Paths to QUALITY Evaluation Brief #3: Parent Awareness and Use

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**Paths to QUALITY™ Evaluation Brief #3:**

**Parent Awareness and Use**

**What is Paths to QUALITY™?**

Indiana’s Paths to QUALITY™ child care quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) was launched statewide in 2008 to help parents identify and select quality child care. Paths to QUALITY also recognizes providers who strive to achieve higher quality care, beyond basic state licensing requirements. Paths to QUALITY is a voluntary system for licensed child care centers, licensed family child care homes, and unlicensed registered child care ministry programs. Purdue University was contracted by the state of Indiana to objectively evaluate whether Paths to QUALITY (PTQ) is effectively meeting its goals.

**Primary Evaluation Question about Parent Awareness and Use:**

Are Indiana parents aware of Paths to QUALITY, and does it help them find quality child care?

**Research Focus of the Parent Surveys:**

- Are parents of young children, aware of the PTQ program?
- How do parents know about PTQ?
- How did parents select their current child care provider?
- Will Paths to QUALITY levels influence parents’ future child care decisions?

**The main goals of Paths to QUALITY are to:**

- Improve child care quality for Indiana children and families.
- Recognize providers for their quality achievements.
- Provide a tool for parents to use to select high quality child care.
- Support optimal development and school readiness for children birth to five years.
Research Methods:
Telephone surveys were conducted with a representative, random sample of parents of young children from all regions in Indiana during 2009, 2011, 2015, and 2017. Parents surveyed had children between the ages of birth and five-years, and were using some form of out-of-home child care. In 2017, there were 450 parent surveys completed, including households at all income levels. The statistical margin of error in 2017 at a 95% confidence interval is 4.62%.

Key Findings:
- Between 2009-2017, awareness of PTQ among parents has increased significantly. This is a key condition for success in a market-based child care quality rating and improvement system.
- The most common reasons parents gave for choosing their child care were:
  1. Level of comfort with child care provider.
  2. Overall quality of care provided by child care center or home.
  3. Warmth of child care provider towards child.
  4. Educational activities provided by child care provider.
  5. Experience level of child care provider in caring for child.
- Parents (75%) with preschool age children say PTQ ratings are important when making child care decisions.
- A majority of parents (58%) say they are willing to consider paying more for higher PTQ rated child care.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations:
Awareness of PTQ has increased dramatically in the ten years since the system was launched, and most parents now say they trust PTQ as a source of information about quality child care. However, the population of Indiana families with young children using out-of-home child care is ever-changing. Because the effectiveness of PTQ requires that parents know about, use, and trust the PTQ quality ratings, it is essential that Indiana keep PTQ in the public eye, using sustained and effective public awareness strategies. For example, in the PTQ Child Outcome Study, we found that most parents from low income households rely heavily on social media and mobile phone texting as primary sources of information. Strategies may change over time, as parents adopt emerging modes of communication and information gathering. Keeping PTQ in the public eye will require using methods of communication and information sharing that parents are using.

The Phase 2 evaluation for Paths to QUALITY was conducted between 2014 and 2018. James Elicker, Professor in Human Development and Family Studies at Purdue University-West Lafayette, Indiana directed the evaluation and led the research team. This research brief was written by Project Manager Sara Lane and James Elicker. We are grateful for the evaluation project support by the Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning (OECOSL) in the Indiana Family Social Services Administration (FSSA). The results and conclusions in this brief are solely those of the authors and do not imply endorsement by the FSSA or OECOSL. The full final evaluation report is available on the web site of the Indiana Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning.