



Evaluation Brief #3: Does Paths to QUALITY™ Benefit Indiana's Child Care Providers?

What is Paths to QUALITY™?

Paths to QUALITY™ was created in Fort Wayne, Indiana in 2000 to help parents identify and select quality child care and to recognize providers who work to achieve higher-quality care, beyond minimum state licensing requirements. In 2008, Paths to QUALITY was introduced statewide as a voluntary system for licensed child care centers, licensed family child care homes, and unlicensed registered child care ministries.

The goals of Paths to QUALITY are to:

- » improve child care quality
- » recognize providers for their quality achievements
- » provide a tool for parents to use to select high-quality child care
- » support better development for children birth to 5 years

The four-level Paths to QUALITY rating system has a “building block” structure¹. Each level has quality criteria that must be met. To advance, the provider must meet all standards for the new level and also maintain the required standards for lower levels. As providers take steps to improve quality, they progress toward Level 4 – *accreditation* – recognized nationally as the highest standard of child care quality.

Figure 1. Paths to QUALITY building block levels



Purdue University Research on Paths to QUALITY

The state of Indiana contracted with Purdue University to evaluate the first three years of Paths to QUALITY, from 2008 to 2011. This research/policy brief highlights key findings about child care providers' experiences with the new program. See other briefs in this series for in-depth information about the Purdue evaluation research.



How many caregivers chose to participate in Paths to QUALITY™?

- » As this research brief was written in July, 2012, there were 603 licensed child care centers, 2,280 licensed family child care homes, and 723 unlicensed registered child care ministries operating in Indiana. The strong and growing level of participation by these providers has been a striking success for Paths to QUALITY.
- » In June, 2011 at the completion of this evaluation research, 82% of all licensed child care centers, 52% of all licensed family child care homes, and 11% of all registered child care ministries had enrolled in Paths to QUALITY. These numbers have continued to increase over the past year. By September, 2012, 88% of licensed centers, 59% of licensed homes, and 10% of registered ministries were participating in Paths to QUALITY.

What were the child care providers' reasons for enrolling in Paths to QUALITY?

- » The Purdue evaluation team surveyed 270 randomly-selected child care providers who were participating in Paths to QUALITY.
- » Providers were asked, **“Why did you decide to join the Paths to QUALITY program?”** Here are their most frequent responses:

Reasons for Enrolling	% of Providers
I wanted to improve the quality of my child care program.	82%
I wanted more professional recognition.	70%
I wanted to make my child care more attractive to parents.	66%
I wanted new ideas for my child care program.	63%
The gifts and cash incentives that were offered for Paths to QUALITY participation.	61%
I wanted the training or technical assistance that Paths to QUALITY offered.	61%
I wanted to increase my business.	49%

Note: Providers could give more than one reason.

What did child care providers say were the most important benefits of participating in Paths to QUALITY after one year?

Most Beneficial Aspect	% of Providers
The mentoring services I have received from the local child care resource and referral agency.	37%
The gifts and incentives I get from the program.	25%
The recognition I get from parents, other providers, or the public that I am providing high quality child care.	16%
The training provided through the program.	9%
Paths to QUALITY participation provides me with a marketing tool for my child care program.	9%

Note: Only the top 5 reasons given are shown.

Were child care providers who enrolled in Paths to QUALITY motivated to advance to higher quality levels?

- » Yes! 23% of providers interviewed had advanced to a higher level in the 6 months since the evaluation visit.
- » 54% of providers interviewed reported they were working hard to move up to higher Paths to QUALITY Levels.
- » Level 2 providers were most likely to advance within 6 months, followed by Level 1 providers:

Level of Provider at Time of Purdue Evaluation Visit	% of Providers Who Moved Up at Least 1 Level in 6 Months	% of Providers Who Stayed at the Same Level in 6 Months
Level 1 (n=65)	26%	69%
Level 2 (n=70)	41%	46%
Level 3 (n=53)	13%	81%
Level 4 (n=50)	NA*	96%

*Level 4 is the highest Paths to QUALITY level, so further advancement is not possible.

According to providers, what are the main challenges they face participating in Paths to QUALITY?

