

DWD BEGINS “GROW IN QUALITY” PILOT PROJECT

The Department of Workforce Development (DWD) recently initiated the “Grow in Quality” project, a pilot project that is being conducted to identify key indicators of child care quality and to begin the process of designing technical assistance specific to these quality indicators. Data will be gathered over the next year on quality indicators from 70 randomly selected licensed group centers participating in four distinct pilot program areas of the state.

The two primary purposes of the Grow in Quality project are:

1. To design and test an efficient, accurate, and effective instrument that can be used reliably by trained observers to assess key quality indicators, including classroom environments and business practices, within early care and education settings statewide.
2. To use the information gathered from the assessments, in collaboration with early care and education program directors, to develop meaningful plans for program improvement, to implement specified amounts and types of technical assistance, and to assess the impact of technical assistance on key quality indicators.

The Grow in Quality project is being funded by DWD utilizing a portion of the Child Care Section Training and Technical Assistance dollars. The Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project, the UW-Extension -Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership, and the Child Care Section in DWD are partners in the project. It is anticipated that at the conclusion of the pilot project DWD will bring together workgroups/focus groups to review the data, the materials developed and the findings established to determine the next steps for developing a statewide quality indicator project approach.

In this project the UW-Extension Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership: randomly selected licensed group center programs in four identified areas across the state. These selected programs received invitation letters in late January, early February to participate in this pilot project. This pilot project will work with 70 programs who have responded with their interest in participating.

The UW-Extension has worked with the Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project and the Child Care Section in developing a quality indicator assessment tool that utilizes the KidsFirst – Quality Care for Kids Task Force recommendations that were submitted to the Governor’s Office in December 2004. In further development and refinement of the Grow in Quality pilot project quality indicators assessment tool, the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) materials, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), the Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS), the School Age Childhood Environment Rating Scale (SACERS), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation Standards and the Program Administration Scale (PAS) were reviewed for content and application. Other state-wide and nation-wide findings and application tools have been reviewed to ensure that quality indicators identified are practical and research based.

Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project (WCCIP) staff will complete assessments of the 70 randomly selected licensed group center programs. Technical Assistance will be identified for each program based on the assessment findings.

Classroom Observation

Classrooms will be assessed in four global areas:

1. Health, safety, and physical development
2. Social and emotional development
3. Language, literacy, and writing
4. Math, science, and child assessments

A MAP scale has been developed to create a consistent format for assessment.

M = **Materials** (the number of materials accessible to the children, the quality of the space available in which to use those materials, and the adequacy of the amount of time that the materials are accessible to children)

A = **Age-appropriateness** (developmentally appropriate materials in a range of complexity to meet the needs of all children)

P – **Plan** (observation of the classroom, looking at the lesson plans, and talking with the teacher to assess whether there is evidence of alignment between classroom materials and daily activities)

The WCCIP observer will also ask questions of the teaching staff in each classroom.

Business practices

Programs will be assessed within three global areas:

1. Staff development
2. Business management
3. Family involvement

The evaluator will conduct a brief examination of written policies, procedures, and checklists related to staff development, business management, and family involvement. An interview with the program director will occur and it will be the director's responsibility to demonstrate and describe what systematic efforts are in place to meet high quality program standards.

The Research Partnership will evaluate pre and post assessments, and specify areas of improvement following specified technical assistance in an effort to bolster the case for a future Quality Care for Quality Kids Wisconsin state-wide model.

It is anticipated that findings from this project will be widely disseminated, and it is the vision of the Department to utilize these findings in promoting a future quality indicator project. Over the next year data will be gathered on quality indicators from these 70 pilot programs. At this time we anticipate that during the summer of 2007 we will bring together workgroups/focus groups to review the data collected, materials developed and the findings established to determine the next steps for developing a statewide quality indicator project approach. Quality Care for Quality Kids Task Force Members and Content Experts will be invited to participate in this process. As data are collected and reports become available, they will be included on the Child Care Section web pages.