

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS):  
Ventura County Office of Education  
Strengths and Challenges of Implementation of  
Quality Initiatives at the Local Level


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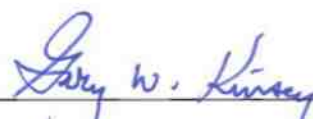
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Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS): Ventura County Office of Education Strengths and Challenges of Implementation of Quality Initiatives at the County Level

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine Ventura County Office of Education's implementation of the Quality Rating Improvement System. The research will outline the core of the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), the five-tier matrix point system, support systems, monitoring of quality programming, participation incentives and program ratings. In addition, the participant's motivation and reaction to the Quality Rating and Improvement System will be considered. This project aims to determine the strengths of the system as well as the areas for growth. In addition, the study will examine the availability of resources that focus on improvement measures for programs not selected to participate in QRIS in Ventura County.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Statement of Matter**

The first five years of life set the foundation for life long learning. A recent report indicates, “A baby’s early experiences shape the brain’s architecture into a foundation for learning, health and eventual success in the workplace (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2011)”. Furthermore, a 2007 study completed by RAND researchers reveals, “High quality preschool programs have been demonstrated to advance school readiness, raise achievement, and improve other education outcomes (Rand Research, 2007).” The reason this study is important is because research shows that quality early childhood experience promotes future academic success. According to a new study by the US census bureau 67% of California mothers with children under the age of 6 are in the workforce (Child Care Aware of America, 2012, p. 24). Therefore these parents must rely on others to share in the responsibility of supporting the growth and development of their children. Finding quality care can be a daunting task especially for a family on a very limited budget. Young children need experiences that stimulate their social, emotional, physical, cognitive, cultural and linguistic development. The National Association for the Education of Young Children’s position statement on school readiness addresses the need for high quality programing. “High quality early education programing provides the foundation for school readiness and must be available to all children (Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation, 2003).” However, early childhood programs often lack the quality that is ideal for optimal learning to take place. In 2009



RAND research reported “California faces shortfalls in preschool adequacy and efficiency (Rand Research, 2009, p. 1)”. This study also determined that children coming from impoverished communities and those who are dual language learners demonstrate “deficits in student achievement by second and third grades (Rand Research, 2009)”. Mediocre learning environments are seen in infant/toddler programs through pre-school. For instance, the teacher/student ratio may be too high making it difficult for the teacher to teach and address the children’s individual needs. As a result many children are not prepared for academic success when they enter the K-12 educational system. This creates an academic achievement gap between children who have had access to quality learning experiences in early childhood and children who haven’t. Students of Latino and African American descent have a higher risk of not completing high school. According to the Department of Education the drop out rate between 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade for African American students is at 14% and Latino students is 17.2% (Department of Education, 2012). To address the disparities, quality initiatives like Preschool for All, Race to the Top and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems were developed.

President Obama has taken notice of research that indicates the importance of investing in quality early learning environments. Moreover, in his 2013 State of the Union address he made a commitment to support education beginning with our youngest learners (Office of the Press Secretary, 2013). According to the United States Department of Education, the Early Learning Challenge Fund was developed to “challenge States to establish model systems of early learning for children, from birth to kindergarten entry, including children with disabilities and English learners”. The Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is a major component of Race to the Top; Early Learning

Challenge. Programs that serve children with the most need are a priority for Race to the Top funding.

The Ventura County Office of Education applied to implement QRIS because they saw it as an opportunity to increase the quality of early childhood learning experiences Countywide. This project is a study of the implementation of our local Ventura County Office of Education Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The goal of QRIS is to assess and provide supports to strengthen the quality of early childhood programming. VCOE quality efforts will concentrate on programs that serve the most disadvantaged children and infant/toddler programming. The premise behind the rating system is to support programs in improvement efforts and to assist parents in making informed decisions about program quality prior to making a commitment to enrollment.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine Ventura County Office of Education's implementation of the Quality Rating and Improvement System. Race to the Top, Early Learning Challenge (RTT, ELC) came out of President Obama's commitment to invest in our youngest learners beginning in infancy through preschool. In January 2012 California was one of nine states that received RTT, ELC funds. A \$52.6 million federal grant was awarded to California with the intention to increase access to high quality childcare (California Department of Education, 2013). As a result the Quality Rating and Improvement System was created and became an integral component of RTT, ELC. In his State of the Union address the President spoke about the obligation that we have to create opportunities for children who have the highest need (Office of the Press Secretary, 2013).

He said by investing in education at an early age we take steps to prevent achievement gaps before they start. Children who have the highest need often lack access to quality programming. Therefore, licensed programs that demonstrate they serve the most needy children based on specific criteria are encouraged to participate in QRIS.

Ventura County Office of Education (VCOE) is one of 16 counties in California selected to implement the Quality Rating and Improvement System (California Department of Education, 2013). VCOE demonstrated success with Preschool for All and the Comprehensive Approach for Raising Educational Standards (CARES), Early Childhood Education (ECE) Stipend Project. The purpose of the Stipend Project is to support early childhood professionals in degree attainment and to provide them with opportunities for professional development including CLASS and ERS assessment training. Their commitment and experience with quality efforts presented them with the opportunity to implement QRIS. However, this undertaking involves collaboration with the State, Federal government and community based organizations. According to Carrie Murphy, the Director of Early Childhood Programs, QRIS requires several different funding streams. First Five California, First Five Ventura County, The Child Signature Program 1 and 2, Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, CARES stipend project and the Department of Education all work in partnership with the Ventura County Office of Education to fund QRIS. In addition, specific tools developed by the California Department of Education (CDE) and a common "Quality Continuum Framework" is incorporated into the QRIS of Ventura County. The state wanted to maintain consistency with tools used in Title 5 programs like Head Start and Special Education.

My study is to determine the strengths of the system in supporting quality as well as the areas for growth. In addition, the study will examine the availability of resources that focus on improvement measures for programs not selected to participate in QRIS in Ventura County. Lastly, my research will look at the potential impact QRIS has on children and teachers.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect Ventura County Office of Education's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) has on the local early childhood community and its members. The following research questions will guide the data collection.

1. What are VCOE goals for supporting Early Childhood Programs in Ventura County to attain higher quality programs?
2. What are the recruitment strategies for programs that may need services but don't seek support? (Incentives)
3. What is being done to ensure that the training/support services are equitable and accessible for the diverse teachers/children in Ventura County?
4. Are there strategies in place within the QIRS to encourage higher education for upward mobility in the field of ECE? If yes, what are they?
5. What is being done to encourage retention in the field?
6. Do non-licensed programs and Family Home Care providers have access to the training and support?
7. What is being done to encourage quality in non-licensed programs?

8. What plans are there to maintain support as programs move up and through the QRIS ladder? How long does the training, support and accountability component continue?
9. In what ways have programs demonstrated they have benefited from QRIS?

### Significance

I am the site director for First Steps Child Development Center. Our program serves infants and toddlers of teen parents enrolled in Ventura Unified School District (VUSD). The commitment of VUSD to provide the resources needed to promote high school graduation for pregnant and parenting teens. Therefore, students are provided with access to free childcare. The beauty of the program is that we are able to support the academic success of two generations, the teen parent and the child. Therefore, it is crucial for us to not only provide quality programming for the infants and toddlers but to also model what quality programming is to the parents served. Having access to quality care empowers the parents to identify best practices. This knowledge will guide them in making informed decisions about choosing childcare after high school graduation. First Steps infant/toddler program is one of four VUSD early childhood classrooms currently participating in the QRIS. Being a participant allows me to have a direct experience with the QRIS and offers me insight into the implementation commitment. Participating in Ventura County Office of Education's, QRIS enables trained assessors to evaluate the programs strengths and areas for growth. In addition, QRIS incentives help with funding for professional development and the purchasing of learning materials for the classroom. This support is welcomed especially with the cuts to early childhood and the elimination of dedicated funding to Cal-SAFE.

As a site leader I am entrusted with providing an effective learning environment for the children we serve in our program. I take this responsibility seriously because all children are deserving of quality care and learning experiences. My job as a leader is to maintain a setting where the development of the whole child is supported and nurtured. My interest in the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) stems from understanding the fundamental impact early childhood experiences have on children beginning in infancy. Quality learning experiences support children in successfully navigating through the K-12 educational system and into higher learning. Therefore, a lack of quality early childhood programming can be detrimental to the success of the child. Even well meaning providers can have a negative impact on children's ability to reach their fullest potential. All children deserve a learning environment that will prepare them for continued success. Therefore, education, training, awareness and accountability are key in building programs that promote life long learning.

