



# **Grow In Quality Report**

## **Technical Advisor Observations & Comments**

**June 30, 2007**

### **Introduction**

The Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project Technical Advisors had the pleasure of implementing the services for the **Grow in Quality** Project. They gathered anecdotes and observations to summarize thoughts and experiences of the project. The following report expresses the information that has been gathered.

The report is divided into three sections:

- I. Description of Project
- II. Time Line
- III. Technical Advisor Observations & Comments

### **I. Description of Project**

**History** - The Department of Workforce Development (DWD), Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project (WCCIP), and the University of Wisconsin-Extension Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership (WCCRP) worked in partnership on a project, named **Grow in Quality**, which began November 2005 and extended through September 2007. Findings from this project will be used to identify key indicators of quality and to design technical assistance specific to these key quality indicators. The DWD spearheaded the project and provided funding and leadership over the two year period. The WCCRP developed a quality assessment tool (Materials, Appropriateness, Plan--MAP) to be used with group child care programs and analyzed the data collected from the project. The WCCIP provided input on the assessment tool, completed the assessments, and provided technical assistance for the programs in the project.

68 group child care programs, representing both rural and metropolitan areas of Wisconsin, were randomly selected to participate in this project:

- Ladysmith – 4 programs
- Madison – 22 programs
- Fox Valley – 22 programs
- Milwaukee – 20 programs

- . Each program was assessed 3 times during the 2 year project: March/April 2006, October/November 2006, and April/May 2007.

The assessment included:

- Observation of one classroom within each age group at each center (infants, toddlers, preschool, and school age) depending on ages of children served at each center.

- Discussion and examination of evidence collected by the center director in 3 administrative areas: Staff Development, Business Management, and Family Involvement.

Each program had access to a maximum of 10 hours of technical assistance consultation. The subject areas for consultation were based on shared conversations between the consultant and the director and were focused on specified areas of need.

The Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project developed 7 Technical Assistance Modules:

- Licensing Regulations
- Materials and Equipment
- Enhancing Classroom Learning Centers
- The Teaching Cycle
- System for Staff Retention
- Administrative Support
- Family Involvement

Four Levels of Support within the Technical Assistance Modules were identified:

- Level 1: Sharing of resources and written materials, web address information, etc.
- Level 2: Overview and/or light discussion on a topic, provided an introduction to a topic - including referral to additional support
- Level 3: In-depth group training for more than one child care center with a skilled trainer
- Level 4: In-depth consultation at individual program site, including the development of an action plan

**Tracking Technical Assistance** - Each WCCIP Technical Advisor documented the technical assistance provided, including the type of technical assistance and the length of time of each session offered to the group center program for each visit and/or phone call or email connection. Technical assistance reports were sent electronically by WCCIP to the WCCRP monthly, and technical assistance progress reports were generated via the data system developed at WCCRP.

During the summer of 2007 the WCCRP finalized the MAP assessment tool (Materials, Appropriateness, Plan) and manual, incorporating suggestions and findings from the three observations completed by WCCIP Technical Advisors. WCCRP will share a key quality indicator report with the pilot participants and key stakeholders.

## II. Timeline

Grow in Quality Timeline		
2006	2/1	Draft MAP instrument is completed.
	2/9	Conference call (WCCIP, DWD, WCCRP) to discuss the MAP instrument, procedures for on-site assessments, and design for technical assistance.
	2/10-2/28	WCCIP technical advisors conduct practice observations using the MAP in two ECE centers that are not part of the random sample. Results are used to clarify data collection procedures and refine the MAP.
	3/1	MAP Assessment is finalized. This MAP (Form A) tool will be used for all on-site observations at Time One, Time Two, and Time Three.
	3/15- 6/1	<b>Time One Observations</b> are conducted in 68 ECE programs, each of which has agreed to participate in this 14-month Initiative.
	5/15-9/30	WCCRP analyzes data from Time One Observations, collaborates with Milwaukee County to test a revised MAP (Form B) in 22 “Milwaukee Counts for Kids” programs; and develops an Access database for WCCIP technical assistance reporting.  WCCIP conducts technical assistance in a subset of 34 ECE programs (Group A), carefully recording the exact amount and type of assistance offered to each program. No contact is made with Group B centers.
	6/15, 7/15, 8/15, 10/6	WCCIP technical advisors electronically send technical assistance reports to WCCRP for cumulative summary reports.
	9/1-9/15	WCCRP, WCCIP, and DWD review outcomes of technical assistance and procedures for Time Two Observations.
	10/9-11/30	<b>Time Two Observations</b> are conducted in 65 ECE programs. Technical advisors use the Form A MAP assessment tool.
	11/15-3/31	WCCRP analyzes data from MAP A (Time One and Time Two) and MAP B observations to develop a more efficient MAP instrument (Form C).  WCCIP conducts technical assistance in second subset of 34 ECE programs (Group B), carefully recording the exact amount and type of assistance offered to each program. No contact is made with Group A centers.
2007	12/15, 1/15, 2/15, 3/31	WCCIP technical advisors electronically send technical assistance reports to WCCIP and WCCRP for summary reports.
	3/31– 5/15	<b>Time Three Observations</b> are conducted in 65 ECE programs. Technical advisors use the Form A MAP assessment tool.
	4/30 – 9/30/2007	WCCRP shares MAP assessment tool and manual with state partners, and finalizes report on key quality indicators.  WCCIP summarizes lessons learned and completes final report on the impact of technical assistance on quality improvement.

### **Descriptors of acronyms used in the timeline**

MAP: Assessment Tool used in classrooms for the Grow in Quality Project.

MAP (Form A): First Assessment Tool developed for the Grow in Quality Project.

MAP (Form B): Second Assessment Tool developed for the "Milwaukee Counts for Kids" Project.

MAP (Form C): Revised Assessment Tool developed.

Group A: First subset receiving technical assistance.

Group B: Second subset receiving technical assistance.

## **III. Technical Advisor Observations & Comments**

WCCIP developed this narrative report indicating the findings that have resulted from providing program assessment and modular technical assistance for the programs.

### **A) MAP Assessments**

Technical Advisors assessed each program 3 times during the 2 year project: March/April 2006, October/November 2006, and April/May 2007. Each program had one classroom in each age group assessed.

As Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project Technical Advisors worked with the Assessment Tool, Technical Advisors and Program Directors provided feedback regarding the tool and how it worked within specific programs.

### **Feedback on the Assessment Tool**

- More information needed to be gathered on outdoor play space and outdoor activities
- More information needed to be gathered on interactions with children, relationship building and guidance techniques.
- Administrators/directors wanted to be given a copy of the assessment tool prior to assessments being done as well as a written report/explanation of ratings after assessments.
- Number of items in a classroom (ex. 15 bins of fine motor materials) doesn't always indicate quality and this assessment leaned toward that assumption
- This assessment tool didn't differentiate between small classrooms and large classrooms (ex. Needed 15 bins of fine motor materials in a class of 8 children as well as in a class of 20 children.)
- The School Age section of the tool was not always developmentally appropriate (ex., types of books, more large motor, crafts/hobbies, computers, etc.)
- Some items in the Toddler section didn't seem appropriate (ex., some items were more appropriate for 2 year olds than for a child that just turned 1 year old.)

### **Successes of the Assessment Tool**

- The assessment tool rated quality in classrooms as well as business practices of the program.
- It emphasized learning centers, which are a key part of a preschool environment.
- The tool was able to be done in a reasonable amount of time.
- The tool was easier to use as time went on.
- The tool demanded conversations between the TA and the director and this helped to build relationships.
- The tool was designed to be done at any time during the schedule of the day, except nap.

### **Barriers of the Assessment Tool**

- Rating a classroom without children was meaningless. Setting up times that worked for all age groups to be present was at times difficult considering the timeframe that TA's needed to follow.
- Montessori programs did not do well in some sections of the tool, such as dramatic play, defined literacy section, blocks and art.
- Some part day programs may not do well in some sections (Ex., director needs to be on site 30 hours per week.)

## **B) Technical Assistance**

Each program had access to a maximum of 10 hours of technical assistance consultation. The subject areas for consultation focused on specified areas of need as determined by shared conversations between the Technical Advisor and the program director.

### **Successes of Technical Assistance**

As collaboration with programs transpired, Technical Advisors observed success stories within programs. WCCIP Technical Advisors considered two questions during the time spent with programs:

#### **1.) What contributed to program growth?**

- Commitment to quality
- Leadership skills of the Director
- Relationship building among staff, families, and children
- Stability in the program (in both staff and director retention)
- Time spent by the Director in direct support/supervision of staff and on Administrative duties
- Comprehensive staff program evaluation system
- Support for continuing education
- Shared decision-making and/or participatory management systems within a program

- 2.) What positive changes were made in the programs?
- Developmentally appropriate curricula adopted
  - Curriculum aligned with Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards
  - Incorporation of The Teaching Cycle, including assessing, planning and implementation of activities
  - Classrooms redesigned
  - Developmentally appropriate materials added to classrooms
  - Developmentally appropriate assessment tools for children utilized
  - Systems for evaluating staff established
  - Salary scales for staff created
  - Professional development plans for staff established
  - Family surveys conducted
  - Family resource areas developed
  - Additional family/social events planned
  - Staff skills strengthened through training opportunities offered by WCCIP on areas relevant to the assessment tool
  - Directors Network group, initially facilitated by WCCIP, continues
  - Directors became members of a professional organization, extending network of contacts, support and resources

