps for afterschool programming and achieving consensus and buy-in among the various players. Networks offer a mechanism to facilitate or host policy discussions on how afterschool program quality should be promoted and monitored through a QRS. In 2002, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation began providing core funding to statewide networks; to date, the foundation has funded network efforts in 32 states. Many other states are beginning to develop networks. For more information, see www.statewideafterschoolnetworks.net/index.html.

Use Standards That Address the Developmental Needs of Older Children

Program activities that are appropriate for children below age five in early care are very different from those in school-age care. For example, programs serving infants and toddlers aim to promote basic verbal skills and prepare students to enter school. In contrast, school-age children benefit from activities that support principles of positive youth development and complement their school-day activities, including arts, physical activity, and community service. Moreover, wide variations exist in the developmental needs of younger and older school-age children. To recognize these different developmental needs, several state rating systems have incorporated research-based national standards or developed state quality standards that recognize how quality afterschool programs differ from quality early care programs.

Incorporating National Quality Standards

A common way for states to ensure that quality standards reflect best practices for promoting school-age children's development is to incorporate national research-based afterschool standards into a QRS. For example, programs can typically reach the highest tier in a rating system by achieving accreditation from one of several national accrediting bodies. In many states, accreditation by the National AfterSchool Association (NAA) is one of the acceptable ways for a program to reach the highest level of quality recognition in the state. The NAA accreditation system is based on extensive research and field testing. It measures several key indicators of quality in afterschool programs, including effective programming, physical environment, and strong partnerships with families, schools, and communities.[11] (For more information, see "National AfterSchool Association Standards for Quality School-Age Care" on page 13.)

In addition, most rating systems assess programs using a nationally recognized, research-based environmental rating scale. The School-Age Care Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS) was adapted from the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and focuses on the needs of children ages 5 to 12. SACERS can be used as an alternative way to measure the quality of care in afterschool settings. Six states explicitly mention SACERS in their QRS materials, but others allow programs to use other appropriate environmental rating scales.[12] Although SACERS is the most common school-age care assessment tool in quality rating systems, it is focused on center-based school-age care and may not be appropriate for other settings where school-age care programs operate. States may consider using other measures to assess afterschool programs, such as the Youth Program Quality Assessment.[13]

Developing State Quality Standards

In addition to incorporating national quality standards, some rating systems use new or existing state-level indicators to assess program quality. When state standards for early care programs are part of a QRS, parallel standards focused on school-age care may be needed. The following state examples demonstrate how existing rating systems use state standards to promote afterschool program quality:

- In **Missouri**'s pilot of the quality rating system, the state has developed a checklist of activities and opportunities that are part of a quality program's curriculum. This checklist informs a curriculum assessment that is conducted by an observer and contributes to a program's overall quality rating. Missouri's pilot QRS currently uses the ECERS-E to measure program curriculum delivered to preschool children and is field testing separate checklists tailored to infants and toddlers and school-age children. The school-age curriculum checklist highlights key indicators of a quality afterschool curriculum,

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[11] National Institute on Out-of-School Time, "Section Two: Understanding Standards of Quality," in *Making an Impact on Out-of-School Time* (Wellesley, Mass.: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2000).

[12] National Child Care Information Center, "Use of Environmental Rating Scales in Quality Rating Systems" (Fairfax, Va.: National Child Care Information Center, 2006).

[13] For more information, see www.highscope.org/EducationalPrograms/Adolescent/YouthPQA/mainpage.htm.

including involving youth in program planning and offering activities that address the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional domains of youth development. This checklist reflects a core set of quality indicators developed by the statewide afterschool network.[14]

■ In **Ohio**'s Step up to Quality program, early care providers at higher quality tiers are required to align their curriculum with state early learning standards or state infant and toddler guidelines. These standards are not appropriate for school-age children, so Ohio requires school-age programs at higher quality tiers to align their curriculum with the state's elementary and secondary education standards. This requirement provides an incentive for afterschool programs in Ohio to build more explicit linkages to the school-day curriculum.[15]

National AfterSchool Association (NAA) Standards for Quality School-Age Care

In some states, NAA accreditation enables programs to automatically reach the highest tier in a QRS. NAA standards also can inform the development of state QRS standards for school-age programs. According to NAA, components essential for quality afterschool programs can be grouped in five categories.

