

Partner Deep Dives

Local Childcare Planning Councils

In 1997, the California legislature established Local Childcare Planning Councils (LPCs) in each county with the intent of bringing together early care and education agencies, parents, and stakeholders to identify local child care needs and priorities, and to support the overall coordination of child care services. LPCs support the overall coordination of child care services in each of California's 58 counties. The LPCs are mandated to conduct assessments of county child care needs and to prepare plans to address identified needs. These assessments must contain information on the supply and demand for child care, including the need for both subsidized and unsubsidized care. As of July 2021, LPCs are overseen by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).

LPCs can help local educational agencies (LEAs) with Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) Planning and Implementation by offering insight on the demographics and needs of families with young children. LPCs may also be able to provide information about the existing early education workforce within a county, such as qualitative information on the status of the early childhood education workforce or quantitative data, as reported through the Quality Counts California (QCC) Fiscal Reporting Portal. The California Department of Education (CDE) encourages LEAs to meet with their LPC to leverage their expertise of the early childhood community.

Resource and Referral Agencies

State-level Resource and Referral Agencies (R&Rs) service data is compiled annually for all child care and development programs administered by the Early Education Division and the CDSS as required by *Welfare and Institutions Code* sections 10217 and 10224.5 and the *California Code of Regulations*, Title 5, sections 18240–18248. R&R programs are required to provide information on the availability of child care services in local communities, and to collect statistical data regarding child care and development services.

R&Rs provide information to all parents and the community about the availability of child care, preschool, and school-age programs in their area and create connections to community resources. They gather and provide quantitative and qualitative data on demand, supply, and child care issues facing providers and families by reaching out to programs on a monthly basis. R&Rs also provide training and assistance to potential providers to become licensed. There are R&Rs in all 58 California counties. As of June 30, 2022, R&Rs are overseen by the CDSS.

R&Rs can assist with UPK planning and implementation by helping LEAs to understand the local landscape of early learning and care (ELC) providers as well as the demographics and needs of families with young children. R&Rs help families

understand the different options they have to best meet the needs of their children. LEAs are encouraged to connect with their community's R&R agency to assist in the co-creation of UPK programming and to help ensure families are well-informed when accessing a UPK program that best meets their needs.

Quality Counts California

QCC is a statewide effort of locally-implemented quality improvement systems (QIS) to strengthen California's ELC system to support young children and their families access high-quality programs. At the state level, the CDE partners with First 5 California (F5CA) and the CDSS to oversee the QCC and local QCC consortia. The CDE provides \$50 million to support the California State Preschool Program (CSPP) Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) Block Grant activities in over 2,660 CSPP programs. Local QCC consortia, made up of single counties or multi-county regional partnerships, work to improve the quality of ELC throughout the mixed-delivery system.

Two significant elements of the QCC are the state's QIS and also a voluntary rating component, or the QRIS. The QRIS includes quality standards, a process for supporting quality improvement, incentives, a process for monitoring standards, and dissemination of information to parents and the public about program quality. Within the QRIS is a five-tier matrix that awards points on the quality of various elements such as staffing ratios and teacher qualifications, child-teacher interactions and instructional strategies, implementation of child assessments, environment, and other program aspects. Tier 1 is equivalent to meeting minimum licensing health and safety standards, whereas Tier 3 is roughly equivalent to the program requirements for CSPP. Programs can have elements at different tier levels, giving them the flexibility and choice to pursue the quality elements that are obtainable as they move along the path of continuous quality improvement. Rated programs receive customized incentives and supports for continuous quality improvement based on their rating.

To obtain a QRIS rating, programs must be rated by an external assessor trained on various assessment tools to conduct a valid and reliable rating. Additionally, county or regional consortia staff review documentation to validate matrix elements not requiring an assessment. Rated CSPP programs can receive a local site block grant to help improve the quality of their programs, including accessing more resources and training.

In 2014–15, Senate Bill 858 (Chapter 32, Statutes of 2014) authorized \$50 million of Proposition 98 funds for a QRIS Block Grant, to be administered by local consortia to CSPP programs, for the support of local early learning QRIS that increase the number of low-income children in high-quality state preschool programs that prepare those children for success in school and life. California *Education Code* Section 8203.1 (b)(1) states:

For purposes of this section, “early learning quality rating and improvement system” or “QRIS” is defined as a locally determined system for continuous

quality improvement based on a tiered rating structure with progressively higher quality standards for each tier that provides supports and incentives for programs, teachers, and administrators to reach higher levels of quality, monitors and evaluates the impacts on child outcomes, and disseminates information to parents and the public about program quality.

In addition, QCC creates connections between early education programs to resources for quality improvement like coaches, trainers, higher education faculty, and tools and guidance. While a rating is not required for quality improvement resources and supports, the data can help target resources to where they will make the greatest impact and help capture progress in improvement. QCC helps communicate the importance of key quality elements, like strengthening family engagement and fostering supportive teacher-child interactions, to parents, educators, and policymakers.

To support UPK planning and implementation, LEAs can work with the local QCCs to learn about the local training and professional development opportunities in the area for staff to support quality learning in UPK classrooms. With the participation in QCC, LEAs will have access to the Early Learning Administrators Leadership Academy, which is a cohort of professionals that connect over several months with the goal of strengthening leadership, management and relationship-building skills. The local QCC can provide technical assistance, coaching and mentoring for early childhood topics such as child development and school readiness, teachers and training, and improving the program and environment. To ensure all elements of the QCC system are being met, LEA administrators might find it easier to designate an in-house liaison to connect with the QCC.