



Background Summary of Existing Child and Youth Quality Initiatives in New Orleans

Note that this document is meant to be used for internal discussion purposes only, based on questions raised at the YouthShift Quality Action Team meeting on July 15th, 2016. It is written by the YouthShift Quality Action Team facilitator based on existing knowledge and very limited research. It is not meant to be comprehensive, and, in some instances there may be information that is either out of date or inaccurate.

Youth Development and Out-of-School Time Programs

New Orleans Youth Program Quality Initiative (NOLA-YPQI)

In 2015, Baptist Community Ministries launched a New Orleans Youth Program Quality Initiative (NOLA-YPQI) Pilot in partnership with local leaders in philanthropy and youth development and the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. The [YPQI model](#) defines instructional quality as a set of professional practices that increase participating youth's access to positive developmental experiences. It includes multiple assessments (both self and external) of program offerings using the Weikart Center's Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) tool, as well as stipends, coaching and training for each participating program to support them in developing and implementing a customized action plan to enhance the quality of their programs. The YPQA focuses on four key areas of quality at the point where staff and youth interact: (1) safe environment, (2) supportive environment, (3) youth/adult and peer interactions, and (4) youth engagement and leadership. The Youth Program Quality Assessment is a research-validated tool that was developed for programs serving youth in grades 4-12 and has been used with more than 4,000 program sites across 41 states.

In August 2016, following a competitive application process, Baptist Community Ministries invited 14 of the original 15 programs along with 19 additional programs to join the NOLA-YPQI pilot, bringing the total to 33 and diversifying the range of programs that are participating to include all volunteer-run programs and church-based programs in addition to some of the city's largest charter school management and youth development organizations. In addition, NOLA-YPQI currently has nine assessor/coaches and 10 additional local youth development professionals who have been certified as external assessors using the Youth Program Quality Assessment. In its first year pilot (September 2015 – May 2016), NOLA-YPQI engaged 15 programs that served and estimated 2,580 New Orleans children and youth per week. It provided a total of 2,352 person hours of training across 27 workshops to 146 program staff. Collectively, participating programs developed 43 goals for program quality improvement and saw the following increases in YPQA scores from the fall of 2015 to the spring of 2016:

- 33% increase in average scores in reframing conflict as a learning opportunity for youth across participating programs on the YPQA scale that measures effective staff practices in this area, which several programs identified as a priority for improvement.
- 39.5% increase in average scores on the YPQA youth planning scale across participating programs, a subsection of youth engagement that measures effective staff practices in providing opportunities for youth to make plans during the program.
- 31% increase in average scores on the YPQA youth choice scale across participating programs, a subsection of youth engagement that measures effective staff practices in providing opportunities for youth to make choices based on their interests in the program.

In the summer of 2016, the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission introduced elements of NOLA-YPQI to inform program quality improvement efforts for its 51 summer camps that serve 4,000 New Orleans children and youth. This summer, every summer camp received an external program quality assessment using

the PQA and nearly 200 summer camp staff attended at least three hours of linked professional development training.

Statewide Standards Development

The Louisiana Department of Education published [Louisiana After-School Standards](#) in 2009, which includes standards in the following six areas related to program quality: (1) Program operations, (2) Administration and staffing, (3) Academics, enrichment and recreational activities, (4) Human relationships, (5) Indoor and outdoor environment, and (6) Safety, health and nutrition. These standards were designed to guide the administration of LDOE-supported afterschool programs, primarily through the administration of federal 21st Century Community Learning Center (21CCLC) funding. Since 2009, the number of LDOE staff dedicated to 21CCLC has decreased and the office may lack the capacity to provide significant supports to grantees in meeting or measuring these standards beyond basic compliance. According to *Public Funding for Out-of-School Time in New Orleans*, an August 2015 report by Baptist Community Ministries and The Forum for Youth Investment, approximately \$8 million in 21CCLC funds went to serve New Orleans youth through expanded learning programs, which include out-of-school time programs and typical out-of-school time program activities that may now occur during the school day.

