

Olympic Educational Service District 114

Bremerton, WA

Kitsap QRIS Design Phase Report

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OESD 114

*Serving the
Kitsap & Olympic Peninsulas*

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BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

In 2007, Governor Chris Gregoire and the Washington State Legislature called for a voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for Washington to improve the quality of child care and give parents access to more information about quality early learning.

The QRIS will be a voluntary statewide system that provides incentives and resources for child care providers to improve the quality of their programs while offering parents valuable information about child care programs available in their community. The ultimate goal is to help ensure all children are safe, healthy, nurtured, learning, and having fun in child care as they prepare for kindergarten. The Department of Early Learning (DEL) will build one statewide rating system for Washington based on input from parents, child care providers, and communities about what kind of system they want and how best to deliver information about quality opportunities for their children.¹

Kitsap County is one of six pilot communities around the state participating in the QRIS Design Phase. The purpose of this report is to share with DEL the information we gathered in Kitsap County along with our recommendations for how a QRIS would work best in our local community. The structure of our report follows the DEL report template, which asks 37 questions in 10 categories. The responses to the questions were developed by Kitsap County parents, providers, and other interested community members committed to creating a QRIS that helps families ensure that their children will be loved and their development will be nurtured while they are in care. Our report incorporates quotes and anecdotal information from these parents, providers, and other community members formatted as in the example below.

Creativity in program development and presentation should be rewarded, so a one-size-fits-all approach should be avoided at all costs. Furthermore, there needs to be a recognition that since there is not just one way to learn, quality might look very different from one setting to another...Standards should be flexible enough to accommodate the continuing accumulation of knowledge about how children learn...
(Child Care Center Director)

INTRODUCTION

Over the past five months, a Kitsap Pilot Project work group of approximately 25 dedicated individuals who met on a regular basis to discuss our community's recommendations for the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The work group members thoroughly explored information about other QRIS programs now being implemented around the country, available tools and resources, and current local models that are being used effectively and actively to promote quality child care. We ensured that the diversity of our community was reflected in our recommendations by including input from tribal, military, faith-based, corporate, Head Start/ECEAP, family child care, foster care, and non-profit programs as well as from school

¹ From Department of Early Learning QRIS web site: <http://www.del.wa.gov/partnerships/qrisc/>

districts, agencies, early learning coalitions, special education service providers, and health care providers. We gathered broad input across the community from parents, providers, agency and government staff, professional development professionals, and others with vested interest in the process using a variety of means to ensure all that had a vested interest in the process were able to participate. For example, solicited and collected input by phone and the Internet (a special “pbwiki” blog and Zoomerang surveys), in focus groups, and in regular work group sessions and other informal meetings. We also solicited input from and reported monthly on our progress to local early learning groups including the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Bremerton, the Kitsap-Olympic Early Learning Everyone’s Welcome (ELEW) coalition, Kitsap Interagency Coordinating Council (KICC), the Readiness-to-Learning Consortium, and the Olympic-Kitsap Regional Early Learning Partnership.

Olympic Educational Service District No. 114 and our partners in this process are pleased to submit our findings and recommendations to DEL. We look forward to a continued partnership with DEL as we work towards the design and implementation of a Quality Rating & Improvement System that best meets the needs of children and families in Washington State.

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?

The best way to gauge and follow children’s learning and developmental status is by conversing with their families and any other primary caregivers. Those who love and care for the children, who spend the most time with the child, and upon whom the child depends for love and care, are the best sources of information about what is really going on in the child’s life and development. These primary and vital relationships are critical to the child’s well-being, and must be honored and respected in every phase of the QRIS process.

In addition, there are numerous sources of information and tools that describe normal developmental stages for each age group and can be used for assessments. Of course, we know that each child is unique and progresses through developmental and relational stages differently. Nonetheless, these developmental and relational stages provide a point for gauging a child’s developmental status when they first enter care. Ongoing observation and periodic more formal assessments can be used to document progress.

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

Our community uses a variety of tools and methods to monitor and document children’s progress over time, including:

- Observations by family and other caregivers (Objective)
- Anecdotal information from teachers, child care providers and primary care givers (Subjective)
- Assessments (Objective)

The critical piece is the starting point, which typically is an assessment of where the child is at when they first enter care. Then ongoing assessment over time allows us to determine whether the child is making adequate progress, and if not, to consider seeking additional resources.

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

Yes, some do, while others have serious reservations about some aspects of the Benchmarks. It is difficult to say whether the document is used by the majority in our community.

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

Some educators in our community use the Benchmarks as a resource guide for planning developmentally appropriate activities and instruction for their classes. Used in conjunction with other tools such as the ITERS and ECERS, the Benchmarks can be used to help plan learning activities suited to the individual needs of each child. The Benchmarks also provide standards to refer to in discussions with parents and others who work with children; they can provide a “neutral” point of reference for conversations with parents about specific concerns and for ideas about how to help the child grow in this area. Finally, the Benchmarks can be a resource in conversations with parents and kindergarten teachers about school readiness.

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

The best strategy is to ensure a holistic approach, which is emphasized in trainings offered to educators. For examples, STARS and other early childhood trainings offered by various agencies in our community include topics to ensure that programs consider the “whole child.”

Since training and technical support are processes rather than an isolated events, reflective consultation and mentoring should be ongoing to help providers develop the skills needed to assist children in achieving their development goals.

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?

From our conversations with early childhood educators in our community, each teacher considers the cultural needs diversity of her or his children and adapts and differentiates for each child.

*We ask families to look at the indicators and activities and give examples of these indicators and activities that match their family’s values and culture.
(Family Child Care Provider)*

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

Ultimately, the individual teacher/provider needs to make the cultural adjustments to their individual program and child, since of course not all members of any one culture have identical needs.

