

**A MULTI-CASE STUDY OF THE ONSITE ASSISTANCE SYSTEMS,
ACTIVITIES AND SUPPORTS OF QUALITY RATING AND
IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS**

by

Kelley J. Perkins

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Human Development and Family Studies

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ABSTRACT

In order to ensure quality outcomes for all children in early childhood programs, U.S. policymakers and researchers have increased their focus on discovering how best to support and strengthen systems for early childhood education. Most U.S. states and territories have implemented Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) to improve the quality of their early childhood programs with the expectation that higher quality programs will lead to more positive outcomes for children. One type of QRIS support commonly offered is onsite assistance, which involves sending a professional to the program site to help improve the quality of the program. Despite the widespread use of onsite assistance across QRIS, there is limited information about existing systems for onsite assistance, the activities of onsite assistance providers, and the supports available to them. This descriptive research used a multi-case study approach to solicit new information and map the system of statewide onsite assistance, its activities, and its supports for onsite assistance providers. Findings indicate different and complex models of onsite assistance within statewide QRIS. Despite these differences, commonalities were found within components of the models, supports provided and the activities of onsite assistance providers.

Keywords: onsite assistance, QRIS, systems

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Study Approach and Organization

The quality of Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs can impact children's outcomes (Burchinal, Roberts, Riggins, Zeisel, Neebe & Bryant, 2000; Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005; Howes, Phillips, & Whitebook, 1992; NICHD ECCRN, 1999; Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997). Thus, different interventions, innovations and efforts have been developed to help increase the quality of ECE programs. Within many states and localities, one effort has been the development of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). QRIS offers a variety of supports to help increase program quality. One particular support – onsite assistance – helps programs by sending a professional to the ECE program site to help improve the quality of the program. This support is present in all current QRIS (Isner, Tout, Zaslow, Soli, Quinn, Rothenberg & Burkhauser, 2011) and yet, very little information exists about onsite assistance (Smith, Schneider & Kreader, 2010; Isner et al., 2011). There is a great deal of funding and support built into the implementation of QRIS and expectations are high for program quality to increase. In a time of increased focus on ECE it is prudent to better understand the systems of onsite assistance within

QRIS. This study's purpose is to map the systems, activities and supports that exist within onsite assistance systems in statewide QRIS.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of ECE, QRIS and shares current literature to situate the research questions. In order to meet the purpose of this study, a theoretical framework- Implementation Science- guided the selection of the research questions and is expanded upon in Chapter 2. The methodological approach selected was a multi-case study, with 10 states selected to provide an in-depth description (Yin, 2013) of onsite assistance systems within QRIS. Data sources include participant interviews, a secondary analysis of the 2014 QRIS Online Compendium and document review. Chapter 3 outlines the methodical approach, data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 describes the findings for each of the three research questions, followed by a discussion of the findings within Chapter 5.

Introduction

Over the past twenty years, policymakers and researchers have begun to focus on ECE. This intensified focus, especially on the part of policymakers, stems from the fact that ECE is increasingly considered a public good (Goffin & Washington, 2007). For example, studies demonstrating the positive economic benefits of ECE spending (Heckman, 2006) have prompted policymakers to rally behind ECE investment. Several studies have also demonstrated the significantly positive effects that *quality* ECE environments can have on outcomes for children later in life (Burchinal et al.,

2000; Gormley et al., 2005; Howes et al., 1992; NICHD ECCRN, 1999; Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997).

Definition of Quality

Both economic and political forces have influenced the definition and focus on quality (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Within the field of human services (which includes ECE) there has been a shift from more individual definitions of quality to more “...quantifiable, objective and open methods of assessment” (Polit, 1997, p. 35) and in turn, pushed for a more specific definition of quality (Dahlberg et al., 1999).

The concept of quality and quality control emerged in the 1920’s within the field of business. Throughout the post war years and into the 1980’s the concept of quality continued to be a focus of business, globally. Multiple definitions of quality were created. For instance, Deming (1992) focused on quality being about consistency, predictability, reliability and dependability (Dahlberg, Mos & Pence, 1999). Eventually, the American Society for Quality Control stated that quality was a subjective term, created and understood by an individual, however, in “technical usage” (Bedeian, 1993) quality can be defined by first, the characteristic of a good service that leads to the ability to satisfy needs and second, a good or service free from fault (Dahlberg et al., 1999). The concept of quality has spread across field and industry as well as globally from private to public sector. Within the field of ECE much focus has been on defining quality and studying the indicators of quality.

There is an underlying assumption that both indicators of quality in ECE programs and the outcomes studied are “universal and objective” thus, they can be identified and measured by experts utilizing the right procedure (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Building on this understanding, a common definition for ECE quality (Slot, Leseman, Verhagan & Muder 2015) includes the structural and process characteristics that are expected to enhance child development (Howes et al., 2008; Layzer & Goodson, 2006; Sylva et al., 2006; Thomason & La Paro, 2009). Structural aspects include examples such as ECE teacher qualifications, and group size (Howes et al., 2008; Thomason & La Paro, 2009) while process aspects of quality include the daily activities of children and interactions with teachers (Howes et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 2005; Thomason & La Paro, 2009). Both process and structural aspects of quality and their relationship to child development outcomes are a continued focus of research.

Enhancing Quality

Despite the importance of ECE programs for children, the overall quality of these programs in the United States remains low. In response, states and the federal government have employed a number of strategies to help improve ECE program quality. One key strategy for meeting this goal is the use of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration of Children and Families (2015) defined QRIS as

a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. Similar to

rating systems for restaurants and hotels, QRIS awards quality ratings to early and school-age care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards. By participating in their state's QRIS, early and school-age care providers embark on a path of continuous quality improvement (p. 1).

A variety of supports, meanwhile, are built into each QRIS, such as onsite assistance.

However, more information is still needed about this component of QRIS support

(Tout, Isner, & Zaslow, 2011; Zaslow, Tout, and Halle, 2012).

This chapter will summarize the background literature to provide a context for understanding ECE settings, funding, and regulations. It will describe the motivations behind providing QRIS, the intricacies involved in the state-specific nature of QRIS, and the major components of QRIS (such as support for onsite assistance). It will also describe challenges with understanding and researching onsite assistance, the current research on QRIS, and the potential focus of future research. The chapter will end with an articulation of the three research questions guiding this study.