1. **Positive Human Relationships.** A program should foster consistent and caring relationships and positive interactions between young people and adults and between young people and their peers. Programs should have a ratio of adults to youth of no higher than 1:15.

2. **Effective Programming.** A program should offer constructive and well-planned schedules and activities that are tailored to the needs and interests of parents, youth, and their peers. A flexible daily schedule offers young people security, independence, and choices among various youth-centered and age-appropriate activities. The activities should promote numerous academic and youth development outcomes, including learning to work as part of a team and developing leadership skills.

3. **Appropriate Environment.** An appropriate environment for school-age care has sufficient and clean space for indoor and outdoor activities, attractive and welcoming décor, appropriate space, and supplies and furnishings to support the program's activities. Specifically, NAA encourages programs to have computer stations, an area with tables and chairs for homework, and an ample supply of books, games, art supplies, and outdoor play equipment. There should be regular safety checks of indoor and outdoor settings.

4. **Strong Partnerships with Young People, Families, Schools, and Communities.** Active relationships with all stakeholders in the program are an important component of an effective afterschool program. Such programs can pursue several strategies to develop strong partnerships, including establishing a youth advisory group, setting up regular parent meetings, connecting with participants' teachers, and reaching out to community institutions, such as colleges, hospitals, museums, and local businesses.

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[14] "School-Age Curriculum Checklist: Missouri Quality Rating System Pilot," draft provided to The Finance Project by Missouri's OPEN Initiative, University of Missouri-Columbia.

[15] "Step up to Quality Benchmarks and Indicators" [updated 11/06], available at: www.jfs.ohio.gov/cdc/docs/Statewide_tiers.pdf.

5. **Effective Staff and Administration.** A program should have sufficient funding, committed and well-trained staff and volunteers, frequent and efficient staff meetings, and ongoing training opportunities. According to NAA, programs also should have clear policies on health, security, and expectations for parents that are disseminated to staff, families, and young people in a handbook. Providers also should post rules and policies for young people at program locations.

Source: Adapted from National Institute on Out-of-School Time, "Section Two: Understanding Standards of Quality," in *Making an Impact on Out-of-School Time* (Wellesley, Mass.: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2000).

Address the Unique Qualifications and Circumstances of Afterschool Program Staff

In child care settings serving younger children, qualified staff typically have a degree or course-work in early education, a child development associate (CDA) credential, and/or work experience in early education. Given its roots in early care and education, a QRS often requires professionals to have some combination of these qualifications. Yet these qualifications may not capture the requisite qualifications for high-quality afterschool program providers, which are more likely to include a background in education or experience in working with youth. With added flexibility around the staff qualifications, it is likely that more afterschool programs would be able to participate in a QRS. In addition, QRS standards would become accessible to afterschool programs if these standards reflected increased flexibility for afterschool program staff who often work part-time schedules.

Afterschool Program Staff Qualifications

To address the staff qualifications held by quality afterschool professionals, several states, including Tennessee and Vermont, allow program staff in quality-rated programs to have a relevant degree besides one in early education.

- **Vermont**'s STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS) requires at least half of program staff to have degrees or a set amount of academic credits in "early childhood education, elementary education, developmental psychology, child development, or other fields with coursework relevant to children's growth and learning or relevant for a specific staff position." **Vermont** also allows staff to demonstrate their competence by documenting past experience in working in an "early childhood or after school setting."[16]

    - In **Oklahoma**, master teachers in school-age programs can meet staff qualification requirements through degrees or coursework in early education. They also may have a degree or coursework in "elementary education, recreation, or other coursework that supports working with the school-age child."[17]

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[16] "STARS Step Ahead for Child Care, Early Education and Afterschool Programs: Program Guide," March 2005, available at: www.starsstepahead.org/press/program_guide.pdf.