Strategies that our providers have found effective include:

- Helping families feel welcome in the classroom.
- Learning and using words of greeting in the family’s language, if non-English.
- Openly communicating with families about their values and activities and looking for ways to integrate those, if appropriate, into the classroom setting.
- Working with consultants. (Licensing requires centers to hire a consultant if more than 5% of the children are Native American).
- Using online information, for example from the DEL web site, to become more familiar with culturally appropriate expectations and best practices.

Additional strategies that could be developed to help in this area include:

- Providing inexpensive alternative training options such as “thumb drives” with topics that pertain to cultural diversity as well as other topics. These could be made available to staff to use when needed.
- Developing a new resource for teachers/providers with general suggestions and ideas about how to support different cultures in the child care / classroom setting. This resource could be made available on a website designed as part of a reference library on relevant topics.

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

Strategies that we have found effective in our community include:

- Hiring bi-lingual staff (where available, consult with Human Resources for strategies for hiring bi-lingual staff).
- Making available forms that are translated into the family’s language.
- Enlisting family members or interpreters to translate.
- Using pictures, icons, sign language for communication.
- Engaging in face-to-face communication as much as possible, so parents can read expressions and body language.
- Being aware of and appropriately responding to body language. Use facial expressions and body language appropriate for establishing a trustful relationship with the family.
- Using resources such as “Babel Fish,” a web-based application which machine translates text or web pages from one of several languages into another.
- Honoring the primary language of the family. For example, talk to families about the importance and value of building language development in the child’s primary language.

For example, encourage families to share nursery rhymes and songs in their own language with their children.

*I can speak a bit of three other languages and sometimes use Spanish, German, and Norwegian during song and circle times. I also have my daughters, who both speak fluent Spanish, occasionally use that language during story telling time.
(Family Home Provider)*

INCLUSION OF ALL CHILDREN

*We do not turn away these families, but actually work very hard to welcome them. We provide specific annual training in a Special Ed area to our staff.
We have developed a culture of acceptance.*

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

Structural

- For center-based programs, consult with Human Resource for hiring strategies to recruit staff skilled in working with special needs children.
- Continue to offer STARS training to providers through a wide variety of sources including early learning and child care programs, colleges and educational institutions, as well as programs offered via computer or video broadcast that incorporate modules on working with children with special needs.
- Develop “thumb drive” and web-based courses that can be used by staff. These courses could be made available on the website along with other resource information for relevant topics such as cultural diversity, behavior, and child development.
- Work directly with Special Education contracted providers to develop and use IEPs to plan and deliver services in the least restrictive environment: the child care center, child care home, or pre-school class.
- Garner the support of Washington State legislators needed to fund QRIS specialists to provide consultation to staff working with special needs students. On-site consultation – where the specialist travels to sites as needed – is preferred, but access to consultation also needs to be available by phone, the Internet, or other alternatives. Funds for additional staff should be allocated to contract for temporary additional classroom assistance when needs of individual children interfere with the learning of the majority of children in the classroom.
- Provide an online directory of resource providers who have children with special needs.
- Assign the responsibility to, and provide funding for, CCR&R to act as a resource for providers in meeting language and emotional needs of children.
- Develop a “Benchmarks-like” framework that providers can adapt, adjust, or modify for use with children with disabilities. Without a common framework, it is very hard to assist children with disabilities.

Process

- Establish/enhance collaborations with families and other primary caregivers, the people who best understand their children’s needs.
- Establish/enhance collaborations with Holly Ridge Center (Kitsap County’s IDEA Part C provider), School Districts, other early intervention / special education programs, and/or health care providers to plan and deliver services designed to best meet the needs of individual children in care.
- Employ reflective consultation and mentoring by supervisors and licensing staff.

I have successfully cared for children who were ADD/ADHD, fetal alcohol syndrome, and drug addicted at birth. (Family Home Provider)

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

In addition to the strategies listed under Question 6, we recommend:

- Engaging / collaborating with natural leaders in the family’s community (local groups, such as El Centro de la Familia, the Bremerton African-American Ministerial Association, and churches).
- Providing links to and collaborating with the local Literacy Council and ESL classes offered by child care providers and other agencies.

9. What consultation services or systems are recommended to support educators’ work with inclusion?

Our recommendations include:

- Hiring mental health specialists on contract to work with pilot sites, possibly in collaboration with contracted local agencies.
- Hiring special education consultants with expertise in room set up and environmental strategies to work with staff in creating environments that promote inclusion of special needs students.
- Whenever possible, delivering services to special needs children in the least restrictive environment.
- Using a common curriculum, procedures, and routines for *all* children, adjusting as needed for individual children who have disabilities.

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?

Our recommendations include:

- Encouraging and finding ways for providers and early learning teachers to establish/enhance relationships with K-12 personnel – teachers, principals, and administrators as well as support staff such as bus drivers and office managers. Ideally, contractually funding additional hours for K-12 personnel, similar to in-service days, to

allow for the exchange of information between child care / preschool and school staff. Such information exchange can greatly assist families and children in making a smooth transition from pre-K to Kindergarten.

- Educating school district staff on the importance and benefits of early learning as well as jointly defining the skills children need upon entering Kindergarten.
- Establishing a “buddy” system between parents experienced with the Kindergarten enrollment process and parents new to the process of transitioning their children from preschool to Kindergarten.
- Encouraging participation of providers and Kindergarten teachers in early learning school-based programs such as *READY! For Kindergarten* and other kindergarten readiness / transition activities. Other activities in our community include kindergarten and preschool registration “fairs” and summer programs designed to help connect families with Kindergarten teachers prior to the start of the school year.
- Building a Preschool (or Birth)-to-Third Grade system of support and work towards aligning services, planning for seamless transitions, establishing standards, and building resources.

