

5 BUILDING EXCELLENCE IN CHILD CARE

“We hope that we are moving way beyond an “either-or” debate about child care. The question is not whether children should be in child care, the issue is about how infants, children, and families can best be supported and how each family can have the best available information and options to pursue what is best for them. The challenge is to support families and child care providers so that the quality of care improves in all settings where infants and children are cared for, and that quality is reflected by nurture of parents as well as their children.”

- Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, 2000

Parents, providers, and policy makers share the same goal: To provide a safe and nurturing environment that engages children in play and intentional teaching experiences that interests, challenges, and enriches them. High quality child care and education is characterized by practices that reflect a deep commitment to fostering the development of a child’s skills and competencies in the physical, social, emotional and cognitive domains.

5.1 HIGH QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

One of the most common topics of child care research and policy discussion concerns the definition and identification of high quality care. Indicators of quality include quantifiable features such as staff to child ratio, group size, staff education and training hours, wages, and turnover. Researchers categorize these structural elements of child care settings as *regulable* quality features.¹ High quality care is also characterized by positive, responsive, and stimulating interactions with care providers, deemed *process* features by researchers². Research indicates that both regulable and process features are linked and that regulable features may make process quality possible. For example, smaller teacher-child ratios are associated with higher quality teacher-child interactions³. High levels of both regulable and

process quality in child care settings positively predicts children’s social emotional skills and cognitive functioning,^{4,5} and academic achievement.⁶

Regulable characteristics of early child care have dominated research and policy in determining quality in early care and education. Such features are easy to assess. However, it is a child’s experience with the process features of frequent sensitive, positive, and language-rich interactions with caregivers that are the more direct indicators of quality and are critical to optimal development and learning.⁷ A focus on these more direct experiences as well as child outcomes is gaining significant momentum in research, practice and policy development on quality in early care and education.

5.1.1 QUALITY CHILD CARE PROGRAMS AND STANDARDS

Four important components for supporting optimal development and learning in child care settings are:

- Establishing partnerships with families
- Ensuring excellent staff
- Providing rich environments, and
- Providing a comprehensive and balanced curriculum⁸

Partnerships with families are demonstrated by establishing two-way communication between the family and care and education staff. Families are respectfully supported in their efforts to help their children be successful in care and education settings. Professional staff seek out and respond to family concerns and diversity in values, language and cultural practices.

Excellence in staff is ensured when care and education providers have research-based, specialized education in child development and early care and



education. High-quality staff demonstrate the ability to consistently use this knowledge in professional practice.

Rich environments offer materials that initiate new skills, and engage and challenge emerging skills. Rich environments also help children work toward self-regulation, establish respectful relationships with others, stimulate motor skills, promote language and creativity, enhance knowledge, and intentionally help children acquire the academic foundations of literacy, mathematics and thinking.

A comprehensive and balanced curriculum provides for learning and development experiences that are engaging, participatory and diverse, whether these experiences are child-initiated or teacher-guided. A critical characteristic of a high-quality curriculum is that it is carefully planned and in alignment with the scientific evidence of how children learn.

A variety of quality indicators and accreditation requirements exist nationally. These standards provide guidelines used not only for daily operation and administration of child care program, but also serve to identify programs meeting accreditation requirements of nationally recognized agencies. While these requirements vary by agency, all share a focus on the development of the child and the impact of the environment and teacher child interaction on the quality of that development. Consistently, qualitative elements appearing in each of these standards include the items listed in the table below.⁹

In 2008, the California Department of Education released the California Preschool Learning Foundations, Volume 1 and in 2010, Volume 2. The California Preschool Learning Foundations outline key knowledge and skills that most children can achieve when provided with the kinds of interactions, instruction, and environments that research has

Qualitative Elements Requirements

Regulatory Requirements	Programs must be licensed and/or in compliance with state and local regulatory requirements. If seeking accreditation, must meet the regulatory requirements of the accrediting agency, which may exceed licensing requirements.
Group Size and Staff-Child Ratios	A low teacher to child ratio is preferred. For more specific data by agency please reference Appendix N.
Staff Standards	Includes age requirements, education levels and coursework in ECE, health and safety training and CPR, as well as pre-service and in-service training.
Administrative Standards	Includes comprehensive administrative policies, procedures and systems ensuring compliance with relevant regulations and guidelines, fiscal soundness, program accountability, effective communication, and staff training and support.
Environment	Requires facilities meet legal standards for health and safety, including adequate physical space both indoors and outdoors to accommodate various activities and group sizes. Facilities, equipment and materials are well organized and maintained. Environment is welcoming and accessible to children, families and staff.
Curriculum	Includes developmentally appropriate activities and materials to meet social, emotional, physical, language, cognitive, creative and, in the case of faith-based providers, spiritual needs of the child.
Literacy	Includes promotion of language development and knowledge of the sounds of words and the alphabet through games, reading, songs, stories, written expression, and verbal interaction.
Family Involvement	Includes regular communication through notes, phone calls and meetings with parents, as well as working with parents to set goals for the child and encouraging parents to volunteer and participate in program.
Program and Child Assessment	Regular assessment of each child's developmental progress using appropriate assessment tools, including observation. Overall children's developmental progress impacts program and curriculum evaluations.