» There were challenges some providers faced in participating and advancing in Paths to QUALITY. Providers were asked, **“In your opinion, what have been the biggest obstacles you face in moving up to the next Paths to QUALITY level?”** 96% of the providers responded to this question. *Here are their most frequent responses:*

Challenges for Providers	% of Providers
Finding the time to complete tasks required by Paths to QUALITY	21%
Completion of required education and training	16%
Insufficient funding to meet standards	9%
Organization; getting paperwork and documentation in order	8%
Preparing for and meeting national accreditation standards	6%
Other obstacles.	6%
Difficulty making needed changes in environment.	4%
Having to wait 6 months to get the next Paths to QUALITY assessment.	4%
Need more feedback from my mentor.	2%
Challenges in developing curriculum.	2%
Reported no obstacles or no response	22%

Conclusions & recommendations for future work with child care providers in Paths to QUALITY.

According to providers, participating in Paths to QUALITY is most beneficial in terms of the mentoring they receive from quality advisors and the public recognition they receive for working to improve the quality of care and education they offer. But there are significant challenges for providers. They often lack the time and resources they need to make changes required to reach the next quality level.

Based on these findings, the Purdue Research Team recommends that:

- » Paths to QUALITY program staff consider providing training in leadership and time management, to support provider’s efforts to manage the new responsibilities that come with participation in Paths to QUALITY.
- » Continue to offer regional meetings and focus groups with providers around the state. Providers will offer valuable information about how Paths to QUALITY is working for them and potential improvements in marketing, incentives and training/technical assistance.
- » In the long term, child care providers need to feel confident that working to advance their Paths to QUALITY level will be beneficial, in terms of their pride in offering quality care to children and families, public recognition for their accomplishments, and financial rewards. Paths to QUALITY should make ongoing efforts to ensure that participating providers are actually receiving these benefits and recognition.



The Purdue Research

Purdue University completed independent assessments of quality using research-validated measures in a statewide random sample of 312 licensed child care center classrooms, registered child care ministry classrooms, and licensed family child care homes. The Purdue team also interviewed more than 1800 parents and 270 child care providers, and completed developmental assessments with more than 550 infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in Paths to QUALITY centers and homes. The research took place between March, 2009 and June, 2011.

The Purdue evaluation research focused on the following questions:

1. Are child care providers of all types entering the voluntary Paths to QUALITY system? Do providers understand the system?
2. What are the incentives for providers to enroll? What are the barriers?
3. Do child care providers move to higher Paths to QUALITY levels after enrolling in the system?
4. Are providers aware of available training/technical assistance (T/TA) resources to help them increase Paths to QUALITY levels, and do they use them? Does T/TA help providers advance their Paths to QUALITY levels?
5. When providers attain higher Paths to QUALITY levels, does this result in higher quality care, as assessed using research-validated measures?
6. Are children who are placed with providers who have achieved higher Paths to QUALITY levels developing more optimally than children placed with providers having lower Paths to QUALITY levels?
7. Are parents of Indiana infants, toddlers, and preschool children aware of and do they understand the Paths to QUALITY system? Does the Paths to QUALITY system affect parents' child care decisions?

¹ QRIS National Learning Network, Glossary of Terms, <http://qrisnetwork.org/glossary>.

This research-policy brief was written by Treshawn Anderson and James Elicker at Purdue University. It is one in a series available on the Purdue Center for Families website (www.cfs.purdue.edu/cff) under "Publications."

1. Evaluation Brief #1: Key Findings
2. Evaluation Brief #2: Does Paths to QUALITY™ Produce Quality Care and Education for Indiana's Young Children?
3. Evaluation Brief #3: Does Paths to QUALITY™ Benefit Indiana's Child Care Providers?
4. Evaluation Brief #4: Does Paths to QUALITY™ Help Indiana Parents Find Quality Child Care?

For more detailed information about the methods, measures, and results, refer to the Paths to QUALITY Final Evaluation Report (2011) also on the Center for Families website.

For more information about Paths to QUALITY, visit the Paths to QUALITY website: www.in.gov/fssa/2554.htm.

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