Reimagining a More Equitable QRIS

The Quality Counts California (QCC) Equity Project

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How Does Better Early Learning and Care Program Quality Lead to "a Better California for All Kids"?

The quality of an early learning and care (ELC) program matters because how a child experiences these settings impacts their learning, development, and later outcomes and opportunities. For all children to have access to high-quality early learning and care, programs, providers, and teachers need resources and supports that help them create safe environments where children can learn and feel cared for. **Equity exists when all California children have the support they need to succeed.**

What Is Quality Counts California (QCC)?

To raise quality in early learning and care settings, states across the country have established quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). In California, the system is called Quality Counts California (QCC). QCC works to improve ELC quality in California by providing training and support to early childhood programs and home-based providers, assessing program quality, and providing information to families to support them in selecting high-quality early childhood programs for their children under age 5.

Source: https://qualitycountsca.net/

What are QCC quality ratings?

Many California providers that offer early learning and care to young children and choose to participate in the QCC system are given a rating. This means that their program is given a score from their local QCC agency that tells them and the families that they serve how they are doing in terms of quality and suggests ways to improve. Programs with higher ratings often get additional resources, such as more funding from the government to invest in their materials, staff, or learning environment. For more information, see **Frequently Asked Questions** about QCC.

What Is the QCC Equity Project?

California administrators; teachers; family child care and family, friend, and neighbor providers; and families have had years of experience with QRIS, working to provide better-quality early learning to children and families. And like many QRIS across the country, QCC must continue to improve and support quality early learning that meets the needs of all children. In 2021, some California early childhood advocates called out quality rating and improvement systems as inequitable and racist. In general, these systems have defined quality with a focus on child outcomes, without considering what quality might mean for all different types of families and children. In California, some people worried that the quality ratings were not fair to all programs/providers as they did not all get the same funding and resources. In response, First 5 California, the California Department of Education, and the California Department of Social Services, with contracted help from WestEd, partnered with School Readiness Consulting, an organization working for equity in early childhood systems, to conduct the QCC Equity Project in 2022. This project is one of many steps being taken by California leaders to create an equitable early learning and care system, made for *all* children and families (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Creating a California for All Kids Means Creating a Child-Focused System

Child-Focused, Not Standards-Driven

Equity, diversity and quality equally valued

Quality improvement support for all ELC providers

Value families and providers' expertise

CALIFORNIA for ALL KIDS

About this brief

This community-facing brief is a summary of the findings and recommendations of the QCC Equity Project and is for anyone interested in the California early learning and care system. Details about the project design, research methods, and other information can be found in the full project materials that were shared with the QCC Leadership Team.

What Did the QCC Equity Project Hope to Learn?

The goal of the QCC Equity Project was to find out how people in California experience QCC. The project team reached out to communities across California to find out who is not receiving the support they need to succeed and why. We talked to families, administrators, and early learning educators to hear their ideas for ensuring that all families, regardless of race, culture, economic status, or language, are set up to succeed.

The QCC Equity Project asked Californians four questions about their experiences with the QCC system:

#1 What is working well in the current QCC system?

#2 How easily can all early learning and care providers and programs access QCC resources and supports? Do they experience challenges accessing or participating in QCC?

#3 Does QCC measure quality according to what families need and want for their children? Does QCC help families find high-quality ELC programs?

#4 What changes or improvements would make the QCC system more equitable? What needs to be done to make these suggestions a reality?

How Was Equity Centered in This Project?

The QCC Equity Project listened to the voices of QCC participants and those not currently participating but who could benefit from QCC resources and support. The project team also reached out to people who often do not participate in research and conversations about quality, such as parents and people who provide early learning and care out of their homes (these are educators and small business owners, also known as family child care providers, or FCC providers) or the informal care that is provided by family members, friends, or neighbors (also known as family, friend, and neighbor care, or FFN care). It was also important to include people with diverse languages, races, and ethnicities from communities across California.

The project invited a diverse range of people from across California—including families, administrators, and teachers from early learning and care programs such as centers and Pre-K programs; family child care providers; family, friend, and neighbor care providers; and QCC-affiliated staff—to share their thoughts and experiences with the QCC system.

New voices were added into the conversation: 72% of those who participated in the QCC Equity Project told us that it was their first time giving their thoughts on the early childhood system.

How was information collected? We used surveys that participants could complete at their convenience and set up group meetings (also known as focus groups) for deeper conversations.

- **Surveys:** The QCC Equity Project had six unique online surveys for families; program administrators; program teaching staff; family, friend, and neighbor care providers; family child care providers; and QCC-affiliated staff.

- **Focus groups:** The QCC Equity Project had 60-minute, online discussions for families; program administrators; program teaching staff; family, friend, and neighbor care providers; and family child care providers organized by language, race, or ethnicity of participants.

