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# Paths to QUALITY: A Child Care Quality Rating System for Indiana. Child Care Provider Focus Group Report

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**Paths to QUALITY™**

**Child Care Provider Focus Group Report:**

**Summary of Findings from PTQ Licensed Child Care Center Directors,  
Registered Ministry Directors, and Family Child Care Providers  
(Technical Report #4)**

**September 2013**

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We especially thank the 58 child care directors and home providers who gave of their valuable time to participate in the PTQ focus group interviews. To the extent that Paths to QUALITY and this evaluation research benefits child care in Indiana, providers, children, and families in child care centers, homes, and ministries are the most important contributors and beneficiaries.

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## **Introduction**

As a part of Purdue University's Phase 2 Evaluation of Paths to QUALITY (PTQ) the research team conducted 11 focus group interviews with Indiana child care providers enrolled in PTQ during April and May 2013. The groups met in five regions of the state and included both urban- and rural-based providers.

## **Goals**

The purpose of the provider focus group interviews was to gain up-to-date, in-depth perspective on providers' views and experiences in PTQ. The interviews were designed to identify key issues for providers that could be investigated in a more extensive study. They were not designed to give a representative picture of the views of all Indiana child care providers who are participating in PTQ. However they did allow us to gain in-depth insights into the current views of some providers around the state, those who volunteered to participate in the focus groups. The main questions discussed in these interviews included: why providers decided to join PTQ, obstacles to advancement, support and assistance they received, perceptions of what they gained from participation, and what they would change about the system.

## **Focus Group Procedure**

PTQ-rated child care providers were recruited in five evaluation regions (including Indianapolis; Lake, Porter and La Porte counties; Lafayette and surrounding counties, Evansville and surrounding counties, and Fort Wayne and surrounding counties) through the local child care resource and referral agencies. Staff at these agencies recommended providers at each PTQ level whom they thought would be open to sharing their ideas and opinions about PTQ.

Providers were contacted via telephone by the Purdue University researchers. Focus groups were held in each of the five local communities at a neutral location such as a library, university, or church. Participants were assured that their involvement and comments would be kept confidential. Each focus group interview took approximately two hours and was recorded for further analysis. Focus group questions were semi-structured, but interviewers gave participants considerable latitude to discuss issues of importance to them. Providers were also asked questions regarding their educational level and training experience, for descriptive purposes. Providers were given a \$25 stipend for participation.

## **Focus Group Participants**

Eleven focus groups were completed in the five evaluation regions. A total of 22 licensed family child care providers, 22 licensed center directors, and 14 unlicensed registered ministry directors who have met Voluntary Certification Program standards participated. Tables 1 and 2 provide additional details regarding the participants' PTQ levels, education, and training.

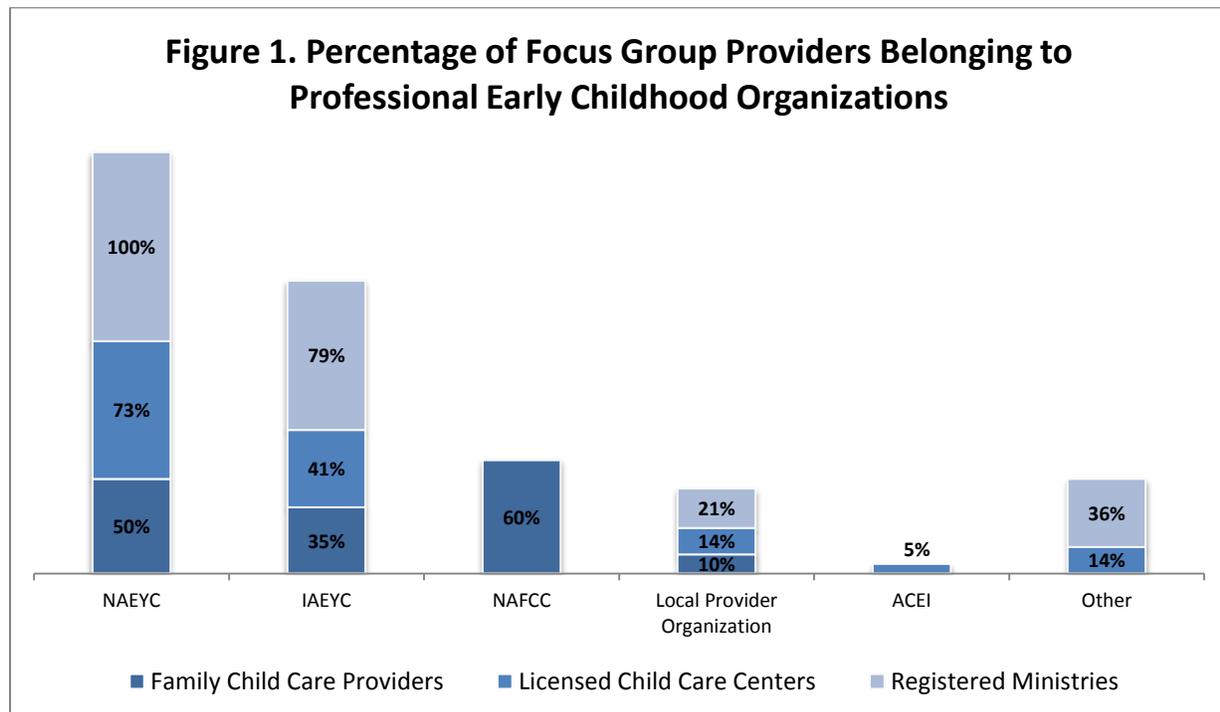
**Table 1. Focus Group Participants by PTQ Level and Type of Care**

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Total
Family Child Care Providers	3	4	8	7	22
Licensed Child Care Center Director	3	4	8	7	22
Registered Ministry Directors	2	4	7	1	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>58</b>

**Table 2. Focus Group Participant Education Level by Type of Care**

	Licensed Center	Registered Ministry	Family Child Care
HS diploma	0	0	2 (10%)
Some college, no degree	0	0	4 (20%)
CDA	2 (9%)	3 (22%)	5 (25%)
Associate’s degree	3 (14%)	3 (22%)	4 (20%)
Bachelor’s degree	12 (54%)	7 (50%)	3 (15%)
Master’s degree	5 (23%)	1 (7%)	1 (5%)
Doctorate degree	0	0	1 (5%)

Providers were also asked about their professional affiliations. Figure 1 details the percentage of providers who belonged to certain organizations. A majority of providers belonged to NAEYC and IAEYC.



In addition to professional organization affiliation, providers were asked about their attendance of early childhood conferences over the past two years. About 1/3 of the providers, 32% (n=18) had attended more than 4 conferences, 23% (n=13) had attended three conferences, 14% (n=8) attended 2 conferences, 13% (n=7) attended no conferences, and 7% (n=4) attended one conference in the past two years.

## **Analysis**

Immediately following each focus group interview, the Purdue research team discussed the major themes that were addressed during the interview. The Purdue research team then transcribed each interview and coded the transcripts for themes present in the participants' answers to each main interview question. All transcripts were reviewed and coded by at least two research team members, to make sure the analysis was thorough and reliable.

## **Results**

In the summary that follows, results from the center-based directors (licensed centers and registered ministries) are presented separately from results of the licensed family child care home providers. For each main research question, we first give an overview of the themes reflected in the participants' comments and discussion, we interpret the meaning of these themes, and then we share representative provider quotes.

## Reasons for Joining PTQ

**Questions: What did you initially hope to gain by joining PTQ? Have you gained those things? Why did you make the decision to stay on PTQ?**

## Licensed Child Care Centers and Registered Child Care Ministry Directors

The 36 directors in these focus groups suggested a number of reasons that they had joined and continued to participate in PTQ. The most frequent themes in their responses included: a desire to improve their programs and provide leadership in the child care field; marketing to parents who are increasingly informed about PTQ quality; and to support accountability for quality by their staff. Approximately one-third of the directors mentioned the importance of increasing the quality of their programs. Some directors have a goal to provide the highest quality program possible, and they see PTQ as a means to this end. Others see the need for the child care field in general to provide higher quality programming to support children's development and provide needed support to families. An equal number of directors mentioned the need to meet parents' demands for high PTQ quality ratings, in order to remain competitive. While not all directors had experienced many parents coming to them with questions about PTQ, overall, these directors saw parents increasingly relying on PTQ ratings to help them find quality care.

Staff accountability was mentioned by seven of the directors. By this, they meant that the quality standards and outside input from raters, mentors, and quality advisors was helpful to them in impressing the center staff with the importance of working on specific quality improvement efforts. An equal number of directors mentioned that they and their staff felt "validated" by the quality assessments and rating awards of PTQ. This was a public, objective judgment that they were providing a high quality service.

Other reasons for participation were mentioned by one or two directors. Some directors felt pressure to participate from colleagues or child care resource and referral staff. Others were enthusiastic about participating because PTQ provided opportunities for their own professional development. Individual directors also mentioned that they gained much-needed material resources by participating, including renovations, cash incentives, and materials for children. One director said that the public recognition for advancement in PTQ was an important factor.

### Provider Quotes: Why join and stay in PTQ?

#### Desire to improve program and provide leadership

- *if we are not working on getting better then we are kinda stagnant and not growing ... it is better to get in on front end of a program than the tail end so when a new program comes through we try to jump right on that and get our staff excited about it to be leaders. (LCC Director)*

- *To answer your question, it was ... the validation of my vision. (LCC Director)*
- *For me, with all the things that have happened with the ministries in the past year and the bad name that they have, I think it's really important to stand out and say we aren't like this and this isn't the way it's supposed to be. (RM Director)*
- *...from the beginning of our daycare in 1996, we wanted to do quality care for the neighborhood, and everyone deserved that. We wanted to add stability to the kids we had, and this was a way for us to be recognized for the quality of care that we were already giving and once United Way came along and said they could do capital was great. (RM Director)*

### **Encourage accountability of staff**

- *I think it is like checks and balances too. For my staff it holds them accountable. You can tell them all you want but when you have someone else come in and go through all the things—it kinda helps us be accountable too.” (LCC Director)*
- *My whole staff is wonderful but it is a way to evaluate them more. Even with my instructional assistants, sometimes they can get a little lazy but we go back to here's what quality work is, and here's what the state expects, so... (LCC Director)*
- *So it was really helpful to have someone come in and say, this is how we need to arrange things, so it was helpful for her to come in and to talk about how to do centers appropriately, there were a lot of worksheets happening when I got there and having her talk about why we don't do that was really helpful. Having another voice is huge to have someone else than me, especially being new, I wanted to do things slowly to not offend. (RM Director)*

### **Quality Validation**

- *We already knew we were operating at this higher level, why not have the validation from something like Paths to QUALITY, so that it was more than just us saying we are a strong program, but having Paths to QUALITY backing us up as well. (RM Director)*
- *I think it was really a personal drive, a personal and professional drive. I don't think it was an outside source, per se that hey, you really need to do this. It was really something personally that the staff and I wanted to do. (RM Director)*
- *Getting that recognition is really nice. It's so different than the 'are you licensed question' – but when you say that you are on PTQ, it doesn't pull the negativity from parents who are coming in and saying 'well, so was my old site, and I wasn't happy*

*there.’ So the PTQ helps with that recognition and helps pull us apart a little from the rest. (LCC Director)*

Other themes that emerged from centers and ministries regarding why they joined PTQ included the desire to distinguish themselves from others, gain public recognition, advance in their professional development, and the incentives and new resources that were gained through participation.

Center and registered ministry directors also shared that parents are becoming more aware of PTQ and in some instances, they are seeking PTQ rated providers.

### **Parent awareness of PTQ**

- *...it was a good thing for the parents to tell them that this is the minimum requirement and we are going steps ahead of that. It’s a great way to go through with the parents to show them that these are the steps that we’ve gone through and look where we are compared to some of the others. (LCC Director)*
- *When I speak to parents and tell them that we are Level 4 PTQ, they’ll say, that’s what I was looking for or that’s one of the reasons why I came here. (LCC Director)*
- *They’re aware of—not what Paths to QUALITY represents, what you have to do to get to the levels, they are not aware of that, they’re aware of the sign, they’re aware 1, 2, 3, 4 and what it means in that regard, but they are not aware when walking in the door and what any of that means ... They walk through the door, they are bringing me a child and they don’t know anything, and so I think that what this does is it provides us with a means of educating them, as opposed to parents going out and finding out what Pathways to QUALITY is. This is how I look at it, it makes us better centers and it makes us educators to our clients. (RM Director)*

### **Parents seeking PTQ providers**

- *Educated parents know what it is and they are looking for quality child care and they understand that it wasn’t easy to just put that flag out there. (RM Director)*
- *“Parents don’t know how many levels there are. We make assumptions that they know. And parents do too – maybe there’s 10 levels, and Level 4 really isn’t that great – but they make assumptions that we are high quality. That’s why I’m surprised that only one parent has asked me why we are only a Level 1. (LCC Director)*
- *“I hope that PTQ puts these other ministries out of business, I really do. I know that sounds harsh, but they need to be (out of business). When you are throwing 30 to 40 kids in a room and what I’m hearing what’s going on across the street, it just breaks my heart. The problem is the parents – we have to get them educated and not just going to the cheapest and what they can afford. (RM Director)*

## Family Child Care Providers

The 22 family child care providers voiced several different reasons for why they joined Paths to QUALITY. Among the main reasons were for credibility to parents, recognition and validation of their efforts, and as a business decision to bring in more clients and to remain competitive. Some providers felt that joining PTQ would help them gain the same level of respect and legitimacy they perceive that parents have for licensed child care centers. Family child care providers also felt that joining PTQ helped them validate the level of care they were already delivering. About one-quarter of providers shared that they joined PTQ as a way to stand out among the different child care choices that parents can make.

Some providers shared that the PTQ rating was not important to parents, while other providers shared that parents were aware of their PTQ ratings. For those parents to whom it was important, providers had made efforts to inform them of PTQ, or the parents observed the PTQ rater visiting the provider at drop-off. One home provider shared that parents are specifically looking for the PTQ rating when inquiring about child care.

Other reasons for joining PTQ included the incentives and assistance they received in getting organized with their paperwork. For a couple of providers, the incentives were important, because they could not have afforded the materials that PTQ provided. One provider shared that she felt that PTQ was better for newer family child care providers rather than the more established providers because they needed to build a client base.

### Provider Quotes: Why join and stay in PTQ

#### Credibility

- *I live in a low income area and I have had so many times since I started that I have had interviews set up with parents and I get no reason why they don't show up. I wonder if some of them just figured out where I'm at and they won't come. I've had someone say that on the phone one time – I know where that's at. They don't like the area...I thought it would give me some credibility.*
- *We wanted to prove that we was more than a home child care provider. We wanted to set higher standards and doing that, PTQ became somewhat of that way because it's like Oh! You have to wait a certain amount of time before you can move up a level and so we now just got done from waiting so now we're about to try to advance to level 3. And one of the parents said oh! I seen a facility, a child care facility and they on the same level as you! And you are just like, yeah, we are doing better....*
- *And I have to say, in this area, there are a lot of homes and daycares just in general, it's a lot, and in order to make yourself stand out you have to do a little bit extra, and you want to prove, and you want to show your parents "I'm here because I want to, this is*

*my passion” and so it’s more of proving that we’re not playing here, we’re serious...just as a center is. So to me, I think it’s sometimes hard for home facilities to get the same respect as maybe a center.*

- *... you see providers come and go, and you get to know a couple of the providers in the area and sometimes we’re all not on the same page...you know, that quality of care. So this is a good start to get everybody on the right path to that good quality of care.*

### **Recognition and Validation**

- *This is what is best for children. This is what quality care is. I know this is what I have been giving this past few years. I’m going to validate what I am doing.*
- *I think we would like to get some recognition and also about what we do and maybe in return parents will be calling us and saying “oh, you are this level, we appreciate what you are doing so that is why I want my child to come to you.”*
- *I saw it as selling myself short. I already had the educational system in place. When God gives you some responsibility, you have to do something with that. I was already doing a curriculum, it was in place, I saw it as an opportunity to say something about yourself, this is a voluntary rating program the state has offered you and if you don’t take advantage of it, then you’re kind of selling yourself short.*
- *I did work in a professional setting prior to doing child care and it was never my intent to be mediocre. So this was a tool that was available to me to help me set myself apart from babysitting. It’s hard to get respect in this field so that’s probably why I originally pursued it.*

### **Business Decision**

- *For me, I joined PTQ because parents are looking at all types of daycares and if you want to stand out, you have to do something to stand out. Participating in whatever you can, accreditation, whatever. It gives the parents a little something more to look at than just someone watching their kids. That this is what they do, this is their profession, they want to stand out with everything and with PTQ that helps us better our programs and our children so that it is beneficial to us and our programs.*
- *I wanted to draw more quality parents, some I could work with, (laughs)...but it just depends. The main people I get calls from are that they want it cheap and they want it close. That’s their main concern. Most the time.*
- *I go to all classes I can go to and try to get as much as education as I can to try to stay as competitive as I can. They are opening up centers all day long – I just seen a new one up*

*on about a month ago. I want people to know that I'm a good child care provider, an educated child care provider and I try to do the best that I can even though I'm at a smaller capacity than the centers can do.*

### **Parent Awareness of PTQ**

- *I let them know when we're getting ready for a new rating and they say 'did we pass?' it's important to them. I gave them the accreditation information (the little books that they gave them) and they are really interested in it so I enjoy that they share that with me.*
- *My parents didn't get excited until they seen the lady there. Then they were curious and then when I passed out the surveys then and I was like 'I been trying to get you all involved all this time and now you're excited.' So I do see a slight change...and now that they see that 'ok this is not just a babysitter, she's really putting forth that effort'. I have 2 people in the CDA class now too, so they see we're trying to give them the best care possible.*
- *We're getting parents because they are looking for the specific PTQ level. They respect me, they respect my time.*

### **Parents Not Aware of PTQ**

- *Part of my problem is that the people I serve over there could care less. I get so many people that don't ever ask me. A whole bunch of them – their moms don't pay attention to what I'm doing – they don't bother to take home their work so they have no clue what the kids are doing.*
- *I can say, a lot of my parents didn't really care that we were on PTQ...besides the kids...they were like 'oh yes, the sign is up there!' I might have had two parents that asked about it. I put it in the newsletter all nice and typed it up and passed it out and nobody really cared.*
- *The referrals – they care. It's like they are getting the education, but the families I have enrolled, they are word of mouth. I tell them to interview other places. The ones I have aren't there because I'm a Level 3.*
- *For someone who is new to daycare, I can see PTQ working for them. Not to say that we can't improve but someone totally new, PTQ would be helpful.*

## Advancement in Paths to QUALITY

**Questions: How do you feel about advancement? How important is it to you to move up a level? What do you need to advance?**

### Licensed Child Care Centers and Registered Child Care Ministry Directors

Directors of licensed centers and registered ministries shared diverse views about advancement. Some had programs that were advancing or had advanced rapidly in the PTQ system. Others were struggling to advance or had decided to “pause” for a while at their current level. Some expressed strong beliefs in the benefits of striving for higher PTQ levels, while others expressed doubts. There was, however, general agreement that advancing in PTQ requires a great deal of effort for directors and staff, and that support and resources are needed.

