Recommendations for a School Age Design of Great Start to Quality

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Introduction

This report contains information on a study conducted by American Institutes for Research (AIR) to make recommendations for a school age design of Great Start to Quality, Michigan’s tiered quality rating improvement system (QRIS). The first two reports for this project, described next, contained information about the current quality improvement efforts for school age programs in Michigan and nationally. This third and final report presents recommendations for Michigan’s School Age Design of Great Start to Quality based on data collected throughout the project.

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation contracted with AIR to gather recommendations for the development of Michigan’s School Age Design of Great Start to Quality. The collaborative project has the following three key objectives:

1. Develop a definition of school age with input from Michigan stakeholders
2. Review current school age quality improvement efforts in Michigan and nationally
3. Make recommendations to build a comprehensive QRIS for school age programming in Michigan

The AIR team submitted Report 1, *Current Quality Improvement Efforts for School Age Programs in Michigan*, to the Early Childhood Investment Corporation in August 2014. This report contained information about the current quality improvement efforts for school age programs in Michigan based on a document review and an online survey of direct service providers and organizations that support school age programs. The report presented findings related to Michigan: school age standards, school age certificates and credentials, and professional development and technical assistance for school age programs.

The AIR team submitted Report 2, *Quality Rating Improvement Systems: National Scan of School Age Programs*, to the Investment Corporation in August 2014. This report provided information about school age QRIS models in a sample of states based on document review and phone interviews with statewide and national stakeholders. The report presented findings in six categories: QRIS system models, tiered program standards, monitoring, public availability of quality ratings, supports to meet progressive standards, and the QRIS operating system. In addition to these six categories, the project team collected information about the funding sources used to support the school age QRIS in each state.

This report outlines recommendations based on information collected about current quality improvement efforts for school age programs in Michigan and nationally, while also taking into account the current QRIS model. Throughout this document, we will discuss school age programs that occur in out-of-school-time settings. We use out-of-school time to refer to programs that operate outside of the regular school day (e.g., before and after school, during the summer, and during school breaks). The report is divided into four sections: Methods, Findings, Recommendations, and Considerations and Next Steps.
Methods

The project team used a mixed-methods approach to data collection that included three key components: (1) a document review, (2) an online parent survey and phone interviews with parent Advisory Committee members, and (3) a feedback loop with the Advisory Committee. Each form of data collection and data source is described in the sections that follow.

Document Review

The project team reviewed publically available information explaining Great Start to Quality, Michigan’s tiered QRIS. The project team focused on the six categories described previously: QRIS system models, tiered program standards, monitoring, public availability of quality ratings, supports to meet progressive standards, and the QRIS operating system. The AIR team used information about the current QRIS to make informed recommendations for a school age design of Great Start to Quality.

Online Survey and Phone Interviews

The Investment Corporation developed and administered an online survey to gather information from families in Michigan about out-of-school-time programs. The Investment Corporation distributed the survey link using four avenues: shared in the Weekly Bulletin that is distributed through the statewide Great Start Collaboratives and Coalitions, distributed through the Michigan Department of Education’s newsletter, e-mailed the survey link to the project’s Advisory Committee members, and shared on social media. The survey consisted of 19 questions that were a mix of closed or forced-choice responses and open-ended responses. In an effort to get as much input as possible, answers to the survey questions were not required to move forward in the survey. As a result, the number of responses to each question varied considerably from 60 to 416 of a total of 421 respondents. The survey questions are included in Appendix A.

In addition to the online survey, the AIR project team scheduled interviews with parent stakeholders on the Advisory Committee. The phone interview questions mirrored the online survey but allowed the interviewer to probe and ask for clarification or narrative to corroborate the survey findings. At the beginning of each interview, interviewees were provided with the project background, the objectives of the interview, and a summary of the findings from Report 2 (if the interviewee did not attend the feedback webinar described next). The AIR team attempted to interview all four parent stakeholders on the Advisory Committee and was successful in interviewing two individuals.

As stated, the survey link was sent to members of the project’s Advisory Committee, who were asked to distribute the link to their network of families. Participation in the survey was optional. As Figure 1 indicates, respondents represent all 10 Great Start to Quality Resource Centers areas in Michigan. The Resource Centers implement components of Great Start to Quality, including awareness building and increasing participation in the system, providing consultation and access to quality improvement resources, and providing professional development. The most represented region was the Southeast Resource Center (42.8 percent), followed by the Central
Respondents included a mix of parents whose children are participating in out-of-school-time programming (68.8 percent) and those not participating in out-of-school-time programming (31.2 percent).

