



MAY 15th QRIS DESIGN PHASE FINAL REPORT:
THRIVE BY FIVE WA/WHITE CENTER EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE

INTRODUCTION

The White Center Community Planning Team appreciates the Department of Early Learning's continuing support and the opportunity to participate in the QRIS pilot planning. Our goal in this project was to assist DEL in gathering information from our community to inform the design of a statewide quality improvement rating system for early learning. Attached is our final report for the QRIS design phase.

We gathered information for this report from a variety of sources, including online surveys, interviews, small group discussions, community planning team meetings, and other reports that addressed the community's knowledge and awareness of the local early learning landscape and of aspects of high-quality early learning environments. Specifically, the White Center Community Planning Team utilized:

- **Online surveys:** In mid April, we sent surveys containing questions from the DEL final report template to: all of the licensed early learning providers in White Center whose email addresses were in the Child Care Resource database; parents from White Center who used Child Care Resources to search for early learning programs during the past 6 months; direct service providers including Public Health and early learning licensing staff; center directors who were asked to forward to the parents of the children in their programs. Responses were received from **41 parents, 9 early learning professionals, and 7 direct service providers.**
- **Parent Interviews:** In late April, we held 3 meetings at local early learning programs in which parents or caregivers were given the opportunity to discuss questions related to quality from the DEL final report template. We held one-on-one and small group conversations, and accessed Vietnamese and Spanish interpreters (family advocates from Head Start) as needed. We conducted **23 interviews in total**, with 20 parents and 3 grandparents. We conducted four interviews in Spanish, and three in Vietnamese. (*see attached parent meeting notes*)
- **White Center Community Planning Team Meeting:** The White Center Community Planning Team used the April meeting to discuss portions of the DEL final report template. Representatives included **5 child care center directors, 3 family early learning**

professionals, 2 local licensors, and 1 community college representative. (*see meeting minutes*)

- **Professional Development Discussion: Five local trainers, early learning educators, and early learning coaches** provided email responses about the professional development needs of the White Center community in late April using the DEL final report template as a guide. (*see attached professional development document*)
- **Somali Family Child Care Meeting**: In late April, a group of **five Somali family early learning providers** met with members of the Planning Team and a Somali-speaking consultant (also a family child care professional, not in White Center) to discuss quality improvement initiatives in the community and DEL final report template questions. (*see attached Somali meeting notes*)

We also used the following additional materials:

- White Center Providers Group – “Quality” Focus Group discussion notes (January 16th, 2008, February 20th, 2008)
- Community Conversations from the White Center Early Learning Initiative (November 18th, 2007)
- White Center Readiness to Benefit interviews (June 2007)
- Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. 2007 Baseline Report

Finally, the responses to questions regarding the recommended structure of QRIS were formulated from the results and learning from our community’s work in the past 18 months with Thrive by Five and the Gates Foundation. We hope that DEL finds this information valuable in the design of the statewide model.

WHAT CHILDREN NEED TO KNOW AND BE ABLE TO DO

1a. What are the best ways to gauge and follow children’s learning and developmental status?

Early learning professionals and direct service providers in White Center report that ongoing observation should be used consistently to assess and follow children’s learning and development. Many White Center early learning professionals indicate that they keep portfolios or other files about individual children with both written documentation of children’s progress – social, emotional and physical – as well as related information such as photographs, drawings and art work, and quotations. When “red flags” in development are suspected, early learning professionals share concerns with families and refer families to additional support resources. Early learning professionals also document information about family engagement progress, family conferences, home visits, and any parent education and family support needs

and goals. Child care center directors who are part of the Community Planning Team noted that many formal curricula, such as High Scope and *Creative Curriculum*, have child observation components, and expressed interest in further training for staff on these and other tools.

During one Planning Team meeting, a participant from a local community college described his experiences with “Learning Stories” (*Dr. Margaret Carr, Waikato University in New Zealand*), or narrative about children that captures their interactions and experiences in story form, as a relevant way to document children’s growth. Many Planning Team participants expressed interest in learning more about this method of documentation and observation to share with their program staff.

Several parents who participated in interviews about quality remarked that the way they know their child is learning in his or her early learning program is to look at their children’s growth and progress shown at home in areas, such as language development, social skills, sharing stories and songs.

1b. How do you describe or detail children’s progress over time?

White Center early learning professionals overwhelmingly report that they document children’s progress over time through portfolios, and detail their growth through written observation, photographs, sample work and dictation. Daily, as well as ongoing progress is also described and detailed at parent conferences and individual family meetings, through written information sent home to families, as well as through regular phone calls and emails to parents and families.

2a. Do early learning professionals in your community use the Washington State Early Learning and Developmental Benchmarks as a resource guide for child development?

Online surveys with early learning professionals and others in the early learning field indicate that while some early learning professionals do use the Washington State Early Learning and Developmental Benchmarks as a resource guide for child development, others use the guide only partially and many do not use it at all. Many remarked that they feel that the majority of early learning professionals and parents are not aware of the Benchmarks. Many of those who are aware of the Benchmarks report that the document is not user-friendly due to its lengthiness, lack of availability in hard copy, and lack of availability in languages other than English.

2b. What are the best ways to use this document as a resource guide?

Early learning professionals tell us that the most practical utilization of this document as a resource guide is to view it as a framework for curriculum topics and as a reference for children’s skill development. It should provide guidance to support children as they move towards, reach and surpass goals, but should not serve as a definitive document. It should be an organic document that early learning professionals can utilize, learn about and adapt through training and on-site coaching. It must be noted however that, as the document currently

stands, revisions must be made to be more inclusive of children at all levels of need and cultural backgrounds.

The White Center Community Planning Team expressed concerns and questions over the references to the Washington Early Learning and Developmental Benchmarks in the QRIS final report questions. A main criticism of the Benchmarks that emerged in Planning Team discussions is the belief that the Benchmarks are not inclusive of children with special needs and not culturally relevant for children and families who are English Language Learners. There is concern by some that use of the Benchmarks will dictate that the focus of quality improvement will be only on outcomes – having to teach to a “baby WASL” test – rather than on the experiences and growth of young children. They want to ensure that proper value and emphasis is placed on the quality of the interactions and complex processes that exist between early learning professionals and the children they serve.

Through our partnership with Thrive by Five we have learned that DEL is developing a Parent Companion to the Benchmarks. We also understand that Thrive by Five will be working on addressing the concerns of cultural relevancy that some have identified within the language of the Benchmarks. We feel both of those pieces are necessary will be extremely beneficial to early learning professionals when using the Benchmarks. We strongly urge that training for early learning professionals in appropriate methods for using the Benchmarks accompanies the “re-release” of them.

3. What are the best strategies to ensure that early learning professionals are considering development of the whole child in preparing children for what they’ll need to know and be able to do?

Early learning professionals in our community tell us that they have the experience to teach to the developmental needs of the whole child. What they need, rather, is the terminology and the latest research to support their work in a purposeful and directed way. They inform us that the best way to ensure that the whole child is considered is to “educate the educator”. College classes, community-based training and continuing education in developmentally-appropriate and culturally-relevant practices, as well as on-site coaching, peer mentoring, and self-assessments all strengthen early learning professionals’ ability to effectively serve children’s social, emotional, cognitive, language and physical development needs. Individualized planning for children, written observations, deliberate daily lesson planning and parent and family feedback also aid these efforts. Both early learning professionals and parents emphasized that it is especially crucial that efforts in early learning programs to prepare children for school encompass the social and emotional components of development.

CONSIDERATION OF DIVERSE CULTURES

4. If using the Washington State Early Learning and Developmental Benchmarks, what cultural adaptations are being made to this resource document to consider diverse cultures in your community?

In order to use the Washington State Early Learning and Developmental Benchmarks effectively with diverse cultures in the community, White Center early learning professionals and others in the field state that each early learning program must assess their specific situations and make adjustments and adaptations accordingly. Early learning professionals should thoughtfully consider their children and families, and use the Benchmarks as a guide in providing quality services. They must look at the needs and goals of each child and design activities and lesson plans to support individual children as well as the group.

Again, early learning professionals who participated in Community Planning Team discussions and submitted responses through the online surveys overwhelmingly reported that they do not use the Benchmarks as a resource guide specifically because the document does not support the diverse cultures in the White Center community. Instead, the early learning professionals in White Center design individual programs that better meet the needs of their children and families. We are hopeful that the release of the campaign pieces to the Benchmarks, in addition to training on the tool will result in more programs' regular use of the Benchmarks.

5. What are the best strategies to aid early learning professionals in ensuring that their classroom curriculum and family support consider diverse cultures in appropriate and relevant ways?