ECE Settings

ECE comprises many different types of programs: public preschools, Head Start, Montessori schools, nursery schools, and childcare. Both family and center-based childcare are considered part of ECE. While many consider the early childhood time period to include children ages 0-8 (which would include formal schooling grades K-3), programs within a QRIS tend to serve children 6 weeks to 5 years old (or the age at entering Kindergarten). With many different types of programs, funding sources can vary and are usually dependent on the eligibility of each program for

different funding streams. One important form of funding for family and center-based care programs is the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG).

Funding and Regulation of ECE

Since 1990, funding from the CCDBG, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has been allocated to states to subsidize the costs of ECE for low-income families. To help ensure a high level of program quality, some states have connected eligibility for state childcare subsidies to participation in the QRIS. In this model, programs are eligible to receive a childcare subsidy after reaching a high-level QRIS rating. This is often referred to as tiered reimbursement.

States are required to institute a lead agency to oversee CCDBG funding. In many states, these are known as Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies. CCR&Rs are charged with helping parents access and pay for quality childcare (Child Care Aware, 2014). Some CCR&Rs also provide professional development (PD) for ECE providers as well as other ancillary services. CCR&Rs can be housed in state or other public agencies or they may be run by private nonprofits. There can be many CCR&Rs within a single state. These agencies can be spread across a state and can be run by a variety of local nonprofits or other organizations, or the state can have a single network of CCR&Rs. As of 2014, thirty-eight states had statewide CCR&R networks created to provide “best practices and standards, training and technical assistance, and monitoring and evaluation services” (NACCRRA, 2015).

CCR&R state networks also collect data across all local ECE programs to document child-care needs and trends (NACCRA, 2015).

Individual state licensing programs are responsible for regulating ECE programs, primarily child-care centers, and family providers. As of 2014, all fifty states and the District of Columbia had some licensing regulations for programs (Office of Child Care's National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement [NCCCQI] & National Association for Regulatory Administration [NARA], 2013). There is significant variation in the implementation of licensing and the nature of the QRIS lead agencies, such as CCR&Rs, in each state, however. Some states have stringent licensing regulations while others have policies that do not require all programs to be licensed (NCCCQI & NARA, 2013). Although certain states use CCR&Rs to facilitate the CCDBG, other states contract this responsibility to independent agencies. These differences impact the organization and facilitation of QRIS systems.

The integration of childcare licensing into QRIS can influence the variety of systems implemented throughout the country. Typically, QRIS systems are designed with licensing requirements as the base of the system, with the level of quality ratings assigned based on quality levels determined in the licensing standards (NCCCQI & NARA, 2013). Consequently, many QRIS systems require programs to comply with state licensing in order to enter into the QRIS. However, some state QRIS systems allow the participation of non-licensed programs through alternative pathways (AFC, 2015).

Increasing Quality: Systems Building

The goal of systems building, in this context, is to ensure quality and connectivity between state systems that serve young children and families in order to facilitate the best possible outcomes for children (BUILD, 2013). Ensuring the best outcomes for children requires creating, strengthening, coordinating, and integrating state systems that serve very young children and their families (BUILD, 2013). Policymakers have advocated developing stronger early childhood systems primarily because of the broad support for ECE investments among researchers and the public. These systems coordinate access to quality services, enhance data management practices, and support the building of QRIS (Shonkoff & Fischer, 2013).

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems: Motivations and Purposes

The motivations for states to create QRIS include the aforementioned CCDBG and tiered reimbursement, the eligibility requirement to build a QRIS for federally funded Race to the Top: Early Learning Challenge grants, and a social focus on school readiness. Since preparing children for school is considered a pressing issue (NAEYC, 2009), a great deal of attention has been paid to school readiness. ECE licensing is based on health and safety guidelines, but licensing alone does not work to improve the overall quality of ECE programs. Consequently, the building of QRIS in states allows for a focus on quality that surpasses licensing regulations and begins to focus on other components of quality, such as ECE teachers' professional development, the curriculum, teacher-child interaction styles, and assessment tools.

QRIS assesses and rates the quality of ECE programs, communicates their level of quality to the public, and promotes improvements in program quality (Mitchell, 2005). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2011) states that a QRIS should have several purposes: (a) to increase the supply of and access to high-quality programs for young children and families, (b) to improve the quality of all ECE program settings, (c) to focus on the importance of quality indicators and the supply of high-quality programs, and (d) to provide resources and support so that programs can continue to function and improve. Many QRIS guidelines, however, are designed and implemented around these purposes in very state-specific ways.

Implementing State-Specific QRIS

The first state QRIS was implemented in 1998. Other states and regions quickly followed suit. Between 1998 and 2006, ten additional states began implementing QRIS. Many states' QRIS programs originated at the community or county level and then expanded to a full-state QRIS. This trend has continued, and as of 2014, according to the BUILD initiative's QRIS National Learning Network, thirty-eight states had implemented a statewide QRIS. In addition, two states had implemented regional QRIS systems (California had one and Florida had three), a few QRIS remained at the community or county level (e.g., Miami-Dade County, Florida), and nine states or territories are in the planning stages of implementing QRIS.

System Features of QRIS

Within QRIS systems, there are common characteristics and features that can be found across multiple systems as well as features that are individual to a specific system. Each QRIS system includes features, such as the type of management agency for the QRIS and whether it is centralized, with one main agency overseeing the system, or diffuse, with many agencies participating in the system. Such system features, among others, differ across QRIS programs and influence the way in which each QRIS is structured and implemented.

States, for example, have different lead agencies managing QRIS funding. Whereas in some states CCR&R agencies coordinate and manage the QRIS, in others a state agency such as a department of human services or education coordinates the QRIS. Because different agencies in different states are responsible for executing QRIS, there is no uniform implementation of this system across states. State-specific QRIS influences ECE program participation, the rating structure of the QRIS, and the integration of licensing into the QRIS (Connors & Morris, 2014).