### **Barriers of Technical Assistance**

Technical Advisors found “what didn’t work” as they collaborated with programs. WCCIP Technical Advisors considered two questions during the time spent with programs:

- 1.) What inhibited program growth?
- Lack of leadership: Directors incapable of motivating staff or encouraging follow-through.
  - Lack of commitment: Directors not invested in quality.
  - Turnover, both of staff and director: The process often needed to start over when new directors or staff came on board.
  - Regression: At times a staff member took some steps forward in a classroom, but then a new person was put into the room who did not continue with the quality efforts that were started and in fact quality went backwards.
  - Lack of education on the part of some directors or staff: They did not understand quality and were unable to implement what was suggested.
  - No interest in attending training opportunities: Staff missed out on opportunities that may have made a difference in their programs.
  - Lack of or inconsistent communication: Ex., a director not passing on Grow in Quality information to a new director or a director not passing on TA discussions to staff.
  - Meeting cancellations: Directors often needed to be in classrooms to meet teacher-child ratios and were unable to meet with the Technical Advisors.

- Programs in 'crisis' for one reason or another or preoccupation with day to day issues of operations: Directors were unable to concentrate on quality enhancement.
- Insufficient time: Programs that were committed to enhancement needed more time to fully implement systems and improvements.
- Programs for sale: These had no commitment to further investment in the program.
- Programs not meeting licensing regulations: These programs were struggling to meet basic minimum rules and could not envision quality enhancement.
- Lack of resources: Programs needed extra money to purchase needed materials or to implement some aspect of quality such as providing health insurance for staff.
- Lack of decision-making power: Owners or corporations did not allow the directors to make changes.
- Time of year for Technical Assistance: Directors did not want to meet during the holidays and during the summer.

## 2.) What could have been done differently?

- Implement an agreement or contract to instill in the directors what their commitment to the Grow in Quality pilot project entailed.
- Clearly identify what 'free Technical Assistance' means and a strategy to instill value of Technical Assistance.
- Have additional hours of Technical Assistance available to the TA providers to use when a program cancelled an appointment as this affected the entire schedule.
- Offer tangible incentives for centers to make improvements to programs, including grants or stipends.

## C) Lessons Learned from the Grow in Quality Project

- Commitment is key to making positive changes.
- Not all those working with young children are dedicated to quality early childhood programming.
- There are many outside issues that affect directors, staff, and families that interfere with providing a good program.
- Many centers are dealing with low enrollment, in some instances due to 3 and 4 year-old-kindergarten programs in public schools. Programs could not concentrate on quality enhancement efforts when under-enrolled. These centers would have benefited from some marketing strategies..
- At times, owners of programs feel more invested in their programs than a 'hired' director.
- Programs that were already high quality oftentimes worked harder to attain even higher quality than those that were mediocre or less. It appears that quality program directors and staff are proud of what they do and continually strive to do better.

- Education of director and staff appeared to make a difference in progress made.
- Directors reacted positively to 1-on-1 consultations and hands-on trainings for staff.
- Many programs have not yet adopted developmentally appropriate assessment tools to utilize with children.
- Some programs may have tried to 'perform' for the assessment day, such as putting out materials to get a better score, but not actually embracing the concept behind it and later possibly going back to their previous ways.
- Some directors may have answered interview questions in a way in which he/she thought it should be answered but may not have always been the actual practice of the program. (Ex., "Do staff have paid planning time away from responsibilities of children?")
- Relationship building between Technical Advisors and program directors develops trust. This trust allowed Technical Advisors to go into programs and work honestly and with a colleague-to-colleague approach throughout this project.
- Resources that were most valuable were: Teaching Cycle information; "Suggested Materials for Preschool Learning Centers" handout; Science and Math handouts; and Hiring Packets.

### **Summary:**

Participation in this program was voluntary. Programs came for two main reasons, either to validate that they were good, or to get assistance in areas they felt were lacking. Technical assistance, from consultants who have a broad base of core knowledge of the field of early childhood, made a difference. Although confined to using the assessment tool, and therefore addressing assessment tool issues, technical assistance was individualized and unique to each program, dealing specifically with aspects each program wanted to see changed.

The value of good technical assistance lies in its ability to be individualized, and in the relationships built between the technical advisor, the program director and staff, as well as the networks developed between programs.

Child care programs pervasively struggle with survival; with turn over and often with staff who are under-trained, over-worked, or burnt out. Consultants struggle with the need to encourage directors and staff to follow through and have successes. Despite these struggles, this project did see improvements and quality enhancement in the participating programs.

WCCIP appreciated the opportunity to have collaborated with DWD, WCCRP, and the programs that volunteered their time and efforts in the Grow in Quality Project.