White Center early learning professionals note that regular communication with and engagement of parents and families as well as appropriate and relevant training are key strategies to ensuring that curriculum and family support are delivered in culturally-relevant and appropriate ways. Community members and early learning professionals shared with us the following suggestions to aid providers as they work towards this goal:

- Take the time to get to know families and encourage their participation in their children's activities, creating an environment that welcomes diverse cultural ideas and practices;
- Use a personalized approach to community engagement, connecting with representatives from a range of early learning and community-based organizations;
- Ensure that all early learning professionals receive cultural competency training that includes information about the history of other cultures as well as information about the cultural perspectives and belief systems of different cultural groups towards early learning, academic achievement and such topics as discipline and health care;
- Ensure that all early learning professionals receive anti-bias training;

- Offer a multicultural curriculum, ensuring that children learn about different cultures and traditions and have opportunities to hear and learn other languages in the program;
- Offer curriculum that specifically reflects the culture and language when possible of children and families currently enrolled;
- Talk to families regularly to discuss the progress of children, and use interpreters when needed;
- Send information home in the family's home language;
- Invite parents and family members from different cultures to be volunteers and to teach others about their cultures;
- Encourage elders and grandparents to read books and tell folktale stories in their home language to young children at home;
- Post artwork and feature songs, dance and celebrations that reflect the various cultures of the community;
- Provide culturally-appropriate food;
- Help parents and family members enroll in parenting education classes that are offered in their home language;
- Provide program application assistance in different languages, and;
- Be aware of and sensitive to the fact that some families are undocumented.

6. What are the most effective strategies for early learning professionals to work with children and families who speak a native language other than English?

White Center early learning professionals and parents tell us that effective strategies for early learning professionals to work successfully with children and families whose native language is not English include:

- Offering early learning professionals training and education opportunities that focus on best practices to serve the community, and strengthening early learning professionals' ability to serve immigrant and refugee children.
- Increasing opportunities to support early learning professionals who reflect the culture and language of the community. For example, several area colleges have established Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (IBEST) models for early learning professionals that focus on English Language Learners. More specifically, Seattle Central Community College is piloting a Chinese/Vietnamese Child Development Associates degree, and Child Care Resources has worked to increase training opportunities offered in non-English languages including Somali and Spanish.
- Hiring staff that speak the same language as families when possible;
- Working with translators and interpreters to facilitate both written and verbal communication between early learning professionals and families.
- Engaging early learning coaches and mentors who can speak and understand the language of the professionals (and, therefore, families) they are supporting.
- Utilizing picture books to encourage parents who are unable to read in English or in their native language to "read" to their children.

- Sharing research and literature with families, early learning professionals and the community about the importance of honoring and supporting home languages.

INCLUSION OF ALL CHILDREN

7. What are the best ways to ensure that providers and early learning professionals have the means to work with children who have special needs?

Early learning professionals, families and others in the community tell us that appropriate training opportunities and resources are the best ways to ensure that early learning professionals can appropriately identify and serve children with special needs. An early learning professional is often the first one to spot a developmental concern and acts as a crucial source of information and resources for families. One foster parent who has raised several children with various special needs emphasized the need for early learning professionals to be non-judgmental, especially in cases where special needs may not be visible, such as with mental health issues or fetal alcohol effects. She noted that these children are too often quickly labeled as having behavioral problems instead of special needs that require specific support.

Continuing education and training opportunities will give technical knowledge to strengthen early learning professionals' skills. Examples of trainings that currently exist include those that focus on developmental "red flags" as well as training about specific special needs, such as autism and learning disabilities. On-site coaches can provide important mentoring, and community resources such as the Public Health Child Care, Child Care Resources, the school districts, and local early intervention providers can serve as critical partners in connecting children and families with resources, and designing and implementing children's development plans, such as Individualized Family Support Plans (IFSP) or Individualized Education Plans (IEP). Additionally, additional support services for children, such as speech therapy, can and should be provided in the child's natural environment, which is often the early learning program. The provision of services in the early learning program benefits the child, his or her peers, and the early learning professional.

Early learning professionals reported that delivery of services within the classroom environment can also be enhanced with greater financial resources to hire more early learning professionals to improve the teacher/child ratio and/or to acquire specialized equipment. Additionally, professionals feel that resources designated for families can strengthen their own capacity to support their children, proving the crucial connection between the home and early learning program.

8. What are some of the best strategies for working with children and families who are English Language Learners?

One of the best strategies for working with children and families who are English language learners is to create environments that allow for positive experiences for children in the

language in which they feel most comfortable. Research has shown that children who have strong foundations in their home languages generally acquire the English language (or another 2nd language) faster and with greater success than those whose home languages are not supported.

Child care centers can hire a diverse staff who are skilled in languages and/or are familiar with the culture(s) reflective of their community. A diverse staff can not only help the program understand parents' and families' needs and questions, but can also help parents learn English and better support their children. Many families in White Center choose to utilize family child care programs in which the early learning professional shares the language and culture of the family. Other successful strategies that both parents and early learning professionals have shared with us include:

- Utilizing translators and/or interpreters and providing training to early learning professionals to ensure best use of these resources;
- Providing early learning professionals with training and education about how to work effectively with English Language Learners (ELL);
- Respecting the child's native language and welcoming families by incorporating both English and the home language into daily routines;
- Involving all the English-speaking children in teaching English to ELL children and, at the same time, inviting ELL children to teach the class words or phrases in his/her native language;
- Posting photographs around the classroom/home so that the child(ren) can point to them and communicate effectively while learning the new word(s) in English;
- Labeling furniture and materials in multiple languages;
- Using open-ended, hands-on, non-language based activities (music, play, art, modeling, etc.) to engage children;
- Devoting individual attention to ELL children, spending time talking, singing and reading books in both their home language and in English to support language development;
- Maintaining a low ratio of early learning professional to children, increasing the likelihood of individualized attention to ELL children;
- Providing inclusive small group activities to support and encourage the practice and use of English;
- Providing translated information in both written and verbal forms for families to ensure comprehension;
- Providing extra assistance to ELL families, in advance, so that they can prepare responses for future conversations;
- Encouraging and empowering parents from similar language backgrounds to serve as supporters and mentors to help ELL parents understand cultural and educational issues;
- Providing resources for families to learn English when requested; and
- Being open to creativity and reevaluation of strategies as needed, as the children and families adapt to their new environment, and as new families with different needs enroll.

9. What consultation services or systems are recommended to support early learning professionals' work with inclusion?

There are many resources available to support early learning professionals' work with inclusion. Early learning professionals and parents alike feel that trainings in specific issue areas, such as autism, the effects on brain development related to early neglect and abuse, pre-natal drug exposure, etc., can provide early learning professionals focused skills development, strengthening their capacity to identify and address concerns that, if ignored, could lead to exclusion. Among other things, early learning professionals can learn how to identify developmental concerns, how to refer families to services, and how to modify and adapt environments and curricula to better support all children. Examples of agencies that currently provide training and education about special needs include early intervention providers such as Kinderling Center, Seattle King County Public Health Child Care Health Team, Child Care Resources, and local community colleges. Other resources that offer broader approaches to establishing an inclusive environment include trainings to undo institutional racism and trainings to work appropriately with lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender/-sexual families.

Training opportunities should be linked with follow-up support to enhance the application of new knowledge and skills around special needs. On-site consultants, on-site coaches, education specialists, child development specialists and healthcare professionals can also offer expertise that strengthens early learning professionals' best practices for working with children with special needs. Building a list of accurate, relevant referral information also facilitates the early learning professionals' support of families and increases the early learning professionals' knowledge base.

An existing system that can be strengthened is the link between outside services and early learning programs. Early intervention services such as speech therapy can and should be provided in children's natural environment, which is often within the early learning program. Members of the community planning team who work in the early intervention field as well as early learning professionals note a lack of communication between early intervention service providers and early learning programs. Many early learning professionals and families are unaware that these early supports can be connected. Early learning professionals and families are more aware of school district special education services, but relationships among the school districts, early learning programs, and families need to be strengthened to ensure that all eligible children receive comprehensive support services.

Finally, communication between families and early learning professionals is crucial in supporting the development of all children, and especially critical for children with special needs. Early learning programs that prioritize building strong relationships with families can more successfully support early learning professionals' work with inclusion.

10. What are the best ways to link early learning with the K-12 system to ensure smooth transitions, continuity of services, and academic/social success?

Early learning professionals feel that developing positive, high-quality relationships through open dialogue and consistent communication is the key to linking early learning with the K-12 school system. All early learning and school district professionals must operate from the perspective that learning occurs on a continuum that begins at birth and continues through adulthood and that they must, therefore, work together to help children and youth overcome barriers that may make transitions between these environments difficult.

Coordinated planning meetings and staff development that includes both early learning and K-12 staff – or, at the very least, early learning and kindergarten teachers – can facilitate these relationship-building efforts. Center directors and family child care professionals also can make efforts to visit local schools by attending events for families and the community, as well as to build relationships with school teachers and other staff. Additional partnership activities are likely to include the following:

- *Shared resources, facilities and other supports* – increased collaboration and partnership among school district and early learning staff and programs throughout White Center, including possible co-location of some early learning programs to increase access and use of school district facilities by White Center families. This could be realized through the provision, by the Highline Public Schools, of space at Salmon Creek Elementary for infant, toddler and preschool programs.
- *Services for children with special needs* – exploration of partnerships that make birth-to-three early intervention services more accessible to families, who currently have to travel outside of the White Center community to be served. Through this effort, we will work collaboratively to increase awareness about early identification and referral for special services, and participate in joint training and common developmental screening tools used among school district, early intervention service agencies, early learning professionals and the White Center Early Learning Initiative (WCELI) staff.
- *Teen parent programs* – exploration of joint supports for teen parents at the WCELI Hub at Salmon Creek, and through other WCELI services (e.g., home visiting, supports for FFN and licensed care, etc).
- *English Language Learners, both children and families* – share best practices among organizations serving ELL children and families, and coordinated services as these families transition from early learning services to school district services.
- *Community outreach and school readiness messaging* – coordinated and aligned community outreach and awareness efforts regarding school readiness. Working together, early learning and school district professionals can develop agreed-upon key messages about school readiness to share within the school district, early learning programs and the wider community.