How was equity kept in mind when the project collected information? Participation was made convenient and accessible.
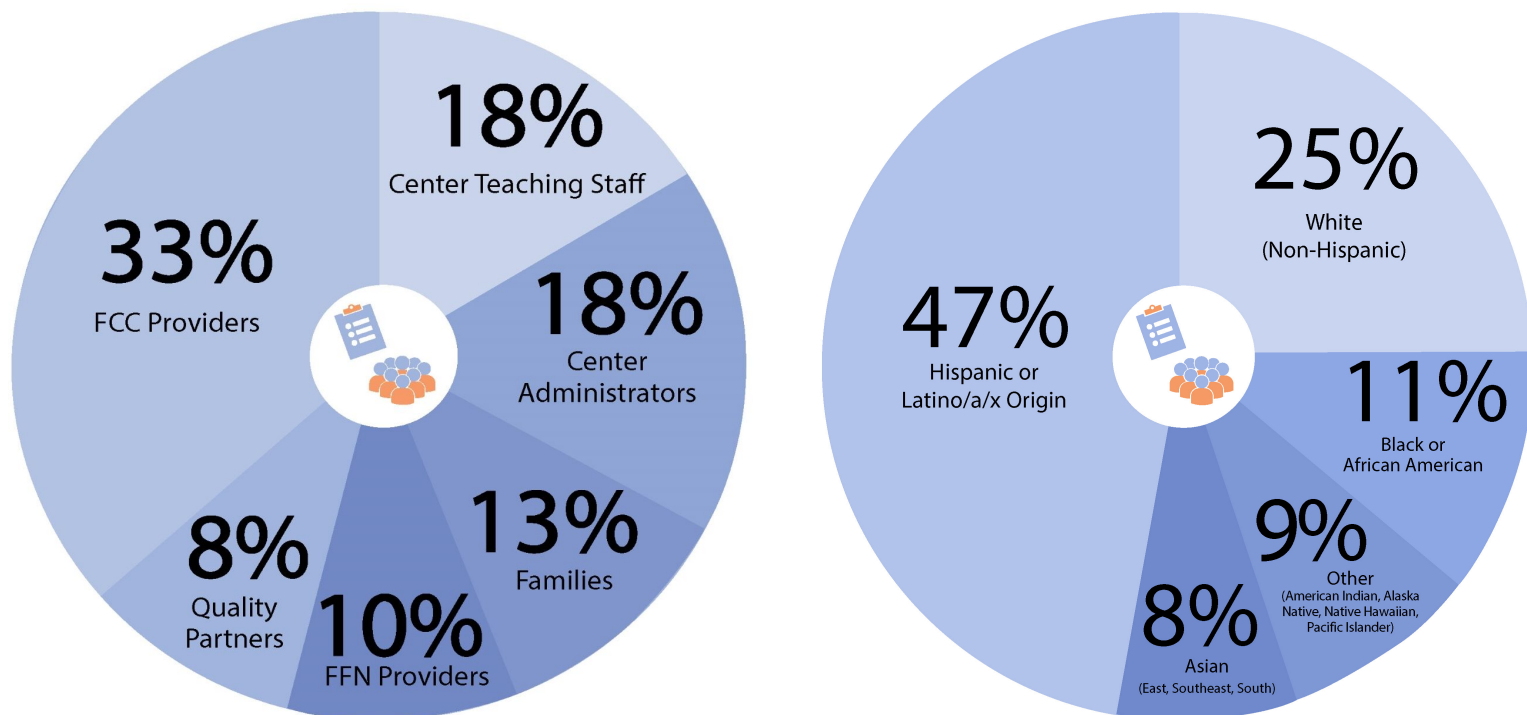
- **We tried to hear from as many people as possible across California:** Information about surveys and focus groups was translated into six languages. It was shared by state, regional, and local QCC agencies, as well as community early childhood partners. The study was also advertised on social media channels (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). We tried to reach participants and invite them to participate for several months.

- **We had materials and information in multiple languages:** All focus groups and outreach materials and most surveys were available or conducted in the six most widely spoken languages in California: English, Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, and Vietnamese. Translation and interpretation services were available to those who spoke other languages.

- **We created a safe space for people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds to talk about their experiences:** The focus groups were led by a diverse group of facilitators from different California communities. Facilitators were matched with groups of participants of their own race, culture, or language to create a space where people felt they could share their experiences more freely.

- **We offered online participation options:** Focus groups were conducted online using the Zoom app, and surveys were available online on computers and phones or tablets as part of an effort to reach rural providers and families.

- **We paid participants for their time and effort:** Gift cards were provided to 68% of survey respondents and 100% of focus group participants.[1]

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1 To make the most of the resources available, the project team prioritized sending gift cards to families, educators, FCC providers, and FFN providers who participated in the survey.

Who Participated?

