“Seeds to Success has been an incredible opportunity to further develop our craft and focus on the practice and profession of Early Learning.”

SARAH AIRIAR,T
FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL OF WEST SEATTLE

Lessons Learned
The two-year field test revealed the following elements as vital for success:

- **Coaching, training and incentives.** Help improve quality of care provided to children and families in a short time period.
- **Standardized assessments.** Provide a benchmark for measuring quality improvement and a foundation for goal setting.
- **Strong relationships with community stakeholders.** Help build local capacity and create critical infrastructure, maintaining momentum and increasing participant buy-in as Seeds to Success expands statewide.
- **Simple is better.** Prioritize critical elements using evidence-based, research-supported indicators to create a model that is easy for caregivers and families to use and understand.

Next Steps
The field test results and community feedback demonstrate that a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) is a valuable tool both for families seeking quality child care and for providers committed to making improvements.

While the program’s reach depends on funding, Department of Early Learning envisions a statewide implementation of the QRIS, with expansion beginning in 2011-2012. Plans include:

- Introduction of the updated QRIS standards in August 2011
- Ongoing quality improvement efforts by field test participants, who will lead the way as “early adopters”
- Development of key statewide data systems, ensuring seamless infrastructure and leading to valid, accurate and meaningful ratings
- Participation by at least 120 facilities in QRIS beginning in July 2012, depending on available funding
- Continued efforts to secure both state and federal support and funding

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Parent Evaluation Survey 8/2010-2/2011; Child Care Resources, King County, WA

Sandey et al., 2004; Jenkins et al., 2007; Neuman et al., 2005; Powell et al., 2010.
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What is Seeds to Success?
Where can parents turn for information about child care quality? When Child Care Resources surveyed over 400 Washington state parents, 70% supported a quality rating and improvement system—Seeds to Success—Washington state’s voluntary quality rating and improvement system—was developed to meet that need. Tested over the past two years, this new model uses nationwide best practices, and it adds a research-based rating system to the state’s licensing requirements. Seeds to Success includes:

- Quality standards
- Accountability measures
- Provider outreach and support
- Financial incentives
- Parent/consumer education

It gave us the ability to be the kind of program I knew we could be.

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The growing demand for quality child care

Every day in Washington state, at least 176,000 children are cared for in licensed child care. But the quality varies dramatically. Very young children, who most need high-quality care, often don’t receive it. Providers need effective supports to help improve the quality of care. And parents concerned about quality need a standardized tool that will provide the information they need—no matter where they live.

Quality affects school success

Parents have always known that a quality child care program must provide more than just a safe place to play. Experts agree that a child who experiences a high-quality learning environment enters school better prepared for success.

One national study followed 733 children from ages 4 to 8, and found that quality teacher practice has a positive impact on language and academic skills. Additionally, positive teacher-child interactions strengthen children’s cognitive and social skills.

Brain development scientists at the University of Washington’s Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences (I-LABS) find that “…relationships, how we interact with children, what kind of input, the quality and quantity of that input early on, can predict kindergarten and school readiness much earlier than we think.”

Clearly, the availability of high-quality early childhood care is critical. Parents are reaching out for help to find the best care options for their children. And 49 out of 50 states, including Washington state, are responding with child care quality rating systems.

Washington’s response

Responding to the needs of parents, providers and children, Washington state’s Department of Early Learning (DEL) and Thrive by Five Washington (the state’s nonprofit public-private partnership for early learning) developed Seeds to Success, a method to assess, improve and communicate about quality of care.

The Seeds to Success model is based on input from thousands of parents, child care professionals, and advocates, along with best practices from similar systems in 22 states. The Seeds to Success field test (2009-2010) ensured a fair system, focused on changes and supports that most impact children. In addition, this model will provide parent consumers with accurate information about quality when ratings are released.

Who benefits?

• CHILDREN
  Thrive on higher quality care
• PARENTS
  Enjoy access to “consumer reports” information about program quality
• PROVIDERS
  Receive support and incentives for improvements

Testing Seeds to Success

Child care providers—center-based and family-home based—in five communities participated in a two-year field test. Participants included over 100 child care businesses and 300 child care professionals in Clark, Kitsap and Spokane counties, as well as the two Thrive by Five Washington Demonstration Communities in White Center (King County) and East Yakima.

The major focus of Year One was a randomized controlled trial—one of the first in the country for a quality rating and improvement system—conducted in White Center and East Yakima. Results informed a refinement of the test for the second year.

Field tests show that Seeds to Success improves quality

YEAR ONE, 2009-2010: TESTING THE EFFECT OF COACHING AND FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

In East Yakima and White Center, 52 family child care providers and 14 centers were randomly divided into treatment and control groups. Providers in the treatment group received eight hours of coaching per month, quality improvement grants, professional development opportunities and funds, and additional supports.

It was clear the coaching and financial incentives provided through Seeds to Success significantly improved the observed quality of child care. According to the researchers, “the differences in observed quality were larger than those reported in other recent studies” of child care or preschool quality improvement interventions.

The bottom line? When child care providers receive one-on-one coaching and modest improvement grants, program quality begins to improve—quickly.

Washington Demonstrations Communities

In East Yakima and Washington Demonstration Communities in White Center (King County) and East Yakima, 52 family child care providers and 14 centers were divided into treatment and control groups.

Partnerships

Partners in all five communities received consistent levels of coaching, training, and other professional development opportunities. DEL and Thrive by Five Washington evaluated the entire Seeds model, using fall and spring assessments to measure changes in program quality.

YEAR TWO, 2010-2011: TESTING THE FULL SEEDS TO SUCCESS MODEL AND SERVICES

Participants in all five communities received consistent levels of coaching, training, and other professional development opportunities. DEL and Thrive by Five Washington evaluated the entire Seeds model, using fall and spring assessments to measure changes in program quality.

Quality scores were much higher for the group with access to Seeds coaching and quality improvement funds than for the control group that did not have access to these resources.

Kim Bollier, Mathematica’s lead researcher for first-year study