Quality Rating and Improvement System is a new quality initiative that is being implemented in California. In 2008 Governor Schwarzenegger signed Senate Bill 1629 the Early Learning Quality Improvement Act (Preschool California, 2013). I feel that it is important for us to look at the quality of early childhood settings in Ventura County, with special attention to programs that serve children with the highest need and infant/toddlers. Assessing program quality provides us with the opportunity to do what is necessary to support, build and maintain excellent programming. Because the system is new to California I want to gain a deeper understanding of the QRIS. My position is to take a critical look at the design, implementation and components attached to the system. My

goal is to identify the benefits it offers Ventura County as well as the challenges it presents to participating programs.

### **Definition of Terms**

- *VCOE*-Ventura County Office of Education
- *VUSD*-Ventura Unified School District
- *CDE*-California Department of Education
- *Early Childhood*- Children ages 0-5
- *Infant*- Children ages 1 to 18 months<sup>1</sup>
- *Toddler*-Children ages 18 months to 36 months
- *Preschool*-3 years through 5
- *Quality Rating and Improvement System*-QRIS is an assessment and rating system used to evaluate early childhood programs.
- *Early Childhood Quality Initiatives*- State and local strategies for improving quality in Early Childhood programming. (Race to the Top, Pre-School for All, Quality Rating Improvement System)
- *Early Learning Standards (NAEYC)*-Expectations for the learning and development of young children.
- *Content Standards (NAEYC)*-Summary descriptions of what it is that children should know and/or be able to do within a particular discipline. McREL

- *Performance Standards (NAEYC)*-Levels of student performance in respect to the knowledge or skills described in a single benchmark or a set of closely related benchmarks. McREL
- *Center Based*-Licensed Child Development Center
- *Family Child Care Home*-Licensed child care home environment
- *Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS), Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS), and Family Child Care Rating Scale (FCCERS)*-Observation tools used to assess and rate environment quality.
- *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)*-Observation tool used to assess and rate teacher/child and peer/peer interactions.
- *Desired Results Developmental Profile*-Developmental assessment
- *Ages and Stages Questionnaire*-Tools used to screen developmental delays and mental health concerns.
- *Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL)/Teaching Pyramid*-Professional development focused on supporting the social and emotional development of children.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

The emphasis of this study is on the implementation of the Quality Rating Improvement System. The framework for this project is research that focuses on the core areas of the California Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge, and specifically Ventura County QRIS. Because California's Early Learning System is an integral part of the Ventura County QRIS it was included in the study.

#### ***California Early Learning System***

The California Department of Education established a comprehensive Early Learning Plan in June, 2013. The system was developed to facilitate quality programming and create environments conducive to learning for children birth to kindergarten. This system was established to guide programs in implementing quality learning environments for children birth through preschool. The State of California's objective is to promote school readiness and to reduce the achievement gap (Preschool California). The framework for the system includes:

- Program guidelines and resources
- Learning and Development Foundations
- Curriculum Frameworks
- Desired Results

- Professional Development (California Department of Education, Child Development Division, 2012, p. 4)

The matrix addresses three core areas of focus. For the purpose of this research I will identify which core area I am addressing, beginning with the first. Core 1 of the matrix is centered on child development and school readiness. Research on early childhood assessments and quality initiatives, Desired Results, Learning and Development Foundations and Curriculum Frameworks are included in this section of the paper.

### **Core 1: Child Development & School Readiness**

Core one of the matrix focuses on the observation, assessment and health screening of young children. Observation and assessment of children enable teachers to plan and implement individualized curriculum in an intentional manner. The developmental and health screenings have the potential to lead to additional services children may need. Research on early childhood quality initiatives, Desired Results, Ages and Stages, Learning and Development Foundations and Curriculum Frameworks are included in this section of the paper.

#### ***Assessments and Quality Initiatives***

According to the California Department of Education (CDE), the state has received \$52.6 million grant to implement a new quality initiative called Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) (California Department of Education, 2013). Quality Rating and Improvement System is a component of RTT-ELC effort to raise quality and improve

accountability in early childhood programming. As reported by the Department of Education, assessments are a major piece of the initiatives that fund quality efforts and have become an integral part of accountability in early childhood settings (Federal Register, 2013). Quality initiatives like the Quality Rating Improvement System utilize various assessment tools to measure the quality of participating programs. Assessment and additional quality indicators like teacher/student ratio and staff qualifications are measured as means to rate and improve the learning experience of young children.

### ***Assessment and Quality***

In 2002 the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in the State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) took a stand on assessments for children birth to age eight. Their statement read “Make ethical, appropriate, valid and reliable assessments a central part of all early childhood programs (Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation, 2003, p. 10).” In keeping with the stand for assessment an article in *Beyond the Journal* states, “Assessment of very young children is an essential part of quality (Ensler, 2004)”. Research indicates that assessments lead to greater knowledge about the children being served. This knowledge is translated into improved curriculum implementation and teaching practices.” (Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation, 2003, p. 11) The assessment provides the teacher with the opportunity to understand and appropriately respond to the individual needs of the children in their care.

### ***Family involvement and assessment***

Studies indicate that it is essential for the family to participate in the assessment process. Family involvement and input in the assessment is the means to gaining a deeper understanding of what is best for the child. NAEYC asserts, “Families own perspectives about their child are an important resources for staff” (Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation, 2003). As teachers and caregivers we must respect and acknowledge that parents are their child’s primary teacher. When the child enters into care outside of the home, parents and teachers must work together to best meet the needs of the child. Partnerships with families enable teachers to gain insight about the child, family and culture.

### ***Purpose for assessment***

In a 1998 report to the National Education Goals Panel, Shepard, Wurtz and Kegan identified the four purposes of an assessment 1) assessment to support the learning of children, 2) assessment for identification of special needs 3) assessment for program evaluation 4) assessment high-stakes accountability. Each assessment is used for its specific purpose (Shepard, 1998, p. 7). In this section of the paper I will focus on the first two purposes of assessment. It is difficult to ignore the importance of teacher involvement in both formal and informal observation and documentation. The National Research Council of the National Academies states “Teachers and parents are the primary audiences for assessment information collected to guide instruction” (National Research Council of the National Academies, 2008). The purpose of developmentally appropriate assessments

is to empower the teacher to be intentional in lesson planning. Observation should enable the teacher to provide meaningful activities that support the development of the whole child. It also aids the teacher in setting up the environment to meet the diverse needs of the children exploring it.

### ***Effectiveness of an assessment***

Effectiveness of assessment is dependent on many conditions. NAEYC indicators of effectiveness include:

- Ethical principles guide assessment practices.
- Assessment instruments are used for their intended purposes.
- Assessments are appropriate for ages and other characteristics (cultures, home languages, socioeconomic status, abilities and disabilities) of children being assessed.
- Assessment instruments are in compliance with professional criteria for quality.
- What is assessed is developmentally and educationally significant.
- Assessment evidence is used to understand and improve learning.
- Assessment evidence is gathered from realistic settings and situations that reflect children's actual performance.

- Assessments use multiple sources of evidence gathered over time.
- Screening is always linked to follow up.
- Use of individually administered, norm-referenced tests is limited. Staff and families are knowledgeable about assessment (Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation, 2003).

A study completed by Horton and Bowman addressed the teacher's level of skill in conducting assessments. "The quality of teacher-generated assessments is necessarily dependent on the ability of teachers to make informed judgments about individual children's learning and development" (Bowman, 2001, p. 23). To be valid and reliable research indicates that assessments need to be implemented by teachers who are prepared to execute them. Bowman and Horton believe that teachers responsible for assessment need education and training. They also noted the importance of time for staff to reflect, record, update, and analyze assessment data. However, NAEYC found that teachers often lack the expertise needed although it is critical to assessment success (Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation, 2003).

***Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP 2010)***

Programs participating in QRIS are required to use evidence-based child assessment. However to reach tier 5 on the matrix the use of Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) assessment instrument is necessary. According to the California Department of Education (CDE), Child Development Division, all centers and

family home care programs funded by the State of California use the DRDP. This is important to note because state and federally funded programs traditionally serve children who have the risk factors that are associated with the educational gap. The most recent revision of Desired Result tool was in 2010. California Department of Education aligned (DRDP 2010) with the Infant/Toddler and Preschool Learning Foundations. Listed below are the ways in which the assessment instrument is in alignment with these foundations.