Figure 2. Participation by Role and Race/Ethnicity

Pie chart 1 (Participation by Role):
- 18% Center Teaching Staff
- 33% FCC Providers
- 18% Center Administrators
- 13% Families
- 8% Quality Partners
- 10% FFN Providers

Pie chart 2 (Race/Ethnicity):
- 25% White (Non-Hispanic)
- 47% Hispanic or Latino/a/x Origin
- 11% Black or African American
- 9% Other (American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander)
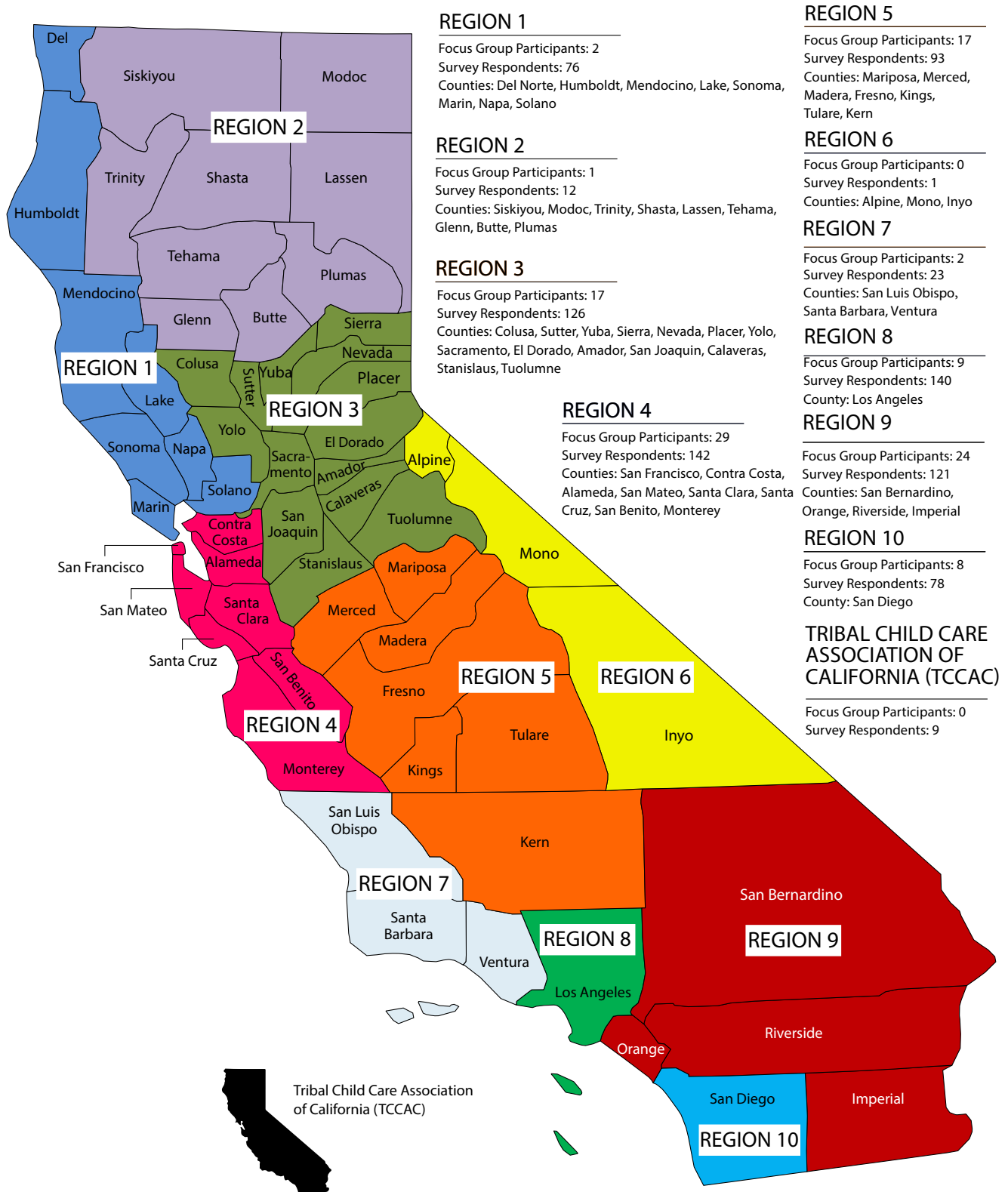- 8% Asian (East, Southeast, South)

The QCC Equity Project reached many groups of people who have not been included in past studies. For instance, people of color represented the majority (67%) of all participants, most of whom were of Hispanic or Latino/a/x background (47%). Family child care providers made up the majority of participants in focus groups (39%) and surveys (32%). All 10 QCC regions plus Tribal Child Care were represented in the survey, and nearly all (except Region 6 and Tribal Child Care) participated in the focus groups. See Figures 2 and 3 for more information.[2]

2 Due to the small sample size, this report describes the experiences of those individuals who participated, but these results cannot be generalized to all interest holders in California.