shown to promote early learning and development. The foundations provide early childhood educators, parents, and the public with a clear understanding of the wide range of knowledge and skills that preschool children typically attain when given the benefits of a high-quality preschool program.¹⁰

In 2010, the California Department of Education released the California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1. The Framework provides research-based overarching principles in four topic areas that include Social-Emotional Development, Language and Literacy, English Language Development, and Mathematics. These principles include the importance of strong relationships, the benefits of play, the effectiveness of integrated learning experiences and intentional teaching. Additional principles center on the individualized and responsive approach to work with children and partnerships with families, especially those families with children with special needs or children who represent the variety of cultures and languages present in California.¹¹

5.2 INFANT AND TODDLER – EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

The development of strategies to promote high quality standards and supports for early care and education caregivers is a step towards providing infants and toddlers with comprehensive care. Research clearly shows the importance of responsive care giving in the socio-emotional and intellectual development of children.¹² Children between the ages of birth through three are at a critical stage of development that can significantly influence their cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional capacities. The need for infant/toddler caregiver training in both socio-emotional and cognitive development in order to address the unique needs of infants and toddlers has been identified.¹³ On average, children between the ages of birth to three with working parents, spend 25 hours per week in child

care. A full 39 percent spend 35 hours or more in care per week.¹⁴ Nationwide this represents six million infants and toddlers spending some or all of their day being cared for by someone other than their parents.¹⁵

Studies show that investing in early childhood impacts not only the child's life course, but also the parents.¹⁶ It also impacts law enforcement, education, health care and social services.

State initiatives to address quality standards for infant and toddler child care have been developed in many states nationwide and were developed in California in 2009 with the publication of the *California Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Foundations*.¹⁷ The document presents 28 research and evidence based foundations in four domains that describe the competencies that infants and toddlers typically attain in the first three years of life. The descriptions of competencies are enriched with examples of typical behaviors at each age level in each of the four domains as well as behaviors leading up to attainment of those competencies. By creating a common language to facilitate communication among families, infant care professionals, community members, and policymakers, the foundations built an understanding about the importance of the early years in children's learning and development.

5.3 QUALITY RATING SYSTEMS

Nationwide there is a growing trend to create and implement Quality Rating and Improvement Systems.

In California in 2008, Senate Bill 1629 (Steinberg) created the Early Learning Quality Improvement System (ELQIS) Advisory Committee. The committee worked toward reforming existing preschools to create the type of quality experience that would prepare children for learning and was charged with developing policies and an implementation plan to improve the quality of early education programs. It was also charged with developing an early learning rating scale that included features that most directly contribute to high quality care and a funding model aligned with the quality rating scale.

On December 16, 2011, the U.S. Departments of Education (ED) and Health and Human Services (HHS)

“Children’s earliest experiences profoundly influence later intellectual and emotional functioning. High-quality care during the infant and toddler years – care that supports healthy cognitive, language, physical, and social-emotional development – is the cornerstone of later accomplishments, such as learning to read and getting along with others.”

WestEd Policy Brief, Urgency Rises for Quality Child Care, August 2002

announced the winners of the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTT-ELC). California was awarded \$52.6 million in federal grant funds to support early learning and care systems through public-private partnerships. The majority of the funding will support a voluntary network of “Regional Leadership Consortia,” led by an established program that is already developing a quality rating system of its own. The Sacramento County Office of Education administers one of the 16 established programs that will participate in this project. As part of this grant, the Consortia will expand their current areas of impact by inviting other programs in surrounding areas to join their efforts. Consortia will bring together organizations in their region with the same goal of improving the quality of early learning, including but not limited to: school districts, County Office of Education, the First 5 County Commission, local institutions of higher education, the Local Child Care Planning Council, local R & R agency(ies), Early Head Start and Head Start, Child Development programs, migrant child care programs, alternative payment programs, tribal child care, county Health and Human Services including Women, Infants and Children (WIC), California Home Visiting Program (CHVP) and local home visiting programs, and non-profit agencies and other organizations providing services for children from birth to age 5. For additional information on approved projects to be funded through the RTT-ELC grant, please see the full application at www.cde.ca.gov.