1. The measures in the DRDP (2010) instruments are organized by the foundation domains
2. Each measure is based on the same continuum of development as the corresponding foundation
3. The DRDP (2010) instruments are grounded in the same research and child development literature as the foundations and standards (California Department of Education, Child Development Division, 2012).

The DRDP (2010) has a specific set of domains and measures for infant/toddler and another for preschool children. Through observation teachers collect objective documentation on the individual growth and development of children under the various domains and measures. Research indicates that watching children as they work and interact with others enables the teacher to plan intentional curriculum that supports each child's individual needs. (California Department of Education, Child Development Division, 2012). However, Piaget explains that observation alone does not enable teachers to respond in a manner that "generate ideas for how the teacher might intervene" (Forman,

1993). He believed that teachers needed to possess a theoretical base to draw on when developing curriculum ideas specific to observation (Forman, 1993, pp. 124-126). Therefore to make meaning out of children's behavior teachers need a strong understanding of child development.

### ***Early Learning Standards***

The California Department of Education has developed Early Learning Guidelines for infant/toddlers and preschool children. Therefore, early learning standards are integral component of QRIS early learning system. NAEYC and NAECS/SDE developed a position statement on Early Learning Standards in 2002. They stated, "Early childhood education has become part of a standards-based environment" (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2002, p. 1). Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Foundations are guidelines or standards for children age birth to 3 (California Department of Education and WestEd for Children and Family Studies, 2009). Preschool Learning Foundations Volumes 1-3 are standards for children aged 3 through 5 years old. The standards define a wide range of skills and knowledge young children who attend high quality programs typically attain. Foundations illustrate a continuum of growth that takes place in all areas of development. The California Infant/Toddler Learning Foundations are in alignment with California Preschool Learning Foundations (California Department of Education and WestEd for Children and Family Studies, 2009). Likewise, Preschool Learning Foundations are in alignment with kindergarten content standards (California Department of Education, 2010). It is essential for teachers to have a firm understanding of



Foundations. The standards define early childhood development and can be used to aid teachers in implementing age appropriate curriculum for meaningful experiences.

Nevertheless, early learning standards continue to be a controversial because learning standards are traditionally seen in the K-12 educational setting. However, they are currently recognized as an important part of programs serving children birth through preschool. Zero to Three defines Early Learning Guidelines or standards as descriptions of “expectations about what infants and toddlers should know and be able to do during specified age ranges” (Zero to Three, 2008). Therefore an understanding of the standards is necessary for individuals working with young children. Likewise, NAEYC professional preparation position statement included Early Learning Standards as a part of their core values. (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009, p. 4)”.

### ***Developmental and Health Screenings***

Similar to the DRDP (2010) developmental assessment, health and developmental screenings are a fundamental part of the QRIS matrix. Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge requires that participants implement screening measures that aid in identifying developmental delays that lead to appropriate interventions. The National Research Council suggests, “Screening and diagnosis remain crucial purposes in assessment of older preschoolers, as well as infants and toddlers (National Research Council of the National Academies, 2008, pp. 5-1)”. Programs participating in QRIS are required to take measures to ensure children receive yearly physicals and well baby care (Federal Register, 2013). In addition they are responsible for yearly screenings that focus on developmental and

social/emotional delays. Ventura County Office of Education requires that programs screen children with a valid and reliable child-screening tool. To support programs in implementing early childhood screenings, VCOE provides Ages and Stages Questionnaire training to program directors participating in QRIS sites.

### ***Ages and Stages Questionnaire 3***

The Ages and Stages Questionnaire is a screening tool used to identify developmental delays in infants and young children. The areas of development screened are communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving and personal/social development. Parent and caregivers complete the questionnaire and para-professionals are able to score the findings. The tool screens children at several different age intervals from 1-66 months ([agesandstages.com](http://agesandstages.com)).

### ***Ages and Stages Questionnaire Social/Emotional***

According to the Ages and Stages website, this is a screening tool used to monitor children for social and emotional health concerns. The areas of development screened are self-regulation, compliance, communication, adaptive behavior, autonomy, affect and social interaction. Parents and caregivers complete the questionnaire and para-professionals are able to complete the scoring. The tool screens children at several different age intervals from 1-66 months ([agesandstages.com](http://agesandstages.com)).

## **Core 2: Teachers and Teaching**

Core two of the matrix is focused on strengthening the early childhood workforce by supporting teachers so that they are better prepared to provide meaningful learning experiences. Programs desire to hire teachers who have strong educational backgrounds. As a result teachers must attain higher learning and seek training in order to meet employment qualifications. In addition to promoting degree attainment the QRIS uses the CLASS to observe and rate teacher/child interactions. CLASS is designed to assess the effectiveness of teachers in supporting the skills necessary for future academic success.

### ***Teacher Qualifications***

Working with children and families requires a host of skills in addition to education and training. Caregivers and teachers have the ability to make a profound difference in the success of children when they have the knowledge and support necessary to do so. Through QRIS the California Department of Education is promoting higher education and training for early childhood professionals. California's Early Learning Plan states, "One essential element of continuous program improvement is a great early childhood workforce (California Department of Education, 2013). The department of education sees the workforce as "the most important determinant of the quality of the child's experience in early learning programs (California Department of Education, 2013)." A prime example of organizations that have made a commitment to raise the qualifications of teachers is Head Start/Early Head Start. According to US Department of Health and Human Services, September 2013 marked the date that 50% of teachers working in Head Start Programs

would be required to hold a Bachelors or advanced degree in early childhood education (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). According to RAND, a collection of earlier research studies indicated, “teacher and caregivers who are more educated and those who specialized in ECE training provide quality care and produce larger child development gains” (Karloy, 2012, p. 16). Furthermore, data collected from Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales (ECERS) suggest that teachers with higher education were “more supportive in their interactions with children and richer in terms of enhancing language development and other cognitive skills” (Karloy, 2012, p. 16). According to RAND’s report a few studies also connected assessment gains to teacher’s education. However, these studies do not go unchallenged. Recent studies contest the correlation between early childhood outcomes and teachers’ qualifications. The relationship of teacher education and childhood outcomes are questioned because further research on this matter “did not find a consistent, positive, and statistically significant relationship between teacher education and certification and classroom-quality measures or child outcomes (Karloy, 2012, p. 17)”.

Studies indicate that degree attainment is one of many aspects that contribute to the teachers’ ability to provide quality care and education. The Society for Research in Child Development determined “Classroom quality and positive child outcomes are influenced by a host of other system components” (Early, 2007, p. 577). The report proposed that supports are needed starting at the administrative level and continuing with supervisors. In other words, work for improvement across the program need to be in tact to implement quality-learning experiences. In addition, the research notes that leaders need to be aware of and committed to implementing best practices program wide. Hence, research suggests

that quality programing includes age appropriate materials, curricula support, skilled aids, mentoring, monitoring and supervision (Early, 2007, p. 577). They found that successful professional development includes on going training, coaching and mentoring (Early, 2007). Leaders must support teachers in maintaining current knowledge of early learning guidelines and staying abreast of best practices in the field. With the push for accountability, programs are being assessed and monitored for quality. Teachers need to be educated, trained and supported in order to succeed in implementing quality learning experiences.

***NAEYC Standards for Early childhood Professional Preparation***

NAEYC's has developed six core standards that describe knowledge and skills "well prepared students" attain and implement while working with children and families.

1. Promoting Child Development and Learning
2. Building Family and Community Relationships
3. Observing Documenting and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families
4. Using Developmentally Effective Approaches to Connect with Children and Families
5. Using Content Knowledge to Build Meaningful Curriculum
6. Becoming a Professional (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009, pp. 11-19).

NAEYC stresses that “reflective field experiences are critical to high-quality professional preparation (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009, p. 6)” and is a key component of each standard.

### ***Effective Teacher-Child Interactions***

Meaningful relationships promote growth in social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic and physical development. *Zero to Three* states, “The interaction between infant and caregiver are recognized to have significant influence on the developmental course of the child” (National Training Institute for Child Care Health Consultants, 2010, p. 9). Furthermore, Maslow identifies the five motivational needs of humans as basic, safety, social, esteem and self-actualization. During the early years children rely on the support of adults to meet their needs. While parents are at work teachers are entrusted to share in the responsibility in providing a secure base for children to flourish in. Nurturing strong relationships is instrumental in motivating the growth of the whole child because our interactions are key in supporting growth.

### ***Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)***

Ventura County Office of Education utilizes the Classroom Scoring System (CLASS) as a part of QRIS to evaluate effective teacher/child interactions. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System is a fairly new assessment tool that was developed to rate “effective teacher-child interactions” (Pianta, Classroom Assessment Scoring System Manual Pre-K, 2008). QRIS has embraced it as one of the means for rating the teacher child interaction. The preschool assessment tool has 3 domains and 10 dimensions.

<b>Emotional Support</b>	<b>Classroom organization</b>	<b>Instructional support</b>
Positive Climate	Behavior Management	Concept Development
Negative Climate	Productivity	Quality of
Teacher Sensitivity	Instructional Learning Formats	Feedback
Regard for Student Perspectives		Language Modeling (Pianta, Classroom Assessment Scoring System Manual Pre- K, 2008)

The CLASS toddler assessment was “adapted and developed from the pre-K version of the CLASS. (Pianta, Classroom Assessment Scoring System Manual Toddler, 2012). The CLASS toddler tool includes two domains and eight dimensions.

<b>Emotional and Behavioral Support</b>	<b>Engaged Support for Learning</b>
Positive Climate	Facilitation of Learning and Development
Negative Climate	Quality of Feedback
Teacher Sensitivity	Language Modeling (Pianta, 2012)
Regard for Child Perspectives	
Behavior Guidance	

Through observation a trained assessor rates the teacher/child interactions in each domain that consists of various dimensions (Pianta, Classroom Assessment Scoring System Manual Pre-K, 2008). A score can be as low as a one or as high as a seven. All staff interacting with children in the classroom are rated during the observation. A score of one indicates the need for much improvement. Whereas, a seven represents optimal interactions with the exception of one dimension, negative climate. Scoring high in negative climate indicates the presence of serious or several incidences of negative behaviors so a rating of one indicates best practices. RAND reported that various program studies have indicated that preschool classroom staff traditionally score low in the area of instructional support when assessed using the CLASS. The areas of concern were higher order thinking, quality of feedback and support for developing language skills (Rand Research, 2009). This is of concern because these skills are linked to future academic success for children.

### **Core 3: Program & Environment**

Core three of the matrix focuses on the environment and director qualifications. QRIS utilizes the Environmental Rating Scale to rate environments. In addition, director qualifications are based on degree attainment. Quality environments and strong leadership impact the teacher's ability to provide quality-learning experiences.

#### ***Licensing and Regulatory Requirements***

QRIS requires that participating programs are licensed and in good standing. Therefore, at the minimum Title 22, California's Community Care Licensing laws and regulations must be consistently upheld. However, many programs participating in QRIS



have State and Federal requirements in addition to Title 22. Title 5 regulations supersede Title 22 in regulations in State and Federally funded programs. A report by the Child Care Law Center said, “The most stark regulatory difference between Title 22 and Title 5 can be in staffing requirements” (Bolden, 2008). For example, teacher to child ratios for Title 5 exceed the requirements for title 22. State and Federal funded programs follow Title 5 standards, which requires that infant programs implement 1 to 3 ratios whereas Title 22 has a sub-optimal ratio of 1 to 4.

Another area where you see differences is in staff qualifications. Bolden’s (2008) analysis on regulations indicated that Title 5 regulations are more demanding than title 22 in regards to staff qualification. Title 5 requires that the lead teacher has 12 college units in ECE and Title 22 requires 6 units in college level units at hiring in ECE (Bolden, 2008). These variances in regulations are also seen in Head Start programs. When looking at both Title 5 and Title 22 regulations in comparison to Head Start staffing qualifications for teacher assistant and lead teacher, Head Start requirements are highest.

### ***Environmental Rating Scale(s)***

Environmental rating scales are assessments tools used to rate the quality of the indoor and outdoor environment. There is an environmental rating scale specific to infant/toddler (ITERS), preschool (ECERS) and family home care (FCCERS). These assessment instruments are used in QRIS. According to the Environmental Rating Scale Institute the intention of the scales are to rate the physical environment, basic care, curriculum, interaction, schedule, program structure and provisions for parents and staff.

### ***Director Qualifications***

According to the State of California Commission on Teacher Credentialing the site supervisor qualifications in option one include completion of an AA or 60 semester units and 6 units in administration and supervision at introductory and advanced levels. The degree must include a minimum of 24 ECE units with 3 units from each of the core classes. They must also have 350 days of instructional experience in an early childhood classroom that included supervision of adults. The experience requires a minimum of 3 hours of work per day that is completed within a 4-year period (State of California Commission on Teacher Credentialing). The qualifications for directors on the QRIS Matrix exceed that of the State. For example, the highest rating requires the director to attain a Master's degree with 24 units including core ECE courses and specialized courses, with eight management/administrative units or an Administrative Credential is required. Vu, Jeon, and Howe (2008) completed a study on the State of California's ECE credentials. They found that "the teachers' education and credential levels, as well as the credential levels of the program directors, predicted quality.

Pam Boulton quoted Paula Bloom as referring to the director as the "gatekeeper to quality" (Boulton, 2008). Therefore, ongoing education and training is crucial to the directors' success because leaders are ultimately responsible for creating an environment that promotes program quality.

NAEYC's standards for program quality include:

1. Promotion of positive and responsive relationships among all children and adults

2. A well-planned and integrated curriculum that is consistent with goals for children, promoting development in social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive domains
3. Teaching that is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate, using effective strategies that enhance each child's learning
4. Use of ongoing and systematic assessment of child progress, through formal and informal approaches so that results benefit children through program improvement and teaching
5. A safe and healthy environment which promotes nutrition and protects children and staff from illness and injury
6. Consistent, well-trained, and well-compensated staff who have the knowledge, commitment, and educational qualifications to support children and their families
7. Collaborative relationships with families that are sensitive to families composition, language, and culture
8. Evidence of relationships with agencies and institutions in the children's communities that support the program's goals
9. A safe and healthy environment that is organized, properly equipped and well maintained

10. Leadership and management that ensures that policies, procedures, and systems are in place to support staff and their retention, and that builds a quality program (Fowler, 2008).

In addition to the center director's formal education the leader must implement recommendations that support quality environments for example, primary care, low student teacher, small group size, individualized care and continuity of care. A study found that children who were cared for in environments that upheld program standards regarded as quality by professional organizations like PITC, NAEYC, APHA, and AAP demonstrated better outcomes in language, cognitive and social competencies than children who were cared for in environment that implemented fewer of the standards (Mashburn, 2008). Therefore, directors need to be equipped with the tools that will empower them to be successful in executing quality programming.

### ***Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness and Anti-bias programming***

Cultural and linguistic responsiveness and anti-bias programming is not a component of the QRIS. However, BUILD sees this as a missed opportunity to promote and support cultural and linguistic competence due to the influence QRIS can have on participating programs (Bruner). A recent BUILD brief suggests that the assessment tools utilized by QRIS do not address or emphasize cultural and linguistic responsiveness enough to impact a program's rating (Bruner). For example, BUILD identified "one of the eight indicators under the "Activities" subscale on the ECERS-R is explicitly about promoting acceptance of diversity, and 10 of the 43 indicators within the ECERS-R have some reference to race,

language, and culture” (Bruner). However, BUILD found that the program’s rating would not suffer if it were solely rated by the ERS in regards to cultural and linguistic diversity (Bruner). Programs can rate high on ECERS-R without implementing practices that support dual language learners (Bruner).

The Campaign for Quality Early Education Coalition (CQEE) has voiced concerns about the appropriateness of the use of CLASS in environments where the teachers speak a language other than the child they serve. They question the validity of CLASS in classrooms “where children do not yet understand or speak English well or not at all and children who are dual language learners” (Zepeda, 2013). In addition, CQEE emphasizes “the CLASS measure disregards language and culture as important determinants of teacher behavior and pedagogy” (Zepeda, 2013). Dr. Vitiello claimed that the CLASS measure is reliable due to scores that showed “no significant difference in reliability” (Vitiello, 2013) regardless of the language being used (English, international language or both) while scoring teacher child interaction during the observation. Vitiello also noted that CLASS is a valid measure because “the scores predicted gains in language/literacy, math, social competence and letter naming” for both children who are monolingual and dual language learners. However, Vitiello recognized that “the CLASS measure does not specifically assess cultural competence, cultural sensitivities or teaching strategies specific to dual language learners” (Vitiello, 2013). “

NAEYC’s standards on linguistics and cultural diversity include the recommendations listed below.

