

# Frequently Asked Questions

## — for Parents

### What is Quality Counts California?

Quality Counts California is a statewide effort in California to improve the quality of early care and education programs for infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children. The effort is carried out in individual counties or regions through a local Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) that works with participating early care and education centers and family child care homes.

### What is a QRIS?

QRIS is the acronym for a Quality Rating and Improvement System, which evaluates, communicates about, and, as needed, helps improve the quality of early care and education centers and family child care homes.

A QRIS:

1. Rates programs on how well they meet program standards for quality
2. Makes the ratings available to parents (and others in parental roles) to help them choose a program for their child
3. Works with the programs to continually improve, as needed

### Why is it important to have a QRIS?

Research consistently shows that children who attend a quality early care and education program are more likely to do well in school and less likely to drop out or need remedial supports later in their education. A QRIS is intended to improve the quality of participating programs so they are better prepared to help all children grow socially, emotionally, and physically in a healthy environment, with knowledgeable and caring providers who engage children in a range of enriching activities.

### Who manages the QRISs in California?

All QRISs operate under the broad oversight of the California Department of Education, the California Children and Families Commission (known as First 5 California), the California Department of Social Services and regional consortia, or partnerships, throughout the state. These consortia consist of First 5 county commissions, county offices of education, local child care planning councils, child care resource and referral agencies, and other child-focused groups. Each consortium is responsible for a local QRIS.

Every QRIS is tailored slightly to serve its own community, but they all have the same mission: “Ensure that children in California have access to high-quality programs so that they thrive in their early learning settings and succeed in kindergarten and beyond.”

## If every QRIS in California is tailored to serve its own community, what do they have in common with one another?

All QRISs in the state have five things in common:

1. They use the same set of program standards to evaluate the quality of a program and assign a rating.
2. They offer financial incentives for programs to participate.
3. They offer a number of supports to help participating programs improve.
4. They monitor program quality.
5. They provide some form of consumer education to help you and other parents better understand what quality looks like in early care and education programs and why it matters.

## Do early care and education programs have to participate in a QRIS?

In California, participation in a QRIS is voluntary for early care and education programs. So, if a program is participating, you can be assured that it is committed to quality improvement over time.

## What kind of commitment does a program make when it opts to be rated?

Programs that want to participate agree to take a series of steps to measure and improve the quality of their program, including collecting common data, sharing the data with their local QRIS, and working to implement needed quality improvement efforts.

For more information, visit [www.qualitycountsca.net](http://www.qualitycountsca.net).