In the text Home, School, and Community Relations there is a focus on the importance of attachments with parents, caregivers and the children. “The presence of the mother or other primary caregiver to whom a child is attached serves as a secure base from which to move out and respond to other aspects of the environment.” In the class we discussed this as how the child/children see us relate to the parents and visa versa will build the trust and security for the whole environment for the child. It doesn’t seem that we need to develop a universal streamlined approach for Birth to Third Grade as much as we need to put a focus in our businesses to be building a relationship with the parents and a bond with the children so they can learn to trust. We then teach them how we like our schools and view school in a positive way. (Center Director)

PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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

The best way to involve parents and families in improving early learning is for early learning educators to be proactive, inviting families to participate in activities such as assisting in the classroom and serving on committees/councils and including them in decision-making and planning. It is also important to provide parents with relevant and easy-to-understand information that will strengthen their understanding of child development and bolster their confidence as their child’s first teacher. By nurturing and fostering parenting skills and educating them about the importance of early learning, parents will be prepared to share their knowledge and experience with others. (In our environmental scan, parents indicated that a major source of information about child development and parenting comes from friends and family.)

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

Policies and program that would help increase parents' demand for high quality early learning might include:

- A QRIS that is “parent-friendly,” that is, understandable and relevant to the family’s culture and individual needs.
- New or expanded programs that increase awareness of parents and the community-at-large on the importance and benefits of quality early learning including such areas as reduced crime, better success in school, and improved quality of life for children and families. Existing programs include Born Learning and READY! For Kindergarten. Build awareness of what quality is as opposed to dictating rigid expectations.
- An equitable system that makes quality child care affordable for *all* families so that that children in middle income homes (between 175% and about 300% of poverty level) have the same access to quality care as those who receive subsidies and those from high-income homes. One strategy would be to make tax credits available for parents who select and use quality child care.
- Ensure that readily available and up-to-date information about quality care options in the community is available in a format relevant and accessible to parents. Parents in focus groups recommended face-to-face options in addition to the Internet and telephone.

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?

- Reinforce and honor the truth that parents are their child’s first teacher.
- Identify barriers that keep parents from participating in activities promoting children’s learning. Solicit input from parents on effective strategies in engaging them in the process of early learning.
- Bolster parents’ confidence in their skills by assisting them in identifying and helping to provide resources and skills they need to parent more effectively. Develop a network of parents as mentors. Provide resources and assistance at times that are compatible with parents’ busy lives – web based and text messaging, for example.
- Develop a multi-faceted program targeted to parents with an emphasis on building awareness of quality early learning attributes and resources. Events could include early learning fairs and other activities designed to meet parents where they are.
- Provide parent community centers – physical locations designed for families that foster a sense of community, with hours available in the evening and on weekends.

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

The Kitsap County parents who responded to the parent survey conducted as part of our Environmental Scan expressed the following levels of interest in the types of information below:

Academic Development

- Ways to support their child’s early reading skills.

- Ways to support their child’s development at different ages.
- Ways to help their child start kindergarten ready to do his or her best.

Social / Cognitive Development

- Comparisons between my child and others, in developmental stages each year.
- Ways to help my child improve their math skills.
- Writing skills.
- Other places for my child to meet other children their own age outside of school.
- Peer pressure/not as good as others at early age.
- First Teacher newsletter/developmental cards.
- READY! for Kindergarten program.
- Born Learning Playbook.
- FEL brochure – Getting School READY!
- Information on learning styles.
- Early identification of special needs.
- Ways to help their child get along with others.
- Ways to help their child manage his or her emotions.
- Early childhood leisure and recreation options.

Parent support/education

- Information on choosing a child care facility that parents can trust; how to find out if a provider has had problems with their license and why.
- Parenting support: forums, parenting classes, other.
- Services and resources for parents concerned about their children’s development or behavior.
- Help build connections with other like-minded moms and dads; programs, events, and places to go in the community that are designed for families.
- More information about options for children’s health, so parents can make informed decisions regarding learning, development, health, and related issues.
- Information about local doctors and dentists who are child friendly.
- Increased availability of drop-in child care.
- More resources/support for kith and kin, grandparents raising grandchildren, and foster parents.
- Child care resources for special needs children.
- Education on ways to help their child have a healthy diet and be physically fit; physical activities for children.
- Information on positive child discipline and how to handle problem behaviors.

Cultural diversity

- Availability of cultural/multi-cultural experiences.
- Resources / support for bi-racial children.
- Availability of translated material.
- Program information about cultural relevance.

For the 14 years that I have been a family home provider, I have found most parents tend to be most concerned about hours of service, rates, and ratios. I will usually mention my education, preschool program, homework assistance, and memberships to educational organizations. I inform prospective parents about the STARS continued educational requirements and show them my file of certificates if they desire.
(Family Home Provider)

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

Our community has had several recent initiatives that been quite effective based on feedback from the community. They include:

- School District websites are starting to include information and links to early learning resources. This should be expanded, both online and at schools.
- The *READY! for Kindergarten* programs in South Kitsap and Bremerton School District are proving to be quite a draw to our community. This program has attracted participation by the Regional Library System, Kiwanis and the Rotary, and has included support from high school students and senior citizens.
- Parents enjoy the Parenting Matters “First Teacher” newsletter and developmental cards that provide parents with age-specific, community-specific resources. Other popular sources of information include child care providers; home visitors; early learning programs; the faith community; families, friends, and other “word-of-mouth” sources; parenting classes; mailings, newspapers, television, radio, the telephone directory, and the Internet (including online forums, such as Yahoo groups); libraries; and health care providers.

Recommendations for additional efforts include:

- Meet with district administrators to discuss ways for the K-12 system to be more involved. Currently schools are prohibited by law from maintaining a list of phone numbers for preschool programs and other providers. This restriction limits the schools’ ability to partner with families of preschool children, child care providers, and preschools. A change to this law would eliminate a significant barrier to coordinating seamless systems and services for families, especially those with limited literacy and English language skills, as well as those who are new to the community.
- Parents suggested that early learning information also be displayed on posters/banners and media that are highly visible in the community, such as healthcare provider offices.