[17] National Child Care Information Center, "School-Age Care and Quality Rating Systems" (Fairfax, Va.: National Child Care Information Center, August 2006).

Another strategy to adapt staff qualification requirements is to develop a state school-age care credential, similar to the CDA for early childhood educators. (For more information on states that have developed school-age care credentials, see "State School-Age Care Credentials" on page 19.)

Part-Time Employment among Afterschool Program Staff

Quality rating systems have staff training requirements and various staff obligations that were developed with full-time child care providers in mind. A few states that have sought input from the afterschool program community have adapted regulations to better meet the needs of school-age programs with a largely part-time workforce.

- In **Pennsylvania**'s Keystone STARS, for example, STARS-rated programs are usually required to complete observations of children within 45 days of program entry and, depending on the STARS level, between one and three other times during the year. Results from observations are shared with parents and help inform the development of program curriculum. Given the more limited hours of school-age programs, staff is instead required to perform observations within 90 days of the child's entry to the program and one other time during the calendar year.[18]

Employee benefits is another area where states have found it important to address the needs of part-time staff. Many states' rating systems require quality-rated programs to offer certain employee benefits, such as health insurance and paid leave. Although these benefits are valuable incentives to support a professional workforce and reduce staff turnover, requirements developed with full-time staff in mind may not be appropriate for programs relying on part-time staff. The school-age community in **Missouri** and **Ohio** provided valuable input on which benefits are realistic for afterschool programs.

- In the **Missouri** quality rating system pilot, for example, programs are required to offer paid sick and personal leave to their employees to earn points at the upper tiers. Afterschool program stakeholders participating in the planning process believed that part-time afterschool program employees, who already have flexibility in their schedules, may not value paid leave as much as full-time employees. As a result, the current standards allow programs to offer staff either paid leave or a reduced enrollment fee for their children; the latter is a benefit that part-time afterschool program staff may deem more valuable.

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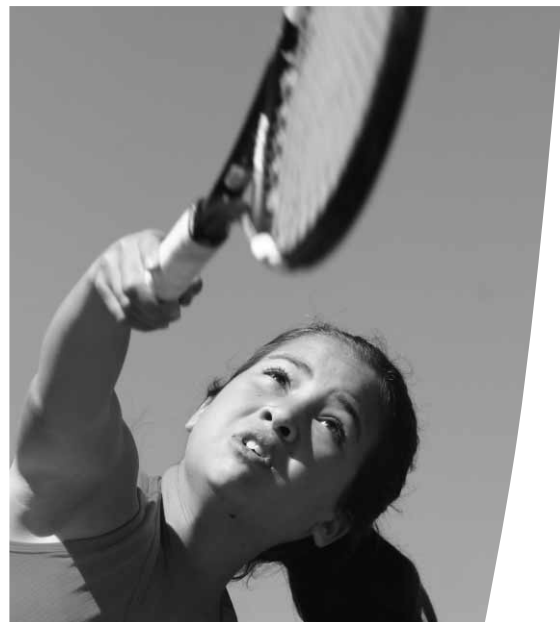
[18] "Keystone STARS: A System of Continuous Quality Improvement for Learning Programs—Center Performance Standards for FY 06–07," available at: www.pakeys.org/docs/STARS%20Standards.pdf.

Reduce the Barriers for Diverse Afterschool Programs to Participate in the System

Typically, a program will need to be licensed in order to meet a QRS's first tier. Licensing ensures a minimum level of health and safety in child care facilities that serve children of all ages and also enables programs to receive federal and state child care subsidies.[19] Yet meeting state child care licensing regulations can be challenging for afterschool programs that also are overseen by other state agencies, local agencies, and/or private entities. For example, in some states, school-based afterschool programs face varied or duplicative requirements related to building and fire codes from education and child care agencies. These requirements can be a barrier for afterschool programs that might otherwise choose to become licensed and participate in a QRS.