- *Transition to school activities* – collaborations to create more alignment between kindergarten readiness expectations and curriculum at local preschools and early learning programs.

PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

11. What are the best ways to involve parents and families as leaders in improving early learning quality?

Parents and families are children’s first and most important teachers, and therefore must play a crucial role in improving the quality of early learning, no matter where it takes place. Empowering parents to be leaders in early learning quality improvement efforts ensures that others, such as early learning professionals and policymakers are not merely speaking on the parents’ behalf, but that parents are also able to express their own voice in what is important for their children’s futures.

A powerful way to involve parents and families in improving the quality of early learning is through the model of “trusted advocates,” who are parents from within the community who serve as liaisons to ensure that the community’s needs are heard and addressed. In White Center, “trusted advocates” work not only to gather input from diverse community members, but are provided training opportunities to develop leadership and partnership development skills to increase the numbers of community members and people of color in decision-making roles within community organizations, institutions, boards, committees and planning groups. As a result, community engagement has consistently been regarded a high priority.

In November of 2006, through the work of the “trusted advocates” and other community leaders, we engaged parents and families, 490 adults and 275 children, at a community summit. This event inspired another group of parents to form a Community Advisory Committee that was committed to efforts that prepare young children for school and life. The Community Advisory Committee is currently undergoing an application process to extend membership to parents who have not previously participated in the process.

Successful strategies to engage parents and families would be to not only provide them with training and leadership development opportunities, but also to regularly and openly communicate with them. Early learning professionals can help parents and families increase their knowledge of what they can do at home to reinforce what children learn at early learning programs and, most importantly, encourage parents and families to share their ideas and expertise among each other. Early learning professionals and parents note that it is important to go where the parents are already and to be sensitive to varying work schedules so that access is not an issue. Parents want more efforts to recognize the strengths of father and encourage their participation in early learning conversations. Parents welcome daily interaction to help them become more effective participants in monitoring/advancing their children’s progress, both by increasing their knowledge base and confidence and by increasing

the early learning professionals' understanding of the families' needs and priorities. These interactions could range from one-on-one conversations to written updates.

Encouraging parents to be actively involved in programming – from planning meetings to helping out in the classroom – also increases their investment in the work being conducted by early learning professionals. Designating parent ambassadors in specific activities or evaluation efforts can also help parents enhance their leadership development skills. Many parents have skills and talents to offer that can enhance the learning environment.

12. What programs or policies could be adopted to increase parent's demand for high-quality early learning?

Early learning professionals tell us that parental involvement is important to increasing their demand for high-quality early learning programs. Activities and events that broaden parents' knowledge, such as forums on early learning topics, increase parents' commitment to engaging in what their children experience at early learning programs. Parent policy councils can also serve as good vehicles to reach and educate broader groups of parents. The South Seattle Community College has a co-op system that requires parent involvement on- and off-site as well as quarterly parent education classes. Such a system can result in deeper investment by these parents in demanding high-quality care and education since they are more familiar with what is happening in the programs. For families who choose family, friend and neighbor care, there is a network of "Play and Learn" groups in King County that partner with community-based organizations to provide neighborhood-based play groups that bring children and their caregivers together while also acting as a rich source of information for caregivers. In White Center, the Refugee Federation Service Center offers groups for children of multiple ages and in various languages.

Equally important as purposeful parental involvement are efforts that address families' varied needs. Community members express families:

- Need to feel support for the whole family, to know that practices and partnerships exist that can help them access the services – transportation, health care, social services, employment, housing bills, care and services for older children, etc.– they need to be a healthy, vital family;
- Need child care to be affordable;
- Need information provided in home languages;
- Need trusted transportation for children to and from school and early learning programs;
- Want early learning professionals that value home teaching as well as center care and early learning professionals who can provide learning tools that parents can use at home;
- Want multicultural curricula in the classrooms that reflect their communities;

- Want grandparents to have sufficient support, with appropriate resources (books and early learning information) available to them that they can use with young children;
- Need representative community leaders from their ethnic and cultural groups to be key partners in designing curricula and policies;
- Desire more slots in early learning programs – such as Head Start, the Multicultural Pre K, Para Los Niños, Play and Learn and PASEFIKA – that meet their interests and needs; and
- Need child care programs with weekend and evening hours that can accommodate non-traditional work schedules.

Early learning professionals believe that financial support for programs to help them implement best practices can also establish programs that parents will desire and therefore advocate for.

13. What can or should early learning educators do to encourage parent and family participation in the learning activities and learning environments of young children?

Both White Center parents and early learning professionals agree that the best way for early learning professionals to encourage parent and family participation in the learning activities and learning environments of young children is to establish an open, inclusive and welcoming environment for them. Early learning professionals who develop knowledge of families' cultures, take time to build relationships, and encourage their participation in appropriate activities will create a strong base for parents' deeper involvement in their young children's learning. As one parent noted, sometimes, the parents who need the most support may be the least likely to feel comfortable expressing that need. Activities and strategies suggested by parents and early learning professionals that can contribute to a stronger partnership include:

- Information provided in home languages;
- Daily notes about children's activities and progress;
- Home visits and/or meetings with early learning program staff to learn about families' goals for children and to share observations about the what the children do at home and in the early learning setting;
- Partnerships with trusted community organizations (e.g., churches) that can help reach out to and educate parents;
- Resource lists for services that can support the whole family;
- Home-to-“school” activities, such as book bags that travel back and forth from the early learning setting and home with books in child's home language;
- A calendar of activities (family nights, dinners, meetings, etc.) that involve parents and families;
- Open houses and/or regular invitations to spend time in the classroom or family child care home;
- Suggestions of books or simple at-home activities that parents can implement to reinforce what children learn in their programs;
- Invitations for contributions of, for example, cooking ingredients for in-class projects;

- Opportunities for family volunteering; and
- Interactions (meetings, etc.) and activities that take place during times of day that are convenient for parents' schedules or through other methods (blogs or other Internet-based tools) that can keep parents informed.

One parent shared with us an example of an after-school program that successfully engaged parents. It was a 10-week program that met once weekly for two hours at a time. Parents and children would arrive after the parents' work day (around 6:00pm) and start the evening with a meal and games with the kids. Then, while the children played, parents gathered to learn about handling children's needs, such as how to deal with the stress of disciplining or how to cope with children who have special needs. After that, everyone would come back together and participate in a raffle. Prizes were available for both children and adults. It was an effective way for parents to connect with their children while learning parenting skills from other parents. Later, parents wrote in to express their fond memories of this program and how it helped them learn and spend quality time with their children.

14. What types of information do parents want to know about quality?

Parents tell us that, primarily, they want to know that their children are safe and cared about, and they want to know what their children are learning, socially and academically. They want to see their children happy and engaged; thriving in a warm, clean and secure environment where they feel supported enough to take healthy risks. More specifically, they want to know that the early learning professional has education and/or experience with children, that they meet children's varied needs, including specific cultural, language or special needs. They want early learning professionals who demonstrate kindness, compassion and a love for their children. The program's learning philosophies, basic day-to-day techniques, and quality of supplies and materials also contribute to parents' idea of quality. Staff retention (including strong employment benefits) and continuing education of early learning professionals are also important to parents in measuring the quality of their child's program.

White Center parents want to understand what their children are learning. Parents note that though programs are licensed, licensing does not necessarily ensure quality. Many shared stories of past negative experiences with licensed programs including lack of professional-parent communication, health and safety issues, and the lack of a cohesive curriculum for the children. Therefore, parents want to equip themselves with the knowledge on what they should look for in choosing a program or in determining whether quality exists in their current program. Parents want to know if the program curriculum is based on research and best practices, whether their children are hitting developmental marks, and what those marks are. Parents also want to know how the performance or achievement of the children in one early learning program compare to that of another and how successfully their children transition into kindergarten because of the curricula of a given program.

White Center parents believe that high-quality programs should help children learn to socialize, recognize letters, numbers and shapes, develop good manners and respect for others,

understand right from wrong, and acquire other skills needed to be ready for kindergarten. They want their children to experience sensory activities and to have the opportunity for fresh air and safe outdoor play. They would like younger children to be able to learn from older children. They want programs that reflect the cultures in their community and staff who communicate with them openly, respectfully and, if applicable, in their home language about their children's progress and about what they can do to help children prepare for Kindergarten. Parents also want understanding in how nutrition and health help children's growth as well as what activities they can implement at home to best support their children's transition to kindergarten.

Parents also rely on other parents for feedback, both positive and negative, about programs that they have sent their young children to and want access to this type of information. They want to feel connected to the program and to trust it as a good place to leave their child. Both parents and early learning professionals noted that parents often pick a program that is similar to their own home environment, and that families should always have that option.