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

It is important to educate all sectors of the community about the benefits of quality early learning to children, families, and society. It is critical to make sure that parents know that learning begins at birth. Provide readily available tools and resources throughout the community to help parents. For example, provide books and information about the importance of reading *everywhere* that families are, such as in grocery stores and doctor’s offices, reinforcing the message throughout the community.

It is also critical to invest the time and effort in building relationships with community leaders. Invite them to participate in planning and decision-making. Provide ways to acknowledge and honor their contribution publicly. Provide feedback on how their contributions led to successes, so they feel a connection between the support (\$\$) they provided and actual results in children.

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

One of Kitsap's shining examples is the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the Bremerton School District. Local service child care providers are linked with each other and with the school district to provide a continuum of services for families. Members receive curricula, supplies, on-site technical assistance and support and training opportunities as incentives for participating. Another great example is OESD's Child Care Connections (CCC). This program delivers Head Start/Early Head Start services in child care centers and family homes. Contracted participants receive additional financial resources, on-site technical support, and access to free training. Three key elements help both of these programs succeed: an emphasis on building and nurturing mutually trustful relationships, on-going support, and consistency.

Currently, child care providers are connected by organizations such as ECCE, CCC, CCR&R, KAEYC (Kitsap County's affiliate of the Washington State Association for the Education of Young Children), the local Child Care Directors Association, and through professional development activities such as workshops, training, seminars, and classes. Providers need to have opportunities to meet when it is most convenient for them, typically in the evenings and on weekends. Meeting notes could be made available through alternative means such as on thumb drives and information and ideas could be shared using technologies like online blogs and forums that providers and parents can easily access. Written information could also be made available through the newspapers, newsletters, and KAEYC.

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

This is an ongoing challenge for which we do not yet have a permanent solution. We do know that we need more education/public awareness of the importance of early learning and must provide meaningful ways for community partners to be involved. To get the word out, we need to participate in meetings of local Chambers of Commerce, service organizations, especially the Kiwanis and Lions organizations since their focus is on early learning, as well as Rotary and other civic, local business, philanthropic, and faith-based communities and agencies.

At present, the Olympic-Kitsap Regional Early Learning Partnership is funded to develop a messaging system for heightening awareness of the importance of early learning and local early learning projects so as to attract interest and participation from the community. The Foundation for Early Learning is providing technical assistance to the Partnership for developing a sustainable funding plan for early learning activities in our region, including Kitsap County.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

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

Industry-wide, the best way to ensure health and safety (H&S) for all children in early learning environments is to first have clear standards/regulations for health and safety that are consistent throughout the entire industry. Training on these requirements should then be incorporated into professional development plans.

At the individual child care facility, it is critical to educate all staff on the importance of health and safety issues and the specific health and safety requirements

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

Our provider community recommends that there be enhanced collaboration between child care licensing and health inspectors. One solution suggested would be to develop a rubric clearly defining expectations and requirements.

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

The federal Head Start Performance Standard Section 1304.22, Child health and safety, and state ECEAP Performance Standards, Section D: Health, Safety, and Nutrition, provide good models for industry-wide H&S standards, although portions are not applicable to the private center-based or family home child care setting. Further, much is redundant with what is already required by state licensing regulations. The Washington State Skills Standards for child care providers sets the following standards for health and safety:²

From Washington State Skills Standards for Infant/Toddler Providers

Implement Health, Safety and Nutrition Practices

- Implement, modify and document a program that meets safety standards.
- Provide a safe, developmentally appropriate indoor and outdoor learning environment.
- Articulate and apply health standards and care.
- Promote wellness through child nutrition practices.
- Maintain sanitary and safe food handling and storage practices.
- Maintain and promote hygienic environment.

² Washington State Skills Standards, <http://www.wa-skills.com/earlychildhood.html>.

From Washington State Skills Standards for Family Child Care Providers

Create and Maintain a Safe and Healthy Family Child Care Home

- Develop and implement safety procedures and precautions.
- Develop and apply health standards.
- Maintain the physical site.
- Plan and document a nutritionally balanced food program.
- Prepare and serve a variety of foods that meet the needs of children in care.
- Maintain sanitary and safe food handling and storage practices.

Our providers noted that it would be helpful if Health District nurses would review provider-developed health plans at no cost to the providers. Similarly, having an appropriate agency review emergency preparedness plans would be valuable.

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?

Using the same methods as described previously for involving the community in early learning quality, incorporate health and safety into community awareness initiatives with the message that a child that is not healthy and does not feel safe cannot learn. Work to ensure that community leaders are advocating at the highest level for children’s healthy and safety to be paramount in policy-making.

Have appropriate agencies review provider-prepared health plans and emergency plans as discussed previously. Promote families’ awareness of available health care resources, including Washington State’s “Basic Health” insurance program, and help connect families to a “medical home.”

CURRICULUM APPROACH AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

NOTE: NAEYC and NAFCC are excellent sources of information on curriculum and quality. Their publications should be foundational resources for QRIS development work in this area.

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

We offer the following general observations about any tool to measure quality of classroom environments:

- While specific strategies will be situation-specific (center-based versus family home), “quality” should be the same. We cannot have different quality expectations depending on the setting. In addition, “Quality” does not automatically equate to an academic degree.
- Make sure that the tool assesses the environment, *not* children.

1. Structural. As for the Health & Safety arena previously discussed, the federal Head Start Performance Standards (Sections 1304.52 Human resources management and 1306.20 Program Staffing) and Washington State ECEAP Standards provide good starting points for developing industry-wide standards for quality learning environments, although again, portions are not applicable to the private center-based or family home child care setting. In addition, the Washington State Skills Standards for child care providers sets the following standards for “Commit to Professional Development:”³

- Maintain current knowledge of the field.
- Identify and build on professional career goals.
- Build community partnerships and public awareness of early learning issues.
- Network with other service providers to develop a community responsive to the needs of children, families and staff.
- Contribute to a professional team environment.