Some states have addressed these issues by exempting programs from some or all licensing regulations, when a system other than the child care system is sufficiently monitoring health and safety issues. The exemption largely applies to school-based programs that must meet building codes for public spaces, but it also could apply to programs such as boys and girls clubs or military-based programs that have their own regulations.[20] Typically, however, license-exempt programs are still required to voluntarily become licensed in order to enter a quality rating system.

In order for a QRS to be a feasible strategy for improving quality in the range of settings where afterschool programs take place, states may consider addressing the challenges associated with licensing. There may, for example, be a need for outreach and/or technical assistance to exempt programs to demonstrate the value of a QRS and to assist them in overcoming any hurdles in the licensing process.

In some cases, states have developed a process other than licensing, such as registration or certification, that asks license-exempt providers to report some basic information to the state. By registering license-exempt programs, states maintain access to basic information on exempt providers and can encourage them to take advantage of training and other resources to improve quality. In Washington, for example, school-based programs are exempt from licensing but can become certified by the state. A certified school-based program will be eligible to participate in the quality rating system the state is now developing. (For more information on how states can adapt licensing regulations to better promote quality in school-age care programs, see "Promoting Quality in Afterschool Programs through State Child Care Regulations: A Related Strategy" on page 17.)

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[19] Note that licensing is not necessarily a prerequisite for receiving subsidies, depending on the child care setting and state policy.

[20] This issue is discussed in greater depth in Child Care Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Promoting Quality in Afterschool Programs through State Child Care Regulations (Washington, D.C., 2006), available at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/childcaregs.pdf.

Promoting Quality in Afterschool Programs through State Child Care Regulations: A Related Strategy

A recent Afterschool Investments publication highlights child care licensing regulations as one way for states to promote quality in afterschool settings. Every state has child care licensing regulations to help ensure a basic level of quality among providers and address fundamental health and safety issues.

Like quality rating systems, child care licensing regulations were developed largely to meet the needs of early care and education providers, but several states have developed separate or supplemental regulations that explicitly promote afterschool program quality. Licensing regulations are typically the first tier in tiered quality rating systems, so states may consider adapting licensing regulations to meet the needs of school-age care providers before urging their participation in quality rating systems.

Promoting Quality in Afterschool Programs through State Child Care Regulations provides detailed information on how states are adapting specific components of licensing standards (e.g., staff qualifications and program activity requirements) to better support afterschool quality. The publication also discusses challenges and strategies for making licensing work for afterschool programs that operate in varied settings and have varied goals.

Sources: S. LeMoine, "States with Separate Center School-age Care Licensing Regulations," *Child Care Bulletin*, no. 29 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Bureau, 2005), 15; and Child Care Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Promoting Quality in Afterschool Programs through State Child Care Regulations* (Washington, D.C., 2006), available at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/childcareregs.pdf.

Developing a QRS as Part of a Broader Professional Development System

The school-age care professional development infrastructure has, in many cases, not been sufficiently developed to meet the needs of school-age providers who may want to participate in QRS. For example, no national credential equivalent to a CDA exists for school-age care providers. In addition, in some states, few training opportunities are tailored to these providers.

Developing a QRS can build momentum for a broader statewide system that supports the professional development of school-age care providers and helps professionalize the field of school-age care. A state school-age care credential and relevant training and coursework can be key components of this system.

School-Age Care Credential

Although no national credential exists, school-age care credentials exist in some states. The state credentialing programs are similar to CDA programs, but they focus on the unique skills associated with providing quality school-age care. Unlike child care accreditation, which recognizes quality programs, credentials recognize the skill set of an individual working in the afterschool care field.

The United States Army's school-age care credential has served as a model for the development of many state credentials. This credential requires individuals to receive appropriate training and demonstrate their competence to a local assessment team. For more information, see www.pba.army.mil/cys/school_age_services.htm. (For more information on state school-age care credentials and how they can be tied to a QRS, see "State School-Age Care Credentials" on page 19.)