*Recommendations for a responsive learning environment*

1. To provide a responsive learning environment for all children including children who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

*Recommendations for working with children*

1. Recognize that all children are cognitively, linguistically and emotionally connected to the language and culture of their home.
2. Acknowledge that children can demonstrate their knowledge and capabilities in many ways.
3. Understand without comprehensible input, second-language learning can be difficult.

*Recommendations for working with families*

1. Actively involve parents and families in the early learning program and setting.
2. Encourage and assist all parents in becoming knowledgeable about the cognitive value for children of children knowing more than one language, and provide them with strategies to support, maintain, and preserve home language learning.
3. Recognize that parents and families must rely on caregivers and educators to honor and support their children in the cultural values and norms of the home.

*Recommendations for professional preparation*

1. Provide early childhood educators with professional preparation and development in the areas of culture, language, and diversity.
2. Recruit and support early childhood educators who are trained in languages other than English.

***Recommendations for programs and practice***

1. Support and preserve home languages usage.
2. Develop and provide alternative and creative strategies for young children's learning (National Association for the Educaiton of Young Children, 1995).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

Mixed methods of research were applied in this study to examine the effects of QRIS on Ventura Unified School District's early childhood programming. The methods for this research include interviews, personal experience as a site leader participating in QRIS and literature on QRIS.

#### ***Background of QRIS in Early Childhood***

California was awarded with a \$52.6 million RTT-ELC grant in January of 2012. As a result the state decided to use the funding to build on successes at the local and statewide level (Preschool California) by implementing QRIS. The focus of RTT-ELC is intended to promote school readiness for children who have the greatest need. According to a RAND study, California's state funded programs are not adequate in terms of access or quality (Rand Research, 2009). Moreover, children who come from a disadvantaged background are the least likely to attend high quality learning environments. Research has indicated that 40-60% of second and third grade students are performing below grade level in core subjects (Rand Research, 2007). Disparities are seen even more so with children who are Latino, African American, dual language learners and/or live in poverty (Gandara 2012). Evidence is pointing to quality early childhood programming to promote long-term academic success. Research indicates, "High quality preschools have been demonstrated to advance school readiness, raise achievement and improve other education outcomes" (Rand Research, 2007). The state of California anticipates that QRIS will support programs and



early childhood professionals in improving the quality of early learning environments through program assessment, support, training and incentives.

Ventura County is made up of community members who are ethnically, economically and linguistically diverse. However, there is an extreme disparity in the distribution of wealth countywide. Consequently, this presents a situation where there are differences in opportunities for children from city to city and within the various school boundaries. Therefore, the concerns about the academic gaps that exist in our educational system are real and need to be addressed. The programs that applied to participate in QRIS serve children who are poor, dual language learners and live in communities where their schools have low API scores. Again, the intention of QRIS is to support early childhood programs in improving learning environments in order to prepare children for academic success.

### ***Research Questions***

1. What are VCOE goals for supporting Early Childhood Programs in Ventura County to attain higher quality programs?
2. What are the recruitment strategies for programs that may need services but don't seek support? (Incentives)
3. What is being done to ensure that the training/support services are equitable and accessible for the diverse teachers/children in Ventura County?
4. Are there strategies in place within the QIRS to encourage higher education for upward mobility in the field of ECE? If yes, what are they?
5. What is being done to encourage retention in the field?

6. Do non-licensed programs and Family Home Care providers have access to the training and support?
7. What is being done to encourage quality in non-licensed programs?
8. What plans are there to maintain support as programs move up and through the QRIS ladder? How long does the training, support and accountability component continue?
9. In what ways have programs demonstrated they have benefited from QRIS?

### ***Setting and Participants-Defining QRIS in the context of the school***

The research for this study was guided by Early Childhood staff interviews from Ventura County Office of Education (VCOE) and four of Ventura Unified School District's (VUSD), Jump Start Preschool Programs. The vast majority of children attending Ventura Unified School District's early childhood programming are of Latino descent. Parent's interested in enrolling their child into Jump Start Preschool must be income eligible. However, First Steps Child Development Center provides child development services for the children of all adolescent parents enrolled in VUSD who choose to utilize our program.

### ***QRIS and Program Selection***

The children served in VUSD early childhood programming live in poverty. Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) goal is to increase access to quality programming for children with high need. VCOE's Local Planning Council Committee has agreed that the priority will be given to programs participating in QRIS that serve children in communities with API score of 1-3, low income and infant/toddler (VCOE LPC meeting minutes, 2012). Research has shown that program quality is directly related to preparing

children for future academic success. Therefore, it is believed that supporting school readiness efforts will close the achievement gap.

The core of VCOE's, QRIS is child development and school readiness, teachers and teaching and programs and environment. The intention of QRIS is to assess, improve and inform parents about quality care and education. This is done by collecting evidence of the education and training of staffing and by using various assessment instruments to rate the quality of participating programs. The data collected from programs identifies the supports needed like teacher training, coaching, classroom materials and incentives. The assistance enables programs to improve the areas that need additional attention.

## **Chapter 4**

### ***Applying the research***

The information for this study was gathered through field research that included interviews, participation in Local Planning Council Meetings and various trainings. The questions for the case studies were intended to gain insight into Ventura County Office of Education's implementation of the Quality Rating Improvement System.

### ***Launching of Ventura County Office of Education implementation of QRIS***

The launching of QRIS began in 2012 through a pilot project for the first year. In 2013 full implementation started in various participating early childhood programs located in Ventura County.

***Findings.*** The California Early Learning Quality Improvement System (ELQIS) Advisory Committee recommended, "QRIS builds on effective programs" (Preschool California). According to Carrie Murphy, due to Ventura County Office of Education's work with Preschool for All and the CARES Stipend project, VCOE was in a position that enabled them to attain the RTT-ELC grant. VCOE began implementation of QRIS when funding was approved.

### ***QRIS Funding Source***

From interviews with Carrie Murphy it was found that the financing for QRIS is a blend of several funding streams, which include First Five California, First Five Ventura County,

Child Signature Program 1, and 2, Early Childhood Stipend Project, California Department of Education and Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge.

**Findings.** California was one of nine states to win the RTT-ELC grant. As a result they received \$52.6 million to fund early childhood quality efforts over a span of 4 years. About 75% of California’s funding will be utilized at the local level. Ventura is one of 16 counties in California to be involved in the development of QRIS (Preschool California).

**QRIS Components**

**CALIFORNIA RACE TO THE TOP – EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE (RTT-ELC)  
QUALITY CONTINUUM FRAMEWORK – QRIS HYBRID MATRIX (HYBRID MATRIX)**