15. What efforts would be best used for parent and consumer education?

An effective strategy is to partner with communication vehicles that parents and families already use as resources. Numerous sources currently exist to deliver information to parents and families about the importance of early learning, quality in early learning settings, different early learning options, local community resources, information about national research, child development, parenting information, local community events, etc. Sources include:

- **Early learning providers** provide information to families in their care about various areas related to early learning such as development, importance of play, and health information. Providers also frequently refer families to community resources. Parents reported that flyers, brochures and letters passed out at their early learning programs are useful sources of information about early learning.
- **Thrive by Five WA Parent and Community Awareness Campaign** will promote efforts to increase the community's understanding about the importance of early learning and for families, what to look for in quality early learning settings. Strategies include:
 - Developing a parent-focused section on the Thrive website that educates and engages parents on positive early learning opportunities;
 - Inserting educational pieces about early learning in CHILD Profile mailings;
 - Offer contributed articles to local and state-wide early learning publications;
 - Develop/identify a healthcare professional (such as a pediatrician or obstetrician) education program that can help disseminate information; and
 - Partner with Parent Television Network and other media channels to produce and place on-demand programming and online video about quality early learning.
- **Child Care Resources (CCR)** operates a telephone and web-based referral service that helps over 7,000 families annually to find child care and other early learning

opportunities. CCR's website provides a checklist and other information for families, including in-depth information about how to make child care choices. CCR will be a crucial resource to educate families and the community about an eventual QRIS system.

- **Local school districts** can provide information about early learning services and programs including licensed childcare programs and special education pre-school programs.
- **Parent Central Express** is a free e-newsletter for parents and caregivers in King County that features local resources and information about issues affecting children and families. The newsletter is developed by the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Networks and partners locally with **CCR**. CCR recruits local families and parents to sign up to receive the newsletter.
- The Washington State Department of Health mails **CHILD Profile** age-specific materials periodically to every parent with children under six in Washington State. CHILD Profile includes development charts, and immunization and check-up information.
- **White Center Early Learning Initiative (WCELI) Community Advisory Council** is comprised of families and residents and serves to advise WCELI about services and programs and to inform families and residents about early learning.
- The **Trusted Advocates** are a group of bicultural and bilingual community advocates who have strong connections to ethnic/cultural communities and act as brokers of knowledge and information.
- **Family members, friends and peers as well as spiritual and social groups** serve as trusted referrals and sources of information. Parents report that word of mouth is often the way that they learn about the quality of an early learning program.
- **Parent Map** is a free monthly local publication that lists community events and services, and provides information for families about education, health and development, and other relevant topics.
- **Local community-based organizations** provide outreach and community engagement activities for families.
- **King County and Seattle Public Library Systems** provide literacy materials, children's programs such as story times, and free classes, including those for English Language Learners, for families and children in various locations in the community.
- **Play and Learn Groups** partner with community based organizations to provide neighborhood-based play groups that bring children and their caregivers together to learn through play, and act as a rich source of information for caregivers.
- Government agencies that provide services and information to families, **such as the Department of Social and Health Services** and **Department of Early Learning** can act as rich sources of information.
- Many parents reported that they prefer **websites** as a source of information about child-related issues, but interestingly, none could name one specific site that has been useful in the past, and many mentioned that they search by key words. This could be a potential area to be strengthened in terms of easier access and recognition of appropriate web-based information sites.

Parents also suggest town meetings (in person and/or online), community fairs, pot-lucks, block parties, open houses, free evening classes (offered with food and child care), community swap meets, and emails as effective ways to reach out to parents and invite them into the early learning environment to share information about parenting, quality early learning or other topics of importance to them.

16. What are the best ways to involve the community in improving early learning quality?

White Center parents encourage early learning programs to actively form partnerships with organizations within the community in an effort to improve early learning quality. Zoos, community centers and other children-friendly places are natural investors in quality learning experiences. Parents feel that bringing children on field trips to diverse settings, for example, nursing homes, can also help children learn how other people live; at the same time, older adults can offer insight about things from which children can learn and benefit. Older adults can also play an important role in raising awareness about early education issues and gathering support for specific initiatives. Recently, Generation United, a non-profit group that supports intergenerational programs and policies reported that an untapped resource is older adults. Seniors4Kids is a Generations United program that taps the skills, connections, and time of older adults to support Pre-K investments. In Florida, they coordinated Pre-K efforts in their communities, recruited like-minded seniors to join them, petitioned their legislators to support the state's universal Pre-K program, and hosted educational events.

Events presented at or co-presented with neighborhood schools, churches and community centers not only bring visibility to the early learning program, but also bring different stakeholders together. With the formation of these community collaborations, additional information can be shared about the advantages of quality early learning (or the consequences of poor experiences) for our youngest community members.

17. What are the best ways to link local quality service delivery providers?

Note: This question was a bit confusing to our group and therefore we have provided two answers to fulfill each interpretation of the question. The first interpretation is that the question is asking for the best way to link families with quality service providers. The second interpretation is that the question is asking for best way to "link up" various providers to one another.

Interpretation #1- Link to families:

Many entities already exist that successfully serve as a link for families to quality service delivery providers. The following list was derived by individuals and agencies active in the WCELI planning process, and enhanced by Community Planning team members:

- The Washington State Department of Health mails **CHILD Profile** age-specific materials periodically to every parent with children under six in Washington State. CHILD Profile

includes information about child development, development charts, immunization and check-up, and parenting.

- **Parent Help 123** is a program of **WithinReach**, a not-for-profit organization that focuses on improvement in maternal, child and family health in Washington. This program offers a web-based search for family benefits like health insurance and food programs in Washington. The website also offers links to information about child development, special needs, child care and parenting classes.
- The **Trusted Advocates** are a group of bicultural and bilingual community advocates who have strong connections to ethnic/cultural communities and act as brokers of knowledge and information, and can provide information and outreach about local community resources and service for children and families.
- **Family members, friends, peers, spiritual organizations, social groups and healthcare professionals** serve as trusted referrals and sources of information.
- **Parent Map** is a free monthly local publication that lists community events and services, and provides information for families about education, health and development, and local community events and services.
- **Local community-based organizations** provide outreach and community engagement activities for families, and provide information about early learning, health and safety, child development, and community resources.
- **Local Community Service Offices (CSO)** of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) provide information and resources to families related to child care subsidies, medical insurance, and other benefits.
- **Play and Learn Groups** partner with community based organizations to provide neighborhood-based play groups that bring children and their caregivers together to learn through play, and act as a rich source of information for caregivers.
- **Early learning early learning professionals** provide information to families in their care about various areas related to early learning and often link families to services such as parenting classes, community resources and special education services.
- **Child Care Resources** provides information to families about choosing quality care, care options, and family support services.

In establishing the network of resources for families, it is important to bear in mind the breadth of needs that families in White Center have.

- Families need services that are easily accessible by public transportation;
- Families benefit from services that are located in close proximity to and/or deliberately integrated with other resources (DSHS, housing, energy assistance, etc.);
- Families prefer programs to be located at schools or other venues in which they already have developed familiarity and trust;
- Families need services that are free or affordable;
- Families are strengthened by programs that implement a “whole family” approach, such as *Para Los Niños*, which offers child care and homework support for older children while

parents take ESL classes, or PASEFIKA's, which connects children who are enrolled in preschool with Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) services and other family supports.

Frequent meetings or trainings on topics of early learning with these community partners can help build an early learning network, creating a group of invested organizations that can work together to solve problems and overcome challenges.

Interpretation #2 – Link for quality service providers to one another:

We suggest the following ways to link local quality service delivery providers:

- Create a cohort for those participating in the QI framework
- Assist service delivery providers in developing relationships and partnerships
- Provide opportunities for information exchange and support
- Use coaches and mentors as a resource to facilitate linkages

Quality service delivery providers in the White Center area suggest regular meetings/gatherings among providers in order to develop and maintain good communication. Providers expressed the need to have a formal structure for organizing meetings and maintaining effective communication.

18. How can key community partnerships be sustained over time to support increases in early learning quality?

To sustain community partnerships, it will be critical to have clearly-defined expectations and roles as well as consistent and open communication among stakeholders. Each partner bears responsibilities in the efforts to ensure that quality in early learning for the benefit of young children remains at the core of our work. It is critical that:

- New initiatives or programs build on existing relationships and services in the community;
- All key partners are present and are able to participate equally;
- Resources are shared to strengthen programs and avoid duplication of efforts;
- Funding is leveraged to maximize returns on investment; and
- There is “buy-in,” commitment and active participation from the community.