In most states, programs participate in the QRIS on a voluntary basis (Administration for Children and Families [ACF], 2015). However, some states mandate that programs participate. Several (fifteen) have also connected participation in the QRIS to eligibility for state childcare subsidies (ACF, 2014). Programs that serve children are eligible to receive a state childcare subsidy after they attain a certain level of QRIS quality rating. Further, various states (for example, North Carolina)

have linked their QRIS to state childcare licensing and, therefore, have a “rated license” for their programs.

QRIS systems generally have three approaches to assigning ratings (referred to as the QRIS rating structure; ACF, 2015): building blocks, points, and hybrid. The building block approach refers to a structure under which programs must meet specific quality standards at one level before moving up to the next level. Under a points system, each quality standard is assigned a number of points and the combination of points determines the rating level of the program. The hybrid or combination approach uses parts of both the building block and points system. Typically, under this structure, programs at the lower levels participate in the building block approach, whereas programs at the higher levels operate under the points system (Tout, Chien, Rothenberg, & Li, 2014).

Some states have as few as three while others have as many as six levels of quality for programs evaluated by QRIS. Currently, the majority of QRIS systems have a five-level ratings hierarchy (QRIS Online Compendium, 2015). Typically, programs go through a rating cycle (the process of receiving a quality rating) for each quality level. However, in some states, programs can move up several levels in one rating cycle depending on the quality standards the program has been able to document reaching. Plus, programs can go through a rating cycle more than once for the same level if they fail to move up on the first try.

Components of QRIS

Although their specific implementation can vary, all QRIS programs tend to share five components: (a) quality standards for ECE programs, (b) a method for monitoring standards in ECE programs, (c) financial incentives for improving ECE program quality, (d) a process for supporting this improvement in quality, and (e) a mechanism to inform families about the quality of ECE programs (Mitchell, 2005; NCCIS, 2009). Although all components of QRIS are of interest to researchers (see, for example, Hestenes et al., 2014; Mitchell, 2012; Smith, Robbins, Stagman, & Kreager, 2012), certain QRIS components have received comparatively little attention in the literature. One area where additional research is needed is the fourth component of QRIS—onsite assistance processes that support program quality improvement.

Onsite Assistance

Recent research has indicated that all QRIS programs have a component of support that includes onsite assistance (Smith et al., 2010; Tout et al, 2010). Within QRIS, onsite assistance is conceptualized as sending a professional to the program site to help increase program quality within the QRIS standards. As noted, however, there are many variations of onsite assistance in QRIS (Zaslow, Tout, & Halle, 2012), including the use of multiple types of providers for onsite assistance and variable approaches to the onsite assistance activities for variable purposes.

Challenges With Understanding and Researching QRIS Onsite Assistance

Much of the onsite assistance occurring in QRIS is related to coaching and/or technical assistance, as documented in several recent studies (e.g., Isner et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2010; Smith, Robbins, Schneider, Kreader, & Ong, 2012). Even with its similarities across programs, however, there are challenges to researching and understanding onsite assistance within QRIS.

The definitions and terms used for onsite assistance and for onsite assistance providers, in particular, have been blurred in both research and practice. Isner et al. (2011) and Isner and Zaslow (2011) identified multiple definitions of onsite assistance and inconsistencies in the description of different programs' onsite assistance efforts. These onsite assistance practices are often referred to as technical assistance, coaching, mentoring, and even consultation. Thus, in many QRIS programs, onsite assistance providers are referred to variably as technical assistants (TAs), coaches, mentors, or consultants.

It is difficult to accumulate and aggregate research findings in a field that does not use consistent definitions (Zaslow, Tout, & Halle, 2012). In an effort to increase clarity, however, the NAEYC and NACCRA (2011) have proffered definitions and categories for each important term in this field. Although each term is explained and defined individually, all are categorized under the broader term of *technical assistance*:

Technical Assistance (TA) is the provision of targeted and customized supports by a professional(s) with subject matter and adult learning

knowledge and skills to develop or strengthen processes, knowledge application, or implementation of services by recipients. (NAEYC & NACCRA, 2011, p. 9)

Within this category are a number of more specific definitions:

Mentoring is a relationship-based process between colleagues in similar professional roles, with a more experienced individual with adult learning knowledge and skills, the mentor, providing guidance and example to the less-experienced protégé or mentee. Mentoring is intended to increase an individual's personal or professional capacity, resulting in greater professional effectiveness.

Coaching is a relationship-based process led by an expert with specialized and adult learning knowledge and skills, who often serves in a different professional role than the recipient(s). Coaching is designed to build capacity for specific professional dispositions, skills, and behaviors and is focused on goal-setting and achievement for an individual or group.

Consultation is a collaborative, problem-solving process between an external consultant with specific expertise and adult learning knowledge and skills and an individual or group from one program or organization. Consultation facilitates the assessment and resolution of an issue-specific concern—a program/organizational, staff-, or child-/family-related issue—or addresses a specific topic. (NAEYC & NACCRA, 2011, p. 9–12)

The job of onsite assistance providers in QRIS encompasses working individually with teachers and caregivers, and/or teacher groups, as well as with administrators (Isner et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2010). It is important to point out, however, that these activities do not occur only onsite. They may also take place in other contexts, such as by phone or over e-mail. In fact, some technical assistance and coaching involves providing modeling and feedback over the Internet (Zaslow et al., 2010).

Onsite assistance providers cooperate with program administrators to help them understand the QRIS rating process and improve program management and administration (Zaslow et al., 2012) and engage in different kinds of tasks depending on the role of the individual or group with which they are working. Onsite assistance providers might help administrators prepare paperwork for a rating assessment, for example, or help a group of teachers meet a specific quality standard within their classroom. Accordingly, the onsite assistance provider's role and the work he or she engages in may vary depending on the needs of the particular program, individual or group at the time. Thus, in many ways, the role and work of onsite assistance providers in QRIS programs is ambiguous and does not appear to match the defined terms under the umbrella of *technical assistance*. In fact, the work of the onsite assistance providers in QRIS appears to encompass much more than the definitions from NAEYC and NACCRA suggest.

System of Onsite Assistance

The present lack of information about how the system for onsite assistance providers is organized across QRIS programs complicates a basic understanding of the role of these assistance providers for themselves, for researchers, and potentially for programs working with the provider. Information about the organization of these systems should, therefore, include understanding the structure or components of the system such as who employs the onsite assistance providers and whether or not the onsite assistance services provided are coordinated. Research has indicated that in

some QRIS programs, several onsite assistance providers from multiple agencies may simultaneously provide onsite assistance for different purposes within the same program (Isner et al., 2011). For instance, onsite assistants may specialize in an area such as infant/toddler care or social-emotional development. Consequently, different onsite assistance providers may work with the same program but with a unique area of focus.

In addition, the manner in which onsite assistance providers from different agencies do their work may vary, even if they have the same area of focus or specialization. This is primarily because each agency within a state may have a different model for onsite assistance. Thus, without a functional understanding of the organization of onsite assistance systems as a whole, it is difficult to understand and research the efficacy of these systems in terms of supporting ECE quality improvement.

One resource that has helped to define the basic components of onsite assistance systems is the NAEYC report *Strategic Directions: Technical Assistance Professionals in State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems* (Young, 2012). This report provided information on onsite assistance, defined as technical assistance, with a focus on technical assistance across various states' early childhood systems, which includes QRIS and providers of onsite assistance for infant/toddler consultation, mental health, Head Start and Early Head Start, and other initiatives. Although the report marks a significant step in taking a closer look at state systems of

onsite assistance, it does not isolate the individual components of QRIS onsite assistance for examination.

For this reason, in the same report, Young (2012) suggested that the ECE field begin to map the current uses of onsite assistance using job information from onsite assistance providers, such as standard job descriptions and definitions of onsite assistance, the qualifications, specialized knowledge, and competencies providers are required to have, and the ongoing support they are expected to provide. Based on these suggestions, NAEYC (2014) compiled a state policy database of technical assistance practices and policies for each state. However, information about QRIS onsite assistance components is not specified in their database. Thus, more individualized information about QRIS onsite assistance systems is needed.

Onsite Assistance QRIS Research

Despite the challenges associated with researching QRIS onsite assistance, several reviews and studies have helped to better explain onsite assistance practices, paving the way for defining a research agenda for the system. Smith et al. (2010), for instance, completed a statewide survey of QRIS on the features of onsite assistance, which they referred to using the terms *coaching* and *technical assistance*. States with fully implemented statewide QRIS programs were asked to participate in the study (eighteen states in total). One state declined participation as its QRIS was in a redesign process. Thus, respondents from seventeen states shared information on the features that their QRIS systems offered. For each state, the state childcare administrator

identified one or two respondents who were knowledgeable about onsite assistance and QRIS PD.

The results of the survey by Smith et al. (2010) showed that twelve of the states (71%) required coaches to have special certifications or qualifications and six states reported minimum requirements or qualifications for onsite assistance providers that included a Bachelor's degree (three states), a Master's degree (one state), or a Bachelor or Associate's degree (two states), depending on the education of the population with which the provider is working. When asked what types of activities onsite assistance providers engaged in, respondents most frequently reported discussions with staff. They reported only limited use of modeling and observation. When asked about the frequency of onsite visits to their programs, respondents answered *monthly* (35%), *less than monthly* (24%), *twice a month* (6%), or *varies by need* (29%).

The participants also provided information on approaches to ongoing support and supervision for onsite assistance providers (Smith et al., 2010). Some states reported that QRIS PD staff supervised and provided regular ongoing training for onsite assistance providers. Seven states reported that their CCR&R organizations led this effort. Two states reported that local universities administered onsite assistance provider training, while other states reported that QRIS PD staff facilitated ongoing training and supervisory meetings.

In a report submitted to the Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County, Isner et al. (2011) conducted a literature review of onsite assistance aimed at

improving program quality (referred to as coaching) within the broader context of ECE interventions. Their review included studies of both family and center-based childcare, and Isner et al. pointed out that more work is needed to determine the link between desired outcomes and specific components of coaching, the duration and frequency of coaching, and the known characteristics of coaches since researchers have not clearly identified specific coaching best practices. A close examination of coaching practices showed that most of the activities were goal directed. For instance, to achieve the broad goal of improving program quality, coaches used reflection, assessment of practices, goal setting, and collaborative problem solving.

In addition to a comprehensive literature review, Isner et al. (2011) completed a multi-case study to describe the coaching practices within four QRIS programs, building upon the work of Smith et al. (2010) by including four QRIS programs not examined in Smith et al.'s research since they were not statewide systems.

The major findings of Isner et al.'s multi-case study indicated that coaching “happens in a larger, pre-existing, and evolving system in which attention and staff are divided among multiple initiatives and priorities” (p. 30). The intensity of coaching tended to depend on the needs of specific programs, where the program was in the rating cycle, and the coaches' caseloads. Coaches in the QRIS system received relatively little support in the form of supervision, evaluation, or monitoring.

Isner et al. (2011) also found several similarities between QRIS programs, such as their use of assessment tools, initial focus on quick fixes, flexible coaching models, and tendency for coaches to work with both directors and teachers onsite. The findings

from their multi-case study also showed several differences among the broad ECE coaching literature. For example, they found that coaches in their study focused more on programmatic quality than on working at the classroom level quality. Although the literature showed wide variation in the duration and intensity of coaching, most QRIS coaches in the multi-case study appeared to agree that changing a program's rating requires a sustained coaching effort over time. Further, the QRIS coaches in Isner et al.'s (2011) study had a smaller caseloads than those reported in the overall ECE coaching literature.

In light of these findings, Isner et al. (2011) made the following recommendations: Create a coaching manual to articulate priority coaching activities and specify the individuals with whom coaches should work to improve program quality. The authors stressed that future research should focus on understanding existing models of onsite assistance, conducting supervision and documentation of onsite assistance providers, and measuring the effect of long-term onsite assistance.