2. Process. There are multiple environmental rating systems that can be used to assess process quality such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS), the School Age Environment Rating Scale (SAERS), and the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS). Our QRIS Pilot Work Group examined these and the CLASS, Creative Curriculum, and CCC’s mentoring models. The Pilot Work Group invested a great deal of effort on reviewing several of the existing, recognized curricula and other tools used to deliver and assess early learning quality. Table 1 is a summary of our research in this area. Curricula evaluated were:

- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Presented by Lorraine Olsen, Director, OESD Head Start/Early Head Start/ECEAP.
- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS). Presented by Ilene Guinn, Head Start / Early Childhood Development Coordinator
- Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS). Presented by Robin Williams, Early Head Start Coordinator.
- Washington State Skills Standards. Presented by Gayle Dilling, Early Childhood Education Program Director, Olympic College.
- Creative Curriculum and mentoring. Presented by Peggy Brown, Early Childhood Assistant Coordinator.

The Child Care Checklist that CCR&R provides to families looking for child care lists the following attributes to look for:

- Caregivers appear to enjoy what they do.

³ Washington State Skills Standards, <http://www.wa-skills.com/earlychildhood.html>.

- Positive discipline techniques are used.
- Children are treated as individuals.
- Caregivers comfort the children when needed.

The Washington State Skills Standards for Family Child Care Providers & Infant/Toddler Providers lists the following strategies and behaviors that providers should use to ensure a quality environment for children:

Meet Each Child's Individual Needs

- Interact with each child to nurture self-esteem and optimize learning.
- Provide an environment that supports the whole child's development.
- Guide children's developing independence, self-control and social interactions.
- Provide an inclusive environment that promotes respect for individual and cultural differences.
- Provide ongoing assessment and evaluation.

Support Each Child's Growth and Development

- Interact with children to nurture a positive self concept.
- Provide a home environment that supports the whole child's developmental and individual needs.
- Guide children's developing independence, self-control and social skills.

Foster and Nurture Attachment While Respecting the Significance of the Parent and Child Relationship

- Develop and practice strategies that promote healthy attachment for the child.
- Provide emotional support to parents and other caregivers to promote healthy attachment.
- Provide and model supportive, culturally aware, responsive and affectionate care.

Additional sources:

- National Program for Playground Safety.
- CDA program.

OESD 114 QRIS Design Phase Report

Table 1. Kitsap Quality Rating and Improvement System Pilot Project Work Group
Early Learning Evaluation Tool Comparison

CURRICULUM →	FAMILY COLLEGE PRESS (ITERS, ECERS)	CREATIVE CURRICULUM	CLASS	SKILL STANDARDS
QUALITY MEASURES ↓				
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT				
Physical Environment	Space and Furnishings	Physical Environment	Positive Climate Classroom Organization	Create & maintain a safe & healthy environment
CHILD DEVELOPMENT				
Cognitive	Learning Activities	Cognitive Development Learning and Problem solving Logical Thinking Representation and Symbolic Thinking	Instructional learning formats Concept Development Quality Feedback	Concept Development
Social / Emotional	Social Development	Pro social Behavior	Behavior Management Positive climate, Regard for Student perspectives	Nurture self esteem
Health / Development	Health and Nutrition	Physical Development -Gross Motor -Fine Motor		Health standards, addresses nutrition
Self Sufficiency	Self Sufficiency	Responsibility for self and others Sense of Self	Encourage student interests	Nurture self esteem
Early Literacy	Early Literacy	Language Development Listening and speaking Reading and Writing	Language modeling	Provide developmentally appropriate practices

Table 1. Kitsap Quality Rating and Improvement System Pilot Project Work Group
Early Learning Evaluation Tool Comparison (cont.)

CURRICULUM →	FAMILY COLLEGE PRESS (ITERS, ECERS)	CREATIVE CURRICULUM	CLASS	SKILL STANDARDS
QUALITY MEASURES ↓				
PROGRAM				
Structure / Routine	Program Structure Routine and Schedule	Routine and Structure	Positive Climate	Create routine that supports development
Curriculum / Activities			Instructional learning formats	Utilize curriculum resources & learning materials
Individualization			Maximize learning opportunities	Identify & support individual learning styles
Inclusion / Special Needs	Provisions for Exceptional Children		Interaction with students	Recognize & support emergent situations
Culturally Relevant				Exhibit respect & appreciation for each family & their culture
STAFF				
Teacher / Child Interaction	Teacher Child Interaction		Positive Climate; Teacher sensitivity; Quality of feedback Productivity Regard for student perspective; Student engagement	Interact with children to optimize learning.
Staff Development Opportunities	Professional Growth Opportunities		Offers a tool to provide teacher development at all stages	Develop personally & professionally, networking, mentoring, identify & build on professional goals

Table 1. Kitsap Quality Rating and Improvement System Pilot Project Work Group
Early Learning Evaluation Tool Comparison (cont.)

CURRICULUM →	FAMILY COLLEGE PRESS (ITERS, ECERS)	CREATIVE CURRICULUM	CLASS	SKILL STANDARDS
QUALITY MEASURES ↓				
STAFF (cont.)				
Staff Health and Well being	Balancing personal and care giving responsibilities			Create & maintain a professional team environment
PARENT INVOLVEMENT				
	Relationship with parent	Family Involvement		Support the Child & Family
ASSESSMENT				
		Assessment		Self assessment & mentor assessment
CHILD OUTCOMES				
		Child Outcomes	Student Engagement	Meet children’s needs. Student interaction

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

Several of our providers use the “Creative Curriculum.” There are many other curricula that can and do fit well with individual early learning and child care programs. In Kitsap County, providers do not support the concept that a specific curriculum, or even limited menu of curricula, be required for QRIS. We value the flexibility for providers to choose a curriculum that honors the individual families’ and providers’ strengths, culture, faith traditions, and other unique factors that preserve the unique character of our individual families and programs.

