



Preschool Program Quality Assurance System Discussion Guide

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This discussion guide is designed to facilitate policymakers’ review of their state’s *Preschool Program Quality Assurance Systems* (PPQAS) and serve as a tool to examine and strengthen current approaches. PPQAS often involve shared responsibilities between State Education Agencies and Local Education Agencies and other local partners. Therefore, it is important to consider the state, as well as local, capacity to set and monitor program quality standards and then support program improvement as you review this document.

This discussion guide includes two frameworks to inform the critical analysis of the state’s current PPQAS. The first framework addresses common components of the system and the second framework considers the governance and functionality of the PPQAS. State teams can review the information below, with a particular lens on what the monitoring review looks like from the perspective of a local program.

1. Preschool Program Quality Assurance System Framework

To develop the PPQAS framework, CEELO reviewed literature on early care and education accountability approaches, continuous quality improvement systems, and child care monitoring systems. A preliminary list of common components was developed and then underwent an expert review. Informed by this process, the framework includes the following five components along with “considerations,” which include specific design choices policymakers can think about as they examine their existing and visionary program quality improvement approaches.

1. Program Quality Standards
2. Monitoring Systems
3. Observational Measures of Instructional Practices
4. Data-Driven Support for Program Quality Improvement
5. Governance of Preschool Program Quality Assurance System

Components of a Preschool Program Improvement System	Considerations
1. Program Quality Standards	Common Standards (what standards and how many) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff qualifications 2. Group size and ratios 3. Global/environment quality 4. Teaching Quality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Interactions o Curriculum implementation o Culturally responsive teaching 5. Inclusion/services to children with special needs

Components of a Preschool Program Improvement System	Considerations
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Comprehensive assessment 7. Family engagement and support, including comprehensive services 8. Program management and work environment 9. Health, safety, and nutrition 10. Transitions to kindergarten
<p>2. Monitoring Systems</p>	<p>Monitoring procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-site visit for review and verification • Online document review • Assess sample or all sites/classrooms • Assess sample or all standards • SEA or LEA responsibility • Embedded or aligned with other state monitoring approaches (e.g., QRIS, Head Start, special education, child care licensing) <p>Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case load • Frequency (none, every 4 years, annually) • Announced or not • Capacity and qualifications of monitoring staff • Number of people used to conduct a monitoring review • Number of days spent on site • Training and oversight to ensure consistent implementation of procedures and policy interpretation • Process for recording and reporting monitoring findings to the state and the local program • Consequences and follow-up based on results
<p>3. Observational Measures of Instructional Practices</p>	<p>Tool choice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One tool for all programs • Choice of tool based on program or classroom needs, CQI plan, or quality level • Tool content focus: ECERS, PQA, CLASS, ELLCO, SEQUAL, etc. <p>Assessment responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program self-assessment • SEA or LEA • Independent rater • QI coach and part of CQI process <p>Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency • Assess all sites/classrooms or a sample • Consequences and follow-up based on results • Embedded or aligned with other state observational measures of instructional practice (e.g., QRIS, Head Start, special education, child care licensing)

Components of a Preschool Program Improvement System	Considerations
4a. Data-driven Support for Program Improvement: Coaching and Professional Learning	<p>Model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching focus aligned with observation data • Mental Health Consultation model • Curriculum Coaching • Job-embedded peer support and community of practice <p>Personnel qualifications and expertise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent QI coach(es) or SEA/LEA instructional coordinators • Coaching consistency and differentiation <p>Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency • Duration • Consistency • Case load • Embedded or aligned with other state data-driven supports for program improvement (e.g., QRIS, Head Start, special education, child care licensing)
4b. Data-driven Support for Program Improvement: Financing	<p>Financial Supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants for materials • Wage supplements • Awards for retention • Tax credits for programs and teachers • Subsidy/voucher increase • Estimated costs of the state’s monitoring system (FTEs/\$) • Embedded or aligned with other state approaches (e.g., QRIS, Head Start, special education, child care licensing)
<p>5. Governance of Preschool Program Quality Assurance System</p> <p>(Refer to the following pages for the framework for examining governance.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree of improvement in program quality over time • Use of data to improve monitoring and improvement approaches • Extent of inter-agency engagement and information sharing in monitoring and improvement practices • Embedded or aligned with other governance structures (e.g., QRIS, Head Start, special education, child care licensing)

2. Framework for Examining the Governance of Preschool Program Quality Assurance Systems¹

This framework identifies five dimensions to evaluate the governance of a state PPQAS. For each dimension, questions to spark a critical review of the state approach are identified. Review the document before the Peer Exchange, and there will be time during the meeting for deeper discussion.

¹ This table uses Brewer and Smith’s (2007) framework and applies it to the early childhood program accountability context based on Tarrant & Schaack’s (2015), *The intersection of quality rating and improvement systems and ECE governance: Issues of accountability and authority*.

Criteria	Definition and Indicators
Stability	<p>Legal/Statutory Stability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the PPQAS established in statute or regulations? <p>Funding stability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the funding source for the PPQAS embedded in statute or tax code? • Is there a line item in the state budget to pay for the PPQAS? <p>Rating structure stability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there clear processes to alter standards, monitoring procedures, and data-driven quality improvement procedures? • Are the supports for participating programs predictable and fairly distributed?
Accountability	<p>Monitoring Program Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are programs participating and reaching high quality indicators? • Are all types of programs participating, including those that serve high numbers of dual language learners and children with special needs? <p>Substantive oversight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there evidence or sound justification for the PPQAS?
Transparency	<p>Decision Making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there adequate representation from all stakeholder groups when making major decisions, including teachers, families, and community members? • Is it clear who makes decisions and why? • Are aggregate overall performance data publicly available and updated regularly? <p>Design Choices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can participating programs clearly articulate the processes and measures by which they are evaluated? • Is the appeals process established, accessible, and understandable?
Innovation and Flexibility	<p>Research and Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a commitment to, and funding for, ongoing research and evaluation? • Are there mechanisms in place to allow for pilot testing and evaluating new quality improvement strategies? • Is there a timeline for examining and revising the PPQAS? • How are states using data to inform improvements? <p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the structure nimble enough to incorporate new approaches?
Efficiency	<p>Managerial Efficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the process for making decisions simple enough to respond quickly? • Do leaders have the information they need, the expertise, and the authority to make sound decisions? <p>Financial Efficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is funding being used appropriately to maximize resources to programs?