There was a great deal of discussion in the focus groups about the challenges of meeting the teacher qualification standards at PTQ Levels 3 and 4 and for national accreditation. Many directors struggle with the issue of how to hire and retain qualified teachers, how to motivate their current staff to get additional education and credentials, and how to compensate teachers adequately once they have attained additional credentials or degrees. Many directors expressed a wish that PTQ and the accrediting organization would give more credit for years of experience and in-service training.

It was clear in these interviews that the quality of mentoring available to them as they work to advance is a crucial ingredient for success in PTQ. It was especially clear that the mentor-program relationship, and the continuity of that relationship, is something that directors value a great deal. Directors mentioned that they appreciate the expertise of mentors, they appreciate it when mentors take the time to get to know the program and the staff, and they think it is important for mentors to visit classrooms. One director mentioned that she wished there were ways to network with other programs working on or that had already attained the level they were working to reach.

### Director Quotes

#### Advancement and support for advancement

- *I don't think I've hit any challenges yet. I have a really great mentor and she's helpful. The staff are energetic about it. They like what they offer, the incentives they can get. I don't have to be in a classroom, I'm in the office most of the day, so I really haven't had issues with getting paperwork done. So far, I'm OK. (LCC Director)*
- *She's (the mentor) coming next week to observe the meal and naptime. So I'm like OK, it is something we are working on...I'm very honest...you will probably see some things that need to change...I'm interested in your input, ... Another set of eyes outside of me and*

*my staff, is a benefit to me. I had to read just how to do things because of the building set up. I always appreciate others opinions, even though I may not take it! (LCC Director)*

- *The mentoring has been incredibly helpful. The mentor is always with you and updating things. My staff is always excited about updating things, so having to renew every year, they have a reason to update and they like that. In our initial stages, it helped us link our curriculum to the Foundations, and it's led us to the ISTAR-KR, and parents really like that. The beginning process of getting Foundations training was helpful. (LCC Director)*
- *And Paths to QUALITY was one we were really excited about. And it also assists you, it has mentors come in, they'll assess your program, they are very helpful in making sure you are making the points you need to be and that is coincides with your statements, your regulations and things of that nature. Of course, we had our accreditation some time ago. (LCC Director)*
- *We have a teacher renewing her CDA as we speak and because of the time frame she was going to go ahead and pay her own renewal fee and I had to call Judy Tonk down at the state level yesterday to ask her a question and she asked me if she was using the TEACH and I said no and she was so adamant about it, she goes no, that's what these dollars are for, they are to pay for these applicants like this and I actually had to get my teacher on the phone and she pretty much told her you get to the office at this point and we'll get it to Washington. They are so good. (RM Director)*
- *In the beginning when we became a level 1, I wasn't aware that we qualified or were eligible for the stipend for materials or supplies and the mentor was really something that was really helpful. And the IAEYC advisor for accreditation through Paths to QUALITY checks in to see how you are doing in between times and I think that is very beneficial too—that communication. (LCC Director)*
- *I love my mentor. You get the same mentor for level 1, level 2 and then there is a switch and then you got to start over and oh no. But it was really questioning, getting to know each other making sure everyone is on the same page and I think that was very helpful and beneficial to have the same person for level 1, level 2 and then they give you a new on for level 3. Level 4 you go to the accreditation and then you have a different mentor, but I think it also helps because you are getting to know other people in the field and it helps to know that there are others like us that are genuinely in it for the children. (LCC Director)*
- *The ones we have had have been great. They have really been helpful. They have given us a lot of information, a lot of tips, a lot of things to do and they have been great. You can tell a little bit of their frustration in that they are out there and then I will use my example, I am stuck at level 2, you can tell she is just so gung ho. I love it but I am dead*

*in the water and there is nothing I can do and you can tell she is just as frustrated as any us. They all want us to be the best and get to a certain spot. (LCC Director)*

- *Our experience has been fantastic. I always tell people that I talk to at the state level, the people at the CCR&R at the state level that there is nothing in child care we can't accomplish in child care with their support. Every help that we would need whether it is the inclusion specialist or infant toddler or curriculum specialist or whatever needs we have as far as educational and support for families and children and any kind of need, it's there for us. And it takes a lot of the fear out of it for us because I don't feel alone at all as far as the helps they offer, the financial concerns, of course will keep me awake at night. (RM Director)*
- *Mentors are the salespeople for Pathways to QUALITY. Because nobody would go out and buy it without the mentors selling it correctly, period. It's really the bottom line. (LCC Director)*
- *Things like this is very helpful to me, because I don't get out much to listen to what else is going on-- and to vent a little bit and to get ideas is good for me. It's networking. I've been to a few of the IAEYC meetings and there are not as many people there and I understand why – it's the end of the day and we're tired too. But we are at the back burner at 8 pm after the 'business' part of the meeting is finished. (LCC Director)*
- *(Regarding PTQ Mentors:) They were here in [community]. They were a phone call away. And if you had a question they would drop in and they'll be right there. (LCC Director)*

### **Challenges to Advancement: Staff Education**

- *We are taking a break now – we are doing a self study. We were tired, and staying at Level 3 for a little while. It was a lot to go through with the moving, construction, it didn't take us long from Level 1-Level 3 and we did it in the 6 months that we could. (RM Director)*
- *I think ... some of them (teaching staff) would further their education more if there were more incentive for it. I see it now as they see it – why would I spend 2 years to get my AA when I get 15 cents or 35 cents more? That's not an incentive, especially for the staff that has been in there for a long time. (LCC Director)*
- *TEACH is a great thing but it's not always – it's the practicum you need to do. It's not always possible with our staff to do 5 eight hour days or have families that they have to take care of. The student teaching is hard for them to do and it's required. Why not take some of their past trainings to help them achieve some of this quicker? (LCC Director)*

- *I am kinda in the same boat as you, we are a level 3, but time [is a factor holding us from getting to Level 4.] ... We are for profit so we have to look at what will it bring us if I work another 5 hours a week. And then there are staff who have been there for years and years and they are good staff, but they are not willing to go on with their education. That's not part of their lives. I think that is a lot of it. (LCC Director)*
- *Or you have someone who is just out of school vs. someone with 10 years' experience. On paper they look like they have the education but you want the one with experience or the mom with 10 kids who can come in and handle the classroom—she is going to be the better caregiver 90% of the time. (LCC Director)*
- *My situation is different because I don't have a CDA. My Bachelor's degree is in elementary education, because 35 years ago early childhood education was nothing. So with Paths to QUALITY and NAEYC, no matter how [training] hours I get I don't count at all, because I don't have a CDA or early childhood background. Mine is in elementary education 1<sup>st</sup> thru 8<sup>th</sup> with an endorsement in reading. So I count for nothing, yet I have been in this profession for 35 years. (LCC Director)*
- *For us we've been Level 4 up until last October when my staff didn't meet the educational requirements for Level 3. So that's been the toughest part for us for PTQ and accreditation. Educated people aren't always the best people so we have a real hard time maintaining that. (LCC Director)*
- *I feel like we are always looking for those credentials. As a child care center, we all have child care budgets, so it's hard to compete with the school systems, when a lot of those just starting out, we're just the stepping ground, you know? 'I'm trying to get into the school system' – that's what we hear – and we're just a stepping stone until they can get into there. (LCC Director)*
- *In my center alone, I have 4 of the best preschool teachers you can ever imagine. One has been with our agency for 36 years, one had 24, one is on 20 and the other is 19 years and they are phenomenal educators for young children. They have their CDAs and they are getting older and don't want to go back to school and it's hard to keep with that ever-changing; and it's hard, because I understand it – for the education levels and it's hard when you have staff like that because you can't teach life lessons like they can. (LCC Director)*
- *That has been our biggest challenge now is to get to Level 3. Because 50% of my staff either have to be going to school or CDA or above and with the budget I have, it's almost impossible. I can either keep hiring people with degrees and every stays at the same level with their pay – that's not going to fly. I don't know how to address that. (LCC Director)*