State School-Age Care Credentials

In recent years, several states, including **Florida**, **Indiana**, **New York**, and **Wisconsin**, have developed a school-age care credentialing program, while other states are doing so.* In **Missouri**, a youth development credential developed by the state National AfterSchool Association affiliate is now built into the pilot QRS program as a way for school-age care programs to meet education requirements for lead program staff. **North Carolina** recently developed a school-age care credential through the community college system and has linked this credential to the state QRS. In **North Carolina**, when 75 percent of an afterschool program's group leaders have received the school-age care credential, the program now earns quality points toward a higher level in the state's rated license system. Both **Florida** and **New York**, which do not have a QRS, have linked their school-age care credential to state child care licensing regulations. Finally, other states with a QRS, including **Ohio** and **Pennsylvania**, are considering developing a school-age care credential that will be linked to various tiers of quality.

Note: *Examples are from the Afterschool Investments State Profiles series, available at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/statep.html.

Training for School-Age Care Providers

Given the different developmental needs of school-age children, school-age care professionals can benefit from training that is geared specifically to the age group they serve. Since many states have existing child care professional development systems, it may be possible to add trainings or modules focused on school-age care. States may also consider looking beyond the child care field to other key groups that support professional development for afterschool program staff, such as other state agencies supporting afterschool programs, community colleges, and 4-H organizations. Statewide afterschool networks can serve as a forum for developing linkages among these groups (see "Statewide Afterschool Networks: Potential Forums to Discuss QRS Issues" on page 11). (For more information on training programs for afterschool program staff and how these programs can be linked to a QRS, see "Training Programs for School-Age Care Providers" below.)

Training Programs for School-Age Care Providers

Several states have adapted or developed training programs to better support a QRS. In **Pennsylvania**, where the STARS program requires new staff in quality-rated programs to attend an orientation program, the state has developed a separate 15-hour self-learning module specifically for afterschool care. **Ohio**'s Career Pathways professional development system is now being adapted to have a school-age care track to better support the state's QRS. In addition, **Vermont** is developing afterschool education and care coursework in coordination with local community colleges and universities. This coursework is aligned with "core competencies" that assess various levels of professional development for afterschool program providers. In the future, coursework and core competencies may be aligned with the state QRS as well as a school-age care credential that is under development.

Linking Afterschool Quality and Sustainability

Alongside policymakers' increasing concerns about the quality of afterschool programs are their growing worries about these programs' long-term sustainability. Afterschool programs may receive ongoing support from parent fees and CCDF subsidies, but they are more likely than early care programs to rely on short-term grants. The most significant source of federal support for afterschool programs is the 21st Century Community Learning Center program, which provides seed grants lasting three to five years. Most states administering these funds do not provide renewal funding. Similarly, other public and private sources of support for afterschool programs often operate as seed grants or diminish over time as funders focus on other priorities. As a result, afterschool programs typically find it necessary to rely on multiple funding sources and face ongoing challenges to sustain the services they provide.

In response to these challenges, some funders now require programs to develop a long-term sustainability plan. The process of planning for sustainability encourages programs to consider the diverse in-kind and financial resources they can pursue in coming years and to identify specific strategies for attaining these resources.

During the planning process for **Missouri**'s pilot QRS system, afterschool program leaders expressed concern that many of the state's quality school-age care programs operate on short-term grants. As the state invests in promoting and assessing the quality of these programs, they found it was important to also consider the programs' longevity. As a result, the state decided to link the QRS to efforts to promote sustainability. A program that has a sustainability plan will now earn points toward a higher tier of quality in the QRS. Although **Missouri**'s efforts to link sustainability and quality are only now being tested through its pilot program, the findings may be instructive to other states.

Conclusion

Quality rating systems are growing in popularity nationwide as a strategy to improve and assess the quality of care. This momentum provides an opportunity for school-age care leaders to work with early care leaders and to ensure that rating systems are developed with the unique needs of various age groups in mind. States can take several steps to make a QRS work well for afterschool programs, including involving afterschool program leaders in the planning process, developing standards that recognize the varying developmental needs of the children and the unique qualifications and circumstances of afterschool program staff, and reducing barriers to QRS participation. Finally, states may explore how to link quality improvement efforts to other state quality efforts and to state efforts to support afterschool program sustainability.