Figure 3. Participation by QCC Region

REGION 1
Focus Group Participants: 2
Survey Respondents: 76
Counties: Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Lake, Sonoma, Marin, Napa, Solano

REGION 2
Focus Group Participants: 1
Survey Respondents: 12
Counties: Siskiyou, Modoc, Trinity, Shasta, Lassen, Tehama, Glenn, Butte, Plumas

REGION 3
Focus Group Participants: 17
Survey Respondents: 126
Counties: Colusa, Sutter, Yuba, Sierra, Nevada, Placer, Yolo, Sacramento, El Dorado, Amador, San Joaquin, Calaveras, Stanislaus, Tuolumne

REGION 4
Focus Group Participants: 29
Survey Respondents: 142
Counties: San Francisco, Contra Costa, Alameda, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey

REGION 5
Focus Group Participants: 17
Survey Respondents: 93
Counties: Mariposa, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, Kern

REGION 6
Focus Group Participants: 0
Survey Respondents: 1
Counties: Alpine, Mono, Inyo

REGION 7
Focus Group Participants: 2
Survey Respondents: 23
Counties: San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura

REGION 8
Focus Group Participants: 9
Survey Respondents: 140
County: Los Angeles

REGION 9
Focus Group Participants: 24
Survey Respondents: 121
Counties: San Bernardino, Orange, Riverside, Imperial

REGION 10
Focus Group Participants: 8
Survey Respondents: 78
County: San Diego

TRIBAL CHILD CARE ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA (TCCAC)
Focus Group Participants: 0
Survey Respondents: 9

What Did We Hear? These were the key takeaways from this work.

1. QCC resources are valuable to programs that know about and can access these QCC resources to improve their quality.

2. There is work to do to ensure that everyone gets QCC resources regardless of their race or language, or whether their program is in a center or home-based setting.

3. For QCC to be a useful resource for families, quality needs to be measured according to what families need and want for their children.

4. Expand access to training and supports that are already working well across the state so that all providers can find and use them to improve quality. At the same time, make sure providers receive the individualized training and support they need so they can meet all children's needs.

What is working well in the current QCC system?

QCC resources are valuable to programs that know about and can access these QCC resources to improve their quality.

Trainings, coaching, a peer community, and financial support were found to be the most important QCC resources and supports across all provider groups. More than 80% of participants said that QCC trainings that improve their knowledge and program quality were an important QCC resource. Compared with program-based administrators and teachers, family child care providers and family, friend, and neighbor care providers have the least access to QCC resources. More than other providers, 63% of family child care providers said

they participate in QCC for the opportunities to share experiences, ideas, and resources with other family child care providers, which is very important for reducing stress and isolation. Providers are not against having QCC rate the quality of their program but would like what is rated to be more connected to their ideas of quality.

> "Even if operating out of your home, you still need accountability, and you want to be connected. So I think even though I'm operating out of my home, and it is isolating in a way, [QCC,] it keeps me on track. It keeps me connected, it keeps me learning and growing. And my coach is amazing. I can text her at any time. She doesn't just care for me in terms of me as a family child care provider. She elevates me as an educator. She cares for me as a wife and mom. She shares her experience. We have a very authentic, open relationship."
>
> — **Asian (East, Southeast, and South Asian) family child care provider**

How easily can all early learning and care providers and programs access QCC resources and supports? Do they experience challenges accessing or participating in QCC?

State and local leaders have work to do to ensure that everyone gets QCC resources regardless of their race or language, or whether their program is in a center or home-based setting.

Setting

Participants said they wanted access to the same trainings, coaching, and other resources but would like them to be designed specifically for their program setting and experience or education level. Currently, participants feel that coaching, trainings, and quality ratings are best suited for program-based administrators and teachers, rather than home-based providers and family, friend, and neighbor care. Making the time and location of coaching and trainings more flexible was also important to participants. Increased financial support is required, especially for family child care and family, friend, and neighbor providers. Awareness of QCC also varied by setting. Family child care and family, friend, and neighbor providers were three times more unaware (30% were unaware) of QCC resources and support than program-based administrators and teachers were (10% were unaware).

> "I know the matrix was just revised, but it's highly inequitable still, particularly when you look at it from the point of view of a family child care educator. Often, the progress that educators are making gets lost . . . . They're making great strides, but then they're like, 'Well, but I didn't move up. I'm not moving up.' The quality is improving, but the way the system is set up on paper, it doesn't appear to be that."
>
> — **Latino/a/x program administrator**

Race, ethnicity, or background

Black / African American (31%) participants were twice as likely to be unfamiliar with QCC than all other racial groups. Asian (East, Southeast, South) (19%) and Black / African American (17%) participants said they had more negative experiences due to their background or identity in the QCC system than other racial groups. White (non-Hispanic) (6%) and Hispanic or Latino/a/x (5%) participants were less likely to say they had negative experiences because of their background or identity.

