

ACTION 3.10

Ensure that the way effectiveness is measured in early learning programs and schools is relevant and meaningful to families, students, and other stakeholders. Engage people from low-income communities and communities of color in the design, reporting, and fine-tuning of accountability measures.

Ensure Education **ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS** are **CULTURALLY RELEVANT**

Accountability systems in early care and education—such as how student, educator, child care and school performance are measured—are most effective when they are relevant to the cultures of children, families, staff, and communities involved. Examples of this include assessing learning environments for their ability to accommodate different cultures, and evaluating how family-friendly practices are implemented. The National Association for the Education of Young Children's states that a **providers' level of cultural competency should be measured** by the extent to which they demonstrate valuing of the diversity of the families they serve. They list the following aspects of family diversity that should be considered:

"This structure encompasses family socioeconomic status, family composition, parent's level of educational attainment, abilities of children and family members, family's immigration status, family's religion, family's home and preferred languages, parent's sexual orientation, and the way that a family classifies its race and ethnicity."

Across the USA, **CHILDREN IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES MAKE UP APPROXIMATELY 22% OF CHILDREN** ages birth to six **WHO ARE RECEIVING CARE AND EDUCATION SERVICES** from someone other than their parents.

WHAT WE KNOW

One approach to improving and maintaining high quality early childhood programs is through statewide assessment of each program using a quality rating and improvement system. **North Carolina's childcare Star Rating** was the first market-based rating system developed in the U.S. and has been replicated in other states. Programs applying for a Star Rating are assessed on the following indicators: licensing compliance, ratio and group size, health and safety, curriculum, environment, child assessment, staff qualifications, family partnership, administration and management, cultural/linguistic diversity, accreditation, community involvement and provisions for children with special needs. Given the diversity of young children in North Carolina, it is important to ensure that the Star Rating assessment measures quality in ways that represent a broad diversity of families' cultural values.

Based on input from numerous stakeholders, the National Association for the Education of Young Children developed a Quality Benchmarks for Cultural Competence tool. This tool includes ideas to **help childcare providers build their capacity** to be responsive to the cultural diversity of the families they serve, and **guidance for those assessing and evaluating programs** on how to determine the level of cultural competence within a program.

WHAT WE NEED

It is important to ensure that measures of childcare quality are inclusive of what counts as quality for a wide variety of families. NCECF, in partnership with the Care and Learning (CandL) Coalition, has led a year-long effort to understand the barriers and facilitators to quality child care from the perspective of a diverse group of over 500 parents and providers in 34 counties across North Carolina. These listening sessions have illuminated and reinforced that **quality child care is defined by three key components: trust, affordability, availability.**

Many caregivers noted that an obstacle to trust in the childcare setting included STAR ratings that create an inequitable system for both parents and providers as well as the absence of a centralized portal with information about childcare and parent resources. Lack of affordability also presents a key barrier, with ineffective voucher systems and grant opportunities being a determining factor in the availability of affordable child care centers. Further, the ability of parents and caregivers to obtain quality childcare for their children is impacted by the availability of child care facilities, and related factors including staffing shortages, nontraditional hours, and long distances to and from centers.

The lessons learned from these listening sessions will be used to inform the second phase of the ongoing CandL Coalition project, which will focus on drafting policy recommendations.

HOW TO SUPPORT

Policy makers and those charged with implementing North Carolina's measures of childcare quality, which includes Star Rating quality rating and improvement systems, licensing and monitoring systems, pre-kindergarten standards and monitoring systems, and other early learning guidelines can ensure that their measurements consider cultural diversity.

What counts as high quality child care may be different based on family background and characteristics. Therefore, quality rating systems must be intentional about functioning in ways that are responsive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse families and providers.

The Center for Law and Social Policy suggests that these various assessment, rating, and monitoring systems should consider measure the following aspects of cultural competence:

At a minimum measurements should include:

- Incorporation of children's home culture in daily activities
- Support for home language development
- Percentage of staff who reflect the children and community served

Additional measurements can include:

- Staff fluency in languages other than English
- Staff understanding of cultural practices
- Staff proficiency in second language acquisition strategies
- Staff experience working with diverse families
- Staff engagement in professional learning on cultural competency, second language acquisition strategies, and opportunities for cross-cultural learning
- Classrooms, materials, and interactions reflect value for children's home languages and culture
- Translation, interpretation of materials to facilitate communication with LEP families
- Opportunities for meaningful involvement by families whose language is other than English
- Use of cultural mediators to communicated with minority and immigrant families

INITIATIVES WORKING IN THIS AREA



Empowered Parents In Community

(EPiC) aims to cultivate parent leadership and improve family

engagement to better support students' educational needs. Their mission is to dismantle systemic racial inequities in education. They advocate for high quality educational opportunities and equitable distribution of resources. They do this by intentionally engaging Black parents and empowering them through collective organization to advocate for accountability at all levels to close the educational opportunity gap.

Visit the Pathways Action Map to learn more about initiatives leading efforts in this area.