Relevant Resources

Related Resources from the Afterschool Investments Project

Child Care Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Making Smart Investments in Afterschool: A Policy Primer for State and Local Leaders.* Washington, D.C., 2006. Available at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/policyprimer.pdf.

Child Care Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Promoting Quality in Afterschool Programs through State Child Care Regulations.* Washington, D.C., 2006. Available at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/childcareregs.pdf.

State Afterschool Profiles. Available at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/statep.html.

Resources on Quality Rating Systems

Mitchell, Anne W. *Stair Steps to Quality: A Guide for State and Communities Developing Quality Rating Systems for Early Care and Education.* Alexandria, Va.: United Way Success by Six, 2005. Available at: www.unitedway.org/sb6/upload/StairStepstoQualityGuidebook_FINALforWEB.pdf.

National Child Care Information Center. "Common Categories of Criteria Used in State Quality Rating Systems." Fairfax, Va.: National Child Care Information Center, 2005. Available at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/qrs-comcat.pdf.

National Child Care Information Center. "School-Age Care and Quality Rating Systems." Fairfax, Va.: National Child Care Information Center, August 2006.

National Child Care Information Center. "Use of Environmental Rating Scales in Quality Rating Systems." Fairfax, Va.: National Child Care Information Center, 2006.

Additional relevant resources from the National Child Care Information Center available at: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/index.html#qrs.

Resources on Afterschool Program Quality

Bodilly, Susan, and Megan K. Beckett. *Making Out-of-School Time Matter: Evidence for an Action Agenda.* Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2005. Available at: www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND_MG242.pdf.

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Committee on After-School Research and Practice. *Moving Towards Success: Framework for After-School Programs.* Washington, D.C.: Collaborative Communications Group, 2005. Available at: www.publicengagement.com/Framework.

The Finance Project and Public/Private Ventures. *Key Characteristics of High-Quality Out-of-School Time Programs: A Review of the Literature.* Washington, D.C.: The Finance Project, 2006.

LeMoine, S. "States with Separate Center School-age Care Licensing Regulations." Child Care Bulletin. No. 29. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Bureau. Available at: http://nccic.org/ccb/issue29.html.

National Institute on Out-of-School Time. "Section Two: Understanding Standards of Quality." In Making an Impact on Out-of-School Time. Wellesley, Mass.: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2000.

State Quality Rating System Guidelines

"Keystone STARS: A System of Continuous Quality Improvement for Learning Programs—Center Performance Standards for FY 06–07." Available at: www.pakeys.org/docs/STARS%20Standards.pdf.

"Missouri OPEN Initiative: QRS Models." Available at: www.openinitiative.org/qrsmodels.htm.