Examples of key community partnerships that need to be sustained include those with:

- Community-based organizations and local community colleges that provide trainings that strengthen early learning professionals' skills;
- Support groups, such as the White Center Providers Group and the Family Child Care Associations that offer important networking, training, and education opportunities for early learning professionals;

- Organizations that provide parenting and family support classes, and networking groups; education about topics including health, safety, and child care choices; literacy activities and materials; and
- Local and state agencies that provide services, including subsidies; and
- District schools to and align programs to facilitate children’s transitions and enhance their educational and life achievements.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

19. What are the best ways to ensure health and safety for all children in early learning environments?

Direct service providers in White Center feel that the best ways to ensure health and safety for all children is to have clear expectations for early learning professionals, regular professional development opportunities (both on- and off-site), strong supervision, regular monitoring of programs, and family engagement. Specific strategies that parents and early learning professionals suggest include:

- Supporting accreditation of child care centers, which establishes a strong, healthy environment for children’s developmental needs;
- Instituting low adult-child ratios;
- Instituting strict safety guidelines;
- Making incident and accident information accessible to families;
- Offering first aid and other training classes that build early learning professionals’ skills and help them model both practical and compassionate behavior;
- Establishing and practicing emergency plans with staff and children;
- Tracking up-to-date contact lists, allergy lists, immunization records, physical check-ups, etc. to ensure full knowledge and response plans;
- Establishing a relationship between early learning and health care professionals so that information can be mutually shared about children’s development;
- Educating parents about when to leave ill children at home;
- Encouraging and enforcing safe play among children;
- Teaching children good hygiene habits, like washing hands each time they enter and before they exit the classroom;
- Cleaning younger children’s toys on a daily basis;
- Implementing a buddy system during field trips;
- Providing information to parents about development, immunizations, health and safety, etc.;
- Encouraging parents to have children vaccinated;
- Installing a web camera to help parents see and understand daily activities and programming so that they can continue these activities at home;

- Conducting background checks before hiring new staff;
- Bringing in community members, like police officers to talk about safety with children and families;
- Installing security codes in buildings; and
- Regularly inspecting facilities.

Some of these strategies are covered under licensing requirements.

20. How can State Child Care Licensing be utilized to aid in maintaining health and safety in early learning programs?

State Child Care Licensing can help maintain programs' health and safety by:

- Continually assessing the Washington Administrative Codes licensing standards for child care centers and family child care homes to ensure that the standards for health and safety are reviewed and revised to remain relevant.
- Communicating and clarifying monitoring standards for early learning professionals, families and the community.
- Ensuring that all early learning professionals comprehend what is required within the licensing standards, particularly if the early learning professional is an English Language Learner, by providing culturally and linguistically relevant licensing staff, interpreters during licensing orientations and subsequent visits, and health and safety information in multiple languages.
- Conducting more frequent inspections to ensure that licensing requirements are being met;
- Identifying strengths in early learning programs, and offering information and resources when challenges are identified;
- Building supportive relationships between licensors and early learning professionals to allow licensors, so that licensors are seen as supporters of early learning programs and professionals;
- Ensuring frequent communication between licensors and early learning professionals;
- Educating the community and families about licensing regulations so parents can ask early learning professionals informed questions about how licensing standards are met; and
- Providing regular workshops, trainings and other opportunities for early learning professionals to strengthen their understanding of licensing regulations as well as to learn about any changes in the codes.

21. What standards are necessary to promote and support health and safety in all early learning facilities?

All suggestions offered in responses to questions 19 and 20 are relevant to establishing standards necessary to promote and support health and safety in all early learning facilities.

Additionally, families and the community need education and information not only about licensing regulations as mentioned above, but also about what types of programs are and *are not licensed* by the state of Washington. Information and Referral Specialists at Child Care Resources report that parents frequently assume that all settings for young children, such as part day preschools, nanny care, and drop-in care at gyms and malls are licensed and obligated to maintain health and safety standards. Referral staff also talk to families and potential early learning professionals about the differences between family, friend and neighbor care and illegal or unlicensed child care. Parents need to be aware that health and safety standards and enforcement systems may not exist for their preferred early learning setting. Ensuring that families have access to information to make informed early learning choices is critical to maintaining health and safety of young children.

22. What are the best ways to engage and include local community partners to ensure health and safety for all children in early learning environments?

Local community organizations and leaders should be active participants in conversations about health and safety, and can play active roles in supporting and educating early learning professionals, families and children. Suggestions offered by parents as well as early learning professionals include inviting community members, such as police officers, fire fighters, and community workers to early learning programs to share information with children, early learning professionals, and families about safety. Additionally, in discussions about how to educate parents and the community, many parents requested workshops in the community on topics such as child development, health, and nutrition. Early learning professionals often refer families to health resources such as Public Health clinics. Other community partners active in providing information and resources to early learning early learning professionals include the Seattle King County Public Health Child Care Health Team and Kids Get Care programs, and Child Care Resources.

Both parents and early learning professionals in White Center who have experience with children with special needs noted the critical importance of involving both early intervention services and school district special education services into the early learning program. Early learning programs act as a “natural environment” for young children to receive services such as speech therapy, and are present a critical opportunity for the child’s growth and development. Likewise, children aged three and older who receive special education services from the school district benefit when the early learning program is involved in the creation and implementation of the IEP (Individualized Education Plan).

CURRICULUM APPROACH AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

23. What are the best strategies for assessing and ensuring the quality of classroom environments? Learning environment assessments should measure both:

- ***Structural quality issues* - things that help set up a quality environment – such as group size, teacher education, and administrative policies supporting training and planning.**

- **Process quality issues – the ways in which adults and children relate to others in the learning environment – such as positive teacher-child interactions.**

In discussions about quality elements of early learning programming, early learning professionals and families consistently name curriculum, daily activities and routines, materials and space, staff qualifications, adult-child ratios, and staff resources as critical indicators. Early learning professionals and other service providers in the community name a number of strategies for assessing and ensuring structural and process quality in classroom environments.

Structural quality in a classroom or family child care home begins with the establishment of overall standards and goals for the program. Licensing standards are an example of a structural quality assessment tool, by establishing criteria for initial and ongoing professional development and qualifications requirements; group size and child-adult ratios; and business administrative policies and procedures. The creation of a Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) in Washington will potentially serve to establish professional development goals beyond basic licensing expectations, as well as to increase support and resources for ongoing professional development opportunities. Other examples of structural quality assessments currently used by some in the White Center Community include the Program Administration Scale (PAS), which assesses and sets quality improvement goals for organizational practices in early learning programs, and measures: human resources development; personnel costs and allocation; center operations; child assessment; fiscal management; program planning and evaluation; family partnerships; marketing and public relations; technology; and staff qualifications. A complementary tool for family child care businesses, the Business Administration Scale (BAS) is currently under development. Head Start and ECEAP standards offer another set of tools to measure overall program structure.

Strategies related to improving structural quality include: ongoing staff development to help early learning professionals develop the skills they need to implement best practices; financial and logistical support to encourage further professional development; on-site coaching to support the development and implementation of professional development plans; and peer mentoring and support to strengthen networking and collaborations. On-site coaching and training can also address quality improvement in leadership and management practices in early learning programs.

Process quality can be assessed through formal and informal methods. Early learning professionals in the community named class/home checklists, observations, documentation of children's growth, family interviews, parent feedback, and staff self-evaluation as ways to gather information about quality of interactions in the environment. Programs also need ample and appropriate materials and equipment to enhance and support children's experiences. Interviews with and self-assessments by early learning professionals help them feel more invested in contributing to the program's success.

Specific assessment tools that measure process quality that are familiar to some in the community and widely used in quality improvement projects nationally include the

Environment Rating Scales (ERS). The ERS measure interactions between children, providers, parents, and other adults, and among the children themselves, as well as the interactions children have with the materials and activities in the environment, and those features, such as space, schedule and materials that support these interactions. Other tools that measure provider-child interactions, such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA), and the Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale, were less familiar to the community, and could be made available for review by key stakeholders including early learning professionals. Many White Center early learning professionals also cited formal curricula, like *Creative Curriculum*, as a useful framework for assessing and ensuring that environments are set up to facilitate positive, developmentally appropriate learning experiences for children.

Assessment results, on-sites coaching and mentoring, and partnership with and visits to other early learning programs provide feedback and learning opportunities that can ultimately strengthen quality of early learning for the benefit of children.

We must note, however, that during Readiness to Benefit interviews and forums, and discussions with the White Center Early learning professionals Group, early learning professionals raised numerous concerns about the program assessment and evaluation component of a QRIS. Specifically, early learning professionals wanted to know what assessment measures will be used, whether evaluations would be objective, how quality can be measured, who would conduct the assessments and whether assessments would be conducted by people with experience in early learning environments. Early learning professionals repeat the importance of ensuring fair and consistent methods of program evaluation that also recognize and value the strengths and differences of individual programs. We recommend that in order to gain their support and ‘buy-in’ of a QRIS, evaluation measures first be explained to the early learning community, and then conducted in a professional, consistent manner by a entity that early learning professionals trust.

24. What curricula, or learning approaches if any, support quality early learning environments?

Just like there are many environments that support early learning, many different curricula support quality early learning environments. In the Readiness to Benefit Interviews, 89% of family child care professionals and 92% of center directors report using a curriculum for planning, though there was a range of descriptions and definitions provided, from a purchased program with specific activities to a general philosophy that aids in planning. Early learning professionals report that curricula should be designed based on knowledge of and resources about child development, domains of growth, and appropriate activities. Early learning professionals find that it is important to allow a balance among varying needs, including large and small groups; structured and choice learning activities; opportunities for exploration; and meaningful conversations between adults and children. Lesson plans, resources books, on-site coaching, workshops and other tools and materials guide early learning professionals in establishing an early learning framework. Early learning professionals in the community named

Creative Curriculum, High Scope, Head Start, Montessori and Reggio Emilio/Emergent as familiar formal curricula currently used. They were interested in learning more about these approaches but were careful to note that curriculum is only as strong as the skills and the knowledge of the early learning professionals who implement it. While formal curriculum provides a good foundation that can be used exclusively or through blended approaches, any learning approach must reflect the needs of the program and the families and children it serves.