Later, Smith et al. (2012) focused on onsite assistance providers—specifically TAs—in a variety of state contexts in order to better understand the features of onsite technical assistance. The researchers contacted twenty statewide QRIS administrators to each help identify two TAs from each state to participate in the study. Of the twenty administrators contacted, three declined participation either due to either a recent redesign of their QRIS program or the administrator being on leave. In all, the researchers interviewed thirty-four TAs in seventeen states, asking them about the content of the assistance they provided in order to determine how that content aligned

with school readiness domains and TA activities during onsite visits (e.g., observation and feedback). In order to promote individualized learning and support for TAs, Smith et al. also sought to determine how TAs helped teachers with child assessment.

Their results showed that the most frequently reported TA activity was talking to teachers about improvements to the physical classroom and curricula (Smith et al., 2012). Other frequently reported activities included observing the teacher or assistant and modeling. The least frequently reported activity was planning and carrying out specific teacher behaviors that the teacher would practice during observation by the onsite assistance provider. Their findings also showed that the number and frequency of onsite visits varied significantly. More than half of TAs reported monthly or bimonthly visits. Five percent reported weekly visits, and 20% said the number of visits varied widely.

In terms of qualifications, most TAs reported having a Bachelor's (41%) or a Master's (44%) degree (Smith et al., 2012). When asked about training, the TAs in the study reported formal training twice a year or less (29%), whereas 10% reported three or more training sessions throughout the year. About 50% of the TA providers stated that they participated in up to thirty hours of training each year, either one or two times each month or quarterly. When asked about the type of training they received, 46% stated they had been trained on how to use the Environment Rating Scales. In terms of supervision, 56% of TAs reported regularly scheduled supervision (either weekly or monthly) or as-needed supervision. The types of supervision they received included observations of onsite assistance visits (15%) and phone calls or staff

meetings. Additional support reported by TAs included peer-to-peer support and other online QRIS resources.

Research Needed

Research regarding onsite assistance in the broad ECE literature has tended to focus on practices involved in working with individual teachers (Zaslow et al., 2012). Further research within QRIS is needed to investigate approaches that are effective when working with administrators, groups of teachers, teaching teams, and individual teachers to increase quality (Zaslow et al., 2012). However, before more research can be conducted in this area, additional information about the system of onsite assistance is required. Due to the complex nature of QRIS and the individual variations that exist in the support of onsite assistance, it is necessary to investigate how this support is structured and organized. Research on QRIS and onsite assistance needs to be expanded to incorporate a system-wide perspective, which includes an in-depth description of existing onsite assistance systems.

Model/Organization of the System

Currently, there is a lack of information about the systems for onsite assistance within QRIS (Young, 2012) and research is needed to understand their primary characteristics or features. As Isner et al (2011) explained, in other words, more research would help to determine if a specific model of onsite assistance should be

followed. The features of onsite assistance systems that would help to define such a model include the following:

- the types of managing agencies providing onsite assistance;
- the terminology that is used to describe onsite assistance providers;
- the caseload of onsite assistance providers (e.g., the number and type of programs that providers are assigned);
- with whom providers are working within programs;
- the job turnover rate for onsite assistance providers; and
- the qualifications required for the position of onsite assistance provider.

Activities of Onsite Assistance Providers

As Sheridan et al. (2009) pointed out, onsite assistance is still considered a “black box.” Specifically, it is necessary to gather more details about the activities that make up existing onsite assistance models (Isner, et al., 2011). Further, the study on onsite assistance by Smith et al. (2010) echoed the more general findings on coaching by Isner et al. (2011). According to both studies, more information is needed on the duration, intensity, and, most importantly, the activities of onsite assistance providers. It is clear from the literature that the activities utilized by onsite assistance providers need to be documented (Sheridan et al. 2009).

For instance, information is needed to help understand where onsite assistance providers are doing their job: Is it always onsite or are some of their activities conducted offsite as well? In addition, it would be prudent to learn more about the

type of process oriented and content oriented activities in which providers engage. Process orientated activities include aspects of how they did their job and content activities are what, specifically, they are doing in their jobs. Researching to better understand the activities that individuals engage in for a job is a common undertaking. This kind of knowledge is a component of a job analysis that concentrates on activities and behaviors that can be confirmed (Harvey, 1991)

Supports for Onsite Assistance Providers

In order to better understand onsite assistance, researchers must focus on selection, preparation, supervision, monitoring, and data collection in regard to activities that support quality improvement (Zaslow et al., 2012). More specifically, Smith et al. identified the need for further analysis of what individual states are doing to help support onsite assistance providers in order to determine whether or not ECE providers are receiving appropriate support.

Other studies in the mentoring literature have demonstrated the importance of support for mentors. Ryan, Hornbeck, and Frede (2004), for instance, concluded that when mentors received specific early childhood training and had an enhanced understanding of their responsibilities, they were better able to help teachers improve their practice. In addition, when mentors were asked what helped them to increase their capacity and skills for mentoring, they identified training and sharing strategies with colleagues as vital forms of support (Hudson, 2010). Other research has

demonstrated that mentors require extensive training (Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2009).

Support for onsite assistance providers to do their job successfully could be operationalized in several different ways. Within the literature about onsite assistance, several researchers have stated the need for QRIS programs to more closely examine the training, ongoing support, and supervision of onsite assistance providers (Smith et al., 2010) and the publication of manuals for coaching/technical assistance (e.g., policy and procedural manuals; Isner et al., 2011). Training, supervision and manuals for onsite assistance could be considered ongoing support (guidance and/or providing instruction about the job) to help onsite assistance providers do their job. In many ways, due to the scant information about the job of onsite assistance providers, these supports are also helping to define what the onsite assistance providers do in his/her job. For instance, the presence of a manual about onsite assistance would define the characteristics of the job (what they should be doing) but could also be used as a resource support to help onsite assistance providers do their job successfully.

In light of the individual differences across contexts that influence QRIS programs and in turn, the training, supervision and manuals created for the needs of different onsite assistance providers, information on these three supports is needed. For instance, some QRIS programs include onsite assistance that is highly controlled through a state office. Others have multiple agencies contracted to provide onsite assistance. Still others use various onsite assistance providers who are specifically employed to help enhance one domain of quality. Accordingly, training, may vary

depending on the specific job expectations or the agency that employs the provider. This may cause variation in content, type and access to training. Thus, it is important to understand how onsite assistance providers are trained.

