

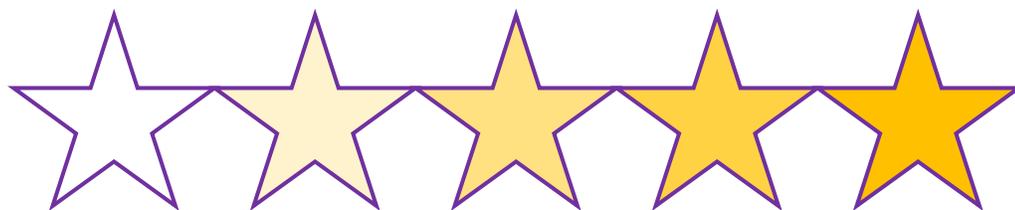
Pilot Test of the Draft Rhode Island BrightStars Child Care Center and Preschool Framework

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BrightStars is Rhode Island’s quality rating and improvement system for child care and early learning programs. Over a two-year statewide planning period funded by United Way of Rhode Island, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT worked with a 30-member steering committee, national and local consultants, and families to draft a comprehensive set of standards and criteria for child care and early learning programs (child care centers/preschools, family child care homes, and school-age programs) in Rhode Island. The draft frameworks were intended to reflect the range of quality within all types of care in Rhode Island, establish research-based quality benchmarks, and provide a basis for quality improvement efforts.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT contracted with FPG Child Development Institute (FPG) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) to collaborate with the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children (RIAEYC) to develop and implement a statewide pilot test of the draft frameworks. The core members of the BrightStars Pilot Test Team were: Kelly Maxwell and Syndee Kraus from FPG, Leanne Barrett from Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, and Tammy Camillo and Shane Szrom from RIAEYC. This team worked closely to conduct the pilot test. FPG provided guidance, helped develop data collection tools, and analyzed the data. RIAEYC was responsible for recruitment and data collection. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT provided general advice on multiple aspects of the project.

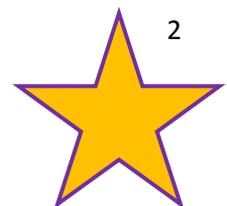
The primary purpose of this pilot test was to use data to review and potentially revise the draft BrightStars standards and criteria before formally implementing BrightStars statewide in January 2009. For the pilot test, data were collected from 25 randomly selected licensed/approved child care centers and preschools, 25 randomly selected licensed family child care homes, and 25 randomly selected licensed school-age programs. This report focuses on the sample of child care centers/preschools. Findings from the pilot test of the other types of programs will be presented in future reports.

Framework Revisions for Pilot

A multi-step process was used to refine the standards and criteria before collecting data for the pilot test. As a first step, FPG met with the Evaluation Subcommittee of the BrightStars Steering Committee to develop the following guidelines for revising the draft framework:

- Criterion is not covered in licensing/regulations,
- Criterion is based on research regarding high quality care and education, and
- Criterion is feasibly measured by either direct observation or review of program documents.

As a second step, the core pilot test team used the guidelines to reduce the number of criteria and revise the wording, as needed. These revisions were then reviewed and approved by the Evaluation Subcommittee.



The Child Care Center/Preschool Framework used in the pilot test contained 26 standards that measured 62 different aspects of quality.

Measures for the Pilot Test

Five types of data were used for the pilot test:

1. Review of existing program documents
2. Facility observation checklist
3. Program director questionnaire
4. Director and teacher qualifications form
5. Compliance data from the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)

RIAEYC also asked for verification of director and teacher qualifications through college transcripts. Copies of the pilot test tools are available from RIAEYC.

Pilot Sample

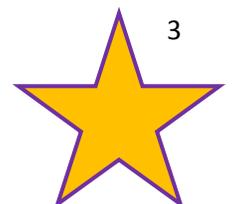
To reach the goal of piloting the framework with 25 licensed/approved child care centers and preschools, 96 programs were contacted. Of the 96 programs contacted, 58 were eligible to participate in the pilot (e.g., were open, had a working phone number). This represents a response rate of 43%.

The sample included programs from across Rhode Island, with most from Providence County (15) and a few from Kent County (4), Newport County (3), Washington County (2), and Bristol County (1). Table 1 provides more information about the sample of 25 programs.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Child Care Center/Preschool Pilot Sample

Characteristic	Percentage of Sample
Not for profit	52%
NAEYC accredited	32%
RIDE approved	48%
Head Start	20%
Serve infants	64%
Accept child care subsidies	96%

The size of centers/preschools participating in the pilot varied. Forty percent(40%) of the participating programs served fewer than 50 children, 52% served between 50 and 100 children, and 8% served more than 100 children. Programs also varied in the percentage of children served who received child care subsidies. Three programs did not serve any children receiving subsidies. For ten programs, 25%



or less of enrolled children received subsidies. For nine programs, 26% to 75% of enrolled children received subsidies. Finally, three programs enrolled more than 75% of children receiving subsidies.

The characteristics of the sample suggest that the pilot was successful in including a range of programs. Because of the voluntary nature of this project and the modest response rate of 43%, it is likely that the sample represents a higher level of quality than the total population of licensed/approved child care centers and preschools in Rhode Island.