- *Mine (challenge) is the education piece. I haven't looked at the accreditation piece too closely. I just got Level 3 two weeks ago. It took us over 1 year to get to Level 3 because of the education piece. It seems to be ongoing. We didn't have a turnover issue, it just took 50% of my staff that amount of time. I encouraged the AA so that we don't have to deal with this issue every 3 years. Not only the education piece, but also the 20 hours of training per year. (LCC Director)*
- *What stopped us is one of our teachers –she was 63 and didn't have a degree in early childhood and there wasn't any convincing her to get the degree. We've replaced her with a teacher that has an early childhood degree so now we can proceed. (LCC Director)*
- *We didn't have any difficulty maintaining. The piece that's been a struggle is making sure that the staff we have, we are at capacity – to have over 50% staff having credentials makes it difficult. (RM Director)*
- *It's difficult to maintain, keeping staff members...They are always trying to find higher pay, they want benefits. (RM Director)*
- *If we are going to talk about levels, and I was waiting to discuss this, I have been doing this for 13 years and Pathways to QUALITY has not been around that whole time and the criteria for some of the levels for example level 3, the reason I can't move to level 3 is what you call education, having a certain amount of people in you center, 50%, with certain degree. I have people who have been with me since I opened the doors, they have been with me for 13 years now and we know in our industry turnover is a very large issue... But I am being penalized because I have kept my people and they are educators just like anyone else, we do school, we don't do daycare, and that's my reputation. I am actually held back. Then do I get rid of these people? Let's be honest as an industry we don't pay huge money, we don't make that kinda of income to do that, so how do you have someone that has been with you for 13 years suddenly have to go back to school for a degree whether they have the time and finances. (LCC Director)*
- *...the current staff because of some of their ages, they are not wanting to go back to school at this point. They will do everything that I ask of them of them as far as attending IAEEYC conferences, attend trainings but to go back to school, they are totally intimidated by that, plus we don't have the finances with the small amount of children we have to even give a raise, because those who work here their heart is in the ministry, their heart is in what they do so thankfully I don't get a hard time about that but as I bring in new qualified staff that could change. (RM Director)*
- *I see the value in the requirements, but time is so limited and it is such a huge process to hire someone. And the responses I get are dismal, they really are. Even the ads I put out to the schools that have EC programs, I'm still getting calls from people who are taking*

*business courses. Where are all of these people that are supposedly taking education courses? (LCC Director)*

- *I've always felt that it seems as though the cart came before the horse. I've always felt that the focus should have been on staff first. I love the incentives, but I really felt like that things we needed were for our staff and that should really be the most lacking and I agree with everyone else has said. I've been a Level 4 forever. It's still a struggle at Level 4, it's a revolving door with staff and I don't feel that...sometimes people just seem to dictate what it should be for staff, but there's never really a solution on how to make that happen... Whether it's an incentive – where we help them get it (the education) but where all of them then? I've put several students through college but I knew at the end they weren't going to be in early childhood because there wasn't enough there for them, the benefits, the pay – we cannot pay them for that incentive. (LCC Director)*
- *You can look for those (degreed teachers), but it may be that you can't find them – and that's where we struggle. I had a major staff turnover and we dropped from Level 4 to Level 3 and I just couldn't do it. It was explained to me recently that for accreditation that you have to meet just so much of the criteria that would be one that I just wouldn't meet. We are working hard on all of the other areas for accreditation, so we can still pass. (LCC Director)*
- *I'd like to know how would PTQ help us if we were to advance to help us to find a more refined employment pool? The people coming in seeking employment, 8 times out of 10, they are coming in with incomplete Ivy Tech credit hours. They are working on an AA. But we want people that already have the degree and wanting to work. It's a difference when someone already has their degree and they present themselves to you and they can take on a class. Having children of your own or loving children isn't enough. (LCC Director)*
- *It's hard to find staff with the qualifications for what we pay – it's hard to find someone to work for us for \$9 and \$10 an hour with no benefits. We are not reimbursed what a licensed center is if you take CCDF ... for the licensed center, it's a big jump from reimbursement from Level 3 to Level 4. We aren't reimbursed the same. It's \$150 to \$240 for accreditation. (RM Director)*
- *I will say that we will go to Level 3 hopefully if we can get teachers on the bandwagon but we won't do Level 4 because we are small and it's not worth our money and effort and we would rather put that in the center. But just that education part, I've worked with so many wonderful teachers that have degrees in something else and I understand wanting them to have a degree, but it doesn't make a good teacher. (RM Director)*
- *We are requiring teachers to have degrees when they can go out and get elementary education degree and make double and get their summers off. It's not fair to require*

*them to have these degrees; and my staff has said that if I'm going to get a degree, then I'm going to get an elementary degree, and then I can make more money. But we're requiring them to get these degrees and we're paying them like they work at McDonald's – or less. (RM Director)*

- *“I think you get the idea that everybody here is committed with their heart and their soul to what we do. You don't get in child care because you are going to buy a Bentley or go to Tahiti, it doesn't happen. So everybody here has their heart and soul in it and they are in it for the right reasons which are children. If you get involved in child care because you are going to make money you are already out of business, you just don't know it. But the idea what this organization is trying to do, which I love is to try to elevate us all and try to help us all and so forth, but there are certain things about it that are putting restrictions and shackles and hurting from a business standpoint. Those kinda things I think have to be changed or modified, and you can hear it in people's voices here and how they feel about it and what's going on.” (LCC Director)*
- *Well, basically it goes back to financing. And you can't give these people the money they deserve but at the same time you are being forced, that's what it is, you are being forced to adhere to certain rules and regulations that being 50%. So you may get people that you feel could be very workable in your program but because you've got to have this 50% you've got to hire people that are in the CDA program or are willing to go. And we have made that a requirement at hiring. So if they don't have a CDA but I feel they would be good in a classroom they have to make a commitment to go through TEACH and go to the CDA program. (LCC Director)*
- *It's really that the person is committed to what they are doing because financially you are not able to offer them what you should offer them. You get people who came into child care because they want to be there so you put it on the table and they are basically willing to accept what you have to offer because they want to be in the program. Now with accreditation, there is a possibility that the lead teacher is going to have to have a bachelors. How are you going to pay these people who have a bachelors? (LCC Director)*
- *Our student population is valuable and very important to us and what is going to happen now (with Affordable Health Care Act) is that we were able to employ them 30 hours a week trying to stay between 25-27 because we want to support their role as a student too. But now we are going to have to hire more staff and less hours. And that plays into continuity. (LCC Director)*

#### **Challenges to Advancement: Mentor Continuity and Quality; Coordination with Licensing**

- *[We are moving] slowly, cause I do not want to add a lot of paperwork. I also was wondering if we would lose our current mentor if we go further, and I would really hate that part of it. I don't know, I am just telling the girls we will move slowly because the last thing you want to do is go backwards. I would rather just stay the same.*

- *Nothing like having a local mentor ... I call our level 2 mentor all the time and she has helped me so much this year. Where[as] my level 3 mentor [Quality Advisor] I have talked to twice since we became level 3. We have been level 3 for a year. [Advisor] called me once to tell me my CDA was up, well, it was up in two weeks. That wasn't helping me, I had to have all the paperwork in for months. It is kinda a joke. (RM Director)*
- *... they look at different things. What one mentor says then the next one comes in a says that's not how it is supposed to be done or let's change this around ... They are not consistent... Even when they go through your center and look they are not consistent on what they are looking for. (LCC Director)*
- *Honestly I think that level 3 mentors have such a wide area to cover, they are overloaded, I see that, but I think even they lose focus that we are level 3, we still have problems and we still have questions we would like answered. (LCC Director)*
- *And we still want to grow, even if we are working on NAEYC, especially if you are doing the self-study you can look on it, but it is really confusing but I don't feel like I can call my [Quality Advisor]. I call someone across town---okay you are NAEYC accredited, what did you put in you thing for this. (LCC Director)*
- *That's the big thing—when you are level 3 you still have to have those 20 hours [of training] for your staff, and when you were level 2 they (R&R) would come in and do classes in your centers--they would do naptime things so you are not having to pay for people to go to trainings after hours---we have to pay for all that when comping them time, and then you have to replace them in the room. (LCC Director)*
- *I was just going to say that was a little scary thought for me when our mentor told me that to go to Level 3 that she will stop being our mentor and that is a little scary for me that I will be on my own. We're at Level 2 now, and she thinks that I'm ready for Level 3 and then she said we would really be on our own. We would have someone from the state I guess that we can call. (LCC Director)*
- *There's definitely that step down when you get to that level. Our mentor was telling us that we ready for accreditation and then having her gone I wasn't ready for that. (LCC Director)*
- *My challenge has been that there's a disconnect between licensing and PTQ. I don't know if they are on the same level of the building and if they are they are in the opposite sides of the room. (LCC Director)*
- *My PTQ mentor and my rater – when they come in – they are looking at the best interests of kids, but when state (licensing) comes in, it's not about the kids, it's about a*

*commercial facility. We are in the business for children and all my stuff for PTQ for training and education is in one binder and then the state makes me take it out and put it in the files, and then when my rater comes out, I take it out of the files and put it back in a binder. This is crazy. I'm glad I'm not the only one who sees it. (LCC Director)*