> "I do just see the inequity in services and access to different resources. In some of the groups that I've gone to before COVID . . . I saw some of the Caucasian providers knew more about different services and resources that we could attain as providers. And we didn't know. I mean, they were gracious enough to share with us some of the things, but it was like, 'Why didn't we know? Where do we go and get this information?' Even with some of the other agencies, like regional centers, we're getting a lot of kids now that are autistic or that need some additional services, and it's like we're just out there blindly trying to figure it out and to help the parent. But it seems like a lot of them [White providers] kind of know already the ins and outs of that and they're able to get help for their families a lot quicker than we can."
>
> — **Black family child care provider**

Providers also shared that many materials used in the QCC system to measure quality (tools and assessments) do not reflect the cultural background of all children and families. Some providers felt uncomfortable and less connected to the QCC staff person when they did not share their culture or racial/ethnic background. Some providers felt they were treated differently or unfairly in their experience with QCC staff who came in to observe their program.

> "Assessments are very generic, and a prime example is positive climate in Classroom Assessment Scoring System [CLASS®] and eye contact. Perhaps in a community, eye contact is seen as disrespectful."
>
> — **Latino/a/x program administrator**

Language

While there are efforts to provide QCC resources and materials in multiple languages, there is still a need for more widespread access in many languages. Asian (East, Southeast, and South Asian) (39%) and Hispanic or Latino/a/x (39%) participants suggested translated QCC assessments, materials, and trainings as a needed improvement in QCC.

> "It's a very unfair and unjust system that an educator that does not speak English is being assessed and observed on tools that have not been bothered to be translated to their native language. But they have them in English."
> — **Latino/a/x program administrator**

Participants were asked whether they had experienced challenges or barriers to QCC participation. The following are the most frequently mentioned challenges and barriers:

- QCC resources are uneven across California regions and counties

- Time or staff effort required to participate is unmanageable

- Lack of awareness about QCC

- QCC is not as helpful for home-based providers

- Unclear rules and regulations regarding eligibility, enrollment, and other QCC requirements

- Lack of technology or technology training

- Costly or inaccessible higher education or training requirements

- Inadequate financial resources

> "And it's just really a challenge to do the observations and assessments when you're either short-staffed or you may have one other assistant with you. And it's really challenging when you don't have enough staff. I don't always have the luxury to just be observing in my classroom."
> — **Latino/a/x family child care provider**

What is important to families when choosing an early learning and care program for their child?

After the program's location, cost, and hours, which are major deciding factors, here are what providers, educators, administrators, and families spoke about as important considerations for families before placing their child into a program:

- Accepting and inclusive of all types of families

- Additional languages offered in the learning environment

- Cleanliness, safety, and accessibility of environment (e.g., secure entrance to building)

- Diversity of educators

- Kind, welcoming, and engaged educators

- Lack of licensing complaints or violations

- Open communication between families and provider

- Organized classroom and "good flow"

- Outside time available for children

- Recommendations and reviews from neighbors, friends, and other parents in the community

- Type of curriculum (e.g., focus on getting children ready for kindergarten)

- Web-based research (Google, etc.)

What do California early learning and care program administrators and teachers think an ideal program should offer/include?

Program Administrators

- Professional development for staff, including more up-to-date fieldwork and preparation for educators
- Fully staffed
- Fair salaries and benefits for staff
- Diverse staff to attract diverse families and help children learn about diversity
- Safe, accessible, inclusive program
- Affordable for families
- Parent education workshops
- Open doors for parents to come in and talk anytime
- Beautiful, aesthetically pleasing environments (inside and outside)
- Continuity of care
- Enough children enrolled in the program
- Resources to make physical upgrades
- Transportation for families to attend programs that they choose

Early Learning and Care Teachers

- Ongoing staff training
- Developmentally appropriate environment and materials
- Accommodations for children with special needs
- Comfortable, safe facility, including supervision of children
- Diversity of staff, including race, language, gender, and matching the culture of children being served
- Enough pay to ensure retention of high-quality teaching staff
- High levels of family engagement, honest and open conversation between the primary caregivers in child's life
- Efforts to help families understand how their child should learn at developmental levels
- Social-emotional aspect of learning for children (e.g., how to process or express feelings)
- Nurturing and loving environment

Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care Providers

- Relationships with parents/community
- Knowledgeable staff with experience
- Training in caring for children with special needs, disabilities, and trauma
- Safe and clean environment
- Kindness, patience, love for young children
- Hands-on experience with caring for children
- Proper supervision and teacher-child ratios
- Resources that are inclusive