Any approach to delivering the curriculum should start with an assessment of where the child currently is and work to take that child to the next level, rather than focus on “force-fitting” a child into a predetermined level based solely on their chronological age.

Finally, providers in our community believe the approach to delivering the curriculum is just as or more important than the curriculum itself. The *relationship* the provider has with the child and the experiences the child has during child care are the critical factors. Further, many providers, through their innate nurturing nature and experience, intuitively know how to interact with children in a loving way regardless of the curriculum.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING OF PROVIDERS, DIRECTORS, AND STAFF

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

From our Environmental Scan, we know that STARS training is the most widely accessed of the several professional development opportunities available in our community. Other opportunities include community/technical colleges, other training available from CCR&R, distance learning programs, “Building Bridges,” and professional conferences. We know that it is important to provide multiple options and venues for professional development, such as classroom experience, opportunities for higher education, video conferencing, and “traveling” training programs that deliver training on-site. A specific current need is for more online courses that can contribute to CDA, Accreditation, AA, and BA requirements. It is also important to provide professional development at an affordable cost.

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?

Many tested, proven standards are available that can provide the framework for professional development and continuing education. They include the CDA curriculum, NAEYC and NAFCC Accreditation Standards, Head Start Performance Standards, and the Washington

State Skill Standards. (There is a need for training/accreditation standards for child care center administrators.)

Efforts to develop standardized early education professional development should first evaluate existing curricula and standards and select those portions that are applicable to our state. The content should match the position's level of responsibility for child care, teaching, and working with the family. As noted in the response to the previous question, the most beneficial strategy is to make professional development opportunities available in multiple options and venues to accommodate the time and travel constraints of working professionals. Two other strategies that would facilitate professional development in the field are:

- For those that want to pursue a Bachelor's degree, the ability to be rewarded credits for prior relevant training and experience by means of, for example, equivalency exams.
- A comprehensive matrix of educational opportunities for early learning professionals showing how each track relates to each other. There is a real need for clear information on how to transition from a certificate to a Bachelor's degree without having to repeat a lot of coursework.

27. What support for programs and educators currently exists and what needs to be developed?

In our Environmental Scan, 136 child care providers responded to questions about support they received and support they need in their early learning environments. From their responses, early educators greatest needs are for assistance with materials, time for professional development, and access to training and technical support. Educators in our community receive information and support from their employers, CCR&R licensors, and other resources such as KAEYC.

The biggest help that could be offered would be to make scholarships for ECE more widely available, especially to those already working in the field. Also, early childhood certificates and degrees should universally provide the means to continue beyond that step. (In the nursing profession there has been a movement in this direction to allow LPN's to become RN's, for example.) No degree or certificate should become a dead end for further advancement.

STAFF COMPENSATION

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

There is a need in Washington State, as there is in other states, for a system that adequately compensates early child hood educators that provide high levels of quality. Compensation should be tied to the QRIS standards, not just formal academic degrees.

Example strategies for compensating some of the quality providers in our community include:

- Child Care Connections (CCC). CCC providers who have a Head Start or ECEAP program in their home or child care center receive monetary support for facilities and materials as well as staff hours for additional required casework and responsibilities.
- Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Bremerton. ECCE is a simple but effective model. Participating providers agree to use the program curriculum, which is selected by the community and to send staff to periodic trainings. In addition, the Director attends the monthly Director’s meeting. In return, the participants receive free educational supplies, on-site technical support, and regular training, and can display a sign identifying the program’s participation in ECCE. There is growing awareness by parents in the community that the “sign” is an indication that the program offers quality services as well as an assurance that this child care program and the school district are working together on behalf of the children in their care.

Suggestions to consider for the state level are:

- Develop a funding plan that incorporates elements that have successfully been used to enhance quality in child care settings such as the ECCE and CCC models described above.
- Develop grant programs that reward a provider’s longevity and commitment to the Child Care profession. Features of the plan could include forgiveness of debt based on years of service.
- Include incentives for ongoing professional development and training of direct service staff, directors, and administrators.

State monies are the most viable resource for ensuring adequate compensation. However, this does not address providers who have only private clients. Further, Washington rates are significantly less than other states. In Kitsap County, providers who accept subsidies receive about \$150 per month less for each DSHS child they accept, and the differential is much more with infants. Further, there is inequity for how school age kids are accounted for. Providers receive only part-day subsidies, but each school age child takes up one licensed slot in a family child care home. This discourages family home providers from accepting school age children and translates to many latchkey kids in the community due to lack of part-time care. Further, there are no grant opportunities for expansion or equipment for family child care providers, as there are for many centers. (Family Home Provider)

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 education administrators, such as child care center directors and/or family child care home providers should be the *leaders* in increasing the quality of early learning environments. This is true in Kitsap County where we have successfully launched several early learning initiatives including *Child Care Connections*, a program that provides both home and center based child care providers models for offering Head Start services as part of their program; the Olympic-Kitsap Regional Early Learning Partnership, which is a regional Early Learning Coalition funded by the Foundation for Early Learning and DEL to plan for systems and services for families with children birth to Age Five; *READY! for Kindergarten*, a program dedicated to promoting community awareness of early literacy through parent education programs that provide research-based toys and education for parents to play intentionally with their child to help get ready for Kindergarten; the Kitsap-Olympic Regional Reading Foundation, funded by Thrive-by-Five to advocate for the importance of reading to children “20 Minutes a Day;” and the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program in the Bremerton School District; and Parenting Matters and their popular *First Teacher* newsletters.

Further, administrators should be not just leaders in the field, but also mentors and models for their staff. New staff may have the education but may not have the practical experience, so it is important for supervisors to be able to model best practices. Directors should also assist in providing regular training; even just one-half to one hour per month of such training can be tremendously effective. STARS should recognize that Center Directors are qualified to provide training to their staff and grant credit for even short “bursts.”

