

Technical Report

March 2010

Technical Report: Development of a Classification System for Quality Initiative (QI) Activities Reported by Local Social Service Agencies in Virginia

Federal regulations for state block grants for the Child Care Development Fund (CCDFBG) require that four percent of state funds be dedicated to child care quality improvement activities. Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) in turn required each local agency who received CCDF block grant funding to report QI activities. In 2009, each of 118 local departments of social services reported narrative plans for QI activities to their regional DSS office.

This report describes:

- The development and preliminary testing of a classification system to quantitatively summarize QI activities for Virginia.
- How category data could be entered at the local agency level
- The classification system and working definitions of categories
- Anticipated benefits of the system

Background:

- This brief Research Report is one of a series of fact sheets produced as a result of a state-wide data inventory during 2009.
- As part of the first phase of Project Child HANDS, all local social service agencies and school divisions were surveyed regarding what kinds of early childhood data they collected. Social service agencies reported on whether they collected data beyond CCDF federal reporting requirements, particularly related to the child care quality. Agencies also indicated the kinds of data or reports they would value from an integrated early childhood data system.
- Regional narrative 2009 QI reports were classified into different categories of activities, using information from 118 (93% of 120) local agencies. Classification was aimed at minimizing overlap between categories.
- For results, see *Virginia's Local Social Service Agencies: Child Care Quality, Improvement, Subsidy Data, and What Would be Most Useful in an Early Childhood Data System* at www.childhands.org.

Anticipated benefits of the system

The system would:

- Make it easier for local offices to report QI activity by using a prescribed category checklist
- Enable activities to be tied to expenditures in one form for reporting and planning purposes
- Enable localities, regional child care consultants and state administrators to track types of QI activities to better describe what is being done and to evaluate effectiveness.
- Aid regional and state policy making regarding child care QI efforts.

Project Child HANDS (**C**hild Care Subsidy and Early Education: **H**elping **A**nalyze **N**eeded **D**ata **S**ecurely) is a state-wide collaboration to build a cross-agency, web-based data system for early childhood programs and initiatives to inform and guide evaluation and policy decision-making. Partners include the Virginia Departments of Social Services, Education; and Virginia Tech's Institute for Policy and Governance, and Child Development Center for Learning and Research. Funding is provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families.

<http://www.childhands.org>

How the classification system was developed:

- Two Project Child HANDS team members developed a set of categories of common QI activities and used them to classify one region's 2009 QI reports in sets of three localities. After the initial three locality activities were categorized, team members compared classifications. Categories that achieved perfect agreement were retained; others were modified or subsumed under a broader category. This process continued iteratively through the entire regional narrative report and resulted in a preliminary classification system.
- A second team of Project Child HANDS members then tested the classification system to test for clarity, using two regional reports from 2003. Team members classified activities one locality at a time, compared groupings, and reasoned together about mismatches. The system was again revised based on this team's recommendations in consultation with the system developers.
- Once categories were conceptually clarified, definitions were written and given to the second classification team to test with different regional 2003 reports. Team members independently classified the same regional report without consulting one another. This test indicated the classification system was clear: classifiers achieved a 92% match across all categories. The final system has five broad categories with a total of 20 specific QI activities.

How category data could be entered at the local agency level:

Categorization information is easily entered into a spreadsheet (see screenshots below). First, at the very top of the box is the option of choosing "A" or "B." This is useful if two people are entering the same data, to check reliability. Next, users select the correct locality out of the options in the left column. Each region has a separate box identical to the screenshot. The middle columns contain the specific QI activities that localities may be using. Multiple selections can be made by using the CTRL button while clicking on the activity. The last column contains the special populations that may be reached through these activities. Multiple populations can also be selected. Once all appropriate activities have been selected, the user can hit "Submit" and the data will appear in the spreadsheet.

The screenshot shows a software window titled "UserForm1" with a close button in the top right corner. The form is divided into three main sections. On the left, under the heading "Region", is a list of Virginia localities: Albemarle/Charlottesville, Alleghany-Covington, Amherst, Appomattox, Bath, Bedford, Botetourt, Buckingham, Campbell, Charlotte, Charlottesville, Craig, Danville, Franklin County, Halifax, Henry-Martinsville, Highland, Lunenburg, Lynchburg, Mecklenburg, Nelson, Patrick, Pittsylvania, Prince Edward, Roanoke City, Roanoke County, Rockbridge-Buena Vista-Lee, and Shenandoah Valley (Staunton). The "Albemarle/Charlottesville" locality is selected. In the center, under the heading "Assessment", are two radio buttons labeled "A" and "B", both of which are unselected. Below these are three scrollable lists of activities: "Child-Care Environment" (with "Child Focused" selected), "Child Care Provider Focused" (with "Technical Assistance", "Professional Development", "Materials Curriculum", "Physical Education & Activities", "Health & Safety", "Mini Grants", and "Licensure/Compliance Activities" listed), and "Education" (with "Parent/Child Activities", "Parent Training", "Consumer", and "Field Trips" listed). On the right, under the heading "Special Populations", is a list: "Bilingual Children", "Special Needs Children", "Children At Risk", "School Age Children", and "Head Start". At the bottom of the form, there is a text prompt "Enter data for one region at a time" and a "Submit" button.