Family Child Care / Home-Based Providers

- Accessible professional development opportunities (e.g., offered at times that are convenient for providers, virtual and in-person options, multiple modalities)
- Funding for resources to enhance the classroom (materials, supplies, healthy food, outdoor learning environment) and to promote diversity
- Family engagement and classes for parents (e.g., positive discipline, child development)
- Funding for more staff and to retain quality staff
- Funding to help with payroll so providers can take professional development / classes for improving quality
- Funds to help family child care / home-based providers to attend conferences (e.g., scholarships, paid time to attend, other incentives)
- Affordable care options, family supports, financial assistance
- Access to education in providers' preferred language
- Proper facilities to have quality care (e.g., larger spaces, proper lighting, ventilation, child-sized bathrooms, equipment)
- Programs that incorporate play-based learning
- Warm, safe environment that respects children
- Peer mentoring and coaching supports from high-quality family child care programs
- Access to regional/local family child care networks and outside support (e.g., food services, licensing)
- Trainings led by other family child care / home-based providers facing similar challenges

Does the way QCC measures quality align with families' needs and preferences? Is QCC helping families access high-quality early learning and care programs?

For QCC to be a useful resource for families, quality needs to be measured according to what families need and want for their children.

> "I promote it when we have our parent orientation, because we're proud to be a rating of five, but our families don't even understand. So I don't know, really, that being accredited or having a great rating matters to our families."
>
> **— White program administrator**

Families are not frequently relying on the QCC rating system to make early learning and care decisions. Almost half of families surveyed said they were not aware of QCC or its rating system. Providers already know this, and therefore, family views of QCC are not a reason for providers to participate in QCC.

The QCC rating system includes some things that families value, including teacher-child relationships, health and safety policies, and learning environments, but there are other ideas of quality, from a family's perspective, that are missing. For example, families prefer programs that understand and respect the cultural background of their child and family, but this is not included in the QCC quality rating system. Families want the program to be accommodating for their bilingual or multilingual children or for their child to not feel singled out as the only person from their cultural background. Others spoke about the need for open communication between educators and families.

> "We often tell families, 'This is what you need, this is what's best for you,' but there's not that much opportunity to listen to our families and take that into practice . . . . But I think when we stay up here, we lose that opportunity to have an equitable view when it comes to engaging and really meeting the needs of our families."
>
> **— Latino/a/x program administrator**

Expand access to training and supports that are already working well across the state so that all providers can find and use them to improve quality. At the same time, make sure providers receive the individualized training and support they need so they can meet all children's needs.

Participants across the state would like to have access to the same type of training and support but would like these resources to be relevant to their work and appropriate for their education or training background. Participants also want all training and resources to prepare them to teach culturally and racially diverse children who speak many languages. Teachers want more training on social-emotional health and how to work with children with trauma or behavioral issues, particularly after the pandemic. Other providers spoke about the need for guidance on marketing their program, including website design and communications with families in the community. Antibias or anti-racism knowledge for all providers and local and state QCC agencies is also an important need across the state.

"And I wish that we could have more stronger teachers to deal with challenging behaviors, and more training and more tools so that they could feel successful and not so much of their unconscious bias stepping in like, 'Well, this parent just doesn't care. Why do I have to deal with this child when the child comes to school?' So that kind of thing, I think, is a really big one that I see that needs to be worked on."

— **Black teacher**

"But my teachers have been there and done that, and done that training five times. They don't need another observation training, or DRDP [Desired Results Developmental Profile] training, or things like that. They're ready to keep looking on that cutting edge. What's the newest thing? What's the best thing that would fit for our program? They've started looking at the workforce registry for trainings outside of the county, because they feel like they've done everything that the county is offering. So they're looking for new and fresh opportunities."

— **White (non-Hispanic) program administrator**

What changes or improvements would result in a more equitable QCC system? What needs to be done to make these suggestions a reality?

Participants talked about many improvements that can be made to ensure that everyone who wants support from QCC can participate and get what they need. Taken together, it is clear that Californians want the following ideas to be part of an improved QCC.

1. **QCC includes all Californians: changing QCC to be useful for all providers and families.**

2. **QCC is easy to access and use: making QCC resources easily accessible and useful to all.**

3. **QCC's vision of quality includes family and provider ideas: making sure quality is defined by listening to families and early learning and care providers.**

> "I was just thinking . . . what helps providers feel supported and uplifted? Obviously, surveys are one way, but in person, coffee, breakfast, something where providers feel like they are important and you can really get them [to that] place where they could open up and talk about what's working and what's not working. Maybe every six months might be a great way also to see that improvement, because you're talking to real-life providers who are already doing the work and getting them to share that in their vulnerable state and getting real honest feedback."
>
> — **Latino/a/x family child care provider**

The Equity Road Map: Recommendations for California to Create a More Equitable QCC System

Efforts to improve the system's equity and quality should go hand in hand and will require a shared commitment, dedicated funding, and partnership between state and local agencies, programs participating in QCC, and families. After hearing from the community, the project team reflected on the types of change that could move QCC in the right direction. The SRC project team recommends that change take place across the following three areas of QCC:

- **Communications: General communications and purposeful outreach by QCC** (e.g., messaging to the public and the early learning and care community, strategies to better engage specific populations). Outreach is not outreach if it doesn't reach everyone.