Also needed is a streamlined process for approving ECE and other related training and college-level coursework as continuing education.

New people need continuous/consistent modeling, so that the child receives consistent care regardless of who is there on any particular day. (Observation from a parent)

Center Directors need to be full participants in environmental enhancements. They are the gatekeepers who must lead the way, nurture momentum, find the financial resources, and mete out the emotional rewards that will inspire direct care providers to do the hard work. Further, all early education administrators can help educate parents on the importance of quality child care in laying the foundation for later success in school.

We are the people who are working directly day-to-day with the children and are often the first to recognize both the areas of progress and areas of concern. We can help parents recognize need for assessment of learning disabilities at a young age, which supports effective early intervention. We partner with parents in fostering the growth and development of their children.

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

Any strategy for developing leaders must be forward-thinking, considering what our society will look like in five to 10 years, and should incorporate recommendations from those in the field. From our experience, community coalitions can be very effective, but in general a model such as the Bremerton ECCE is much better because it is broader, more formalized, and recognized in the field, which is important for leadership development.

At present, barriers to leadership development in Kitsap County include:

- The lack of an appropriate education “track.” If it existed, such a track would encompass leadership and management skills as well as early childhood learning and development. (It is difficult to get even STARS training that is business/leadership oriented. Western Washington University has a teacher education program that will grant a Bachelors’ in interdisciplinary child development. The Child Care Director’s Association is the only organization to our knowledge that provides anything for management hours for Directors.)
- The lack of industry groups and similar networking systems means that most early educators tend to work in “silos.” (There is a Washington State Family Child Care Association, but no active chapter in Kitsap County at the present.) Leaders and leaders-in-the-making need to be able to connect with other leaders. In groups, natural leaders become evident. If there are no organized groups, however, this does not happen. Ideas for promoting networking include a state directory of child care professionals, periodic video / phone conferences, and blogs.

In addition to an education track and additional opportunities for networking with others in the field, there is a need for a “mentoring/support” system that uses the best professionals in the field to model additional best practices. Better acceptance and results will happen when the mentors/consultants are local persons who have worked directly in the early learning / child care field.

Other ideas for guiding and modeling best practices include:

- Providing videos of best practices and exemplary good child care professionals in action. For example, vignettes showing the mentor working with difficult children would be very helpful.
- Making available online video training, such as that provided by DSHS for prospective foster parents.

A mentor would be very helpful, especially for a new provider. Maybe more so than someone who has been in the field a long time – “seasoned” providers would tend to view a mentor with distrust. Any mentor would need to be someone who had experience with the situation they are mentoring – someone who could share their own experiences / mistakes / successes.

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

Foundational to any effective strategy for promoting shared leadership for administrators and staff is having a set of clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each. Further, management must ensure that the roles, responsibilities, and expectations are clearly communicated. Though finding the time for this communication is challenging in a busy child care setting, taking the time is critical, as is providing time for appropriate staff /professional development so that all persons are equipped with the training required to fulfill their responsibilities. Finally, management must implement strategies to provide continuity through staff transitions.

In addition to understanding mutual roles and responsibilities, specific strategies for sharing leadership in a center setting might include having Lead Teacher and Directors planning curriculum together and discussing policies, procedures, and daily routines.

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

Balancing business viability with quality initiatives is always challenging, even more so in today’s economic downturn. With respect to possible funding from the local community, local giving has been adversely affected by the economy, so it will be more important than ever to effectively communicate the message that donating towards quality early learning will produce tangible benefits down the road, both personally and for the community as a whole. For example, quality early learning supports success in school, which leads to a better educated and trained workforce, which in turn attracts more business to the community.

Another concept that would help is a program that would provide assistance and support to providers with the business end of their operations. A volunteer committee of business advisors, after the Small Business Administration model, would likely be of great assistance. Finally, content on business practices could be incorporated into STARS or other training, including video training.

Providers are more likely to stay in the business if they feel supported; if they have peers to talk to.

Many natural “nurturers” are attracted to the field because they love children. However, it can be difficult for nurturers to ask for money that is owed, for example. This situation can drive some of the best people out of the field.

Some parents are just over the limit to be eligible for subsidies, but still are not where they should be in income. Some family home providers in our community allow families to compensate in other ways, by providing reciprocal services, such as lawn-mowing or other tasks.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

33. What should the structure of QRIS look like?

First, QRIS should *not* be directly linked to licensing or a provider’s ability to meet the minimum licensing requirements. Instead, the QRIS should resemble accreditation in its approach, which is not required for licensing but provides a recognized “value-added” attribute for providers. Unlike accreditation, however, QRIS should require little to no out-of-pocket expense for participants.

Our recommended QRIS would:

- Be family/child-focused and relationship-based. Information needs to be easy for parents to understand and available in a variety of formats and languages.
- Ask providers to demonstrate how they are providing quality rather dictating another set of formal requirements.
- Allow providers to select the curriculum that best supports social, emotional, physical and cognitive development (“whole child”) of the children in their unique child care / classroom setting.
- Be organized in three distinct divisions: licensing, mentoring/support for QRIS, and data/recordkeeping, each with clearly defined and separate but mutually dependent roles. The three divisions will work as a team. Licensing’s role will be to monitor providers for meeting “minimum” licensing requirements. The mentors will provide the guidance/tools to providers for increasing quality. The record-keeping division will maintain a state-wide database for information such as status of provider licenses, permits, and educational achievements. An effective system of communicating among the three divisions will ensure information is readily available and up to date.
- Provide training for all adult participants (evaluators, trainers, providers, mentors) on respectful ways of participating in the QRIS process.
- Ensure that evaluators are thoroughly trained and skilled in the use of whatever tool(s) are used for assessing quality.
- Use mentors / consultants to provide technical assistance and support by establishing and maintaining relationships with providers. Mentors / consultants

would deliver technical assistance and support using self assessments, reflective consultation, and mentoring.