5.4 TEACHER AND PROGRAM QUALITY ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

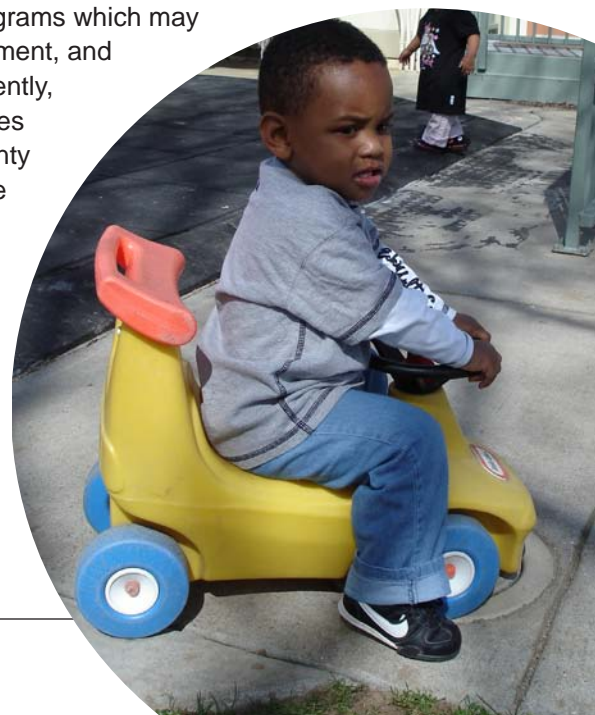
Within Sacramento County several quality enhancement programs exist to assist early care and education professionals remain in the field. High staff turnover is one major component of early care that has a detrimental effect on the quality of programs on young children during a critical stage of their emotional, social and cognitive development.¹⁸

■ **The Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Education Standards (CARES)** program is designed to provide training and support to caregivers along the entire continuum of care, from family, friend and neighbor caregivers to teachers with advanced degrees. The program encourages retention of caregivers in the field, and provides cash stipends or resources to further educational attainment. The

target population of the CARES program is early childhood education staff, including home-based, licensed and license-exempt family child care providers, family child care assistants, and center-based staff in public and private child care programs in Sacramento County. The program is funded through the California Department of Education and in Sacramento County supported by the First 5 Sacramento Commission.

Started in 2001, the CARES program has given out stipends ranging from \$200-\$3,000 to child care providers who increase their knowledge and skills in the ECE field and work directly with children in Sacramento County. Between 2001 and 2011, the Sacramento CARES program has awarded over 5,549 stipends totaling \$6,965,876.

■ **Environmental Rating Scales:** In recent years, Sacramento County has taken significant steps to train child care professionals in the use of environmental rating assessment tools. These include the Harms/Clifford *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS)*, *Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS)*, *Family Child Care Rating Scale (FDCRS)*, and *School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS)*¹⁹. The use of these assessment tools is a major component of the CARES program. The American River College Department of Early Childhood Education introduced in the spring of 2006, a course designed to train child care professionals in the use of ECERS (ECE 455). The course is offered each semester at one of the four Los Rios Community College campuses in Sacramento County. In using the tool, providers identify areas in their child care programs which may need improvement, and then subsequently, utilize resources within the county to increase the quality of their program. In addition to the courses offered at the community colleges, Child Action, Inc. offers



basic introductory trainings on the ECERS and FDCERS tools for child care providers. This training is not intended to replace the college course, but rather to serve as an introduction to the assessment tool and to support an individual provider in self-reflection.

■ **The First 5 Sacramento Commission** provides funding for the assessment and quality improvement of child care centers and family child care homes through the Quality Child Care Collaborative. In 2010/11 one hundred and forty-eight child care programs were assessed using the Harms/Clifford Environmental Rating Scale (ERS).²⁰ The average score for all the assessment sites, which include both public and private centers and homes, was 5.2, a half a point above the average score of 4.8 in 2009/10.

- The average score for 55 Preschool Classrooms was 5.3.
- The average score for 36 Infant Toddler Classrooms was 5.2
- The average score for 57 Family Child Care Homes was 5.

The majority of programs (52%) scored in the Good (5) to Excellent (7) range, which is a milestone in our effort to integrate quality improvement strategies into Sacramento child care programs

■ **CARES Plus:** In 2011, the Sacramento County Office of Education was selected to administer the CARES Plus program, funded by the California First 5 Commission. This introduced the

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) to the Sacramento region.