Supervision is another type of support that may be available for onsite assistance providers referred under an umbrella term of coaching. As defined by the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN), there are four main roles of a coach: (a) supervision, (b) teaching while engaged in practice activities, (c) assessment and feedback, and (d) provision of emotional support (Spouse, 2001). Additional information, however, is still needed about how coaching, especially supervision is integrated and utilized as a support for onsite assistance providers.

Further information is also needed on the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to complete the job successfully (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005; Harvey, 1991) and on how onsite assistance providers are supported to learn new knowledge, skills, and abilities. As defined by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2013),

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs), or Competencies, are the attributes required to perform a job and are generally demonstrated through qualifying experience, education, or training. Knowledge is a body of information applied directly to the performance of a function. Skill is an observable competence to perform a learned psychomotor act. Ability is competence to perform an observable behavior or a behavior that results in an observable product.

Research has shown that an understanding of the KSAs/competencies required for any job is a good predictor of job performance (Hunter & Hunter, 1984; Reilly & Chao, 1982; Schmitt, Gooding, Noe, & Kirsch, 1984). Thus, identification of the common

and needed KSA's/competencies for onsite assistance providers could help to support success in their jobs.

Further, in light of increased attention being paid to ECE and increased funding for quality improvement, there has been a rising general interest in the outcomes of systems-building strategies like QRIS and its supports. One important step when considering supports for onsite assistance providers is to address the integration and use of data, especially data related to tracking time spent on activities and the activities performed. This area—time spent and activities performed—is particularly important to track because very little is known about it in the context of QRIS. In order to evaluate the potential uses of such data, researchers must have a clear picture of the data they are collecting (e.g., onsite assistance). If the goal of ECE is to provide positive outcomes for children as a public good, then QRIS must be prepared to use data-driven results to justify the commitment of funds to QRIS-supported programs.

As demonstrated by the findings from the Early Childhood Data Collaborative (ECDC, 2013), states are working on and have continued to express interest in data systems and coordination. The goal of ECDC's 2013 report, *State of States' Early Childhood Data Systems*, was to investigate the coordination of ECE data; however, the report did not refer to any QRIS onsite assistance data. Future reports must include these data in order to provide a comprehensive view of QRIS.

System Features of QRIS

The literature in business and economics recommends gaining an understanding of the contextual elements that could potentially influence an individual's job performance. For instance, in discussing work analysis methods, Wilson, Bennett, Gibson, & Alliger, (2013), suggest completing a contextual analysis including the broad context of a job. In other words, investigating the features of the system in which the job exist. Within QRIS, a broad look at the job context for onsite assistance provider's work would include features that provide a system level view. Thus, these features would include the following:

- the state agency where funding is housed for the QRIS;
- the managing agency for the QRIS (i.e., multiple agencies, higher education institutions, or CCR&Rs could be used within a given state);
- the type of managing agency (i.e., one centralized agency overseeing the system or a diffuse system in which many agencies participate);
- the nature of participation of programs in the QRIS (i.e., whether voluntary or required);
- the rating structure; and
- the QRIS' relationship with licensing.

To date, there is no information on how the QRIS context influences onsite assistance providers jobs. It may be, that certain characteristics of a QRIS system at a state level, such as the type of managing agency or the rating structure, may influence the type of

activities onsite assistance providers engage in and the supports that are built into the system of onsite assistance.

Focus of the Current Study

The purpose of this study was to begin filling the gaps in the research about onsite assistance in QRIS programs. To this end, the focus of this study was on contributing to the literature on onsite assistance in QRIS by providing a description of specific aspects of an onsite assistance system.

In sum, the three aspects focused on in this study are as follows: the model of onsite assistance, the activities of onsite assistance providers, and the supports offered for the various onsite assistance providers. Thus, three main research questions guided this study:

1. What onsite assistance models are states using for QRIS?
2. In what types of activities do the various onsite assistance providers engage?
3. What supports exist for the various QRIS onsite assistance providers to help them do their jobs?

Chapter 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter illustrates the theoretical framework—implementation science—that guides this study. Building upon information in the literature review, this chapter articulates the purposes of each research question and their connection to implementation science.

Connections to this Study: Onsite Assistance as a Driver of Quality

Linda Smith (Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) was the first to refer to QRIS using the umbrella model (Zaslow & Tout, 2014), according to which there are several activities, initiatives, and efforts under the QRIS umbrella that support quality improvement for early childhood programs (Zaslow & Tout, 2014). One of the supports built into most QRIS systems to help improve the quality of programs is onsite assistance, which serves as an implementation driver within QRIS.

Since the delivery of onsite assistance exists within the larger QRIS system, there are system features that could potentially influence the delivery of quality of onsite assistance. The first is the individual state's QRIS model, which includes the following aspects of how each state organizes its QRIS:

- Which state agency houses the funding for the QRIS;
- How participation is defined for programs (mandatory or voluntary);
- How licensing is integrated into QRIS (rated license, etc.); and
- The rating structure implemented for the programs.

A second influence is how the state organizes their onsite assistance systems within QRIS. This includes which managing agency oversees the system of onsite assistance and the type of managing agency—either centralized, one main agency overseeing the system, or diffuse, with many agencies participating in the system. The third potential factor includes the supports available to help onsite assistance providers do their jobs. These supports include systems like training and supervision.

While there is a great deal of literature about coaching within ECE programs, within the QRIS literature, there is limited research about how QRIS features influence the system of onsite assistance. One potential reason for this could be the broader definition of onsite assistance within QRIS in comparison to coaching with its focus on enhancing teacher skills – such as language and literacy practices in the classroom. In addition, there is comparatively little information about onsite assistance and its capacity to drive program quality. In other words, onsite assistance is an example of an existing support for QRIS programs that is not evidence based. While onsite assistance is considered a driver of ECE quality at the program and individual level, it is also in need of implementation support as an innovation unit within the larger QRIS system. Thus, in order to help fill this gap in the research, this

study examined onsite assistance as a form of support to programs existing within a QRIS larger system.

