



Evaluation Brief #1: Key Findings

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.



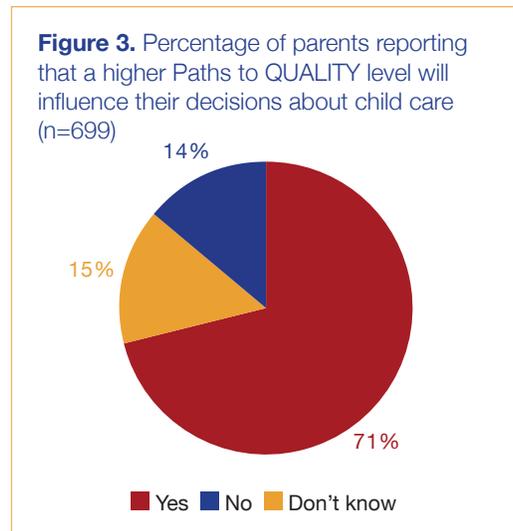
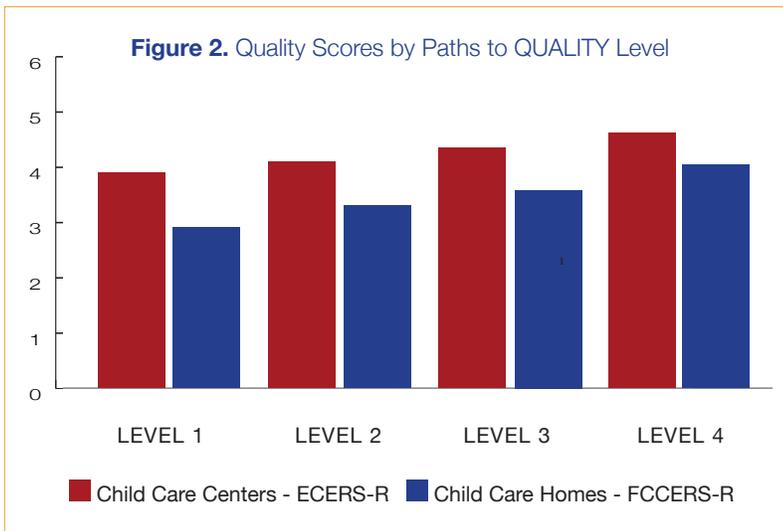
Figure 1. Paths to QUALITY building block levels



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 from the Purdue research regarding the quality ratings, the child care providers, the parents, and the children. See other briefs in this series for more in-depth information about the Purdue evaluation research.





Do Paths to QUALITY ratings give parents valid information about child care quality?

» The Purdue researchers found that Paths to QUALITY ratings provide trustworthy information about child care quality, when compared to research-validated measures. Providers rated at Level 4 were observed to be providing significantly higher quality care and education when compared with providers at Level 1. (See Figure 2.)

Will parents use Paths to QUALITY ratings when they make child care decisions?

» Parents reported they planned to use the Paths to QUALITY ratings to select child care, and they may be willing to pay more for more highly rated care. In a random statewide survey, more than 70% of parents said they would use Paths to QUALITY ratings to guide their child care decisions. More than 55% said they might pay more for higher-rated care. (See Figure 3.)

Does Paths to QUALITY have benefits for child care providers?

» The first 2½ years of Paths to QUALITY saw a high rate of participation by Indiana’s child care providers. More than 85% of licensed child care centers, more than 55% of license family child care homes, and more than 10% of unlicensed registered child care ministries enrolled.

» Providers reported they benefited from the public recognition, and from the mentoring they receive from the state to improve quality.

Will Paths to QUALITY make a difference in children’s development?

» It is too early to tell if Paths to QUALITY will result in better development or better school readiness. That will require longitudinal research that takes into account what *amount* of child care, and *at what quality level*, is received over time.

» However, the Purdue researchers did find that in homes and centers where the caregivers were more positive and responsive to the children, and when they interacted with the children in more stimulating ways, the children were observed to have more social competence and better language and thinking skills.

Moving forward with Paths to QUALITY: Recommendations

While the Purdue evaluation research revealed many early successes of Paths to QUALITY, it also revealed areas for potential improvement:

- » Observations showed that Indiana child care providers were offering higher quality on some dimensions than others. The Purdue researchers recommended that Paths to QUALITY strengthen quality standards and rating methods related to:
 - ✓ health & safety practices;
 - ✓ caregivers’ support of language and cognitive development; and
 - ✓ learning activities, including early math, science, nature, literacy, and blocks.

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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