- *I wish licensing would be more focused – it's just a new thing every year. My personal opinion is that I am going to focus on PTQ and when the state comes, I hope she is OK with it. I don't have the energy to please everyone. (LCC Director)*
- *I will say the really confusing thing for us, is that our license goes from this time to this time, and accreditation is the same, but PTQ timeline changes every year, so we have to bump back our training hours to a different date every year. They came in February this time, but initially it was the end of March so we have to change the date that we have to monitor our staff training hours. ... Licensing ends in January, but our license ends in March. Changing the dates around would be helpful. (LCC Director)*
- *The only thing that concerns me, is that when you get to Level 3, you get a new one, correct? See, I'm not comfortable with that. You've built up this relationship, they know your facility, the little quirks about it, and you have her all through Level 2, and then when you are at Level 3, you are with a whole new person and have to start that relationship all over again. I just wish it was consistent. (LCC Director)*
- *We have had 3 mentors since we began and they all have their own styles. Some are particular, some aren't so particular. When you do get switched over, it is difficult, because someone else can tell you that you're not quite there. (LCC Director)*
- *But it is hard on all sorts of levels. (Changing from PTQ Mentor to Quality Advisor) It's hard because of personalities. You have kinda meshed with this mentor and she kinda knows you and you kinda know her or him and you kinda get it together and all the sudden she is like "Okay, you are onward and upward." And you are like "where are you going?" And then you get someone new and they might not have the same personality, you might not click as well that kinda thing. But you work through it. You might not get to know the person as well because you are only doing that one level where as you got to know your mentor very well. (LCC Director)*
- *I qualified for the playground grant. Got the playground all done, got what I could get, got some new water tables and stuff. The very next year the state licensing lady comes in and says your toddler playground can't stay—we got rid of it. Why didn't you tell me that a year ago, when I had the money and I could have fixed that playground with the money? Now I have this nice playground for my bigger kids and I have nothing for my toddlers—now you are saying it has got to be this way. You know, you got to get on the same page. It like oh, man, where did that come from? (LCC Director)*

## Other Challenges to Advancement

### Documentation burden

- *I think I am going to do NECPA because of the documentation pieces and I have heard there's more documentation with NAEYC and I don't want my teachers to get so wrapped up in that that they forget about the kids. (LCC Director)*

### New health regulations

- *Before I came here, I asked individual lead teachers, I'm going to this meeting, what are your thoughts about PTQ and almost everyone mentioned the hand washing thing – going from 10 seconds to 20 seconds it has been a big issue. We're not opposed to being clean, but that is huge. It just felt like someone was sitting at a desk somewhere and thought 'what could we bother them with'? (LCC Director)*

### Training hours, quality of training available

- *We struggle with training hours ourselves. I think it's a good thing. We have a tough time convincing staff that they need those additional hours. There's not enough opportunities out there to get them done. We have to find those opportunities on our own and it's difficult, and if they can't get it done during the day, it's tough. They understand that it's part of it, but we get a lot of grumbling about it. Quite frankly, I don't think there's a lot of good training opportunities around here, and they are repeated often, but people are just taking it to get the hours, and it defeats the purpose of getting new information. (LCC Director)*
- *I just post anything I get for staff to get the training hours but I'm not sure if it's always appropriate for what they need. We are offering things on their lunch breaks; but again it's finding someone to do the presentation. And conferences are great, but it's a Thurs-Sat so you are either shutting down or telling some people that they can't go. We try to use our parent resources, so if they can do some training for us, we have them do that. We work with the schools too so sometimes we can piggyback on their trainings but some of them are expensive. (LCC Director)*

### Teacher education level vs. experience

- *I hired someone with a bachelors degree and I went on that---couldn't do the practical. And I would much rather take someone with no experience who can go in a room and do the practical and listen to me and do it than someone with a bachelors degree who I have to pay more money to and then it cuts into the budget. (RM Director)*

- *If you are going to get truly high quality teachers, the whole package, the experience has to come with the education. (RM Director)*

### **Need for support for Registered Ministries to get VCP**

- *... I shared how much we spent to get on level 1 and is it worth it just to participate on a Paths to QUALITY program? I believed it was, ... I believed it was important, but for other ministries, that is why a lot of ministries are not participating in Paths to QUALITY, because they do not have that support to get over that first hurdle. (RM Director)*

### **Dissatisfaction with incentive materials**

- *...another thing is the quality of the things in the binder were really low quality. One of my classrooms needed a kitchen set, and all they had was a rinky dink kitchen set that might be great for maybe a family child care home, but in our program when there are 15 children playing with it, you need a good quality kitchen. There were so many things we wanted, like we wanted sensory tables, but I don't want that cheap one because it is not going to last. We have been in early child hood long enough, you have learned there are places you can skimp and there are places you really need to buy the high quality. (RM Director)*

### **Uncertainly about Level 4 mentoring of other programs**

- *They assigned me a mentee every time because I am a Level 4 and my first one – and I tried to help, but she may not have really been into it and acted like she didn't need me. I haven't had anyone for the past 2 years. My mentee was a Level 2 – and maybe she saw me as a competitor, so that could cause a little bit of why it didn't work so well, I'm not sure. (LCC Director)*

## **Family Child Care Providers**

Family child care providers shared their thoughts about how their mentor or quality advisor has helped them with PTQ advancement. All of the providers shared positive comments about their mentors or quality advisors, such as their thoroughness and attentiveness to the details needed to help providers advance. Several providers shared that the mentor or quality advisor has intentionally built relationships with them and the children they served.

Nearly all of the providers shared that there had been some turnover in mentors and/or quality advisors since they had been on PTQ, and some of those changes caused anxiety and frustration for the providers. Several questioned why there are different mentors for different PTQ levels, and they stated that the changes sometimes resulted in a lack of uniformity in

interpreting the PTQ standards. One provider felt that changing mentors was difficult because it meant having to build a new relationship.

Family child care providers acknowledged that advancing through the PTQ levels is difficult for them because of a lack of time, stress, paperwork, and the perception that it is too difficult to advance levels. Nearly half of the family child care providers we interviewed shared that finding time to continue their education, or to just keep up with their current level of education, was time consuming. Other time constraints mentioned were related to the long work hours required of family child care providers.

Other barriers to advancement family home providers mentioned included paperwork and the perceived difficulties in advancing levels. Providers felt that more would be asked of them at the next level and the lack of staff to help them advance was a hindrance.

## Provider Quotes

### Support for Advancement: Mentor/Quality Advisor Assistance

- *My mentor is great, she even remembers some of my kids' names and they know her...she's good for us and she's very encouraging and you can just feel like she cares.*
- *But (QA) would share what she's learned from other homes and bring it to me. I can't see how other people are doing things, but they've brought it to me because it's so hard for me to get out.*
- *She makes me feel like I can do it all. She really does, she makes me feel so comfortable. Before I was scared, I'm not after I talk to her. I'm a person that has to have steps, and the way she does it makes me feel comfortable.*
- *She makes sure everything is correct. We went through everything on this list and we talked, and talked and then she goes in the daycare and checks everything and says 'no, take that out', or 'ok, that's fine' – she's for real, she does it like that. She knows what is needed, she's been around. She does it in a nice way, it's not like 'oh my god, what is that', but she's sure every little thing is in place and then she'll call me and say 'are you ready or do you want me to come back' and when I say I'm ready after she's been through everything, then she calls the rater. She is very concerned, she wants to help you get there. Every little nook and cranny, everything – she is going to go over it. And I like that. It doesn't bother me. I want her to help me. She comes as many times as she thinks it's necessary.*
- *As many times as I need her, she comes over every single time. She is always there. She didn't even know me for a month, and she told me I can do this and I believed her. I haven't had this much on my plate before, and she really calmed me down. I feel like she's in my corner.*

### **Mentor and/or Quality Advisor Changes**

- *I've had 3 mentors in the last 10 months. That was my hiccup leveling up because my leveling up and being accredited did not go smooth. Because each one of your mentors interprets the book differently.*
- *I just don't feel the same connection with the new people coming in from IAEYC. They are always changing. Now that's an obstacle...Every time I look around, there's someone new over TEACH.*
- *Why can't your mentor that you have for levels 1, 2, and 3, move up with you to level 4? Because once (MENTOR) left me it was just mentor after mentor after mentor.*
- *Now I did, all those mentors I did truly love but for me, too many changes in the program was one of the factors was why I was debating if I was going to stay in it or not.*

### **Barrier to Advancement: Time and Stress**

- *That is correct, and the reason is stress and work. Just taking way too much time. When you know you are already doing something and you feel confident to have someone come in from accreditation with a pen and paper...and then I heard something that a provider just got dinged and I would put herself above me in terms of quality and I thought you just reassured the fact that I'm done. If they gave me \$2000, \$5000, I wouldn't do it. I'm done.*
- *It's challenging, if you're a family child care provider. I put in 13 hours a day, It's been challenging to do the classes that are required for your CDA and then do PTQ...it's a great program, but it's one of those programs that you really have to have the time.*
- *Right now, it's just time, it's so stressful. I'm a Level 2 right now. With homeschooling (my own children), I can't do it. My husband doesn't really have a steady job again. I don't want to have 13 kids anymore, it's hard to keep up with them and I can't keep up with all of them. I'm not young anymore. I wouldn't mind trying to go up to a Level 3. I feel like I spend so much time trying to keep Level 2, that I can't imagine the time it would take for me to get to Level 3.*
- *I went to a class on Tuesdays (CDA), there's 20 of us there. My last parent leaves at 5:30, I'm racing over there, I'm trying to get my daughter to do this, and I'll pay her more to do it. And I love (CDA instructor). We are only there because we want PTQ. I'm going to do it online. (Mentor) says it's cheaper, but I don't care about the money. The whole 6-9 pm, that's my time and I'm working from 5 am-9 pm. I have to have the CDA within 3 years or you won't have the license. I'm nowhere near it.*