In addition to gathering information from parents and caregivers, the project team gathered feedback from members of the Advisory Committee via a webinar. The next section describes this activity.

**Feedback Loop**

The purpose of the feedback loop was to ensure that the voices of key stakeholders were represented in the final recommendations. To get feedback from stakeholders, the project team e-mailed a copy of Report 2 to members of the Advisory Committee and invited them to attend a webinar. The purpose of the webinar was to gather feedback from the project’s stakeholders before developing recommendations for a school age design of Great Start to Quality. During the webinar, the project team presented the progress of the project to date and a summary of findings from Report 2. After we presented each section of the report, the project team facilitated a discussion with key questions. This provided a structured feedback loop for stakeholders to weigh in on findings. Additionally, the project team distributed notes from the meeting, as well
as a link to the webinar recording, to all Advisory Committee members and asked for more feedback after the webinar.

The AIR team analyzed and summarized data from the document review, the online survey and phone interviews, and the webinar using traditional qualitative pattern matching methods (Yin, 2009). The findings section summarizes the themes that emerged from this analysis and provides examples.
Findings

The project team analyzed data from the document review, the online survey and phone interviews, and the webinar feedback loop. This section has three subsections of findings: an overview of Great Start to Quality, stakeholder feedback, and parent and caregiver views of out-of-school-time programs.

Overview of Great Start to Quality

Great Start to Quality is Michigan’s tiered QRIS. The Investment Corporation is responsible for the implementation of Great Start to Quality through a contract with the Michigan Department of Education Office of Great Start. The six subsections that follow provide a summary of Great Start to Quality that align with the six categories of interest: system models, tiered program standards, monitoring, public availability of ratings, supports to meet progressive standards, and operating system.

System Model

Great Start to Quality includes programs and providers serving children from birth through kindergarten entry. All licensed and registered programs and providers in good standing with the Bureau of Children and Adult licensing participate in Great Start to Quality at its foundational level, an Empty Star. Movement to higher Star levels in the QRIS is voluntary and requires the program to complete an online self-assessment survey. As in most other states included in the national scan, Michigan’s QRIS is linked to the child care subsidy and includes tiered reimbursement.

Similar to states interviewed as part of Report 2, Michigan includes child care centers, group child care homes, family child care homes, Title I program sites, and child care and community-based preschool programs in the QRIS. Great Start to Quality is inclusive of Great Start Readiness Programs, Michigan’s state-funded prekindergarten, Early Head Start, and Head Start. Table 1 shows the types of programs and providers included in the QRIS for each state the AIR team reviewed including Michigan. The data presented in this table are helpful in understanding the program types represented in QRIS models that also include school age programs.

Table 1. Type of Program Included in QRIS by State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>AR</th>
<th>DE</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>NY</th>
<th>NC</th>
<th>OH</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>PA</th>
<th>WI</th>
<th>MI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child care centers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day camps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Head Start</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family child care homes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group child care</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-home child care</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
License-exempt providers | X | X | X | X | X
Preschools and prekindergarten | X | X | X | X | X | X | X
Public preschools and prekindergarten (Title I) | X | X | X | X | X
School age programs | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X
New York State Education Department-registered nursery schools | X
Special education preschools | X | X

*While it is possible to use Title I funds for prekindergarten in Michigan, it is not typical.

**Tiered Program Standards**

Great Start to Quality’s standards align with the state’s early learning standards, the *Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Pre-Kindergarten* and the *Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Infant and Toddler Programs*. Five key areas are included in the Great Start to Quality standards: staff qualifications and professional development, family and community partnerships, administration and management, environment, and curriculum and instruction. The key areas for the standards are the same across all programs in the QRIS; however, the indicators vary based on the specific program type—child care and preschool centers, family and group child care homes with assistants, or family and group child care homes without assistants.

Great Start to Quality is a points-based system with six levels, or Star ratings. Each level has a minimum cut-off score to achieve that Star rating. Programs that meet licensing requirements receive an Empty Star, indicating that the program or provider is in good standing with licensing. Movement beyond an Empty Star is voluntary and requires the completion of an online self-assessment survey. The program’s Star rating is determined by the results of the self-assessment survey.