"Ohio Step up to Quality Benchmarks and Indicators." [updated 11/06]. Available at: www.jfs.ohio.gov/cdc/docs/Statewide_tiers.pdf.
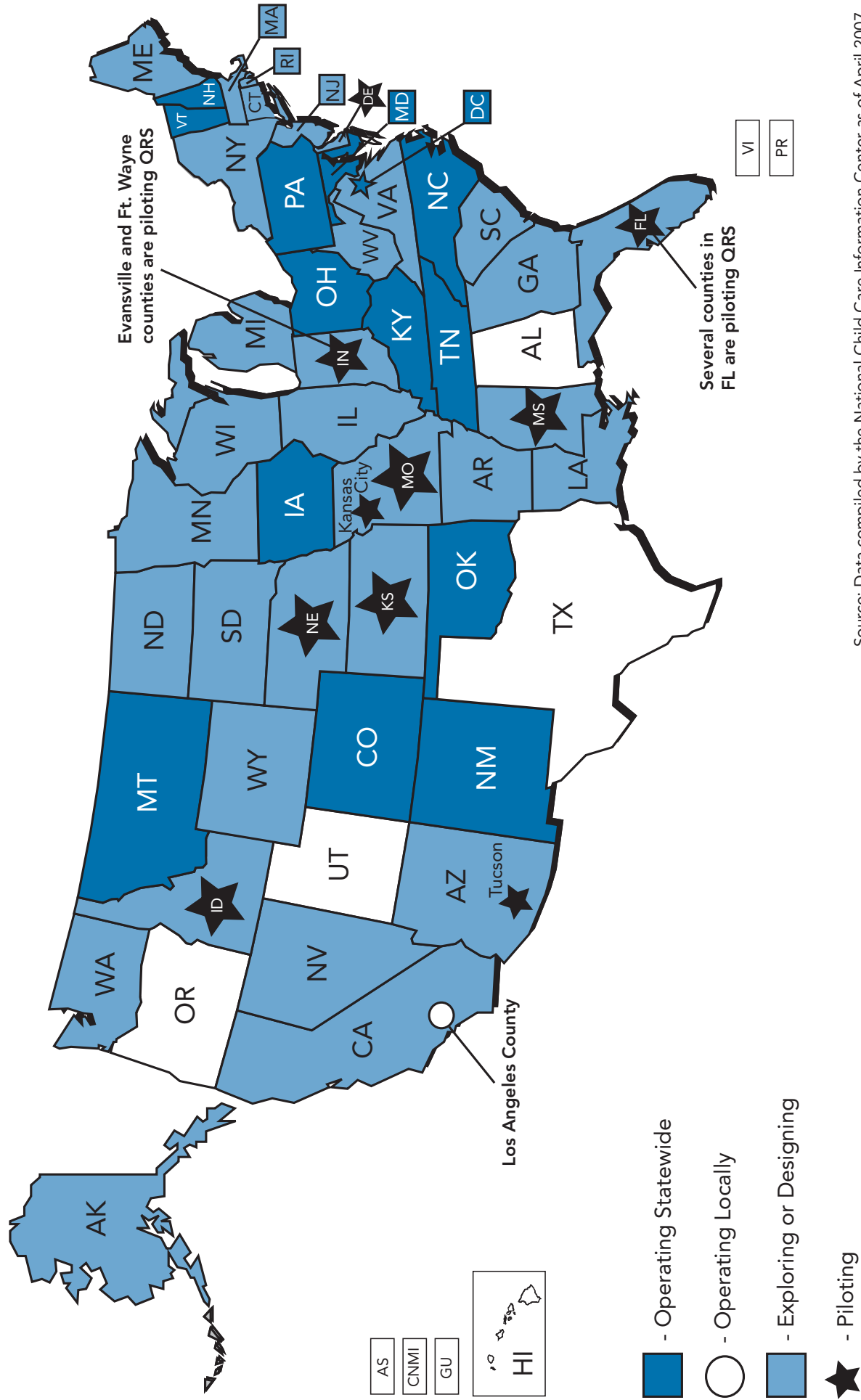
Acknowledgments

States and Communities Operating, Piloting, or Exploring/ Designing a Quality Rating System

Evansville and Ft. Wayne counties are piloting QRS

Several counties in FL are piloting QRS

Los Angeles County

ME

NH

VT

NY

PA

OH

WV VA

NC

SC

GA

KY

TN

AL

IN

MI

IL

WI

MS

LA

MO

AR

Kansas City

IA

OK

TX

MN

ND

SD

NE

KS

CO

NM

WY

MT

UT

AZ

Tucson

ID

NV

WA

OR

CA

AK

HI

AS

CNMI

GU

MA

RI

CT

NJ

DE

MD

DC

FL

VI

PR

- Operating Statewide

◯ - Operating Locally

- Exploring or Designing

★ - Piloting

Source: Data compiled by the National Child Care Information Center as of April 2007.