BLOCK (Common Tier 1) Licensed in-Good Standing	Tier 2 2 POINTS Intermediate	Tier 3 3 POINTS Good	Tier 4 4 POINTS Advanced	Tier 5 5 POINTS High-Quality
<b>CORE I: CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND SCHOOL READINESS</b>				
<b>Child Observation</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> Not required	<input type="checkbox"/> Program uses evidence-based child assessment/ observation tool once a year <input type="checkbox"/> Familiarity with CA Preschool Foundations and Frameworks (e.g. overview training) (Lead Teacher)	<input type="checkbox"/> Program uses valid and reliable child assessment/observation tool aligned with CA Foundations & Frameworks twice a year	<input type="checkbox"/> DRDP 2010 (minimum twice a year) and results used to inform curriculum planning	<input type="checkbox"/> Program uses DRDP 2010 twice a year and uploads into DRDP Tech and results used to inform curriculum planning <input type="checkbox"/> All teachers complete training on Volume I of CA Preschool Foundations and Framework, beginning 2013 14 <sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> A teachers who have responsibility for instruction and child assessments.
<b>Developmental and Health Screenings</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets Title 22 Regulations	<input type="checkbox"/> Health Screening Form (Community Care Licensing form LIC 701 "Physician's Report - Child Care Centers") used at entry, then: 1. Annually OR 2. Conducts vision and hearing screenings annually	<input type="checkbox"/> Program works with families to screen all children using a valid and reliable child screening tool at entry and as indicated by results thereafter <input type="checkbox"/> Meets Criteria from point level 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Program works with families to screen all children using the ASQ at entry and as indicated by results thereafter <b>AND</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Meets Criteria from point level 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Program works with families to screen all children using the ASQ & ASQ-SE, if indicated, at entry, then as indicated by results thereafter <b>AND</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Program staff uses children's screening results to implement intervention strategies and adaptations as appropriate <b>AND</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Meets Criteria from point level 2
<b>CORE II: TEACHERS AND TEACHING</b>				
<b>Minimum Qualifications for Lead Teacher/Family Child Care Home (FCCH)</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets Title 22 Regulations	<input type="checkbox"/> Center: 24 units of ECE/CD or Associate Permit + 12 units of ECE/CD <input type="checkbox"/> FCCH: 12 units of ECE/CD or Associate Permit	<input type="checkbox"/> 24 units of ECE and 16 units of General Education or Teacher Permits <b>AND</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 21 hours professional development (PD) annually	<input type="checkbox"/> Associate's degree (AA) in ECE/CD OR 60 degree-applicable units, including 24 units of ECE OR AA in any field plus 24 units of ECE/CD or Site Supervisor Permit <b>AND</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 21 hours PD annually	<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree in ECE/CD (or closely related field) with 24 units of ECE/CD or master's degree in ECE/CD or Program Director Permit <b>AND</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 21 hours PD annually
<b>Effective Teacher-Child Interactions: CLASS Assessments<sup>1</sup> (Use tool for appropriate age group as available)</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> Not Required	<input type="checkbox"/> Familiarity with CLASS (e.g., 2-hour Overview training) for appropriate age group as available by one representative from the site (on-line or face-to-face via facilitator)	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent CLASS assessment by reliable observer to inform the program's professional development/improvement plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent CLASS assessment by reliable observer with minimum CLASS scores: <b>Pre-K</b> ▪ Emotional Support - 5 ▪ Instructional Support - 3 ▪ Classroom Organization - 5 <b>Toddler</b> ▪ Emotional & Behavioral Support - 5 ▪ Engaged Support for Learning - 3 5	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent assessment with CLASS with minimum CLASS scores: <b>Pre-K</b> ▪ Emotional Support - 5 5 ▪ Instructional Support - 3 5 ▪ Classroom Organization - 5 5 <b>Toddler</b> ▪ Emotional & Behavioral Support - 5 5 ▪ Engaged Support for Learning - 4

Note: Point values are not indicative of Tiers 1-5 but reflect a range of point values.

Draft as of May 15, 2013

**CALIFORNIA RACE TO THE TOP – EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE (RTT - ELC)  
QUALITY CONTINUUM FRAMEWORK – ORIS HYBRID MATRIX (HYBRID MATRIX)**

BLOCK (Common Tier 1) Licensed In-Good Standing	Tier 2 2 POINTS Intermediate	Tier 3 3 POINTS Good	Tier 4 4 POINTS Advanced	Tier 5 5 POINTS High-Quality
<b>CORE II: PROGRAM AND ENVIRONMENT – Administration and Leadership</b>				
<b>Ratios and Group Size (Centers Only beyond licensing regulations)</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> Center: Title 22 Regulations Infant Ratio of 1 4 Toddler Option Ratio of 1 6 Preschool Ratio of 1 12 <input type="checkbox"/> FCCH: Title 22 Regulations (excluded from point values in ratio and group size)	<input type="checkbox"/> Center - Ratio: Group Size Infant Toddler – 4 16 Toddler – 3 18 Preschool – 3 36	<input type="checkbox"/> Center - Ratio: Group Size Infant Toddler – 3 12 Toddler – 2 12 Preschool – 2 24	<input type="checkbox"/> Center - Ratio: Group Size Infant Toddler – 3 12 or 2 8 Toddler – 2 10 Preschool – 3 24 or 2 20	<input type="checkbox"/> Center - Ratio: Group Size Infant Toddler – 3 9 or better Toddler – 3 12 or better Preschool – 3 20 or better
<b>Program Environment Rating Scale s (Use tool for appropriate setting: ECERS R, ITERS R, CERS R)</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> Not Required	<input type="checkbox"/> Familiarity with ERS and every classroom uses ERS as a part of a Quality Improvement Plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent ERS assessment. All subscales completed and averaged to meet overall score level of 4.0	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent ERS assessment. All subscales completed and averaged to meet overall score level of 5 0	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent ERS assessment. All subscales completed and averaged to meet overall score level of 5 5
<b>Director Qualifications (Centers Only)</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> 12 units core ECE (early childhood education, child development, family consumer studies, or related field), 3 units management administration	<input type="checkbox"/> 24 units core ECE, 16 units General Education, 3 units management <sup>1</sup> Administration <u>or</u> Master Teacher Permit	<input type="checkbox"/> Associate's degree with 24 units core ECE, 6 units management <sup>1</sup> administration, 2 units supervision <u>or</u> Site Supervisor Permit <b>AND</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 21 hours PD annually	<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree with 24 units core ECE, 8 units management <sup>1</sup> Administration <u>or</u> Program Director Permit <b>AND</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 21 hours PD annually	<input type="checkbox"/> Master's degree with 24 units core ECE including specialized courses, 8 units management <sup>1</sup> administration, <u>or</u> Administrative Credential <b>AND</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 21 hours PD annually

<b>TOTAL POINT RANGES</b>					
Program Type	Common-Tier 1	Local-Tier 2 <sup>1</sup>	Common-Tier 3	Common-Tier 4	Local-Tier 5 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Centers</b> 7 Elements for 35 points	<b>Blocked (No Point Value) – Must Meet All Elements</b>	Point Range 8 to 19	Point Range 20 to 25	Point Range 26 to 31	Point Range 32 and above
Infant-only Centers 6 elements for 30 points	<b>Blocked (No Point Value) – Must Meet All Elements</b>	Point Range 7 to 16	Point Range 16 to 21	Point Range 22 to 26	Point Range 27 and above
<b>FCCHs</b> 5 Elements for 25 points	<b>Blocked (No Point Value) – Must Meet All Elements</b>	Point Range 6 to 13	Point Range 14 to 17	Point Range 18 to 21	Point Range 22 and above
Infant-only FCCHs 4 elements for 20 points	<b>Blocked (No Point Value) – Must Meet All Elements</b>	Point Range 5 to 10	Point Range 11 to 13	Point Range 14 to 17	Point Range 18 and above

<sup>1</sup> Local-Tier 2: Local decision if Blocked or Points and if there are additional elements

<sup>2</sup> Local-Tier 5: Local decision if there are additional elements included

**Note:** Point values are not indicative of Tiers 1-5 but reflect a range of point values.

**Matrix.** Through grassroots efforts the California Early Learning Quality Improvement System (ELQIS) Advisory Committee developed the QRIS matrix. Several standards for quality are attached to the California Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) Quality Continuum Framework- QRIS Hybrid Matrix. The matrix identifies the specific indicators for program quality. It distinguishes the level of quality a program is at and

establishes guidelines for a continuum of growth that can be attained as programs meet their goals.

**Findings.** From looking at the study we can see that there are many criteria that contribute to program quality. However, in education the tendency is often focused on teacher quality. “Classroom quality and positive child outcomes are influenced by a host of other system components. Even the most highly skilled teachers need, for example, adequate materials, curricular support, skilled teaching assistants, and a physical setting that is appropriate to meeting the needs of young children” (Early, 2007). The QRIS matrix is designed to measure various elements of quality. The standards attached to the QRIS matrix are in alignment with what research and leading early childhood organizations indicate as key to program quality improvement. It takes a complete system to implement quality programing. When we look collectively at some of the elements that impact quality (ratios, assessments, curriculum, interactions, environments, staff qualifications, degree attainment, leadership) it is clear that all segments contribute and factor into the success or failure of programs.

***QRIS and cultural and linguistic responsiveness and anti-bias program:***

The matrix does not include a component on cultural and linguistic responsiveness and anti-bias programing. VCOE developed a system in tandem with the State department of Education by aligning the matrix with their work. Quality improvement and Professional Development (Pathways) is ongoing work. In the past cultural and linguistic responsiveness and anti-bias programing was on the matrix. However, because there is no

way to measure some of the elements it was pulled out. The feds made the recommendation to develop a plan to include it in the professional development.