**Monitoring**

Michigan has a formal process of assessment for programs in the QRIS. Programs and providers with a submitted self-assessment survey at Levels 1, 2, and 3 are subject to random validation of the survey and uploaded evidence. Classroom level observations, using the Program Quality Assessment (PQA), are required for programs and providers with a validated self-assessment survey at Levels 4 and 5. Great Start to Quality uses three versions of the PQA: the Preschool PQA, the Infant and Toddler PQA, and the Family Child Care PQA. The PQA was developed by the HighScope Educational Research Foundation (HighScope Education Research Foundation, 2014).
Public Availability of Quality Ratings. As with most other states included in the national scan, Michigan makes program quality ratings public via its website. Families can also search for child care on the website.

Supports to Meet Progressive Standards. Michigan has set up Great Start to Quality Resource Centers throughout the state to support providers in improving the quality of their programs. There are 10 Resource Centers that offer the following services: coaching and consultation to providers working on their quality improvement plans, information about professional development and training opportunities, and a lending library of books and other resources. In addition to supports provided by the Resource Centers, staff at the Investment Corporation present at statewide conferences and workshops to support the broader understanding of Great Start to Quality. The Investment Corporation staff also host a monthly webinar to share information and updates about Great Start to Quality.

Operating System. Michigan’s QRIS is supported by an online platform called the Great Start to Quality STARS platform. It was developed by Mosaic, Inc., an external vendor. The online system allows for licensed and registered programs and providers to complete their self-assessment survey, upload evidence documents, develop a quality improvement plan, and access resources. The system allows for administrative users to validate self-assessment surveys, review evidence documentation, log technical assistance efforts, and perform monitoring functions. Administrative users also have access to large amounts of data related to participation, quality improvement efforts, and the quality level of programs across each of the standards. Compared with other state’s operating systems included in the national scan, Michigan’s system is more sophisticated and advanced.

This subsection presented information about Michigan’s current QRIS. In the next section, we present findings from the feedback webinar.

Stakeholder Feedback

A key component of the project design was to incorporate feedback from key stakeholders in the final recommendations. The project team presented findings from Report 2 to Advisory Committee members via a webinar. The webinar was designed to provide a feedback loop based on findings related to the six categories of the report: QRIS system models, tiered program standards, monitoring, public availability of ratings, supports to meet progressive standards, and operating system. After findings were presented for each category, the project team asked questions to generate discussion and gather feedback related to each category. The questions are presented in the following section by category.

System Models

Based on this information [presented], what are things for us to consider when recommending a definition of school age for Michigan?

Two Advisory Committee members shared their views for this question. One stakeholder commented that the definition of school age for the QRIS should align with licensing and include children and youth from kindergarten entry to age 12. The other stakeholder wanted the project
team to also consider the age appropriateness of standards, including socially and emotionally appropriate based on ages but did say this might align more closely with the tiered program standards.

**Tiered Program Standards**

Based on this information [presented], are there any special criteria that you think the project team should take into account when developing recommendations for tiered program standards?

One stakeholder commented that the infant and toddler and school age standards are aligned in Michigan but not exactly the same. Another stakeholder suggested the team take into account developmentally appropriate standards.

**Monitoring**

What do you think the project team should take into account in the development of recommendations for an assessment process for school age programs?

Stakeholders thought it made sense to use the Youth Program Quality Assessment tool the quality standards are already aligned to it. One stakeholder asked how other states handle mixed age groups and when to use a specific tool if a program serves mixed age groups.

**Public Availability of Quality Ratings**

What should the project team consider in making the ratings publically available, including how families are made aware of the ratings?

During discussion on this topic, one stakeholder questioned the relevance of ratings for school age programs with the idea that parents and families might not be “shopping around” for school age programs. However, there seemed to be discrepancies in the reaction to our question by respondents depending on their region of the state. Some stakeholders reported that families have little choice in school age programming for their child, whereas others stated that there are options in their communities. Regardless of region, stakeholders did agree that disseminating information about the school age QRIS and informing parents of what makes a quality program would be beneficial. Stakeholders suggest that additional information on QRIS and program quality would empower parents and help them advocate for better programming.