### **Barrier to Advancement: Too Difficult to Advance**

- *I really do think it's more challenging for homes because you don't have the number of people working on it that a center does. It's you, and maybe a couple of people with you. But centers have lots of people to work on different things, so I think it is more challenging.*
- *They are more demanding that you go to the next level. I've been on Level 2 for...um, I just had to a Level 2 visit, and it's my third time for a Level 2 visit. I wanted to go to Level 3 but it was more challenging, and she said just stay at Level 2. I will probably stay at Level 2.*
- *Well when I first did it, everything was fine until I was disqualified for something I really didn't do so it made me really not want to do it anymore (PTQ). I stayed on Level 1 for quite some time and I'm getting ready to move up. And when I was disqualified I was like – I doubted myself. I knew I was doing everything, but I really doubted myself. I called myself stuck – I didn't want a rejection again. I didn't change things up but the only thing different was that I didn't have the accreditation. But it means something more to me now.*

### **Barrier to Advancement: Paperwork**

- *I have my book, (MENTOR's) been out, I'm looking forward to it, it's just kind of hard because I'm not myself and I'm trying to do 2 books because they're doing upstairs and downstairs in one day. And trying to get all that information together is kind of hard when you still have to run a facility and since we have 3 licenses I'm not always in my office. I might be with my infants, I might be in the basement, I might have to go pick up kids. So I'm kind of looking forward to the summer when everyone is out of school then I can really focus on it. I think once I get past the paperwork, maybe it'll be, I can relax a little bit, it might help.*

## Impact of Paths to QUALITY

*Questions: How has being on PTQ impacted your child care?*

### Licensed Child Care Center and Ministry Directors

Directors of licensed centers and registered ministries talked about a number of changes and benefits of participation in PTQ. Most often mentioned was the sense of pride among both directors and staff that achieving a higher quality level brought to them. In addition to public recognition, directors said that participation encouraged staff to further their education, and PTQ helped the directors to explain and justify developmentally-appropriate practices. A few directors, comparing their own observations across programs, expressed concerns about the reliability and validity of PTQ ratings. A couple of the directors expressed doubts that PTQ ratings are meaningful to parents seeking child care.

#### Director Quotes: Impact of PTQ on My Program

- *Even though it's a lot of work, the staff is glad we do it because they like what they are seeing, what kind of center they are, what kind of professional they are. They like the feedback from parents... They see the value in it, they want to do it, they see it's important. I think it's a value, I don't want it to go away. We need something to help the EC field to stand strong and to move forward with everything that it's changing. We can't lose the focus of the children – what's best or right for kids? (LCC Director)*
- *I think it's an affirmation too – it's something you do every day, and I'm doing it well. (LCC Director)*
- *I asked my 36 year veteran, what was child care like then as opposed to now and she said to me – when we first did [curriculum], I wasn't sure about it, and it made it better. All of these things that we're putting in place, these are just things that are helping us grow stronger, making us more accountable, and helping us benefit the children more. She's seen so much transformation and she still thinks this is worth it. It was a good validation. (LCC Director)*
- *The research behind everything with PTQ and accreditation – it has helped us all understand children better, our role in it, and how to do it better. The research has been phenomenal. (LCC Director)*
- *My staff, I think feel that the profession they have chosen is a little more professional now. Personally, I think they feel they have chosen a professional career path... We had a talk in December on evaluation and we are on a bus and the bus is going to Level 4 and you have a seat on that bus, you can either exit now or stay on the bus. And if you stay*

*on the bus, there's going to be expectations. And you have to have an attitude that what we do is important. (LCC Director)*

- *For us, my staff is very excited about it. They see other centers in town with the signs, and they think we can do that too. They were awarded with their gift for getting to Level 2 and that was huge – they got to pick what they wanted. They were excited to do that because we are a very old center, so updates are always a positive thing. I think they are excited to move up, yes, it's a lot of work and they may not see the full scale down the road of what they are going to need to do or implement but right now they are happy. (LCC Director)*
- *I think getting them all onboard was tough, it tied into something. I think as far as the staff, it gives them more pride in their work and they're not just babysitters. They are excited and onboard with that. Having that positive self-image about what I do makes them achieve higher goals than in the past. If you had staff members who weren't ready to make those changes, then it was a nice gauge to say, well it's time to move on. (LCC Director)*
- *It has helped weed a lot of people out especially because having to tell them they have to have DAP practices. I interviewed this one woman and she said I am going to teach the 1 year olds how to write their name, and I said there's the door. The orientation is over and this is not what we believe in so you can just walk out. So you have Paths to QUALITY, the sheet of paper to at least say this is what we are going to do so it is a validation for hiring and things.*
- *I think there's a lot more intentionality once they understand that it's about the children, then they make it work. We have to go back sometimes and review Level 1. But it's about cohesiveness, we're all doing and saying the same thing. (LCC Director)*
- *We had a cohort of staff go through the CDA process when Paths first came out—that everybody could get their CDA—8 or 9 years ago. So that was a good thing. Almost all of our staff have their CDA. (LCC Director)*
- *I think education is the big one everyone has had to go back and get the degree. We initially approached our staff and said next year, after this capital stuff is done, this year, anyone who doesn't have a CDA in 18 months, needs to have one and to maintain it. Every single staff member signed a contract stating that they would do that. All new staff have to sign it too. (RM Director)*
- *I think the going back to get CDA for our staff has been great. All but one had done it online and they have challenged themselves to go quicker. I think it has made them have more appreciation for their job. Once they get their CDA, will they be required to do more, and more? (RM Director)*

- *We had staff that had lots of experience but there was no real recognition for that and thru PTQ we are no longer the babysitters, and we are the educators. The teachers took that on, and parents saw that. Our clientele has changed tremendously. We used to be 85% CCDF, but now we are about 20% CCDF. (RM Director)*
- *People were looking for that – we were the first Level 3 in the state. If you do a good job, and you get some parents that think you do a good job, and they go back to their place of employment then that’s how it starts to happen. (RM Director)*
- *I agree with all the positives about PTQ, it’s a great thing for staff to be focused on and going through all the standards. However, I want to say that one day several months ago and had a family come through and asked if PTQ really means anything. And she was asking because we have a home daycare within a mile of our church and they have PTQ Level 4, and yet we have people who come to our place and say bad things about that place. (RM Director)*
- *How do you discriminate the ones who can put on the show for one day and do the paperwork, and how do you really know that a provider is really deserving of a Level 2, 3, or 4? It goes beyond the checklist. It’s the integrity of the staff and the teachers. How can we make sure that is solid in this system? I wish there was a way for that to be monitored more. (LCC Director)*
- *We need a secret shopper program of the higher ups – not the licensing people, but others. They need to make sure that the integrity of the system is there. (LCC Director)*
- *PTQ is a great idea overall. One of the reasons it was created was to level the playing field, and the big problem that continues to exist, the disparities, is the program types that exist in Indiana. I’ve been to a PTQ Level 4 home that I would never put my child in. But it has all the essentials to pass Level 1, 2, 3 and 4. See what I’m saying here. (RM Director)*
- *In educating the parents – helping them understand what these programs are and what they mean. If you asked if I’ve benefited from being on PTQ, I’m going to say no because I very rarely have anyone look at our program because of my PTQ sign. Even the parents who are here with us, I don’t think it’s made that big of an impact on them. (LCC Director)*
- *We do have some families looking for the PTQ level – they are getting it from Carefinder or [CCRR Agency]. There are just still so many out there that don’t know it. We had a parent that was going to leave us, a Level 4, for a Level 2, because their name was “Day School” – and they thought it was more educational. They still don’t get it. (LCC Director)*

## Family Child Care Providers

Family child care providers listed many benefits of PTQ, including the incentives, help with staff training, validation and respect, and providing developmentally appropriate experiences to children. The staff training helped providers learn better practices, so they could provide higher quality care to the children they serve. Providers also shared that PTQ helped them learn to use more developmentally appropriate practices. While this is related to staff training, it is reported independently here because providers shared examples of how PTQ has helped them think about being more child- focused in their instructional practices. Nearly one-quarter of the providers also felt that PTQ has helped validate them as professionals.