- Put safeguards in place to ensure QRIS is supportive, not punitive (or easy to for providers to view as punitive).
- Incorporate components and measures to ensure that training and technical support are actually resulting in quality improvement for children. (Feasible measures are being developed by the University of Washington team.)

Responses to Environmental Scan question, “What do you think are some important parts of a Quality Rating and Improvement System?” included:

- *Support*
- *Training & education*
- *Flexibility*
- *A separation of Licensing and QRIS.*
- *Be something attainable – realistic.*
- *Practical technical and financial support for programs seeking to improve themselves. Financial recognition by the state that better quality care costs more and better providers ought to be paid an enhanced vendor rate to cover the additional costs. Bad programs ought to be suspended or closed. Quality ratings ought to be widely available to any interested party.*
- *Encourage that child care workers be educated and encourage them to participate in peer groups to strengthen trust and respect of the career field.*
- *Research based; uses input from people working in the field.*
- *Recognition by the State that quality care costs more to obtain and sustain; so they adjust their reimbursements at a higher rate.*
- *To improve child care statewide.*
- *Not sure we need one.*
- *Well balanced financial support as well as technical.*
- *Focus on social, language, physical & cognitive of the child.*

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

Our review demonstrated that each curriculum / method has its unique strengths, but it was clear that none would be appropriate for all situations and settings. The best solution is often a combination of curriculum and tools that incorporates the best and most appropriate elements of each. Our community told us again and again that there is no “one-size-fits-all” curriculum nor should QRIS dictate curriculum selection.

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

The Washington State Skills Standards provide an excellent model for distinguishing levels of quality. For QRIS, we recommend there be at least five different levels of accomplishment. The challenge will be to develop standards that are clear enough to be

meaningful while flexible enough to be useful throughout the diverse child care community in the State. It will be a challenge for our state to develop standards of quality accounting for the numerous unique characteristics of our diverse communities.

Further, “quality” has many subjective definitions at this point. In order to distinguish the differences in quality, the decision makers and participants need to decide on the fundamental definitions for “quality.” In areas where there is flexibility in the system, it will be important to monitor and measure the factors that lead to improved quality, building on successful approaches and techniques.

Responses to Environmental Scan question, “How would a Quality Rating and Improvement System help you improve the care you provide??” included:

- *Receiving equipment/materials that have been identified as beneficial to classrooms.*
- *Resources/training for all educators to implement in their class room with children & families.*
- *I think it would be another way for families and staff to ensure that they are providing quality childcare within the community.*
- *It would help me see where I may be lacking in areas of my room.*
- *It could potentially give me the ability to raise wages and reduce staff turnover. That, in turn would give the families and children more stability.*
- *Would provide something to reflect back to see areas of success & improvements.*
- *I think I am doing a good job, so I'm not sure.*
- *If it would allow more staff from local agencies (like Resource & Referral) to give on site, one on one training, support, and technical assistance.*
- *Show me my strengths & weaknesses.*
- *Let me know what people want that I'm not doing.*
- *It would give guidelines and standards to work towards.*
- *Better knowledge of what you are doing gives you the chance to do better.*
- *My frustration is with the school system and not addressing where the child is until 3rd grade.*
- *It would offer better information to parents and enable them to make a more informed decision on their child's care.*
- *I honestly fear that this whole QRIS thing will limit us rather than help us improve. Students whose focus is just on getting A's are not often students who approach learning opportunities with a thirst to know and grow. I fear an industry being taught to jump through QRIS hoops instead of one driven by the desire to serve the best interests of the children in its care. QRIS risks substituting self-seeking desires for the desire to serve children well.*

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?

In reality, it will be difficult to attribute any outcome to QRIS due to the many, many variables involved as well as the lack of an identical “control group” for comparison. As we are aware, the goal of the UW team of researchers during the next phase of the pilot (July 2008 to June 2009) is to identify “feasible” measures of quality to adopt when the QRIS is implemented.

Nonetheless, the best strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of the QRIS will be individual child outcome based, on a pre-test (where the child is when they enter care), ongoing evaluations to measure progress during the time the child is in care, and a post-test before leaving care. Progress would be monitored for each individual child, and success would be measured on a continuum, relative to where the child was at the start. For example, a child that entered care 1-1/2 years behind in development and progresses to only six months behind within six months has successfully achieved demonstrable progress. While such progress is not conclusively attributable to QRIS – this progress might have occurred in the absence of QRIS – it supports a conclusion that QRIS is effective in this case.

Any program to monitor the effectiveness of QRIS is likely to involve identification of how long children were involved in QRIS, information that would need to go with them wherever they went in the State. Such a tracking system could discourage parents from participating. One of our parents stated that she would want to see a parent report.

Other ideas for indicators that could be used to track and evaluate the effectiveness of QRIS include:

- Numbers of parents who are using QRIS and for what age ranges?
- Numbers of children identified for special education due to general developmental delays (vice health). An effective and widely-implemented QRIS should also result in fewer children identified for special education.
- QRIS assessments –How does the assessment change over time? How is QRIS helping providers increase quality?
- Evaluation of school readiness of incoming kindergartners. (Requires coordination with the school districts.)
- Feedback from providers, mentors, and parents on how QRIS is working.

Over the long term, an effective and widely-implemented QRIS should mean higher graduation rates, lower crime rates, and other improvements in social indicators. Employment statistics will show that parents are taking less time off work for child-related concerns. On the professional side, there will be lower turnover of people working in the child care / early learning field.

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

We recommend that Washington State follow the example of other states that have prioritized early learning and fully funded the QRIS program. Another possible funding vehicle is the establishment of a state-wide philanthropic foundation with the single purpose of funding QRIS, similar to foundations devoted to medical cures or other charitable causes. Another idea is to encourage/incentivize the formation of privatized early learning centers throughout the community, which could be used by families for social gathering, recreation, and education.