**Supports Available to Meet Progressive Standards**

What are some examples of the types of supports that should be available for school age programs? What else should the project team take into consideration in developing recommendations for supports for school age programs?

Stakeholders suggested that resources are available at the community, local, and state levels for school age programs. Stakeholders reported it was important for programs to access coaching, classroom supports, and the right tools to be successful in achieving their goals for quality. Stakeholders also reported the importance of staffing individuals with expertise with a school age population in each of the Great Start to Quality Resource Centers.
Operating Systems

What do you think we should take into consideration regarding an operating system for a school age quality rating and improvement system?

Stakeholders suggested that Michigan should have the same system for school age and early learning programs to provide a seamless system of supports.

Parent and Caregiver Views of Out-of-School Time Programs

There were several themes that emerged from parents and caregivers through the online survey and interviews. The following section contains information on the themes related to this project.

When asked whether parents/caregivers found it easy to find out-of-school-time programming that fits their definition of quality, respondents (n = 158) were split between finding this process easy (53.8 percent) and not finding this process easy (46.2 percent). The perceived barriers to finding a quality program are presented after further discussion on the definition of a quality program.

In the survey, parents and caregivers were given the opportunity to define quality out-of-school-time programming in their own words. Responses to the open-ended question “What do you think about when you read, ‘QUALITY’ out-of-school-time programs?” ranged from “field trips, games, low staff ratio” to “programs that are active, engaged, and/or learning” and “activities that will enhance their lives as adults.”

To understand parents’ definitions of quality out-of-school-time programming, respondents were asked to rate specific definitions of “quality,” with a number between one (does not describe quality) to five (an excellent descriptor of quality). As Table 2 shows, parents’ responses were consistent with open-ended descriptions of quality out-of-school-time programs. Physical, social, and emotional health, safety, and security; Program creates a positive social environment; Environment offers a safe, comfortable age/ability appropriate stable facility; Staff working directly with children and youth are well trained; and Activities are planned to work in tandem with the school day activities were all rated as a 5 by more than 50 percent of survey respondents.

Table 2. Ratings for Definitions of Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program is licensed.</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical, social and emotional health, safety, and security.</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>72.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program serves food and beverages that promote lifelong health.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program creates a positive social environment.</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is low staff turnover.</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff working directly with children and youth are well trained.</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>65.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment offers a safe, comfortable age/ability appropriate stable facility.</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Activities are planned to work in tandem with the school day activities.  
Families are involved in decision making and improvement.  
Families, school personnel, businesses, community organizations.  
Assessments are used to measure child development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2.5</th>
<th>1.9</th>
<th>12.5</th>
<th>28.8</th>
<th>54.4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| N = 161 (The total sample was 421 respondents; 260 respondents missing values for question 7).

Conversations with parent stakeholders during interviews confirmed these findings; however, the interviewees emphasized the safety and security of programs as factors parents consider in their enrollment decision. Interviewees indicated that this is especially the case when limited options are available in a community. Interviewees also noted that quality programs would make accommodations for the diversity of student needs, in particular by allowing for self-driven time for homework completion or recreation activities.

The majority of survey respondents (67 percent) reported that they had previously tried to find an out-of-school-time program for their child; of this subgroup, 54 percent indicated that it was easy to find a program that matched their definition of quality.

When asked, “Do you consider out-of-school-time programs a part of your child’s overall education?”, 76 percent did consider programs to be part of their child’s overall education and 24 percent did not (n = 150).

The survey asked parents and caregivers how many out-of-school-time programs they contacted and visited prior to enrolling their child. Results from the survey showed that the majority of respondents (70.8 percent) contacted between one and three programs before making the decision to enroll their child. Only 29.2 percent indicated contacting more than four programs during the process of their search. These findings point to the importance of effective outreach and marketing activities that make parents aware of the availability of quality programming in their region.

The survey asked parents and caregivers what factors went into their decision for selecting the out-of-school-time programs to enroll their child. The most frequently cited factor was location, with 29.2 percent of respondents indicating this influenced their enrollment decision. The least frequently cited factor was the curriculum of a program, with only 15.4 percent of respondents indicating that this was part of their decision making process in selecting a program to enroll their child. Not surprisingly, parents were more likely to consider the curriculum of a program in their enrollment decision if they considered out-of-school-time programming to be a part of their child’s overall education.