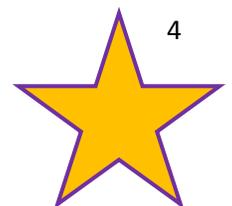
Child Care Center/Preschool Pilot Findings

BrightStars relies on a “building blocks” model for assigning a star rating. Within the building blocks model, a program must meet *all* criteria for Level One to earn a one-star rating. To earn a two-star rating, a program must meet *all* criteria for Level One plus *all* criteria for Level Two. Using the building blocks model with the original framework, 4 programs were not eligible for a one-star rating because they were not compliant with licensing standards. The remaining 21 programs in the pilot study earned a one-star rating. *It is important to note that the pilot test was a test of the draft child care center and preschool framework, not programs. As such, the findings were interpreted as limitations in the draft framework, not the quality of individual programs.*

Recommendations Based on the Pilot

The following recommendations were made to the BrightStars steering committee, based on the findings of the pilot test.

1. **Reduce the number of criteria measured.** The pilot framework included over 60 different aspects of quality. Within a building blocks model, such a large number of criteria makes it very difficult for programs to earn higher star ratings. It is also time consuming for both BrightStars and programs to gather such extensive amount of information. It is recommended that the framework standards and criteria be reduced and revised to reflect only those critically important aspects of quality.
2. **Consider adjusting the framework criteria.** Certain criteria were not met by any of the programs in the pilot. It is recommended that the BrightStars steering committee review the pilot data and adjust the framework to more accurately reflect a range of quality as indicated by a range of star ratings.
3. **Use the pilot data to test possible revisions to the framework.** It is recommended that the BrightStars leadership use the original pilot data to test any revisions to the child care



center/preschool framework. Testing possible changes will enable BrightStars to better understand the likely distribution of programs across the full range of star levels before the framework is implemented.

4. **Build the infrastructure now.** Although BrightStars is just beginning, now is the time to create or expand the infrastructure needed to support its long-term success. If BrightStars requires detailed information about teachers' education and coursework, for example, it would be useful to develop a database or consider joining the National Training Registry Alliance to accurately and efficiently capture the needed information. If BrightStars encourages programs to improve quality, now is the time to ensure that the quality and quantity of professional development and technical assistance opportunities offered across the state will meet the demand. It is recommended that the BrightStars funders and leadership develop an action plan related to the infrastructure needed to support its success.

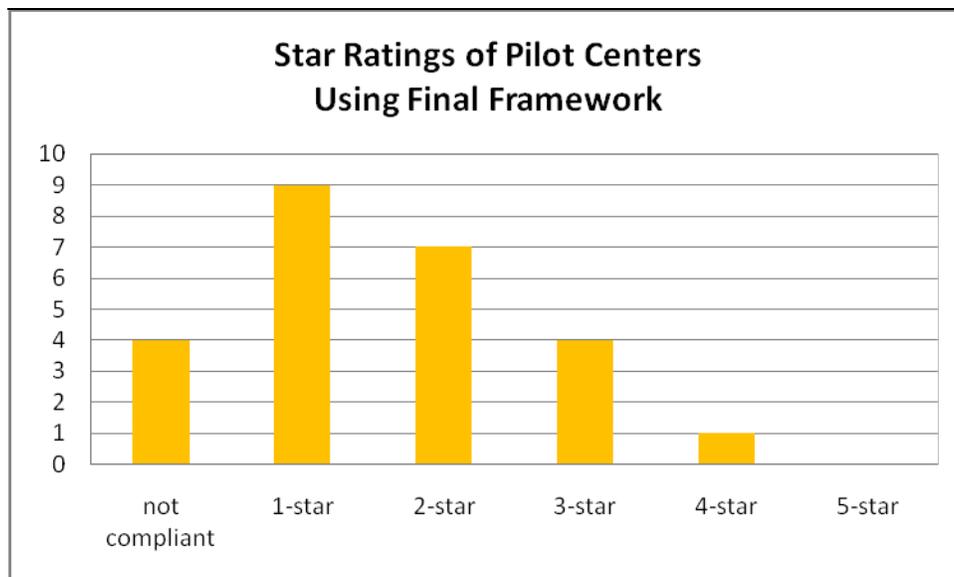
Revisions to the Child Care Center and Preschool Framework

Based on the recommendations, the BrightStars steering committee reduced and revised the child care center and preschool framework to create the final version to be implemented in 2009. The final version includes the following 9 standards measuring 22 quality criteria:

1. child's daily experience
2. teaching and learning
3. curriculum and child assessment
4. minimum staff-child ratio
5. maximum group size
6. family communication and involvement
7. lead group teacher qualifications
8. center director qualifications
9. program management



The revised framework resulted in a wider range of star ratings in the pilot sample of 25 programs. (See chart below.) Using the revised framework, all of the 3- and 4-star programs in the pilot sample were NAEYC accredited, which provides a level of validation for the framework because one would expect nationally accredited programs to provide a higher level of quality.



Future Work

Data from a pilot sample of approximately 25 child care centers/preschools, 25 family child care providers, and 25 school-age programs have been collected. This report describes the findings from the child care program pilot as well as the revisions to the child care and preschool framework. Similar reports will be issued in 2009 for the pilot data from the family child care homes and school-age programs. The data from these pilot studies will help the BrightStars leadership team revise the family child care and school-age frameworks before implementing them statewide.

In addition to these pilot data, BrightStars and FPG are working together to gather baseline data on the quality of care statewide in each of these three types of programs. Data collection methods include document review, questionnaires, observational checklists, and environmental rating scales in randomly selected classrooms. Currently, data are being gathered from a random sample of 50 child care centers and preschools across Rhode Island. Future studies will focus on family child care and school-age programs.