Though few parents used the term “curriculum” when asked about quality indicators in early learning programs, most ranked the components of curriculum, such as schedule, routine, activities, and materials, as important factors, and were interested in knowing more about the daily programming.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING OF PROVIDERS, DIRECTORS, AND STAFF

25. What are the best means to provide professional development opportunities to early learning professionals?

Early learning professionals currently participate in many professional development opportunities, including those offered through: community and technical colleges; child care resource and referral networks; community-based STARS trainings; conferences; distance learning programs; Building Bridges; and four-year institutions. Different approaches need to be available to best meet the needs of the diverse group of early learning professionals in the community, who range in experience, education, language and culture. Bilingual classes or classes offered in languages other than English, the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST model), small groups, one-on-one training, online classes, and cohort models were offered by the community as suggestions of effective approaches.

In terms of professional development, two themes consistently emerge in all conversations and meetings with early learning professionals and trainers: the lack of time and financial resources to pursue further education and the lack of comparable wages to reflect educational achievements. Strategies to help bridge the first gap can include: stipends, full payment or reimbursement for classes and training; financial support for books and materials; training conducted on-site or at a location close to the program; classes offered with flexible scheduling such as weekends and evenings; online training and technical support; hybrid classes that offer online and in-person components; help translating work experience into educational credit; tutoring support; liaisons who can connect providers to community trainings and institutions; on-site coaching to extend learning into practice; substitutes to allow both child care center staff as well as family child care professionals to complete classes; and child care during training times for those attending classes who are, themselves, parents. Somali early learning professionals in particular note the challenge of attending classes or training without child care for their own young children, and request on-site child care options.

Additionally, professional development opportunities that respond to cultural and language needs as well as those that offer a variety of relevant and interesting topics (particularly for those who have already amassed a wealth of experience through their many years in the field) will make trainings more meaningful.

26. What should the content of professional development be, and what are the most beneficial strategies for delivering professional development and continued training to those involved in providing early education?

A majority of early learning professionals express interest in pursuing training and education beyond the state-required minimum level. Early Learning professionals, trainers and coaches name numerous content areas that should be the focus of professional development, including: child development; best practices and emerging research in the field; business management; curriculum planning; volunteer recruitment; developmentally-appropriate practice; behavior guidance; learning environments; safety; nutrition; dual-language models; reflective practice; supporting first relationships; and cultural diversity. In addition, many early learning professionals who are non-native English speakers desire English language classes to improve their written and speaking skills.

Regardless of content area, all professional development opportunities should be intentionally planned to be meaningful and relevant to the early learning professionals and to the families they serve. Professional development should not only lead to the enhancement of hard skills, but also encourage early learning professionals to grow personally and professionally, deepening their relationship with their work and with the children they serve. All training and education should be connected to and integrated with the early learning program, through on-site coaching to extend learning, peer mentoring, and homework or portfolios that encourage application of new knowledge.

Effective strategies for delivering professional development and training are varied and should consider the barriers mentioned under Question 25. Specific activities under consideration for implementation as part of WCELI include:

- **Professional Development Strategies** - Provide coordination and resources that make access to career and academic advancement more accessible and affordable for early learning staff. Highline Community College is our lead academic partner in this effort and will assist White Center partners in accessing and coordinating with all local and state higher education institutions and systems.
- **Education and Training Clearinghouse** - Provide a central, accessible clearinghouse of information regarding training and education opportunities for early learning providers. This service will include general information, on-site academic advising, and referral to education and training providers. The Clearinghouse will compile current information about professional development opportunities, financial aid and scholarships, facilitate coordination across institutions and organizations, and encourage resolution of local barriers to professional development. It will include advising and support for

bilingual/bicultural staff who may need support understanding and meeting English language proficiency requirements.

- **Prior Learning Assessment and Pathways-Based Advising** - Partner with community colleges to develop a process by which competencies and prior learning can be assessed and articulated for credit toward certification or college degree; develop a comprehensive pathway model for life-long education and training for early learning professionals.
- **Expand Washington Scholarships in the White Center Target Area** - Pursue and advocate for increased Washington Scholarship awards to cover the cost of attaining CDA, AA and BA degrees.
- **Increase the Number and Diversity of Higher Education Early Learning Faculty** - Provide funding for diverse faculty internships, endowed early learning chairs, and dual appointments between community colleges and four-year institutions.
- **White Center Early Learning Initiative Education Center**– Support the ongoing training and skills of early learning staff in White Center using the White Center ‘Hub’ as a model center and regional training center that:
 - Create a classroom and computer lab and other instructional tools for on-site or on-line college classes. This on-site educational center is a place where college resources can be assessed by staff and families in a familiar, accessible location.
 - Offers training ‘strands’ that complement the Quality Improvement and Professional Development plans of community early learning and preschool programs and utilizes the Hub as a hands-on learning lab. Possible training strand topics include: observations, assessment and individualizing, setting up environments, planning and documentation systems, implementing culturally relevant curriculum and cultural competency.
 - Serves as a resource for increasing skills, knowledge and capacity to provide culturally relevant early learning services. Partners with community residents who serve as “cultural competency advisors” for all early learning programs as they work to increase the cultural relevancy of their programs. Hub programs model teaching approaches that value and retain home language, and employ bilingual/bicultural staff.
 - Serves as a model for family support services - utilizing a strengths-based approach to developing Family Partnership Plans and implementing meaningful and individualized Parent Involvement strategies.
 - Serves as a venue for the WCELLI community-wide services, including being the “hub” for White Center Peer Programs, which train parents to teach other parents in the areas of Literacy, Health, Male Involvement, and Advocacy. The Hub will also be the home of the White Center Interpreter Training Program that provides professional interpreter training to parents and other residents.
 - Serves as Bounce Learning Network site - host meeting and training events that promote Educare’s principles and practices of high-quality early learning services.
 - Partners with higher education institutions to make the White Center hub an internship and student teaching site for students enrolled in early education

degree programs. Partnerships with higher education may also include collaborations on demonstrating best practices that are being studied or investigated.

- **Child Care/Caregiver Substitute Training Program** - Offer training programs for substitutes that can be a resource for child care, preschool programs, FFNs and families to use. This service will address both the need for more substitutes and the need families have for evening and weekend care.
- **Language and Literacy Training Programs** – Provide a research-based approach that utilizes literacy coaches in a variety of capacities to ensure that language and literacy strategies are infused in all WCELI services.

27. What support for programs and early learning professionals currently exists and what needs to be developed?

Many programs currently exist to encourage professional and program development. STARS-credit and college-credit course work is available through a variety of venues, including community agencies, online, community colleges, and through networking groups such as the Family Child Care Association.

There are nine area community colleges in King County that offer two-year, Early Childhood Education degree programs. Institutions that offer Bachelor's degrees in Early Childhood or related fields include but are not limited to the University of Washington, the Praxis Institute for Early Childhood Education, Eastern Washington University at Bellevue Community College, and Central Washington at Highline Community College. There are also a number of on-line degree options such as Washington State University's Human Development program that are also emerging as necessary infrastructure to help increase accessibility for early learning professionals. Locally, Highline Community College has recently begun to offer college classes directly in the White Center community, using different child care centers as host sites.

The Child Care Resource and Referral Network administers the Washington Scholarships program (formerly Washington TEACH), which is designed to promote access to traditional course offerings towards attainment of an Associate of Arts degree or CDA for early childhood professionals at community colleges (and soon at a university). The Training Resource and Interactive Network (TRAIN) administered by the Washington Association for the Education of Young Children (WAEYC) serves as a repository for training sessions.

Supports for training include the Building Bridges modules that have been funded through the Department of Early Learning at area community colleges, the Career and Wage Ladder, STARS scholarships for community-based training, Washington Scholarships for Child Care Professionals for higher education, and the nurse consultant-partnerships through the Department of Public Health. A few area colleges have established I-BEST models for early learning professionals that target English Language Learners and Seattle Central Community College is piloting a Chinese/Vietnamese Child Development Associates (CDA).

The CCRRN has a wealth of information and has offered in-kind support to share successful local models across the state and to match their statewide partners with the staff working in the White Center. Some models that might be helpful are the SELF (Support for Early Learning and Families) initiative in Clark County and the Pierce County linkages project that both have been effective in creating a systemic approach to professional development in their respective communities along with establishing better connection and partnerships with the K-12 system.

The City of Seattle has been a leader in developing programs that integrate professional development and coaching elements to affect and improve the quality of child care. CCR has been the recipient of contracts for these programs and has coordinated these professional development efforts. The models start with a baseline assessment of classroom quality and then focus on improving the assessment score over a period of time. An example of this is the Step Ahead Preschool project within the Seattle Early Learning Networks (ELN). The purpose of the project is to support children's optimal development so that they will be successful in school.