The interviews with parent stakeholders confirmed these general findings and added emphasis to convenience of a program in their enrollment decision. Specifically, parents and caregivers may have access to a range of programming options in some areas, whereas in other areas this choice does not exist.

When asked, “Is it your sense that most families who use out-of-school-time programs have access to quality programs?”, 43.6 percent responded “no.” The survey asked parents and
caregivers what barriers or obstacles they perceived for families in Michigan to choose a quality out-of-school-time program. As Figure 2 illustrates, most parents and caregivers indicated that cost and availability of programs were barriers to choosing quality out-of-school-time programming.

**Figure 2. What Barriers or Obstacles Do You Think Exist That Make It Harder for Families in Michigan to Choose a Quality Out-of-School Time Program?**

N = 140 (The total number of respondents was 421; 281 nonresponses for question 13).

Another interesting finding is about the barriers and obstacles reported by respondents and whether they report that most families had access to quality out-of-school-time programs. Figure 3 shows that respondents who reported that parents do not have access to quality out-of-school-time programs also reported barriers to quality. Additionally, availability of programs and location were the lowest reported barriers for respondents who felt most families did have access to quality programming but the most cited barrier for those that felt most families did not have access to quality programming.

**Figure 3. The Perceived Barriers Broken Down by Whether Families Have Access to Quality Programs**
Note: Percentages are based on the total number of parents responding “yes” or “no” to the question, “Is it your sense that most families who use out-of-school-time programs have access to quality programs?” Percentages therefore reflect a profile of each subgroup of parents, so as to be comparable across groups.

It is important to note that the barriers most frequently cited by those parents who considered out-of-school-time programming to be a part of their child’s education but had not enrolled their child in such programming were availability of programs and location.

Parents and caregivers were asked whether they felt that resources existed in their community to help them learn about quality out-of-school-time programs. A little more than half of respondents (54.9 percent) indicated that these types of resources did not exist in their respective communities.

Respondents were asked who they trusted to provide reliable information about out-of-school-time programs. As Figure 4 illustrates, the most frequently cited source of reliable information came from friends (28.5 percent), family (26.6 percent), and teachers (26.8 percent). The least frequently cited sources of information were school board members (7.8 percent), religious leaders (11.6 percent), and child care providers (11.9 percent). Respondents also cited other (11.3 percent) sources of information, including coworkers and children, on quality out-of-school-time programming in Michigan. The interviews with parent stakeholders confirmed these general findings. However, in addition to friends and family, the interviewees emphasized the role of the workplace, employers, and colleagues in parents’ enrollment decision. These findings are important to consider when determining appropriate outreach and marketing activities for out-of-school-time programs.

Figure 4. Trusted Sources of Information on Out-of-School-Time Programs

Based on the findings presented in this report, along with information in Reports 1 and 2, the next section outlines the recommendations for a School Age Design of Great Start to Quality.
Recommendations

The purpose of this report is to present recommendations for a School Age Design of Great Start to Quality based on information collected throughout the project. Recommendations are presented based on the six categories of a QRIS: system models, tiered program standards, monitoring, public availability of quality ratings, supports to meet progressive standards, and operating system. The project team included the recommended definition of school age in the system models category.

Because Great Start to Quality is currently based on licensing, the project team recommends that the definition of school age encompass kindergarten through age 12. This will allow the QRIS in Michigan to continue with licensing requirements as the foundation of the system. The project team recommends that the Office of Great Start and the Investment Corporation clearly define school age as a program type that stands alone (e.g., school age center) or as an existing program type (e.g., child care centers) that serves a school age population.

For tiered program standards, the project team recommends using the Michigan Out-of-School Time (MOST) Standards of Quality, which apply to programming for all school age children and youth from kindergarten entry through high school graduation. The MOST Standards of Quality were also aligned with the Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Infant and Toddler Programs and Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten in 2012 (Michigan State Board of Education, 2013). Several other states included in the national scan have the same categories across program type and age groups but with different assessment criteria. For example, all programs in the QRIS may have a standard related to health and safety; however, the assessment criteria may be different for an infant and toddler program than for a school age program. This allows for continuity across the range of standards within the QRIS. The project team recommends that the current categories used for Great Start to Quality—staff qualifications and professional development, family and community partnerships, administration and management, environment, and curriculum and instruction—remain the same and that indicators and criteria specific to school age programs be created for each category.