Key QRS Adaptations in Three States

	Pennsylvania Keystone STARS	Ohio Step up to Quality	Missouri Quality Rating System (Pilot program)
Role of National AfterSchool Association (NAA) Accreditation	NAA-accredited programs qualify for the highest tier under STARS.	The state considered using NAA standards for the highest level of quality, but it found that student-staff ratios were stringent and could be a barrier to program participation. Instead, the state developed its own age-appropriate student-staff ratios for quality-rated school-age care programs.	Programs that are accredited by a state-approved accrediting agency can earn points at the highest tier if all other criteria also are met. Afterschool programs may be accredited by NAA or Missouri Accreditation (MoA).
Staff Qualifications	Staff in quality-rated school-age care programs may have prior qualifications in fields such as education and social work.	Program staff must reach various levels in the state Career Pathways system for programs to qualify for higher quality tiers. Career Pathways levels are based on both prior education and relevant training. Career Pathways are being adapted to provide a track for school-age care providers.	The QRS requires staff to reach specific levels on the state career lattice, which was developed for early childhood, school-age/after-school, and youth development professionals.
State School-Age Care Credential	Pennsylvania is piloting a school-age care professional certificate to serve as an alternative to the child development associate credential.	The state is considering developing a school-age care credential as an alternative for school-age care providers.	Earning a youth development credential is one way to move to higher levels on the state career lattice.
Training Requirements	Staff of quality-rated programs must attend a new staff orientation program. The state has developed a separate 15-hour self-learning module specifically for afterschool program staff. In addition, school-age program staff are subject to reduced annual training clock hour requirements, taking into account their part-time work schedules.	Not applicable.	Staff may complete at least 14 hours of "comprehensive youth development training" in lieu of child-related college credits to meet the requirements in the education specialization category.
Curriculum	Not applicable.	School-age care programs at higher quality tiers must align their curriculum with the state's elementary and secondary education standards.	The state is field testing a checklist of activities and opportunities that are part of the curriculum of a quality program. This checklist informs a curriculum assessment that is conducted by an observer and contributes to a program's overall quality rating. The school-age care curriculum checklist highlights key indicators of a quality afterschool curriculum, including offering youth multiple programming choices, involving youth in program planning, and offering activities that address the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional domains of youth development.
Child Observation and Assessment	STARS-rated programs that serve young children are required to complete observations of children within 45 days of program entry and, depending on the STARS level, from one to three other times during the year. Results from observations are shared with parents and help inform the development of program curriculum. Given the more limited hours of school-age care programs, they are instead required to perform an initial observation within 90 days of the child's entry to the program and one other time during the calendar year.	Not applicable.	Not applicable.

	Pennsylvania Keystone STARS	Ohio Step up to Quality	Missouri Quality Rating System (Pilot program)
Family Involvement	Not applicable.	Not applicable.	At the higher tiers, the QRS for early childhood programs requires regular child-specific written communication between providers and parents. As school-age children are older and more able to communicate to their parents about their daily activities, this requirement was not included for school-age care programs. Instead, there is a required "communication center" where parents can find up-to-date information. In addition, at the highest tier, one of a few optional ways to reach out to families is to provide parent-teacher conferences. School-age care programs may coordinate with existing parent-teacher conferences at schools.
Transitions	Programs participating in the STARS program are required to provide information to parents regarding transitioning children to another classroom or educational setting. Many school-age children spend some of their time in self-care, so school-age care programs also are required to provide information about transitioning to self-care.	Not applicable.	Not applicable.
Administrative Practices	Not applicable.	Not applicable.	At the rating system's second tier, school-age care programs are required to have a "site supply budget." This requirement derives from an under-standing that many school-age care programs are part of large corporations or school districts and have a budget for individual program sites. Programs also must have a sustainability plan.
Workplace Characteristics	Not applicable.	Not applicable.	A reduced enrollment fee for their children may be a benefit for staff in quality-rated school-age care programs instead of paid sick and personal leave. The afterschool community deemed this benefit more valuable to afterschool program staff, because they already have flexibility in their schedules during the mid-day hours.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Administration for Children and Families

Child Care Bureau