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early developments Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

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Improving Early Child Care and Education

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Reaching for the Stars



The rated license or star system, as it's called, adds three voluntary levels of quality to the two basic levels previously available in North Carolina. Centers and family child care homes can earn licenses with up to five stars based on a point system composed of three components: staff and director education, compliance history, and program standards.

Although the rated license does not solve all problems associated with attaining quality in child care, it does help parents become informed consumers who can choose better care for their children.

The new star system affects nearly 9,000 centers in North Carolina that care for nearly a third of the state's children under five

"Next on the video is an art activity. Ready? Roll the tape."

A group of children are playing with modeling dough at a picnic table in a yard. A teacher shows how to use a thick dowel to roll the dough flat. Some of the preschoolers pay attention while others smack their dough delightedly with their hands. Everyone seems to be having a fine time.

Those watching the tape include five women from various areas of North Carolina who are beginning training on using the Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS) to judge the quality of a family child care home.

After a minute or two, the video stops. Cathy Riley, one of the trainers, says, "All right. Now rate the center on 'Art,' which is item 19 in your video training guide." The trainees silently grade the family child care home on art. Then they discuss their rankings. Most give it a four. They discuss whether they could say with certainty that the children were offered art at least three times a week and how creative the teacher was allowing the children to be.

At one point, Trainer Riley says, "You rate what you observe."

In fact, she adds, "When you first go into the family child care home in the morning, tell the owner/operator that you will want to observe everything. And that includes preparing the food, diapering, taking children to the bathroom, naps – everything."

The group then re-starts the video to find out how experts had rated this home's art. They had given it a four.

Using videotape taken in a child care facility to learn how to judge the quality of care is the start of intensive training for these North Carolina Rated License Assessors. They are part of a cadre being trained to implement a new rated license adopted last year in North Carolina.

After video training, trainees complete a number of live observations under the direction of the trainers from FPG, **Lisa Waller, Cathy Riley and Kris Fulkerson**. The overall training is directed by **Thelma Harms and Debby Cryer**, co-authors of the environment rating scales, who also conduct the final practice observations before certifying that trainees are ready to be official assessors for the North Carolina rated license.

The assessors must reach a reliability of 85% (within one point) on each of the four environment rating scales before they can conduct assessments of child care programs for infants and toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children in centers, schools and family child care homes. After each live practice observation, the trainer and trainees compare their scores and talk about discrepancies of more than one point.

The accuracy and objectivity of the assessors is key to the credibility of any certification system. As one trainee put it, "The child care providers really want to know who we are, what our training is, and what level of reliability we've been trained to. I tell them we've been trained to 85% accuracy by the authors of the scales. That seems to carry some weight."

In addition to providing the initial training, FPG trainers conduct a reliability check on each assessor at the sixth assessment completed with each scale. This check assures that assessors maintain their level of reliability. So far, 19 assessors have been hired across the state, some full time and some part time. The new system affects the nearly 9,000 centers in the state that care for nearly a third of the state's children under five. It does not change the minimum standards for child care, but it does add higher gradations in standards.

The rated license or star system, as it's called, adds three voluntary levels of quality to the two basic levels previously available in the state. Centers and family child care homes can earn licenses with up to five stars based on a point system composed of three components: staff and director education, compliance history, and program standards.

Today's training class will help these assessors determine the average score on the FDCRS rating scale used as part of the program standards component for family child care homes. The other scales are the **Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale**,

(continued on page 8)



Sample

State of North Carolina
Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Child Development

Three Star Child Care License

★
★
★
☆
☆

ABC CHILD CARE CENTER
123 ANYWHERE ST
RALEIGH, NC 27777

Sample

In each area rated, this facility earned:

Staff Education: 2 out of 5 points

Program Standards: 2 out of 5 points

Compliance History: 5 out of 5 points

Total: 9 out of 15 points

ID Number: 92001033
Type of Facility: Center



Issued to: CHILD CARE, SUZIE
Age Range: 0 - 12 years
Capacity: 58
Effective Date: July 1, 1999
Restrictions:
Daytime care only
Children in care on ground level only

In accordance with Article 7, Chapter 110 of the North Carolina General Statutes, the above named child care facility is issued a rated license. Licenses vary from an overall rating of one through five stars, based upon their cumulative points in the three categories above.