In August of 2015, The Louisiana Center for Afterschool Learning (LACAL) released a draft of Louisiana Program Quality Initiative (LAPQI) Quality Standards for Afterschool Programs that was informed by LDOE's standards, the National Afterschool Alliance and a series of meetings with afterschool program providers from across the state. LAPQI provides five standards: (1) Environment, (2) Relationships, (3) Programming, (4) Youth participation and engagement, and (5) Emergency preparedness. LACAL has worked with the Louisiana Department of Education to align its standards and encourage the use of mandatory evaluation funding in 21st CCLC grants by programs to work with LACAL to conduct quality assessments and improvement planning. To date, the LAPQI work has focused on a handful of 21CCLC in New Orleans, Shreveport and Baton Rouge, as LACAL is an organization of one staff person.

Unified Summer Grants Collaborative (2008-2010)

The Unified Summer Grants Collaborative was launched as a partnership between the United Way of Southeast Louisiana, the Greater New Orleans Afterschool Partnership/Partnership for Youth Development (which closed in early 2015), and the Wallace, New York Life, and Emeril Lagasse foundations. For three years as New Orleans continued to recover from Hurricane Katrina, the Unified Summer Grants Collaborative worked to increase the availability of summer programs that provide children with access to a range of summer activities — from literacy and hurricane preparedness to sports and the arts — and help them better cope with their still-changing environment. In addition to providing grants for summer programs, the Afterschool Partnership/Partnership for Youth Development also provided professional development training (largely using the Advancing Youth Development training model) for summer workers and evaluation across programs.

Early Care and Education Programs

Louisiana's Quality Start childcare rating system was implemented in 2007 by the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (and has since been transferred to the Louisiana Department of Education). It is a voluntary program for licensed child care centers designed to recognize, support and increase the quality of child care throughout Louisiana. Participating centers can earn up to five stars. Quality Start also offers training and incentives (including tax credits that increase based on the number of stars) to child care providers to help increase their rating. Important new quarterly bonuses and tax credits are also available to parents who choose a Quality Start center. Quality Start rates child care centers on a scale from 1 (the center has a license in good standing) to 5 stars (the center provides high quality child care based on staff qualifications and the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) consistent with national standards promulgated by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. According to the Louisiana Policy Institute, Quality Start has been very successful in

improving the quality of child care centers in Louisiana. Great progress has been made since 2007 in engaging centers and supporting their efforts to meet the higher standards. As of July 2014, there were 715 Class A licensed Louisiana child care centers voluntarily participating in Quality Start (56% of all Class A centers). In addition, the number of centers achieving 3 stars or above (the threshold for “quality” as defined by Quality Start) has increased by over 235% in the last 4 years.

Act 3 of the 2012 Louisiana Legislative session mandated a complete overhaul of early care and education, including the creation of a new rating/accountability system that will assign a letter grade to all publicly funded early care and education programs. As part of the Act 3 implementation, the state has adopted two national assessments to be used as the foundation of the new rating system: CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) and Teaching Strategies GOLD. Every classroom receives two CLASS assessments each year, which examine three domains for pre-kindergarten: emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support; and two domains for toddlers: emotional and behavioral support, and engaged support for learning. 2015-2016 was established as a learning year, in which letter grades would not be issued while child care centers adjusted to the new system. In addition to the observational assessments, LDOE is focusing on providing training and curricula to support improvements that lead to increased kindergarten readiness. LDOE’s current plan is to provide intensive supports in the form of coaching, customized training and planning for six months for centers with very low scores. Failure to improve over a two year timeline will lose funding. Much of the implementation of these efforts locally is being handled by the New Orleans Early Education Network, which is convened by Agenda for Children.