**Findings.** According to BUILD, no state has “established a specific component or subscale” on race, culture and language on the QRIS matrix. BUILD argues, “QRIS was designed to be a powerful tool to shape provider practices and the quality improvement supports available based on what are considered important aspects of quality measured in the rating” (Bruner). Therefore, BUILD identifies it as “important to include cultural and linguistic responsiveness and anti-bias programming as aspects of early learning quality” (Bruner). The organization recommends that QRIS include a “multicultural component” where teachers and environments can be rated on the promotion and support of diversity in early childhood programming (Bruner). Recommendations from BUILD for cultural and linguistic appropriateness include:

- Measures that place value on teachers being fluent in a language other than English and use dual language or multiple languages in the program.
- Multi-Cultural Resources-Measures that place value on children having access and exposure to books, music, food, posters, signs and activities in multiple cultures
- Family participation-Programs that draw upon families in developing and delivering culturally appropriate programming.
- Multicultural Training-Programs that have teachers who have received training in multiculturalism and, in particular, ensuring that programs counter any biases or



stereotyping that children may be exposed to or begin developing patterns of behavior.

**Findings.** Ventura County Office of Education provided trainings that focused on Dual Language Learners during the 2012-2013 fiscal year. The professional development opportunities were open to early childhood professionals countywide.

***VCOE's Recruitment Strategies for QRIS***

VCOE has implemented the QRIS in 70 preschool and two infant/toddler programs in Ventura County. This had an impact on a total of 1700, children age 5 and under. Various center-based programs applying to participate have responded to the countywide recruitment strategies for the project. The outreach for QRIS is focused on programs that serve children who are from communities that have elementary schools with an API score of 1 to 3. Programs that serve children from low-income families and infant/toddler's are also a priority. Recruitment goal for the 2013-2014 fiscal year is a minimum of 12 new sites which include nine family child care programs and three center based.

**Findings.** An API of 1-3 is an indication that the school is low performing. Unfortunately schools with a low API often serve children who live in poverty. In addition, recent studies have found that most early childhood care including infant/toddler programs are providing "mediocre" care for the children they serve. The lack of quality contributes to the academic achievement gap. VCOE recruitment strategy is aimed at programs that serve children RTT-ELL funding was intended for.

***Assurance of equitable and assessable training opportunities***

To ensure training is assessable and equitable, professional growth opportunities are open to all professionals working in the field of early childhood. The trainings are free of charge. VCOE's plan for professional growth opportunities were developed from survey responses collected from administrators and teachers based on their needs. They also collected and analyzed data from the Environmental Rating Scale and Classroom Assessment Scoring System to address professional growth needs. Lastly, VCOE sought feedback from the Quality Committee for training considerations. All teachers who are responsible for instruction and assessments are required to attend training on Volume 1 of the California Preschool Foundations and Frameworks in order to work towards high quality.

***Findings.*** My attendance at one of the Local Planning Counsel Meetings provided me with the opportunity to learn about some of the concerns directors were faced with in regards to staff training. Concern was voiced about the cost of funding substitutes for all staff working directly with children to attend the trainings required to rate in tier 5, Element: (B1) Child Observation. According to the matrix all teachers who are responsible for assessing the growth and development of children are required to attend the training in order to work towards achieving the highest tier. However, the stipend can be used to fund staffing needed for training. In addition, much of the training is offered during non-working hours.

### ***QRIS and Higher Education***

One of the core strategies in promoting quality in early childhood programming is degree attainment. The CDE said, “California cannot have a great system without a great workforce—one that is well educated, well trained and reflective of the State’s cultural and linguistic diversity and supported on an ongoing basis.” (California Department of Education, 2013) The goal of QRIS is to encourage degree attainment. VCOE’s Early Childhood Stipend Project has been integrated into RTT-ELC support systems as a QRIS component. One feature of the QRIS is to support early childhood professionals in attaining higher education. Professionals who are enrolled in courses that enable them to work towards degree attainment can apply for the stipend. Hence, participants are required to work with children age 0-5 and attend school in order to earn credits towards degree attainment. Completing courses towards an early childhood degree enables participants to become more knowledgeable about best practices and apply them in the classroom environment. In addition, professional growth opportunities are open and available countywide through VCOE’s, QRIS. As a result, individuals who are not enrolled in courses have the opportunity to stay current in the field of early childhood while at the same time earn the professional growth hours required for permit renewal.

***Findings.*** Incentives and support for higher learning are necessary for many reasons. First, when referring to VCOE’s, QRIS matrix, the minimum qualifications for a lead teacher or family childcare home provider ranges from basic requirements in tier one to increasingly higher requirements. As in, tier one; the basic level rating requires that the lead teacher match the teachers’ qualifications on the Child Development permit Matrix. According to

the Child Development Training Consortium twenty-four units of early childhood education including core courses and 16 units of general education is considered a teacher on the permit matrix (C. Sharpe, 1999). Whereas in tier 5 on the QRIS matrix, the high-quality rating, the lead teacher must attain a bachelor's or master's degree in in early childhood or a Program Director Permit. In addition the lead teacher must participate in 21 hours of professional development annually. Hence, to be recognized as a highly educated lead teacher, degree attainment at the university level is necessary.

Secondly, the cost involved in attending a higher learning institute can discourage early childhood professionals from furthering their education. Often individuals working in this field are compensated at a lesser wage than elementary school teachers (Center for Childcare Workforce, 2010). The differences are partly due to the lower academic requirements for early childhood professionals (Center for Childcare Workforce, 2010). The early childhood stipend project provides the incentive and offsets some of the cost associated with attending higher learning institutes.

The stipend project allows undergraduates to apply for the stipend. However, not everyone who applies for a stipend receives one. As a result the funding limits the amount of students able to participate. Applicants who seek funding through the stipend are put into a lottery and are only able to participate if their name is drawn. The limited funding may pose a problem to some early childhood students who's names weren't drawn in the lottery. If they are unable to attain an alternative funding source they may need to take out loans or pay for their education out of pocket. This may cause a hardship and discourage early childhood professionals from continuing their education. Additionally, the application

for the stipend is open to undergraduates. Early childhood students who are interested in advancing into post bachelorette studies don't qualify for the stipend. However, students who have attained their BA degree can apply to be a peer advisor through the stipend project. I was one of five students who participated in the stipend project after earning my degree in early childhood.

Higher education can lead to additional opportunities for the early childhood professional because programs are seeking highly qualified staff. Therefore, employees with a bachelors degree or higher in early childhood often seek employment in programs that pay higher wages. During an interview with Ventura County Office of Education I learned that this is a challenge in maintaining program growth. Programs that pay lower wages may lose their most highly educated staff. This loss can affect the quality of the classroom the teacher was teaching in.

### ***QRIS and Support to Non-Licensed Programs***

The Ventura County Office of Education is committed to providing growth opportunities to professionals working in licensed exempt programs. For example, professionals working in license exempt environments can apply for the stipend. In addition, VCOE offers cost free training opportunities to early childhood professionals countywide. Individuals working in license exempt programs have access to training free of charge. Training determinations are based on surveys that go out to administrators and teachers asking what their needs are. In addition training decisions are based on data that is collected from the Environmental Rating Scale, Classroom Assessment Scoring System

and Desired Results Developmental Profile. Training is built around areas identified from data collected as needing support. VCOE also involves the Quality Committee in planning training sessions for QRIS.

### ***QRIS and Support for Program Improvement***

The QRIS is designed to support programs in moving up the tiers on the Matrix. Once a program is chosen to participate in QRIS, VCOE commitment to participants continues as long as they are licensed and in good standing. There are various support systems put in place to encourage the success of teachers, administrators and program. For example, targeted training that includes My Teaching Pyramid, Ages and Stages and CLASS. A coach is also provided to assist teachers in the classroom environment. The staff and My Teaching Partner Coach set individual classroom goals that support intentional learning environments. Programs that rate low in any or all areas can work towards improvement and ask for another rating at any time of their participation. A program rating at level 5, the highest quality rating maintains that score for a period of two years if the staffing for the classroom remains the same.

***Findings.*** My interview with various Site Leaders from Ventura Unified School District enabled me to collect their thoughts on QRIS. The features of QRIS they found most beneficial to their program was the in classroom coaching. They felt the coach was able to support them in successfully addressing some of the challenges they were faced with like behaviors. They also appreciated the debriefing sessions that took place after their environment was assessed with the Environmental Rating Scale and Classroom Assessment

Scoring System. Lastly, they found the professional growth opportunities and training materials useful. They were able to utilize the strategies described and materials provided as instruments to support learning in their classroom environments.