Implementation Science

The implementation science framework emphasizes the necessary programmatic conditions and features that encourage the enactment of innovations. It usually involves changing the way a program or system operates and often requires replacing current practices with new ones. Innovations may include the implementation of evidence-based programs or other programs that benefit the target population (Fixsen & Blase, 2009). However, in many research fields, the best method for taking innovations to scale has not been identified. This is important because the implementation of innovations can fail for a variety of reasons: “The failure to utilize research rests in large part on a faulty or non-existent implementation infrastructure” (Fixsen & Blase, 2009, p. 1). Among the reasons for failure are lack of fidelity between the innovation and its implementation, limited capacity of staff to implement the innovation, and lack of funding to sustain the innovation (Greenwood, 2008).

Overall, successfully implementing an innovation or new system is difficult. Change often necessitates creating an infrastructure that improves a program or system’s capacity. An implementation science approach, when used to design and implement systems, includes actively working to ensure that the implementation is successful. Thus, as Greenhalgh, Robert, MacFarlane, Bate, and Kyriakidou (2004) stated, the field is moving from “let it happen” and “help it happen” to “make it

happen” methods (p. 593) and changing from a focus on “passive to more active forms of implementation” (Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Wallace, 2009).

Implementation science is also designed to help foster a strong connection between research and practice. As Fixsen and Blase (2009) stated, “The bridge from science to service must be built, repaired, maintained, and improved” (p. 2). NIRN (2013) defined implementation as “a specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions.” Recently, considerable attention has been paid to the implementation of evidence-based programs in order to provide better outcomes for children and families. Such programs and practices have a strong research base (Durlak, 2011). However, results from studies of interventions delivered in the field rather than in the controlled conditions of a research lab are often not replicated. This is because the conditions in the field are often far removed from those under which the innovation is developed. Therefore, methods for understanding how to take innovations to scale are critical to improving practice.

In order to effectively create an infrastructure for systems, implementation science describes five frameworks for designing systems useful in providing ideas, strategies, evaluation techniques, and other tools, such as practice profiles, that assist in planning, analyzing, and implementing sustainable innovations. These five frameworks are (a) usable interventions, (b) stages of implementation, (c) implementation teams, (d) improvement cycles, and (e) implementation drivers (NIRN, 2015).

Research Questions and Two Frameworks

For the purposes of this study, implementation science helped to clarify the relevance of the research questions through two of its frameworks and another tool: usable interventions, implementation drivers, and practice profiles. Usable interventions involve ensuring that adequate research and information about the intervention are made available. In order to train staff to implement an intervention with fidelity, sufficient detail about the intervention is required. Further, the intervention must be “teachable, learnable, [and] doable” and must “be readily assessed in practice” (NIRN, 2015). In addition, it is important to understand the unique context in which the intervention will be implemented and the “suitability” of the intervention to that context (NIRN, 2016). For example, when implementing an onsite assistance system within a statewide QRIS, it would be imperative to understand the unique context and features of the system that influenced the design of the QRIS, such as the QRIS managing organization and rating structure. This need to understand and map the onsite assistance organizational structure or model leads to the first research question: *What onsite assistance models are states using for QRIS?*

Implementation Drivers

There are three types of implementation drivers: competency, organization, and leadership. These drivers play a key role in determining the effectiveness of any implementation (Metz et al., 2012) and help to ensure successful implementation through the specific activities and components in each driver.

First, competency drivers are “mechanisms to develop, improve and sustain one’s ability to implement an intervention” (Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Duda, 2013, p. 2). They include the selection, training, and coaching of staff. Second, organizational drivers are “mechanisms to create and sustain hospitable organizational and system environments for effective services” (Fixsen et al., 2013, p. 2). This includes employing administrators for the purpose of facilitating change in the organizations’ practices and helping with system interventions using data-driven support for decision-making (NIRN, 2015). Third, leadership drivers are those strategies that leaders use to address specific challenges to implementing innovations (Fixsen et al., 2013). For the purposes of this current study, the ideas and assumptions about competency and organizational drivers outlined by Fixsen et al. (2013) were utilized.

Organizational Drivers: Practices in the System

The ability of onsite assistance providers to serve as drivers of quality for programs participating in a QRIS may depend on the structure of the system and the drivers of quality for the onsite assistants themselves. Since each QRIS is built in a state-specific manner, variations in system design or unique components of onsite assistance may affect the ability of onsite assistance providers to improve programs’ QRIS ratings. These state-specific variations may include the number of programs with which onsite assistance providers are required to work (caseload), the individuals that a provider works with (e.g., administrators or teachers), the length of time onsite assistance providers generally work with a program, job turnover (or the frequency

with which onsite assistance providers leave their jobs), and the qualifications that onsite assistance providers are required to bring to the job. All of these factors may influence the ability of onsite assistance providers to serve as implementation drivers to improve program quality. Figure 1 below illustrates these influences.

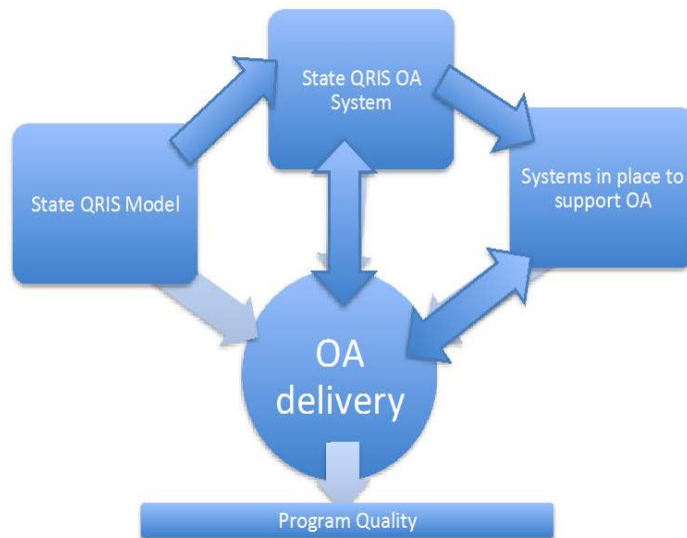


Figure 1 Drivers of Onsite Assistance Delivery

Thus, this dissertation study maps the system of onsite assistance in a QRIS to better explain how these system components are organized, answering the first research question: *What onsite assistance models are states using for QRIS?*