Child Care Rebuild Collaborative/Bridget to Quality

With support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the Greater New Orleans Child Care Rebuild Collaborative piloted Bridge to Quality, an initiative to help early care and education centers improve their quality of care and business practices. While Louisiana’s quality rating and improvement system, Quality Start, provides financial incentives for participating programs that earn at least two stars on the quality rating scale, support to help programs reach that level has been limited. Using an intensive coaching model, as well as financial support, Bridge to Quality aimed to assist centers in reaching at least three stars on the rating scale by the pilot’s end.

The program was developed and piloted in 2009 and 2010. It was managed by the Institute for Mental Hygiene and guided by a steering committee consisting of representatives from the State Department of Social Services Division of Early Child Care and Education, Office of Family Support (which administers Quality Start), Agenda for Children, the United Way, and a number of local early care and education advocates. The Bridge to Quality pilot worked with seven centers in the New Orleans area representing a range of sizes and quality levels. According to the August 2010 Impact Statement, a major criterion for participation in the program was the number of subsidized and low-income children served. Bridge to Quality provided each program with funding equivalent to what a program would receive through Quality Start when they earn three stars. This funding could be used to purchase furniture, materials and supplies, as well as for professional development and benefits for staff. Bridge to Quality also provided intensive coaching to each center, both on ways to improve quality of care for the children, as well as on business planning and data management.

The pilot was evaluated and initial data indicates that it was successful. All participating programs moved up in their quality ratings, and their scores on the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) increased by a statistically significant margin. According to the August 2010 Impact Statement, 87% classroom staff had earned their Child Development Certificate since the program’s launch, making them eligible to receive the annual School Readiness Tax Credit. Since 2011, the program has been administered by the Agenda for Children, the local resource and referral agency, with efforts made to expand the program to outlying parishes. This move has allowed the Bridge coaches and Agenda for Children’s coaches and training staff to work together more closely and share best practices in coaching and program improvement.

K-12 Schools

School Accountability System

The primary – and most known – method of measuring quality in New Orleans public schools has been through the Louisiana Department of Education’s school accountability system. Since 1999, this system creates a School Performance Score for every public school, which has come to be reported as a letter grade for each school, much like individual student report cards. The factors for letter grades differ slightly by grade level:

- Elementary schools (grades K-6): 100 percent of the school grade is based on student achievement on annual assessments in English language arts, math, science, and social studies. Schools may also earn points for significant improvement with students who are academically behind.
- Middle schools (grades 7-8): 95 percent of the school grade is based on student achievement on annual assessments with the final 5 percent based on credits earned through the end of students’ 9th grade year. Schools may also earn points for significant improvement with students who are academically behind.
- High schools (grades 9-12): Half of the school grade is based on student achievement (25 percent on the ACT and 25 percent on End-of-Course assessments). Half of the school grade is based on graduation (25 percent on the graduation index, which rewards achievements like Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exam credit, and 25 percent on the cohort graduation rate, the percentage of students graduating in four years). Schools may also earn points for significant improvement with students who are academically behind.

Schools that continuously have low scoring grades are expected to create a corrective action or school improvement plan, and ultimately may be closed.

School Improvement

Under the current system, individual schools and charter management organizations are largely responsible for the professional development of their teachers, development of school improvement plans and other steps that can be used to improve the quality of instruction and youth experiences in a school. Organizations like New Schools for New Orleans, Leading Educators, education departments at local universities, and other programs have focused on assessing and improving school quality, providing training, coaching and professional development for school leaders and teachers, and making grant funds available to schools seeking to improve quality. New Schools for New Orleans’ efforts to improve the quality of education have included: Connecting 48 school leaders to National Principals Academy Fellowships; providing training, coaching and support to 358 teachers; completing school quality reviews of 26 schools; providing 61 schools with support in the transition to Common Core standards; and providing 29 charter schools serving more than 13,500 students with teacher improvement support through the U.S. Department of Education Teacher Incentive Fund grant.