- **Quality for all: Quality standards and measurement within QCC** (e.g., how quality is defined, how ratings and data are used). Quality needs to be defined and measured in ways that are meaningful to more people on the ground level.

- **Equity in action: Support for programs trying to improve their quality** (e.g., professional development, training, funding, resource allocation). If the goal is to create more high-quality programs, there must be a path forward for all types of programs serving all kinds of communities.

State and local government agencies, policymakers, and researchers at various levels can think through the following actions, informed by California children, families, providers, and community partners, which will move the state toward greater equity.

The Equity Road Map

Inclusiveness of QCC

What we heard

Many providers and families do not see themselves—whether it's their type of program, region, race, ethnicity, cultural background, or preferred language—reflected in the QCC system. Currently, many experience a system that is not designed for them or their unique needs. For example, training is not offered during times that are most convenient for providers, materials they need are not available in their preferred language, and families do not feel they are being included in the decisions that impact them. As a result, many providers and families that could benefit from resources and support that would create more high-quality early care programs are not connecting with these resources. There is a lack of regular, ongoing opportunities to share input with government agencies on how the system might better meet providers' needs or those of the families and children they serve. Without this ongoing dialogue, it is difficult to build trust between QCC and the community.

Where QCC is now

Historically, QCC has defined what program quality is and how it is measured for providers and families. At the same time, building a system that is high-quality and building a system that is equitable are seen as separate goals. There are opportunities for these definitions to change and be better connected to what all California children need.

Accessibility of QCC

What we heard

The QCC system should be accessible for all types of providers so all families can have high-quality choices for care. Serving all children requires providers to have deep knowledge and the needed materials to teach and care for children of different languages, cultures, developmental levels, social-emotional needs, and family backgrounds. Despite these complex needs, providers face several barriers to accessing the resources that they require. Providers suggested increased funding, more outreach to listen to parents and providers and build trust, making sure more providers get training and resources, ensuring speakers of many languages can participate, and assistance with technology and paperwork as possible ways to address these barriers.

Where QCC is now

The QCC system provides free information and resources to families and providers but does not ask for information on how well the system is meeting the needs of diverse children. Many families' and providers' views of quality are not reflected in how QCC measures quality. Currently, QCC providers have access to resources to create a plan to improve their quality; however, more programs could benefit from participation, including those with limited access to funding, resources, and professional development, such as family child care; family, friend, and neighbor care; and Tribal and rural programs.

QCC's vision of quality

What we heard

Right now, the QCC quality rating system uses a definition of quality that does not reflect quality in all early learning and care settings. The ratings are not a useful tool for families choosing an ELC program because they are not well known and do not always include their ideas of quality. Providers agree the quality of the care and education children receive should be measured and monitored but want the rating scale to better reflect what quality looks like in their program.

Where QCC is now

Families' and providers' ideas and definitions of quality are not incorporated in the current quality rating process.

The Equity Road Map

Where we want to go and how QCC could get there

QCC is inclusive for all Californians

Recommendations: How QCC could get there

Communication

● Provide local QCC agencies with guidance or flexibility when possible to help more funding reach communities that need it the most.

▪ With community input, design training that helps ELC providers meet the needs of all children.

Quality for all

● Explore new measures of quality that reflect the language and culture of families.

★ Create definitions of ELC quality that reflect the ideas of all types of children and families.

★ Study how changes to QCC have improved program quality, including children's and families' experiences.

Equity in action

● Offer and spread the word about anti-racism and antibias training and its importance to everyone across the ELC system.

▪ Prioritize providing professional development that prepares the provider community to meet the diverse needs of all children.

★ Develop ways to send resources to areas of highest need.

QCC is easy to access and use

Recommendations: How QCC could get there

Communication

● Collect information in an annual survey about ways to improve QCC and share results with all providers and families.

▪ Create partnerships between counties to expand learning opportunities for providers and families.

▪ Gather feedback from providers, families, and community members on how to improve the delivery of coaching, peer coaching, and communities of practice.

Quality for all

● Identify state resources to help all types of providers start their program and improve the quality rating of their program.

● Spread the word about existing professional development and training opportunities while also offering dedicated funding and support to QCC county agencies to provide accessible and affordable professional development trainings to all providers (e.g., substitute teachers, travel stipends, child care).

Equity in action

▪ Make sure there is a way that all providers can ask for both state and local resources and ensure that more resources go to the communities that need them the most.