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The classification system and working definitions of categories:

- Broadly, the QI activities consist of five categories. Within these categories are specific activities. For example, the Education category includes four different QI activities.
- Quality Initiative categories and subcategories include:
- Assessment: Child-care environment, child focused
- Child-care provider focused: Technical assistance, professional development, materials curriculum, physical education and activities, health and safety, mini-grants, or licensure/compliance activities
- Education: Parent/child activities, parent training, consumer, or field trips
- Capacity building: Small business program development implementation, infrastructure and community collaboration, expansion and/or increased capacity, or resource and referral
- Special populations: Head Start, Children who are ESL (English as a Second Language), at risk, school age, or have special needs.

Working Definitions of QI Category Placement:**ASSESSMENT**

- Child –focus: Ways of assessing individual child development/progress/health
- Provider-environment: all other forms of assessment of child care environment, including providers, physical space, furnishings, how materials are set up, etc.

CHILD CARE PROVIDER FOCUSED

- The structure and provision of curriculum or activities devoted to early childhood education; and procedures and routines involved in the daily operations of child care.
- Technical assistance: Mentor, coach, mental health consultant, computer assistance, provided by contractor not on staff with child care facility
- Professional development: Training for regulated providers, home- or center-based, that advances either (a) educational qualifications; or (b) training in a particular developmental or educational curriculum, practice or knowledge base. Includes: (a) scholarship money for continued formal education, including degree programs, GED, and CDA; DSS endorsement trainings; certification in education or population-specific practices, such as working with ELL families, children with disabilities, etc. (b) in-service trainings on play, social development, specific curricula, behavior management, parent relationships, child care business practices, etc. Does NOT include: Annual MAT, CPR and First Aid certification trainings; other health-related training or practice; other safety practices, such as fire or tornado drill training. Supplies and materials, including curricula.
- Materials and curriculum: Purchase of non-health/safety or non-PA supplies and off-the-shelf curriculum or curriculum-related materials, including record books, computer or DVD materials related to the curriculum, to be used primarily during the program. If solely about assessment related to a given curriculum, place under ASSESSMENT; if included in curriculum package, place under Materials/Curriculum. For materials primarily aimed at increasing parent-child interaction, such as books to go home, place under PARENT-CHILD ACTIVITY.

QI Working Definitions Continued

CHILD CARE PROVIDER FOCUSED continued

- Health and safety: Trainings related to these categories; materials related to these categories (such as fire extinguishers, latex gloves, dehumidifiers, etc.). Do not include mulch in this category. Includes nutrition-related QI activities.
- Physical activity and education: Anything related to the playground, recess, movement activities, indoor gross motor play equipment (such as, mats, bars, balance beam, etc.). Includes trainings and equipment and supplies related to enhancing this feature of the child care program. Includes physically-oriented field trips (for instance, swimming lessons) or summer sports programs (soccer, swimming, etc.).
- Mini-grants: Specially designed mini-grants for purposes not otherwise addressed.
- Licensing compliance activities: Activities designed to help unregulated programs achieve licensure.

EDUCATION

- Parent-Child Activities: Materials or activities designed to enhance parent-child interaction. Examples include books to bring home, science experiments to do at home, or suggested play activities.
- Parent training: Workshop, web-based information or other format to teach parents content related to child development, behavior management, child-related time management or early childhood education; or related to better household practices, such as financial planning.
- Consumer education: Printed material, websites or workshops/talks to help parents choose child care, toys, or other child-related things; more rarely, for business owners, in the capacity of a business consumer (i.e., choosing proper child care-related equipment, toys, eating utensils, etc.).
- Field trips: Central goal of this category is to provide resources for field trips; that is, events or activities outside of the normal child care premises, and usually focused on a particular educational or recreational objective (such as, visiting museums, fire station, minor league ball game).

CAPACITY BUILDING

- Small business program development implementation: Activities or promotional events that help child care businesses. Can include putting in new billing system or similar.
- Infrastructure: Activities designed to increase child care capacity in a region. Includes networking, collaboration with other agencies/organizations to offer something new or improved or sustain high-quality programming; data collection implementation or enhancements; starting up program like summer camp, etc.