

Abstract Title Page

Title: Who Participates in QRIS? Comparing Center Characteristics and Improvement Activities

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Abstract Body

Background / Context:

Unlike the comprehensive, national education system for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade, the federal government has not yet created a systematic approach for the care and education of children before they enter kindergarten. Without such a system in place, individual states are left to respond to the demand for child care as parents participate in the workforce (Blau & Currie, 2006). A fragmented set of private child care centers, Head Start centers, state Pre-K programs, and informal home care each contribute to fill this demand, resulting in substantial variability in the quality of care that children receive before they begin school.

In response, most states have adopted a voluntary Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), which is intended to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs (Goffin & Barnett, 2015; Tout et al., 2010). QRIS differs from other rating scales by aiming to improve the program's quality over time, and as a demand side intervention to inform parents of high quality options in their neighborhoods.

However, participation in this system is typically voluntary for ECCE programs. We do not know who selects into these systems and whether participation varies across communities, by program characteristics, or funding source. Even further, it is unclear if QRIS participation translates to engaging in activities to improve quality. Given current efforts to expand ECCE programs and to understand what constitutes a high-quality program, understanding what states are currently using is essential.

The present study examines the characteristics of center-based programs and surrounding communities that predict QRIS participation, and examines the activities that these centers engage in. Thus, we can identify characteristics of centers likely to participate in the voluntary system in order to identify which centers a QRIS initiative influences and which centers will be left unaffected.

Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:

Using a nationally representative survey of center-based ECCE providers, we examine the characteristics of centers and communities that participate and those who do not participate in QRIS. Additionally, we assess participating programs engagement in improvement activities—a critical component of QRIS. The ultimate goal of our study is to understand who volunteers to participate in a quality rating system. The present research asks:

1. What are the characteristics of ECCE programs that are associated with QRIS participation? In what type of communities are they located?
2. Do participating centers engage in more improvement activities than non-participating centers?

Setting / Research Design / Data Collection:

The present study is a secondary data analysis of data collected for the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE), a nationally representative survey of program directors (N = 8,265) in 2012. We selected this particular dataset because it includes centers from all 50 states and contains extensive information about the centers and communities.

Population / Participants / Subjects:

All data were collected from the directors of the ECCE centers (N = 8,265). We restricted our sample to centers providing responses for the variables included in our analysis (N = 5,773).

Data Analysis:

For our primary analysis, we used a logistic regression to identify which characteristics predicted participation in QRIS. Our predictors include both center and community characteristics collected from the center directors and the American Community Survey. We also used t-tests to determine if QRIS centers participate in activities related to improving child care quality more than non-participating centers.

Findings / Results:

Results for the logistic regression predicting participation in QRIS are displayed in Table 1. The results reveal that funding plays an integral role in predicting if a center is likely to participate in QRIS. For example, centers that report more than two funding streams and centers receiving Pre-K funding are more likely to participate in QRIS. Interestingly, NAEYC accreditation also predicted QRIS participation, as did if the center director held a Bachelor's degree. Taken together, it appears that active directors, those who use a blend of different funding streams including Pre-K funding and who are also seeking out additional accreditations are likely to engage in QRIS. It may be easier for these centers to participate because of state policies providing automatic ratings for these centers or if states require participation if the program receives state dollars. This ultimately supports the idea that QRIS may be engaging center-based programs that demonstrate existing signs of high-quality characteristics.

Importantly, centers located in neighborhoods with low percentages of Hispanic families are more likely to participate. This finding suggests that outreach to Hispanic communities has not been successful, which supports previous research examining the barriers that immigrants and refugees face accessing QRIS (Sugarman & Park, 2017). Southern and northeastern states are more likely to participate suggesting policy differences based on geographical regions. Lastly, centers in high-income areas are less likely to participate, suggesting less of an engagement in QRIS policy in wealthy neighborhoods.

Initial analyses reveal that QRIS participants engage in activities intended to improve quality at higher rates than center-based programs not participating in QRIS (Table 2). QRIS participants were significantly more likely to engage in activities like mentorships and professional development. This finding sheds a positive light on hopes that QRIS can serve as an improvement mechanism to raise quality.

Conclusions:

The purpose of our study was to understand who participates in QRIS intended to improve quality. Using a nationally representative dataset, we examined center and community characteristics associated with participation and tested engagement in improvement activities. Our results suggest that funding streams play a large role in QRIS participation, as does NAEYC accreditation and geographical location. Our study is limited by unsystematic mandatory participation rates in select states and lack of time series data to infer causality. The results describe participating centers and their activities but do not identify QRIS as the cause for these activities. Regardless, a deeper understanding of the centers participating in QRIS ultimately

reveals the type of programs that are (and are not) touched by the QRIS initiatives sweeping the U.S.

Appendices

References

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Table 1. Predicting participation in QRIS using community and center characteristics

Community Characteristics

High Income	0.778** (0.066)
Moderate Income	0.914 (0.076)
Low % African American families	1.144 (0.109)
Moderate & African American families	1.064 (0.085)
Low % Hispanic families	1.296** (0.114)
Moderate % Hispanic families	1.134 (0.085)
Northeast	1.338** (0.130)
Midwest	0.988 (0.104)
South	2.011*** (0.184)

Center Characteristics

Director Experience	1.028* (0.014)
Director BA	1.199** (0.084)
Director Teaching Certification	1.097 (0.079)
Director's race: Black	0.966 (0.086)
Director's race: Asian	0.762 (0.154)
Director's Birth Year	1.007* (0.003)
Head Start funding	1.060 (0.086)
Pre-K funding	1.307*** (0.089)
NAEYC Accreditation	1.784*** (0.157)
Two funding streams	1.009 (0.090)
Three funding streams	1.312** (0.125)
Four funding streams	1.831***

Five + funding streams

(0.201)
2.169***
(0.268)
5773

Observations

Note. Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

Table 2.

Improvement Variables	Participants	Non-Participants
Funding to take college courses/off site training	.689 ***	.579
Paid time off to take college courses/off site training	.504 ***	.372
Staff has mentors/coaches/consultants to work with	.656 ***	.511
Visited by a regulatory agency in the last year	.871 ***	.779
Director: Pro-development/childcare training in past year	.951 ***	.901
Reported community connection	.25 ***	.152

Note: T-tests were run for each of the variables by participation in QRIS. The values represent mean values.

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001