### Provider Quotes

#### Incentives

- *One of the benefits that I enjoy is the, getting to choose materials. That has been so great because I wouldn't have been able to get those things otherwise...not as quickly.*
- *And I like that you do get the benefits of moving up, leveling up and you do get that bonus where you get to go through the catalog because we run on peanuts trying to dish out for nutritional foods and things. We don't have a lot of money to spend on the kids and that little incentive is good too. So it's nice.*

#### Training

- *I was part of it back then (prior to state launch)– everything I do I want it to be excellent for the children. It gives me the education that is so important and what the children really need to get them from here to there. It's not about just eating and sleeping during the day. I'm grateful for all the programs from ECA that got started, like PTQ. It made me a better provider.*
- *It's (the training) given you that language so you can say the correct thing. You can break everything down to them. And that language that a lot of people are looking for and it's like 'oh ok you really know what you're doing'.*
- *...and I just took my Foundations course on Safe Sleep and I feel like I've become such an annoying person because I just watched one of my cousins and I was like 'no they shouldn't sleep in an adult bed, they need to be in their own bed' and 'no, you can't put a cover on their mattress. And I feel like, oh yea we do other stuff, like we don't just give them a worksheet and go color. They planted flowers and then parents are like 'what? They did?'*

- *Or you can back up why you did something (because of Foundations). Ok they are doing this but they are learning science, and they're learning social studies, and they're learning math. And they're like 'you learn all that?'*

### **Validation and Respect**

- *To me, it validated what I did, what I was doing was good, what I was doing was right. It gave me the confidence so I didn't stress, I mean I stressed big time that I was going to screw these babies up. It gave me the confidence so that I could relax and when you are relaxed, they're relaxed, when you're stress they're stressed. So I can see where that helped me a lot. That's where it helped me.*
- *Because we were just talking about, why stay in Paths to Quality, because there are a couple of people who think there is too much paperwork, too much this, too much that, you're not getting the respect. But I think the respect comes from yourself too.*
- *PTQ helps me have some class in what I do – we are not babysitters.*

### **Helped provide developmentally appropriate experiences for children**

- *(PTQ helped me)...Be more kid oriented and help prepare them better for school. They'll do dittos in school, but not in my child care. PTQ helps kids go to the next journey in their life and in their education*
- *When you think about the different levels of PTQ – we need to get them to understand. I had the parents of a 4 year old that was all about ditto sheets. And I was like that's not what PTQ, CDA is about so I had to explain to this father. The things that this little girl is doing in a workbook – she can do this with blocks. I had to get him some information to read about this. That's what I'm trying to teach the kids through PTQ. PTQ is not about getting them to sit down, it's about your indoor, outdoor environment, it's about experiences*

## If you were in charge of PTQ, what would you change?

### Licensed Child Care Centers and Ministry Directors

Directors had many suggestions for changes in PTQ they thought would be beneficial. The most frequently desired change, discussed by nine directors, was that rules, requirements, and quality suggestions be better coordinated among the various training/technical assistance and regulatory agents. Directors related instances where requirements from licensing and PTQ mentors were different or conflicting. Directors suggested that all agencies assisting them with PTQ “get on the same page,” including better alignment of training records and other accountability measures.

A second often-suggested change was that teacher in-service training and experience somehow count for more in PTQ ratings and accreditation. Directors in various groups urged more continuity in mentoring as they move through the PTQ levels. One director offered that just as we try to provide “continuity of care” for children, PTQ should provide continuity in mentoring for providers from Level 1 to Level 4. Several directors suggested that there was a need for improved PTQ promotional materials for parents, something that was simple to use when explaining PTQ to parents who are visiting the center for the first time. Two registered ministry directors urged the PTQ program to grant equivalent CCDF voucher reimbursements to licensed centers and registered ministries, as long as they were at the same PTQ quality level.

### Director Quotes: Suggestions for Changes to PTQ

#### Continuity in mentoring

- *I would change the mentoring for levels 3 and 4. (LCC Director)*
- *Continuity of care! Yes! ... I would like to have kept the same mentor. I would probably be working on level 4 if I had the same mentor, I probably would find a way. (RM Director)*
- *I would like to have [CCRR Mentor] as my mentor through my accreditation process. (LCC Director)*
- *I would keep the same mentor once you're assigned to one. I feel comfortable just picking up the phone and talking to my mentor – they are almost my friend. (LCC Director)*

#### Better coordination of rules and requirements by various PTQ partners.

- *There should be more cohesiveness with PTQ, licensing, and accreditation. For so many things, you have to check 3 sets of standards to see if everything aligns. Even the food program. There's so many different regs. that you can't do with your licensing. (LCC Director)*

- *Paths to QUALITY and the state get together and work together on things. (Interviewer: “Paths to QUALITY and licensing?”) “Yes... State and Paths the QUALITY—nobody gets together. Some of things for Paths to QUALITY you can’t do for the food program or you can’t do. They all have to be aligned and I don’t know how. (LCC Director)*
- *Off the bat, would be the regulations and aligning things better. (LCC Director)*
- *The idea about who is proposing these new things and who is testing this way. Some of the new things are extremely frustrating. (LCC Director)*
- *Or provide more background on where those new things have developed. (LCC Director)*
- *Offer rationale at each level you go to, this is what it is and why. And have staff going to the training so they understand it. My staff will lambast me with these questions, but if there’s someone, a trainer, that can answer these questions of “why we do this”, it would be much more helpful. (LCC Director)*
- *Connect with the licensing. Become our licensing people. I wish they would invite licensing to go through that. It’s more than just handwashing, it’s enrichment, its centered on the child, the well-being of the child. Instead of just caring if your child is alive at the end of the day – that’s all I feel licensing is concerned with. Are we feeding them food than 160 degrees? It’s a higher standard for everyone. (LCC Director)*
- *Consistent rules among all agencies. Because one inspector says bleach water needs to be made this way, and then another wants it made that way, and then you’ve got people who say your centers should look like this, than the other says like that. Who do we listen to? (RM Director)*
- *Building inspectors, VCP, accreditation, consultants – they all need to be consistent. (RM Director)*

#### **Align training and inspection calendars**

- *Alignment with the regulations – the training calendar has changed every year with PTQ. With licensing, it’s a calendar year, with PTQ, it’s from the date of their visit. (LCC Director)*
- *The Health/Safety checklist was new for us with this renewal, and it aligns with accreditation, and the biggest thing is to change that timeline and it would be helpful if licensing and PTQ were more in line. (LCC Director)*

- *Basically with the training hours there can be a conflict with what is acceptable in a certain period of time in Paths to QUALITY vs. accreditation. So I am trying to meet this timeline, this timeline, and this timeline. I think I have it fine, and then Paths to QUALITY says no we can't use this... They need to be more in sync with the state licensing and accreditation. The timelines are all different. One year I thought I was going to lose my mind because nothing worked. (LCC Director)*

### **Fresh training opportunities and more credit for in-service training, experience**

- *Can there not be, if they take a workshop that gives as much credit -for the staff you want to keep – (as) a college course? And they get credit for those things. We have to have 20 hours (training) but it doesn't count for anything except for their own professional development and certainly in your classroom as a teacher, but for PTQ and accreditation, it doesn't count for anything and I feel like it should. (LCC Director)*
- *I think that there may even need to be a grandfather policy of people who have been in this field for so many years and they have that CDA or live experience and there should be some grandfather policy where they're not discredited because of all the inservice hours that they've done throughout the years and all the trainings and workshops and those kinds of things that help you improve in your classroom. I think it's sad that they are discredited because they are the cream of your crop. (LCC Director)*
- *I could see our staff going for it if they knew PTQ would take all that training that they've had and somehow accumulate this to help me graduate quicker. (LCC Director)*
- *I think education is a huge one. As I said earlier, the teacher that had a MSW, to go back and ask her to get a CDA so that I can hire her as a lead teacher – she is a phenomenal teacher – (and NAEYC would count her) – my board president is saying I don't think so Lori, because she doesn't meet the education requirements. And I said 'look, it's more important to me that we have a quality teacher, and I don't care about PTQ standards. I rather have quality teachers and know that we are doing everything right. I mean how do I ask someone with a MSW to go back and get a CDA? (RM Director)*
- *I took the classes to prove what I already learned. I think experience should count. If we are going to require education, what about all these training hours? I've had 50 hours of training this year...but it doesn't count toward a degree. (RM Director)*
- *I would change the educational requirements. When I say change I mean, someone who has been in one center for a certain length of time now qualifies for the same basic principles as an education person would qualify someone with a BA or an AA. There needs to be a number there so you are not penalizing but actually incentivizing centers who keep their people. (LCC Director)*

- *But it could be something as simple as how we do the credit hours for school. They get so many credit hours in school that counts as in-service, depending on what they are doing they could get so many CEU or points for that. (LCC Director)*
- *[My] problem is that we have gone through all the training programs offered. It would be nice to have some new trainings available. We don't have the resources ... for people unless you go up to the Indy conference and I love [local] conference but it's the same people. (LCC Director)*

#### **Improved materials for marketing to parents**

- *It's almost like there should be key points – we have one why we are NAEYC accredited – and there's a lot of info on the parent tour. Even if it's just a little card that explains what it is. (LCC Director)*
- *I would like for them to have better advertisements for the parents for understanding PTQ and just a pamphlet tool to add to our enrollment packet. (LCC Director)*
- *A marketing piece – we need more of it. (LCC Director)*

#### **More funding to improve environment**

- *More monetary support for people who can't afford to build that learning environment at Level 2. (LCC Director)*

#### **Equivalent reimbursement rates, according to PTQ level**

- *Providers need to be paid according to – if PTQ is going to be the end of the day, the providers need to be paid according to PTQ level and not provider type. It goes up 5 or 6 dollars for going to Level 1. (RM Director)*
- *Because we (ministries) get paid less on the voucher, significantly less, in fact there are times I refer them (parents) to a licensed center because I know they (parents) will be able to afford them (licensed center) because of their co-pays or the overage amounts. Once a ministry gets to a certain level on Paths to QUALITY then I think voucher dollars need to be disbursed evenly and it doesn't happen. And it is really difficult. (RM Director)*

## Family Child Care Providers

Family child care home providers were also asked what they would change about the PTQ system. Half of the providers listed consistency among partners and programs, one-quarter mentioned changing the mentoring system and several mentioned more publicity regarding PTQ as the top things they would change. A couple of providers mentioned that they would change the incentives associated with the PTQ levels and a couple of providers said they would change the number of requirements for PTQ for family child care providers and one felt that there was too much intrusion into her home business.