ELN works collaboratively with two- and four-year higher education systems: Shoreline Community College, Seattle Central, North Seattle, South Seattle, Highline, Renton, Center for Cultural and Linguistic Democracy, Praxis/Goddard, Antioch, and soon the University of Washington to provide the following:

- Community-based college Early Childhood Education classes;
- On-site classes;
- College credits for field studies;
- CDA classes that are language-specific;
- Classes at the community colleges that are available in the evening, weekend or in an online format; and
- Advising that takes place on-site so that early learning professionals can easily access classes and receive assistance around articulation issues.

Within the ELN project, a partnership with Washington Scholars has brought about the following:

- A streamlined approach to having classes paid for – through a voucher system – rather than a pay-out-of-pocket reimbursement plan.
- Dialog around future funds to create an I-BEST model at a community college, which would incorporate ECE certificate program with language support for teachers already in the field.

Additionally, there is a wealth of expertise that can be drawn upon locally from the University of Washington, which has been a leader on issues around brain development, the social and emotional development of young children and special needs education. The Praxis Institute and the Center for Cultural and Linguistic Democracy staff are experts on cultural competency.

Our partners at the Puget Sound Educational Service District have developed the Early Learning Outreach Project (ELOP) which has served as a key new pathway for moving early learning professionals from informal education and training activities to formal ones, including college coursework. ELOP helps novice and experienced early learning professionals find their professional and continuing education path. Training and classes offered range from specialized online workshops that meet program accountabilities for health, bilingual classroom support and developmental screenings to courses that meet requirements for and offer a range of credit including: State Training and Registry System (STARS), continuing education, Clock hours and college credit through our partnerships with community, technical and four year colleges.

Despite the resources mentioned above, early learning professionals in White Center express the need for additional programs that are accessible and affordable and new resources to help access existing programs. Supports systems and trainings in place are not necessarily available in all geographic areas. Though this is slowly changing, those who work in White Center often have to go outside the area to reach many resources, which creates a feeling of being excluded. When asked about needed supports to encourage professional development, 73% of FCC providers and 67% of center directors named financial support as the primary resource needed to pursue and continue further education. Other suggestions include flexible times and varied locations for training, neighborhood-based college classes, child care options, and available substitutes. Somali early learning professionals, who make up a large portion of licensed family child care in White Center, are interested in pursuing further education and request: ECE courses combined with classes to improve English reading and writing skills; training such as CDA coursework offered in their native language; and child care for their own young children while in class.

STAFF COMPENSATION

28. What are the most economically viable and practical strategies available to provide sustainable compensation for early learning professionals who provide high levels of quality in early learning environments?

Quality improvement efforts in early learning must be intertwined with efforts to improve and sustain compensation for early learning professionals. Strategies to increase compensation must be prefaced by a systemic change in attitude and policy towards early learning as a profession and requires:

- Broad community education efforts that focus on research about early brain development, the links between quality early learning environments and staff working conditions, and true “cost” of early learning and care;

- Strengthening leadership and organization in the field to enable early learning professionals and families to act as advocates in the legislative arena to demand better working conditions;
- Consideration of a taxation model (as one professional noted, “like a road tax: not everyone uses it, but everyone pays for it because it benefits the community”) that generates additional revenue for programs;
- Increased demand from families, business partners, community partners, and early learning professionals for wages that accurately reflect the importance of early learning; and
- Increase and support for professional development opportunities including degree obtainment for early learning professionals.

The community additionally offered the following strategies:

- Fully fund Washington Scholars to cover all early learning professionals;
- Expand Washington Scholars to fully cover efforts to pursue four-year degrees;
- Increase Working Connection Child Care subsidy reimbursement rates to better reflect market value;
- Adjust tiered reimbursement to provide more income to higher quality programs serving families who use subsidy;
- Offer paid release time for learning professionals;
- Increase options for child care center directors and family child care professionals to provide benefits such as health insurance; and
- Provide support to early learning professionals to increase skills around budgeting, market rates, marketing, strategic planning, fundraising, and grant writing.

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

29. What influence can/should early education administrators, such as child care center directors and/or family child care home providers, have in increasing the quality of early learning environments?

Early learning administrators are crucial in increasing program quality because not only do they interact with children and families on a daily basis, but they are the ones that set the tone and lay the foundation for program structure and planning. Many components of structural and process quality of an early learning program are established and implemented at an administrative level including:

- **Staff development & qualifications**, including offering or approving education and training opportunities, conducting orientation and performance evaluations, determining compensation, developing hiring and human resources practices, role modeling and mentoring;

- **Business practices**, such as ensuring economic stability of the program, conducting strategic and business planning, and budgeting for quality improvement efforts;
- **Learning environment and curriculum**, ensuring there are appropriate and ample activities, lessons, materials and equipment to support development of children and supporting staff around use of materials;
- **Licensing regulations**, ensuring that the program maintains licensing standards and develops strong relationships with licensors; and
- **Family partnerships**, ensuring that policies and procedures are in place at a program level to welcome families, encourage participation and support good communication between staff and families.

Early learning administrators must be committed to continuous quality improvement in order for other early learning professionals in the program to feel supported in their quality improvement initiatives. They must possess a willingness to be transparent about their practices so that areas of improvement can be identified, and to model this behavior for their staff.

In addition, if early learning administrators can come together as leaders of the field, and can speak in a collective voice, they can become their own advocates for quality early learning. As key players, they must not only feel like valued participants in the challenge to increase the quality of early learning environments but feel empowered to help set the agenda. With appropriate guidance and support, early learning administrators can bring a wealth of experiences and knowledge to help lead quality improvement efforts for the state.

30. What are the best ways to develop early education leaders for the purpose of guiding and modeling best practices?

Strategies to develop early learning leaders to guide and model best practices include:

- Providing early learning leaders with ongoing coaching or mentoring that will offer a structured opportunity to examine and reflect on current practice and set goals towards quality improvement;
- Creating professional development opportunities designed specifically for early learning administrators to help them understand how to implement continuous quality improvement practices and to effectively support their staff within a continuous quality improvement context;
- Assisting early learning leaders to form learning and networking groups with peers to establish a support and knowledge sharing system;
- Creating opportunities to allow those in the field to explore and build skills in new arenas, whether through apprentice-type programs or formal or informal shadowing of peers and mentors;
- Providing the reasons behind program administration practices, so staff learn how quality is tied to administrative roles and responsibilities; and

- Using role modeling, peer-to-peer support, self-evaluations to encourage new ways of thinking about work with young children.

31. What are effective strategies in promoting shared leadership for administrators and staff?

Strategies to promote shared leadership and contribute to a stronger administrator/staff relationship include:

- Planning team building activities;
- Conducting regular staff meetings for information-sharing and problem-solving;
- Scheduling regular individual staff/director meetings for mentoring, modeling, reflecting, goal-setting, and providing feedback;
- Offering paid planning and preparation time for staff;
- Providing on-going communication between staff and administrators about daily challenges and successes, as well as long-term vision and program goals; and
- Using tools such as the Program Administration Scale (PAS) to measure and strengthen leadership and management skills.

32. What is the best way to balance business viability with quality initiatives?

White Center child care center directors and family child care professionals report that business viability is a constant struggle. Current and former child care directors and family child care professionals, as well as other community members describe the following strategies to balance business viability with quality initiatives:

- Have a thoughtful plan for quality improvement, utilizing available supports such as coaches and mentors, as well as feedback from staff, on what is realistic and doable and what resources need to be in place to accomplish them;
- Be creative in identifying and allocating resources: know the community well and know how to access free or reduced cost items and services, such as donated paper for art from local firms, lower cost copying and laminating from Child Care Resources, and free community events as field trips;
- Understand that increased quality means increased business from parents, and therefore increased income, especially for family child care professionals who report more vacancies in the White Center community than child care directors; and
- Utilize non-profit and government agencies, such as Cascadia Revolving Fund and the Small Business Administration for information about low cost loans and other business technical assistance to maximize budget.

Recommendations to DEL and its partners, as they develop a framework for QRIS for the state, in helping early learning programs balance business viability with quality initiatives include:

- Establishing a quality improvement system that offers adequate financial incentives to improve quality, such as grants for materials and supplies, money for professional development, and tired reimbursement; and
- Understanding that many quality improvements must be made incrementally to allow a program to sustain business viability, and that many programs do not have the financial reserves in the initial stages of quality improvement.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

33. What should the structure of QRIS look like?

The White Center QRIS Community Planning team’s approach and strategies for a voluntary QRIS reflects our belief that the most successful way to gather accurate and meaningful information and to test approaches is to create a system of attraction rather than to require participation. The QRIS should clearly articulate what high-quality early learning programs look like, which will help parents choose high-quality care while promoting professional development and continuing education for early learning professionals towards those articulated high-quality goals.

We believe strongly that QRIS should be based on a coaching and mentoring approach with coaching happening by a third party, non-regulatory agency. Quality is at the point of interaction and thus, we place the highest importance in the role of relationships within QRIS to improve quality of early learning programs. We know that in an early learning environment, the key relationships are between the early learning professional and children that they serve, among children that are in the program, among professionals that work in the early learning environment, and between professionals and families. In the same vein, in accomplishing the goals of QRIS, not only should we look at those relationships within the early learning environment but at the relationships between quality service providers and early learning professionals, between the System and the early learning professionals, and among early learning professionals in the System, as keys to improving quality. Coaches, once they are able to build a trusting relationship with the participating early learning professional, will be able to help them reflect on all of these relationships as they plan for and implement quality improvement initiatives.