CLASS is an

observational tool that provides a common lens and language focused on the classroom interactions that increase student learning. The CLASS tool organizes teacher-student interactions into three broad domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. Based on research from the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education and studied in thousands of classrooms nationwide, the CLASS tool is designed to focus on effective teaching, help teachers recognize and understand the power of their interactions with children, align with professional development tools, and work across various age levels and subjects. CLASS observations break down the complex classroom environment to help educators focus on increasing the effectiveness of their interactions with children in their care.

■ **Growing, Learning and Caring (GLC):** Licensed child care programs are not the only types of care that can benefit from training opportunities. For over a decade the "Growing, Learning and Caring" (GLC) project outreached to license exempt child care providers, family member, friend or neighbors (FFN) through play days throughout Sacramento County. These play days are hosted regionally throughout the county for license exempt child care providers and the children in their care, to gather socially and interact. Children gain experiences in building social and emotional skills, and providers learn about child development, health and safety issues, and resources available in the community. In some cases, license exempt providers are inspired to pursue licensing, and begin the process to open their own child care business. In 2011, funding for the GLC Project was eliminated. However, Child Action, Inc. continues to support license exempt providers using the GLC model through a grant from Sacramento County.

■ **The Child Care Initiative Project (CCIP):** The CCIP Project offers potential providers assistance with applying for a family child care license and provides on-going support through training, technical assistance, and site assessments, to support them in building a quality child care business. The CCIP program also offers extensive trainings for family child care providers, the most popular of which is a 25 hour family child care start up training program for new and potential family child care providers. The trainings cover topics such as partnering with parents, child development, inclusion, business practices and professional development. The trainings are offered in Spanish and Russian and in English. For more seasoned family child care



providers, the CCIP program offers advanced trainings on topics such as mentoring and accreditation. The CCIP program is funded through a grant by the California Department of Education.

■ **Sacramento Small Business Development Center (SBDC):** The SBDC in partnership with Child Action, Inc. has developed training on business practices that are tailored to child care providers. These trainings include Business Basics, Business Plan Writing, and Marketing for Child Care, Budgeting, Facilities Needs Assessments, technical assistance and assistance with opening a child care center or expanding family child care homes to increase capacity.

■ **The Program for Infant Toddler Care (PITC):** PITC works to help caregivers gain qualitative skills in the care of infants and toddlers with the intent of helping caregivers become sensitive to infant cues, connect with their families and cultures, and develop responsive, relationship-based care. PITC offers comprehensive on-site training and technical assistance for child care centers, family child care home providers and family, friend and neighbor caregivers serving children birth to three. The training material provides a foundation for a system where caregivers observe and reflect on the infants in their care, record information about the interests and skills of the children, and search for ways to set the stage for the child’s next learning encounter.

■ **UC Davis Center for Excellence in Child Development:** The UC Davis Center for Excellence in Child Development offers training, technical assistance, and evaluation services designed to foster successful programs through the development of caregiving and teaching practices, as well as management and administrative support. They are a comprehensive service provider translating current research into effective practice. Services include:

- Continuing education courses in early

childhood education and mental health, program administration, coaching and supervision, and training for trainers.

- Program evaluation and consultation
- Training in the use of assessment tools
- Workshops in multiple languages including English, Spanish, and Russian

■ **Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL):** Sacramento County is participating in a new early childhood professional development opportunity designed to support the social and emotional development of children birth through five. The broad goal of the intensive training and technical assistance (T/TA) activities is to foster professional development of the early care and education workforce that:

- enhances knowledge and skills;
- supports the implementation and sustainability of evidence-based practices; and
- increases the size of the workforce skilled in supporting the social emotional development of young children (birth through 5 years old).

The program has been funded by the Office of Head Start and the Child Care Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The QCCC is a partnership of community agencies and education and governments institutions including:

- California State University, Sacramento <http://edweb.csus.edu>
- Child Abuse Prevention Council of Sacramento, Inc. www.thecapcenter.org
- Child Action, Inc. www.childaction.org
- Department of Health & Human Services, Division of Behavioral Health www.dhhs.saccounty.net
- Department of Health & Human Services, Division of Public Health www.dhhs.saccounty.net/PUB
- Los Rios Community College District www.losrios.edu
- Sacramento County Office of Education, Infant Development Program www.scoe.net
- Sacramento County WIC Program <http://www.sacdhs.com/article.asp?ContentID=16>
- Sacramento Small Business Development Center www.sbdc.net
- UC Davis Center for Excellence in Child Development <http://humanservices.ucdavis.edu>
- WarmLine Family Resource Center www.warmlinefrc.org
- WestEd Program for Infant/Toddler Care www.wested.org