The challenges the site leaders were faced with were of varying degrees from classroom to classroom. However, they all seemed to be in agreement with some of the challenges they were experiencing. For example, finding additional time to communicate with each other, and time to develop educational materials needed to implement some of the strategies learned in the trainings took additional effort. Secondly, getting the team on board was difficult for some of the site leaders. Staff was offered compensation for the time allotted for working on projects but some staff opted to go home instead of work together on projects. All of the site leaders felt that children are the priority during school hours. Consequently, their attention was focused on them while they were present, leaving little or no time to work on projects. The site leaders also shared that the Desired Results Development Profile was time consuming and felt it took time away from working directly with the children. Lastly, site leaders felt that being understaffed or having a new staff in the environment during assessments negatively affected their ratings. One teacher said “low staffing makes it more difficult to meet quality standards, complete assessments, and provide quality environments.”

When asked about their perspective on the Matrix the site leaders felt it was “fair and complete.” Another added that reaching tier 5 on the matrix was “do able”. One teacher said that the CLASS training empowered her staff. She saw a noticeable difference in teacher student interaction that occurred in the classroom environment. She observed

teachers implementing techniques that encourage the children to practice and increase their language development. For example, teachers were asking intentional questions that encouraged back and forth communication and problem solving. The other site leaders were in agreement to seeing stronger teacher student interactions due to CLASS training. It is important to note that VUSD jumpstart programs are supportive of dual language learners. Most of the staff are bilingual and are able to communicate in Spanish with the children new to English. Lessons and conversations are spoken in Spanish to nurture and support the home language of the children they serve. In addition, the site leaders felt that they benefited from the My Teaching Partner, coaching. The coach spent time in the classroom and was able to observe, interact and learn about the children and teachers. Being familiar with the children and observing practices enabled her to support the staff in dealing with challenging behaviors in an informed and individualized manner. The site leaders all agreed that the training provided by VCOE empowered them with the tools and knowledge necessary to help prepare the teachers and classroom for higher ratings. A couple of the site leaders felt that team building, teacher to teacher relationships and collaboration was missing in regards to QRIS support and training.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Implications**

Race to the top, Early Learning Challenge was developed with the purpose of increasing the quality of early childhood programming in order to close the achievement gap. Ventura County Office of Education is one of eleven counties in California chosen to receive funding from the state through the RTT-ELC in order to implement strategies to address the disparities. The Quality Rating and Improvement System is a strategy being executed locally to address the persistent discrepancy seen in education. Schools serving children from low-income families, dual language learners and children of color particularly from Latino and African American descent have consistently demonstrated low API scores across the United States. Therefore, strategies were put in place to prepare children for academic success prior to entering kindergarten. QRIS approach is focused on early childhood programs and professionals who serve children zero to five. The potential that QRIS has to make on the academic success of our youngest learners is great.

VCOE has been very successful in the recruitment of programs applying to be a part of QRIS because many early childhood programs within our community seek involvement. Directors and Family Child Care providers apply to become a QRIS site with an understanding that the ultimate goal of QRIS is to strengthen and improve program quality. The incentives to participate are attractive to program leaders. With the reduction of funding in education monetary support is often sought after. However, QRIS offers a variety of additional supports benefiting programs, staff and children. The incentives motivate the involvement of all stakeholders. For example, QRIS participating programs

receive assessments, access to staff development, coaching and classroom learning materials. Much of the training offered focuses on the assessment tools and learning foundations recommended by the State of California. The coaching and materials purchased are tailored to the programs needs. In addition, the improvement plan is based on the outcome of the assessments.

High quality programing requires implementation of a variety of practices that promote meaningful learning experiences for children. Ventura County's QRIS emphasizes three core areas of focus for quality improvement and support. They include:

- Core 1: Child Development and School Readiness
- Core 2: Teacher and Teaching
- Core 3: Program and Environment

In chapter two I covered the tools that VCOE is required use in their QRIS plan to promote quality in the three Core areas. Programs financed by state and federal funding are familiar with the assessment tools and California's Early Learning System woven into QRIS.

The goal in Core 1, Child Development and School Readiness, is to support the growth of the whole child. In order to rate at the highest level in the area of assessment, QRIS requires that programs assess the growth and development of children by using the Desired Results and Ages and Stages assessment tools. The California Foundations, Curriculum Frameworks and the Preschool English Learner Guide are an integral part of California's Early Learning Standards and are in aliment with the DRDP. The State of California has developed these standards to establish guidelines for professionals working

with children age 0 through 5 to understand developmentally appropriate practices and curriculum. NAEYC promotes the use of standards and assessment. Studies indicate that when appropriate assessment tools and standards are used and implemented correctly they promote quality programming. Teachers who utilize the data gained from assessment are able to build individualized curriculum and provide intentional learning experiences. VCOE provides professional development opportunities for QRIS and stipend participants that focuses on the tools connected to California's Early Standards.

Core 2, Teachers and Teaching is focused on professional development and effective teacher/child interactions. Education, professional development and coaching are key in building and supporting effective teachers. VCOE' offers a variety of professional development opportunities for early childhood professionals countywide through QRIS funding. In 2011 the early childhood stipend project, CARES 2000 AB 212 merged with QRIS. The stipend project encourages early childhood educators to work on professional development and towards degree attainment. The base stipend of \$1,750 is awarded to participants when the minimum stipend requirements are met. Participants who exceed minimum requirements earn additional stipends when extra professional development activities specific to the stipend project are completed. Early Childhood Educators working towards an Early Childhood Associates or Bachelors degree while working directly with children age 0-5 can apply to participate in the stipend project. There are also stipends available for professionals who are chosen to participate in the My Teaching Partner component of CARES. Teachers are provided with coaching that is individualized to support them in providing an environment that promotes intentional learning. Lastly, early childhood professionals who have attained a BA can apply to become a Peer Advisor for

student participants in the stipend project. The stipend project aims to encourage and promote degree attainment and professional development.

Research indicates that quality teacher child interactions do have a positive impact on child outcomes. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System is utilized to rate the effectiveness of teacher child interactions. In the Instructional Support domain the CLASS measures the teacher's ability to model and support language development. NAEYC's standards on linguistics and cultural diversity recommend that educators understand that children are connected to their home language and culture. In addition, NAEYC endorses employment of bilingual educators who can support and preserve the child's home language. Research indicates that a child needs a strong foundation in their home language and pre-literacy proficiencies because these skills directly impact school readiness. The validity of the CLASS was questioned by the Campaign for Quality Early Education (CQEE) in environments where teachers speak a language other than the child's home language. VCOE implementation of QRIS and the assessment tools attached to it are in tandem with the state's recommendations. They support programs in attaining quality by developing quality improvement plans based on assessment outcomes. In addition, programs are provided with onsite training and coaching that is tailored to address the areas that need improvement. Lastly, VCOE provides professional development opportunities that aim to provide teachers with strategies that support Dual Language Learning.

Core 3 on the QRIS Matrix addresses the quality of program and environments. Teachers cannot be solely responsible for creating an environment conducive to learning. Research indicates that low teacher student ratio and group size promote quality learning

experiences. To rate high on the matrix programs must maintain ratios and group size that are considered by the state to be quality based on the age of children served. The Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) is used to assess the infant/toddler, early childhood and family home care environments. The overall score of the ERS assessment must be a 5.5 to rate high in this area of the matrix. VCOE utilizes the data collected from the assessment to support programs in developing their quality improvement plan. Therefore it is specific and individualized to each programs needs. Lastly, the matrix identifies quality leadership. To rate high in this area the directors must hold a masters degree with 24 units in ECE and participate in 21 hours of professional development annually. Through QRIS early childhood administrators countywide had the opportunity to participate in the Directors Tool Kit training. This professional development was designed to support and empower administrators in their leadership roles.

In closing, Ventura County Office of Education's mission is to "provide quality services and support for life long learning opportunities". Through my research I have found that Ventura County Office of Education is fully implementing the Quality Rating and Improvement System in a manner that will support quality improvement efforts countywide. The Quality Rating and Improvement System is designed to support early childhood programs and professionals in quality improvement efforts. Ventura Unified School Districts site leaders testimonials about their experience demonstrate that they have benefited from participating in Ventura County Office of Educations, QRIS. Early childhood professionals seek the professional development opportunities provided by VCOE. The stipend project encourages degree attainment. As a past peer advisor for the stipend project I was able to see stipend participants move closer to degree attainment and

graduate. The State of California's has granted VCOE the funding to implement QRIS. Research shows that children who have quality learning experiences are better prepared for "long term academic outcomes" (California Department of Education, Child Development Division, 2013). It is through applying the Quality Rating and Improvement System that VCOE transforms the method in which the children in the community are educated and improves the probabilities of cultivating successful learners.

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