Consistency was a major theme among family child care providers. Providers talked about consolidating paperwork among the various programs, including PTQ, CCDF, the food program, and others. However, the main concept that family child care providers shared was that they wanted mentors, quality advisors, and licensing consultants to communicate with each other more, so that each person that visits the provider is interpreting the rules and standards uniformly.

Other areas that family child care providers would like to change was in the mentoring system. Some of the providers wanted to keep the same mentor through each of the levels, or to consolidate other advisors or consultants, and have the same person cover licensing, PTQ, and/or the CDA requirements.

Several providers mentioned that they would like to see more publicity for PTQ. Providers want the public and parents to know more about PTQ so they are aware of the voluntary changes the providers have made in their child care. Other changes providers suggested regarded the incentives with PTQ. Several providers would like to see similar reimbursement rates for providing higher PTQ-rated care. One provider suggested offering professional development opportunities at a national conference as a possible incentive.

Finally, a couple of providers suggested changing the number of people that monitor different aspects of family child care and easing the number of requirements for family child care providers to be on PTQ.

### Consistency Among Partners and Programs

- *If I had a magic wand, I would probably find a way to consolidate the paperwork requirements among the programs. If you are in PTQ, you are probably receiving CCDF, you are licensed, probably on the food program. When you take all of that and put it together, how many people do you have coming in and how many times does my QA have to come in, I mean come on...And my licensing person, and other people. There are many things we have to keep track of and I think that one of the things – the attendance sheets with CCDF and if they don't do it, then I have to go back and remind parents. We used to have fill out paper forms. That's one thing. Maybe – it just seems like the food monitor comes in 4 times a year – is there anything else she can observe?*

- *If you're going to have a rule or a regulation, keep it and stick to it and make it clear enough where I can understand what it says without asking 5 different people what does it mean and getting 5 different explanations. So yeah, just consistency overall.*
- *I think that PTQ and IAIEYC, the mentors, and observers, and the quality advisor, I think they all need to communicate together, which they are starting to do more now because it became aware. But I think that, well, let me say this, when I had the quality advisor come to my home and something about mentors. How can I say it...body expression tells a lot about what you like and don't like about people and I think they need to communicate more with each other. By me working in the social service field, I can tell, I don't know if other people pick it up, but I picked it up. And I think there needs to be more communication as far as with the mentoring, the advisor, and the NAFCC accreditation people. Because it's like they really don't....ok you do it this way, and I do it this way, the state does it this way, or this is going on this way, and I think everybody, if you want us to be quality, which we are quality people, then you all need to become quality too and it needs to come from you all first.*

### **Changes to Mentoring System**

- *...why can't your mentor that you have for levels 1, 2, and 3, move up with you to level 4? Because once (MENTOR) left me it was just mentor after mentor after mentor.*
- *If they can take the PTQ people and accreditation people and CDA people – why can't there be one person to take you through those three things? And state licensing and CCDF, can't they be the same person? Throughout the year, there's so many people and so much turnover, especially with PTQ and the advisors. Why can't they consolidate some of these people? Like she said, most of the paperwork is the exact same thing. Why do you need 3 different people?*

### **Publicity**

- *From when I talk to people about Paths to QUALITY, the major response I get from them is why should I do Paths to QUALITY or continue if the public has no idea what it is. That is always their response.*
- *You know, I think it is really educating the public. We can do everything we do in our site, we can do everything and the public is not going to know anything. They will do a blitz once every 2 or 3 years and then it is dead again and then nothing is heard.*
- *It's voluntary, yes it is, but, now what are you going to do for us? Explain to the public what Paths to QUALITY is, just don't do a one time thing. All the parents that go to me know what Paths to QUALITY is but if you talk to strangers out there, so what do you do*

*and all this and you say level this and level that and they look at you and say what is the levels, what's all this about. They don't know.*

### **Incentives**

- *The incentives should be the same. You go all the way up to the top, even though we're a home we should be able to get when a little bit more. When you get to level 4 you should be able to get more than that incentive.*
- *But what I would do, I would give every provider the opportunity to get scholarships to a conference. For them to pay for us to go to a national conference.*

### **Resents Intrusion/Too many requirements for FCC**

- *We already have to deal with the food program, licensing, then PTQ, we get enough visits throughout the year, and it's irritating. This was worse (PTQ) than getting a license with them looking at things – where are your writing utensils? And I'm thinking don't you see that they have paintings up? You are PTQ, you are not my licensing person. They are all working together but I don't need another state employee watching over me.*
- *The amount of stuff they require for home providers. I don't know what centers need to do, but I think it's a lot for the home providers.*

## Conclusions

These focus group interviews were helpful in identifying both common and unique themes from licensed child care center directors, unlicensed registered child care ministry directors, and licensed family child care providers regarding their reasons for joining and staying on PTQ, the rewards and challenges of advancement, what they had gained through participation in PTQ, and areas in which they would like to see change in the system. Below, we outline the commonalities among the different provider groups.

### ***Reasons for Joining PTQ***

PTQ has helped providers improve the quality of their programs and has given them the validation needed to show parents and the public that they are providing high quality care. Many directors find PTQ to be a useful framework to use to promote staff professional development and accountability. Lack of parent awareness, while growing with licensed center directors, seems still to be an issue for some licensed centers, registered ministries, and family child care providers.

### ***Advancement***

All providers shared that their PTQ mentor and/or quality advisor has helped them advance levels, and this is clearly an important component of the program. Overall, mentoring support has been a positive experience for the providers that participated in the focus groups.

Providers cited somewhat similar themes regarding their difficulties with PTQ levels advancement. Center directors and registered ministry directors said that a major roadblock to advancement was the need to increase staff training and education levels. While family child care providers shared that this was also an obstacle for them, it was identified as primarily a time factor.

Another challenge to advancement shared by all provider types was the fact that mentors or quality advisors changed, either as a result of their moving up PTQ levels, or due to staff turnover at the local resource and referral agency. Changes in mentors or quality advisors seems to create uncertainty among providers, because some providers felt that there were inconsistencies in how different mentors or quality advisors interpreted the PTQ standards. Inconsistency in interpretations of standards, rules, and recommendations was a challenge for many providers. They expressed frustration at being asked to keep records in different ways and on different schedules by licensing consultants, PTQ mentors, PTQ advisors, food program inspectors, and accreditation validators. They wished these accountability systems were better aligned.

### ***Impact of PTQ***

For the providers that participated in the focus group interviews, PTQ has made a positive impact on their practices. Many providers liked how the training through PTQ has helped

professionalize themselves and their staff and has helped them provide more developmentally appropriate care to the children.

Some providers questioned the reliability and validity of the PTQ ratings and some questioned whether parents were aware of or understood the voluntary nature of PTQ and how much effort is needed to advance through the PTQ quality levels.

***Recommendations for Changes to PTQ System***

One clear theme emerged when providers of all types were asked what they would change about the PTQ system. Providers stated they would like more consistency among the PTQ partners in their interpretation of the standards, and they would like redundancies in the system to be addressed, so paperwork could be better aligned to make it easier for them to participate. Another recommendation by many providers was the desire to keep the same mentor throughout their PTQ involvement.

Finally, providers expressed a need and desire for more ongoing publicity about the PTQ system, so that parents are better informed about the value of PTQ and better understand the levels and standards.

## Focus Group Questions

- 1. Why did you decide to join Paths to QUALITY?**
  - What did you initially hope to gain by joining PTQ? Have you gained those things?
  - Why did you make the decision to stay on PTQ?
  
- 2. Depending on your current PTQ level, how do you feel about advancement? How important is it to you to move up a level?**
  - How hard will it be to move up? What are the challenges?
  - If there are no plans to move up, why not?
  - How has your mentor helped you with advancement?
  - What kind of support do you have to advance to the next level? What kind of support do you wish you could have to advance to the next level?
  
- 3. Now, we want to talk about how being on PTQ may have impacted your child care.**
  - What changes have you seen in yourself or your staff as a result of participating in PTQ?
  - How has PTQ changed the care you/staff are giving children?
  - How do you orient staff to PTQ?
  - What parts of PTQ made the biggest impact in changing the care you/your staff give to children?
  - How has PTQ affected families?
  - How have you engaged families or oriented them to PTQ?
  
- 4. If you were in charge of PTQ, what would you change?**