■ **The Sacramento Quality Child Care**

Collaborative (QCCC): The purpose of the collaborative is to help caregivers provide quality child care programs for our children. The QCCC Consultation and training services provide a network of support from community agencies and institutions in the areas of child abuse prevention and family support, mental and behavioral health, special education, health education and infant/toddler care and development. Collaborative services are free and include information about child care and operating a child care business, resources to assess and improve the quality of child care programs, training to support parents and child care providers, and consultation to help providers build competence and confidence in caring for children with varying needs. The QCCC is funded by the First 5 Sacramento Commission. Projects of the QCCC include:

- **ECE Leadership in Coaching Series:** A project of the Quality Child Care Collaborative, this program is designed to support directors with a focus on program improvement. It provides an opportunity for directors to receive structured training and technical assistance from an early childhood education consultant from UC Davis. Using the Program Administration Scale, program and administrator quality is addressed with an emphasis on coaching as a strategy for supervising staff. The program discusses communication with parents and staff, child assessments, reflective practice, and promoting pro-social behavior. Participants formed a Directors Support Group in 2011, which meets quarterly and provides an informal setting for child care center directors to discuss topics and challenges and network with others in the field.
- **The Consultation Team,** a project of the QCCC, is available to assist child care providers in addressing questions or concerns about caring for children with a variety of special needs and behaviors. The team consists of staff with training and expertise in child development, behavioral health, family support and inclusion of children with developmental disabilities and health needs. The Consultation Team members are available to provide on-going consultation, technical assistance and training to child care providers to assist with issues of children's behavioral health, inclusion of children with special needs, quality of care, curriculum, site staff support, staff-parent communication and linkage to community resources. While the majority

of Consultation Team services are aimed at child care providers, the team also has a representative from WarmLine Family Resource Center that serves as the "parent voice" on the team. The role of this representative is to evaluate a consultation from the perspective of a parent, and provide information and trainings to both the parents and child care providers on the Early Start and Special Education system.

■ **California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN):** provides professional development for preschool administrators and teachers that highlights current research-based information, resources, and instructional practices. designed to enhance the quality of preschool programs. The program includes: teacher professional development, technical assistance, classroom observation, and on-site support

■ **The Preschool Bridging Model:** PBM is designed to enhance the quality of child care for three through five year old children in Sacramento County. This is achieved through workforce and site development strategies that include on-site mentoring and coaching support for private child care centers and family child care homes, educational and quality improvement planning, and instructional materials. The model promotes seamless kindergarten transitions for children and their parents/guardians by facilitating continuity



between early care and education providers and elementary schools. The Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) serves as the lead agency for the project and works closely with its collaborative partners. PBM is funded by the First 5 Sacramento Commission.

■ **PBM Plus:** In 2011, with additional funding from First 5 California, the Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) developed PBM Plus, an enhanced professional development opportunity for early educators of children birth through five. PBM Plus participants learn new ways to support children's early learning with a special emphasis on their social-emotional development using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Working with an ECE coach, child care providers identify the areas of teaching that they want to improve and choose a professional development approach that will help them reach their goals and integrate new ideas and teaching strategies into their daily practice to support children's learning.

■ **Cover the Kids, Sacramento Children's Health Initiative:** A full time Certified Application Assistant (CAA), housed at Child Action, Inc. since 2005, is specifically charged with conducting outreach to child care providers and working with them to identify and assist children who do not have health insurance to apply for eligible children's health insurance programs.

■ **Provider Associations:** Many professional associations provide support for early learning programs and professionals. A list of those active in the Sacramento Community Can be found in Appendix H.

5.5 EMERGING ISSUES AND POLICY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Childcare services in Sacramento County are on track to promote best practices and support the socio-emotional and intellectual development of children. To continue this progress, child care professionals need financial, educational and vocational resources to provide quality care to Sacramento's children.

To achieve a higher level of quality in child care, it is necessary to:

- Advocate and facilitate the development of dependable high quality child care services for all children birth through age twelve that promote and nurture the healthy growth and development of children in the Sacramento community.
- Increase resources, outreach, and support to license-exempt child care providers in order to ensure quality child care and transition is available to all children regardless of their child care setting.
- Increase resources to maintain and further develop an infrastructure of training and technical assistance to support the development and maintenance of high quality care and services to families through collaboration between child care and other children's service providers in Sacramento County.
- Encourage and support relationships between child care providers and special education services to improve the delivery of inclusive child care services for all children and encourage training for child care workers and providers in the areas of health and mental health.
- Advocate for the funding and resources needed to support the implementation of a Quality Rating System for child care programs.●