

ECESF Community Discussions on Quality Improvements

Essential components underlying the quality of both workplace conditions and early care and education program delivery

[Ideas to support and develop underlying quality components](#)

1. Educators' need to be part of the process of defining and shaping quality *at every step*. This is a quality factor in our work, impacting both our work conditions, **and** shaping the quality of the care & education we provide. Every step of the process includes:
 - Defining and setting expectations for quality
 - Assessing current quality through self and peer assessment
 - Assessing specific needs of community served and target population
 - Identifying both strengths and quality blockers at the site, program, and community level
 - Setting program and classroom level improvement goals
 - Identifying strategies and resources needed to move toward goals
 - Evaluating progress made, ability to secure needed resources and supports, and next steps

A successful quality protocol must include the explicit involvement of the educator workforce.

2. The complexity of quality care and education requires thoughtful interaction with educators and caregivers. Our program and professional “needs” change based on factors existing in the community, therefore, the process in which we can stay informed and voice our experiences is crucial to upholding both the quality of our work and the conditions in which we are asked to do our work.

Educators shared examples of experiences that showed:

- When we have influence over changes in our practice, and know why we are making a change to practice, we execute the changes more effectively, feel respected and invested in our work, and are ready to and invested in evaluating the outcomes of the changes.
- Conversely, if changes are made outside of direct dialogue including educators—either from site administration or outside directives, teachers are often not sure of the source—the changes can be experienced as disruptive, and be counter to quality assessments the teacher has made based on observed needs and interests of the children they work with.

Experiences shared included choosing curriculum, autonomy over how to implement a curriculum, concerns over safety and developmental appropriateness when changing curriculum, materials, and/or environment, clear guidelines and agency over purchasing and selecting curriculum materials, how much flexibility each guideline has, and when and where is best to have discourse about decisions and bring up alternative perspectives.

3. When we identify changes needed, both at the site level, and in community development of policies to support our work, we need to know a) we've been heard and b) a response or timeline for action. We need to see that our recommendations are included in the plan.
4. Supports to improve quality need to be able to be individualized by site, and need a communication process to make them effective. There is no one size fits all.

Experiences shared about the helpfulness of coaching illustrate how important this is to effectiveness. Most effective experiences with coaches included:

- Competency of coaches in being responsive to where the educator or administrator is currently, and what the educator or administrator has identified as needed support.
 - Competency of administrator in communicating site and team needs.
 - Room for coaching support to be flexible and responsive based on site need.
 - Ability to assess and change to the support most needed—at times basic needs may need to come before a coach can be helpful. Examples shared included group and room size, or lack of staffing creating stressful conditions that didn't allow additional information to be taken in without the environmental stresses being addressed first.
5. Skill building around supporting communications and processes to develop quality together are needed at the site level and citywide.
 - Quality programming requires continual and responsive changes based on observations from practice as well as changes in group and community need. To effectively learn from practice every voice needs to be heard and valued: teacher, family-member, child, education support team.
 - Current staffing structures can stop communications when the decision-making is held by identified leaders rather than leaders promoting needed dialogue to learn from practice and bring a staff team into shaping decisions.
 - Conversations can be hard! More skill development on holding these conversations is needed, as well as a shift in understanding leadership from being the decision-maker to being the facilitator of hard conversations.