This license must be displayed in a prominent place so it may be available and shown to each child's parent or guardian when the child cannot be bought, sold or transferred. It is valid only for the location/address noted above. This license is the property of the State of North Carolina and will be returned to the Division of Child Development in the event of termination or revocation.

Note: An actual license will include original signatures of the parties authorized to issue the license.

John Doe, M.D., Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
Jane Doe, Director, Division of Child Development

Graphic: Turner/Collum

Centers and family child care homes can earn licenses with up to five stars based on a point system composed of three components:

1. staff and director education,
2. compliance history, and
3. program standards.



(continued from page 7) **Infant-Toddler Environmental Rating Scale** and the **School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale**.

Whichever scale is being used, it is particularly important because it is based on observation in classrooms. Observation with a valid and reliable instrument is used to show the ongoing daily quality of care and education experienced by children.

The star system, which is administered by the N.C. Division of Child Development, was designed to give parents a better idea of how good their child care center is, as well as giving center operators clear indicators to guide program improvement.

“Research at FPG shows that many parents find it difficult to tell the difference between good programs and bad programs,” said Cryer. If parents can’t really tell what the quality is, there’s a problem with the consumer information that parents have.” She said that according to one study, parents on average spend less than one minute a day in their child’s program, making it difficult for them to know what happens to their child once they have left.

The format of the new license makes it easy to see at a glance how many of the five stars a facility has earned, because only the earned stars are filled in [See picture of sample license on this page]. State officials say they’re hoping that parents will ask what’s required to fill in the rest of the stars.

The new license has specific requirements for each component, designed to improve the quality of care for children. When centers and homes receive their star rating from the licensing consultant, they also receive a comprehensive report on every component. The report includes written detailed feedback from the assessor who observed in their facility about areas of strength and areas where improvement is needed. This detailed report gives the child care providers a blueprint for improvement.

Getting a five star license requires centers and family child care homes to provide high quality in many areas including: protection of children’s health and safety, organization of the caregiving space, provision of appropriate materials for play and learning, practice of positive and supportive interaction with children, and stimulation of language and thinking skills through engaging activities.

Each child care facility will have different areas of strengths and weaknesses. Some may need to make or purchase additional materials while others may need to seek training for their staff so that the materials they have will be put to better use.

Some may need to improve their classroom discipline techniques while others may need to establish better relationships with parents.

Although spending more is not the determining factor in getting a good rating, the director of the N.C. Division of Child Development, **Stephanie Fanjul**, said the state is sensitive to the fact that meeting higher standards may cost more.


That's one reason that multiple stars are voluntary. A center can operate with only one star, which means minimum requirements are met. Centers that had the old "A" rating automatically get one star. The state has allocated \$15 million a year so that centers can improve. This money goes to centers that already receive state subsidies. Operators can earn between \$14 and \$25 extra per subsidized child per month, depending on how many stars they have.

In addition, millions of dollars have been funneled into the state's Smart Start partnership system. [See related stories beginning on page 2 and page 4.] For example, in Wake County, centers that add more stars could receive between 5% and 40% more money per child through Smart Start.

Some critics have said that while the five-star system is a good start, it's still weak in some areas. "We're especially lax on ratios, group size, and especially teacher education," Cryer said. "I go to centers and I realize that many staff members lack training and some have been hired on the spot, with no reference checks."

Studies show that across the US, child care providers earn an average of only \$7.50 an hour or \$13,125 a year. This is considered a major reason for the problem in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. Turnover in child care staff ranges from 25-50% nationally.

Fanjul said she wishes the state could do more. "I wish we financed it. I wish we'd make it possible for every child to get high quality care and for every child care teacher to be paid appropriately. We're not there yet."

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If you want to know more

NCEDL Spotlight #18:
Teacher education, wages key to outcomes.
< www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PDFs/spot18.pdf >

NCEDL Spotlight #2: Quality Child Care
< www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/Pages/spot12.htm >

NCEDL Policy Brief on Quality Care
< www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PDFs/brief11.pdf >

The children of the cost, quality, & outcomes study go to school: Executive summary. Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., Clifford, R. M., Burchinal, M. R., Culkin, M., Howes, C., Kagan, S. L., Yazejian, N., Byler, P., & Rustici, J. (1999). Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, FPG.
< www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/Pages/cq.htm >