The project team recommends that monitoring for the QRIS remain the same, with the addition of the School-Age PQA as the assessment tool for school age programs. The School-Age PQA is a validated assessment tool that is designed for programs serving children in kindergarten through sixth grade. Conversely, Michigan may wish to provide an option between the School-Age PQA and the Youth Program Quality Assessment, which is suitable for youth in grades 4-12 and is also a validated assessment tool. Both the School-Age PQA and Youth Program Quality Assessment assess safe environment, supportive environment, interaction, engagement, youth-centered policies and practices, high expectations for youth and staff, and access (Center for Youth Program Quality, n.d.).

School age programs may follow the same path as early learning programs of completing a self-assessment for the first three levels of the QRIS with an onsite assessment required for the two upper levels of the system. Assessment Specialists would need to be trained in the School-Age PQA to assess school age programs.
In response to the stakeholder question during the webinar about the case of programs serving mixed age groups, the project team recommends Michigan consider the way other states have handled this issue. States often define the program type based on the majority of children served. For example, a school age program is often defined as a program serving a majority of school age children and youth. In this case, the school age assessment would be used.

The project team recommends that school age ratings be listed on the website, along with child care and preschool ratings. However, it is worth noting that listing the ratings makes participation in the QRIS high stakes. The Office of Great Start and the Investment Corporation may want to consider delaying the release of ratings if this is considered to be a potential barrier to participation. The project team recommends a concerted effort for outreach and marketing for school age programs. It was clear from the parent survey that, although parents have an understanding of what they consider to be a quality out-of-school-time program, they do not believe that quality programs are available to all families. Some variation was found in parent and caregiver responses on the belief that out-of-school-time programming is part of their child’s overall education. It will be important for the school age QRIS to first educate families about the importance of out-of-school-time programming and then make the ratings available to families.

The project team recommends that the Office of Great Start and the Investment Corporation explore different avenues of spreading the word because families indicated that they trusted friends, family, and teachers to inform them of out-of-school-time programming.

The project team recommends that the supports offered to school age programs take into consideration the population being served. As in other states, Michigan may decide to require the same amount of training for all programs included in the QRIS; however, the content of the trainings and workshops should be specific to a school age population. The project team recommends that individuals with school age expertise (e.g., afterschool and expanded learning, and youth development) be staffed in each of the Great Start to Quality Resource Centers in roles similar to the Quality Improvement Consultants that currently support early childhood programs and providers. The Quality Improvement Consultants with school age expertise would provide coaching and consultation to school age programs in the QRIS. Based on the initial discussion at the Advisory Committee kickoff meeting in June 2014, the project team recommends that programs serving youth age 13 through high school graduation have access to the lending library and resources available through the Great Start to Quality Resource Centers.

As noted previously, the two most frequently cited barriers to accessing quality out-of-school-time programming by those parents who considered out-of-school-time programming to be a part of their child’s education but had not enrolled their child in such programming were availability of programs and location. Although this particular issue may be outside the realm of developing a QRIS specific to school age programs, it is important to consider when looking at the state as a whole. Out-of-school-time programming might not be easily accessible in some regions and additional supports might be needed to develop quality programming.

The project team recommends that the same operating system be used for all programs in the QRIS. This will allow for a seamless system throughout all participating programs in the state including those that serve mixed age groups.
Finally, based on information collected from statewide and national stakeholders for Report 2, the project team recommends the Office of Great Start and the Investment Corporation explore additional funding options for a School Age Design of Great Start to Quality. As with most other states, Great Start to Quality is currently funded through the Child Care and Development Fund. Individuals interviewed as part of data collection for Report 2 indicated that a few other states (e.g., Connecticut, Oregon, and New Jersey) have braided together additional funds, including 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding to support the inclusion of school age programs in the QRIS.
Considerations and Next Steps

The purpose of the project culminating in this final report was to gather recommendations for a school age design of Great Start to Quality. Through the process of collecting data and presenting information, five additional questions arose that were outside the scope of the current work. We present these unanswered questions next, along with suggestions for answering them.

The first unanswered question is related to subsidy reimbursement. During interviews that informed Report 2, national stakeholders reported that school age programs often report difficulty in implementing tiered subsidy reimbursement as part of their QRIS participation. In the interest of time, the project team did not probe further into this statement. We recommend following up with the national stakeholders for additional information that would inform the Michigan Department of Education and the Investment Corporation about why this is the perception. During this follow-up, national stakeholders should also be asked about their suggestions or lessons learned related to technical assistance and resources to assist school age programs use tiered subsidy reimbursements.

The second unanswered question is related to the credentialing process for staff who work in school age programs. During interviews that informed Report 2, statewide stakeholders were asked if their state has a credentialing process. However, stakeholders did not provide the level of detail needed to understand what the credentialing process looks like in each state. The project team was unable to gather this information through publically available documents. We recommend following up with statewide stakeholders via telephone or e-mail to ask for additional details involving the school age credential process.

The third unanswered question is related to the interrater reliability process for validation by internal staff. Interviews with statewide stakeholders asked about the reliability of assessors but did not probe for the specific process. The project team recommends including a question about this process in a follow-up with statewide stakeholders. We also recommend asking stakeholders to send supporting documents that may not be publically available.

The fourth unanswered question addresses the issue that there are areas of Michigan that do not have sufficient access to programming for school age children and youth. Advisory Committee members had different viewpoints about the availability of quality programming for school age children and youth during the feedback webinar depending on their location. Likewise, parent and caregiver responses to the online survey indicated variability in the availability of quality out-of-school time programming depending on the respondent’s location. We recommend exploring this further through additional analysis of the survey results or focus groups with parents and caregivers in each region of the state.

The final unanswered question is related to the cost of the QRIS. The project team asked statewide stakeholders about the funding sources that are used in their state to support the assessors, the supports for programs, and the operating system. However, interviewees did not share specific costs related to these categories. We recommend including this question in a follow-up with statewide stakeholders.
References


Appendix A. Online Survey Questions

1. Are you a parent or caregiver of a school age (5–17) child?

2. Does or has your child(ren) participate(d) in out-of-school time programs? This could be after school, before school, summer camp, child care during vacation, etc.

3. What do you think about when you read, “out-of-school time programs?”

4. What do you think about when you read, “QUALITY out-of-school time programs?”

5. Have you ever tried to find an out-of-school time program for your child?

6. Would you say that it was easy to find an out-of-school time program option that fit your definition of quality?

7. Let’s look at some words and phrases that others have used to describe the quality of out-of-school programs. Please rate each statement, five meaning the statement is an excellent descriptor of quality and one meaning it does not describe quality.

   a. The program is licensed.

   b. The physical, social and emotional health, safety, and security of all children and youth are protected.

   c. The program serves food and beverages in amounts and types that promote lifelong health and prevent disease.

   d. The program creates a positive social environment where all children, youth, and their families feel safe and respected.

   e. There is low staff turnover.

   f. Staff working directly with children and youth are well trained, with appropriate experience and understanding of child development.

   g. The environment, both indoors and out offers a safe, comfortable age/ability appropriate stable facility with adequate space to carry out the program and meet the needs of all students.

   h. Activities are planned to work in tandem with the school day activities with a focus on supplementing the areas of development not regularly provided during the school day.

   i. Families are involved in decision making, planning, management, evaluation, and improvement of the program.
j. Families, school personnel, businesses, community organizations, and others are involved in the planning process and/or informed of the program.

k. Assessments are used to measure child development.

8. Do you consider out-of-school time programs a part of your child’s overall education?

9. In your opinion, what should out-of-school time programs accomplish for families, children, and youth?

10. Where did you look for information about out-of-school time programs?

11. Before you decided on out-of-school time programs how many did you contact?

12. Did you visit any programs before enrolling your child?

13. What went into your decision for selecting the program(s) that you did?

14. Is it your sense that most families who use out-of-school time programs have access to quality programs?

15. What barriers or obstacles do you think exist that make it harder for families in Michigan to choose a quality out-of-school time programs?

16. Do resources exist in your community to help you learn more about quality out-of-school time programs?

17. Please list the resources you know of in your community.

18. Who do you trust to provide information about out-of-school time programs?

19. What else, if anything, do you think should be taken in to consideration in the development of a quality rating and improvement system for out-of-school programs?
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