● Make sure everyone can participate in QCC, including providers of all races and ethnicities and in all setting types.

QCC's vision of quality includes family and provider ideas

Recommendations: How QCC could get there

Communication

▪● Create a process for providers, families, and community members to develop a shared definition of program quality.

● Provide funding to support these communication activities.

Quality for all

★ Study how well the QCC system is able to make better learning environments for children in ways that are important to families.

Equity in action

▪ Develop ways for providers to write their own quality plan with input from families (e.g., a parent advisory committee).

QCC is inclusive for all Californians

Quality, diversity, and equity go hand in hand. This means that the entire QCC system—including early learning and care educators, trainers, agency staff, leadership, and families—should be prepared to nurture and teach children from a range of diverse backgrounds. Only when the QCC system equitably serves all providers, and when the viewpoints of diverse providers and families are included in its design, will all children receive a high-quality care and education experience.

QCC is easy to access and use

The top-down process of quality improvement should be replaced with a more equal partnership between QCC state and local decision-makers, families, and providers. This requires the QCC system at all levels to develop a clear and equitable process to learn from families and providers about quality, create shared goals, and help to reach those who have been traditionally left out.

QCC's vision of quality includes family and provider ideas

QCC leadership recognizes and gets regular feedback from families and providers working with them to develop a new quality measurement process that includes the viewpoints of all program settings and a range of communities and families, while still aligning with state requirements.

Moving Forward: Holding QCC Accountable

While this work to listen to providers, educators, and families in a meaningful way is certainly a step in the right direction, other foundational changes are also needed to support long-term transformation of QCC into an equity-centered system.

Changes to the QCC system must begin with a change in how people think about early learning and care. This means changing the way the system is designed, including who gets to receive state and federal resources and supports that will create more high-quality ELC programs for all families.

Program quality should be a floor, not a ceiling. Too often, ELC systems treat high-quality early learning and care as a luxury that only some families can afford and only a few programs are able to provide. Instead, quality should be funded and viewed as a baseline standard and should be truly accessible to all families.

Equity in early learning and care also means equitable pay for early childhood educators to help programs keep their teaching staff. Unless programs have enough staff and can keep their staff over time, program quality will be challenging to achieve. It is important to ensure that early childhood educators are paid adequately and are not forced to look for better-paying jobs outside of the early childhood workforce.

For change to be effective, decision-makers should think about how to center families, providers, and their communities in their quality plans. A key focus of this project was to hear from new voices who were not already sharing their feedback with the state and local governments. This is not always an easy or efficient process, but by allowing families and providers—the end users most impacted by policy changes to QCC—to play a part in state and local policy discussions, meaningful changes are more likely to last.

Ask the right questions before or while decisions are being made. Regardless of what part you play in the California ELC system—whether you are a parent, an educator, or staff at a state or county agency—there is an opportunity for you to ensure that equity continues to be centered throughout the process when decisions are being made and not everyone who will be impacted has been invited to the table. Here are some considerations that you can keep in mind to help create more equity-centered programs:

- Who is being consulted, and how are families, providers, and communities being consulted, in the planning and implementation for this change?

- Who is currently not being reached or supported, and why?

- How are different parts of the ELC community impacted by change in this area?

- What are the unintended impacts of this effort?

- Who benefits, and who is being asked to take on the labor for this change?

- What possible barriers may keep those who most benefit from accessing these services or supports?

- Are individuals being paid in some way for their time and expertise?

- When and how are changes going to be communicated with the community?

Conclusion

California children, families, providers, and educators should feel included in the way that the state and local agencies measure and improve early learning and care program quality. The recommendations in this report are meant to be a starting point, as partners across the state work with communities to make sure that all California children and families have access to high-quality ELC programs in the settings that are best aligned with their ideas and preferences.

Glossary of Terms

Early learning and care (ELC) programs:
Programs where young children learn and are taken care of, including child care centers, preschools, schools, and homes.

Equity in QCC: When demographic characteristics of providers, programs, families, and children, including race, language, family income, or neighborhood, do not impact their access to resources, opportunities, or outcomes.

Family child care (FCC): Licensed early learning and care that takes place in the provider's home.

Family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care: Care provided by family members, family friends, or neighbors; not licensed by the state.

Home-based care: Early learning and care taking place in a home setting.

Program administrators: Those who run a child care program, usually in a center or school-based setting.

Program teachers: Teachers who work in early learning and care programs, usually in a center or school-based setting.

Providers: Those who provide care to young children, including Pre-K teachers and administrators; center-based program teachers; family child care providers; and family, friend, and neighbor care providers.

QCC: Quality Counts California, the state's voluntary (not required) system for rating and improving the quality of child care programs.

QRIS: A quality rating and improvement system, administered and funded by state and local government, for participating early learning and care programs across the state.

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