With higher quality come higher costs, especially in obtaining higher degrees for professionals and in decreasing the adult-child ratios at early learning environments. QRIS should provide adequate incentives and funding for early learning programs to increase quality that is sustainable.

Finally, we continue to consider the following principles, as originally outlined in our proposal, as we proceed with the development of a QRIS:

1. Establish design and development capacity to learn from initial sites and integrate lessons into further expansion.
2. Separate licensing from rating and technical assistance.
3. Use existing resources such as local resource and referral agencies, faith-based and other community organizations and child care businesses to deliver child care services efficiently and effectively.
4. Focus on saturating contiguous geographic areas to sufficient depth to allow the above-mentioned market forces to work as well as to realize efficiencies in program assessment and mentoring functions.
5. Provide adequate funds to create dramatic improvement in areas funded, rather than hobbling the existing system with under-funded mandates.
6. Approach child care centers/homes with a business development mentality as opposed to a "regulatory plus" approach.
7. Use quality enhancement grants (in addition to tiered reimbursements and/or other subsidies at least initially) allowing child care businesses flexibility in determining the best use of quality enhancement funding.
8. Over time, transition solely to providing enhancement grants to child care businesses rather than subsidies to children to increase program continuous improvement and stability.
9. Use mechanisms to encourage lowering tuition in appropriate instances and increasing compensation to retain highly-qualified staff.
10. Create a seamless program to join existing systems and services statewide, including provisions for a system for workforce training.
11. Establish regional centers of excellence (virtual or physical), establishing a clear model for parents and providers alike.
12. Use the law of attraction to connect families with high-quality centers/homes.
13. Focus on serving virtually all families without means testing, but providing sliding scale and tuition scholarship options for appropriate families above 100% subsidy.

34. How should “quality” be assessed and rated?

Members of the White Center QRIS Community Planning Team have conducted extensive research at the national level and dialogued with practitioners at the local level to identify the key elements of QRIS systems and of high-quality early learning programs. Systems incorporate some or all of the following: an assessment of the classroom environment; adult-child ratios; staff qualifications; family engagement; and administration and management practices. Linda M. Espinosa (2002) outlines the elements present in high-quality programs in early care and education in “High Quality Preschool: What It Looks Like and Why We Need It” for the National Institute for Early Education Research publication *Preschool Policy Matters*. Espinosa states that quality is a combination of structure and process:

Structure	Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group size • Adult to child ratios 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions • Types of activities children are engaged in

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and language of teachers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning opportunities • Health and safety routines • Relationships with parents • Staff stability and working conditions • Materials |
|--|---|

The following are key characteristics of high-quality programs in regards to children, families and teachers:

<p>Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are respected, nurtured, and challenged • Their home language and culture are respected • Learn skills for future academic success • Have opportunities to develop skills necessary for success in school • Their natural curiosity is used as a powerful motivator
<p>Families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are included as partners in all aspects of the program • Are welcomed into program; allowed to observe and participate • Have opportunities to improve their parenting skills • Receive information about the child’s progress routinely • All families are viewed as having strengths
<p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have high-quality education (specific training in early childhood education, BA) • Are provided with ongoing professional development • Use curriculum with specified goals, approach to learning, expected outcomes • Regularly assess each child’s progress and make necessary adjustments • Have frequent, meaningful interactions with children

Based on this research, the Community Planning Teams in both East Yakima and White Center identified critical elements of a QRIS model called *Steps to Thrive (STT)* with seven focus areas:

1. Regulatory Compliance – In “good standing” within Washington state licensing standards
2. Ratio Requirements - Adult to child ratio, starting with minimum licensing standards
3. Staff Qualifications - Early learning professionals’ experience, education, and professional development
4. Learning Environment - Lesson plans, materials, and activities
5. Curriculum - Program philosophy, approach, design and content areas
6. Program Management Practices - Administration and finance management
7. Family Engagement - Formal and informal ways of engaging families

STT is a five-step rating system that assesses early learning programs against a continuum of quality within these seven focus areas. Programs that meet minimum licensing standards will meet all of the requirements for Step II and most of the requirements for Step III, as we thought it important to develop a system that felt inclusive from the outset. We envisioned Step I, which does not appear on the attached matrix, as an opportunity to work with early learning professionals who are interested in or working towards obtaining a license for their program. Some of the focus areas, such as Ratio Requirements, Staff Qualifications, and Regulatory Compliance can be assessed through check-lists. Others, such as the Learning Environment, Curriculum, and Program Management Practices can be assessed through formal tools, such as the ECERS and PAS, which have been designed to measure these aspects of early learning programs. Programs must meet the requirements for all seven focus areas within a Step level to move up to the next Step.

35. How will differences in “quality” be distinguished?

Each of the focus areas will be separated into five step levels that help distinguish the differences in quality along the continuum. As mentioned above, programs must meet the requirements for all seven focus areas within a Step level to move up to the next Step. The requirements for the each succeeding step must demonstrate progress toward quality that is manageable and achievable within a reasonable time frame. Some indicators will articulate differences using a building blocks approach that culminates in the highest quality at Step V (e.g., from all staff receiving child development assessment training at Step II to daily incorporation of individual child development assessments into curriculum at Step V), while others are inventoried indicators at any level that do not necessarily have corresponding progression of quality levels (e.g., written curriculum statement at Step II, offering social events for families at Step III).

The *Steps to Thrive* elements were based on the work of the Early Learning Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). Using the recommendations of the TAC as a starting point, each community planning team participated in identifying requirements for each of the seven focus areas. Planning team members were asked to identify requirements that would be attainable most importantly in their respective communities but also across the entire state.

36. What are the best strategies to use to evaluate the effectiveness of the QRIS? That is, how can you tell that what is being done differently – as a result of QRIS – is making a difference?

The goal of *Steps to Thrive* is to increase the quality of and access to early learning opportunities. Towards this goal, *Steps to Thrive* will:

- Increase early learning partners’ capabilities,
- Help parents make informed choices for their children’s early learning opportunities, and
- Increase public support for and awareness of the importance of high-quality early learning.

The QRIS system can be evaluated at two levels against these goals – at the participant level and at the system level.

Participant level –

- Is there movement towards higher quality at each level (at six months, in a year, in two years)?
- How satisfied are the professionals with their relationship with coaches in the context of quality improvement?
- Do professionals have increased access to professional development opportunities?
- Are professionals able to make meaningful changes/enhancements to their early learning environments to support children’s experiences?
- Are children’s experiences enhanced as a result of the QRIS (at six months, in a year, in two years)?

System level –

- Are we able to attract participants to enroll into our QRIS program?
- Are there proper support structures in place to support participants?
- Is there adequate funding to support participants make meaningful and sustainable quality improvement efforts?
- Are parents able to clearly identify quality differences among programs?
- Are parents using information from the QRIS to make informed decisions?
- Have we engaged all of the stakeholders in implementing the system?
- Have we created the foundation for increased public support and awareness of high-quality early learning?

We will evaluate *Steps to Thrive* by answering the above questions, using data gathered from Environmental Ratings Scales, observations, and interviews and surveys of parents, professionals, and coaches. In addition, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. has been contracted by the Gates Foundation to conduct an overall evaluation of the White Center Early Learning Initiative, including the implementation of a QRIS project. Mathematica has partnered with the University of Washington to conduct annual ERS assessments of participating programs for the ten years of the overall Initiative.

37. What funding sources exist or are suggested to finance and sustain the recommended structure of QRIS?

While it is not the recommendation of the White Center Planning Team, there is understanding that one of the biggest untapped sources of funds is parent fees. Again, it is not the suggestion of the team that this be utilized within the framework of Washington’s QRIS model. However, we felt it important to acknowledge that we are aware this of this particular source.

According to the NCCIC, throughout the country, the majority of the QRIS systems are supported through Federal Child Care and Development Fund monies. Other sources include:

- Other Federal sources, including TANF and Social Security Block Grant
- Tax revenue
- Tobacco settlement
- State Child Care Quality funding
- State ECEAP and Federal Head Start funding if programs are shepherded to offer preschool and wrap-around child care together
- USDA and other nutrition programs
- EPSDT Administrative match for Medicaid referral
- Early Head Start
- State Seasonal Child Care

Within Washington, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction used to have small pots of funds for ECE professional development, etc., which may currently still be available. Also, additional research funds, like the funds that the National QRIS Consortium is hoping to secure from some other national funders could be targeted on a consortium of states hoping to test some approaches. With Alaska set to pilot their QRIS model in 08-09, this could be the beginnings of a possible consortium in the Pacific Northwest. We see Region X Head Start as being able to assist in the development of this consortium.

We have included a list of potential early childhood education funding sources that was compiled in 2005. While some of this data may be out of date, we felt it important to share with DEL as they explore funding sources as well as information to include in the DEL QRIS report to the Legislature.