In addition, it is reasonable to assume that onsite assistance is designed to help programs implement new practices that meet quality improvement standards. Therefore, is it logical that the activities they perform have that end result in mind. Yet, there is a need to identify the activities that onsite assistance providers engage in while working (Sheridan et al., 2009; Shindler, 2009), which led to the development of the second research question: *In what types of activities do the various onsite assistance providers engage?*

Competency Drivers

In this study, onsite assistance providers are conceptualized as the drivers the help programs increase in quality (although there are others such as financial incentives, etc.). Their ability to act as implementation drivers to achieve this may depend on their preparation and the supports provided to them in their jobs. The presence of supports such as training and coaching could enhance onsite assistance providers' ability to serve as drivers of QRIS program quality. To this end, this study collected information to better understand the training and coaching (specifically, supervision) of onsite assistance providers, as well as the variable criteria used to select job applicants for onsite assistance provider positions, answering the third

research question: *What supports exist for the various QRIS onsite assistance providers to help them do their jobs?*

Practice Profiles

Practice profiles are another implementation science tool that shaped the research questions for this study. Practice profiles provide definitions of essential functions, describe the core components of a job or position (NIRN, 2015), and include the KSAs needed for a particular job position. More importantly, they articulate the behaviors one would see if the hired individual were able to perform their job at capacity. The use of practice profiles helps promote consistency across the provision of services while the presence of practice profiles and related documents indicates that the activities performed are in some way standardized and implemented with fidelity. Thus, this study sought evidence of practice profiles for onsite assistance provider positions to answer the third research question: *What supports exist for the various QRIS onsite assistance providers to help them do their jobs?*

Mapping out the systems, activities, and supports that help onsite assistance providers succeed is a first step toward describing and better understanding the practices that onsite assistance providers use. The implementation science approach guided the focus of this study because its purpose was to focus on the potential of onsite assistance providers to serve as drivers of quality at the program level of programs participating in the QRIS. The connection between implementation science methods and this study are further discussed in Chapter 5, the discussion section.

Chapter 3 describes the methodological approaches used for mapping these systems and exploring the activities and supports for onsite assistance providers working within QRIS.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to better understand the system of onsite assistance in QRIS. By providing a description of existing onsite assistance systems, activities, and supports for various QRIS providers, this study contributes to the current literature on best practices for QRIS onsite assistance support (Isner et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2010, 2012) by addressing three primary research questions:

1. What onsite assistance models are states using for QRIS?
2. In what types of activities do the various onsite assistance providers engage?
3. What supports exist for the various QRIS onsite assistance providers to help them do their jobs?

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology used in this study to answer these questions. It includes the rationale for the selected approach, an overview of the research design, a description of the participants and the sampling process, the data collection methods and procedures, the data analysis and ethical considerations, and the design challenges.

Rationale for Methodological Approach

Because QRIS systems are relatively new, there is a lack of information about their models of onsite assistance. Often, descriptive studies are used when a phenomenon is new and needs to be better understood and explained (Grimes & Schultz, 2002). As the purpose of this study was to better understand the systems of onsite assistance in QRIS, this must first begin with a mapping or a description of this system. Thus, this study is descriptive in nature and uses a specific qualitative approach to help answer the three research questions.

A qualitative approach was utilized in this study to help best describe the systems of onsite assistance. To use qualitative methods, a researcher must serve as an instrument of data collection, gathering data from multiple sources in a natural setting, analyzing data inductively, and focusing on the meaning that participants attribute to a particular context (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2010, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000).

Several aspects of this topic provided a strong rationale for choosing a qualitative research method. Primarily, the use of qualitative methods helps researchers to provide a holistic account of a working organizational system. When providing a holistic account, researchers “try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 47). This includes “generally sketching the larger picture that emerges” (Creswell, 2013, p. 47). Descriptive research and the use of a qualitative approach were, therefore, best suited for exploring a larger picture of QRIS onsite assistance systems than has been previously depicted.

Case Study Approach

This research used a case study approach to provide a qualitative description of the complex phenomena of onsite assistance in QRIS. According to Yin (2013), “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in-depth and within its real-world context” (p. 959). A case study approach is best suited to attempt to understand complex social phenomena (Yin, 2014) and is a common research methodology across disciplines in social science research (Yin, 2013). Two characteristics suggest that the case study approach was most appropriate for this study: It had (a) a contemporary focus and (b) a focus on something the researcher cannot control (Yin, 2014). This study investigated a relatively new phenomenon and the researcher was not involved with any of the systems selected for examination at the time the study was conducted.

While the case study approach can comprise different epistemological orientations (Yin, 2013); the particular orientation that is best suited for this study was a relativist perspective. Yin (2013) states that the case study approach can “...excel in accommodating a relativist perspective...” (p. 975). A relativist perspective understands there are various realities having many meanings and thus, findings are conditional to the participant’s observation (Yin, 2013). For this case study, it was apparent that different perspectives from different QRIS would be needed to help better understand the systems of onsite assistance. Therefore, this epistemological perspective was woven into the design of this study through the selection of multiple participants and multiple data collection methods.

The scope of the case study approach also aligns with the scope of the current study. One of the strengths of case studies is that they may use multiple methods to generate a clear picture of the case (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2013), helping researchers to better explore complex contemporary social phenomena by allowing them to conduct in-depth investigations in real-world contexts (Yin, 2013). The case study approach may also apply to multiple cases, referred to as multi-case studies. Since multi-case studies provide cross-case conclusions, they are considered stronger than the single case study approach, as their findings may be more compelling (Herriott & Frestone, 1983; Yin, 2013). A multi-case study was appropriate for this study because it ensured an in-depth investigation into the system, activities, and supports for onsite assistance within state QRIS programs. The use of a variety of data collection methods in this study also is consistent with a case study approach: In order to develop a picture of several complex onsite assistance systems, multiple methods—a document review, interviews, and a secondary analysis—were used.

For this study, ten states were selected and treated as separate cases, making this a multi-case study. When conducting case study research, cases are also bounded, or clearly defined (Yin, 2014). The cases for this study were defined as individual states that had a statewide QRIS program.

Case Study Data

For the purposes of this study, both primary and secondary data were used. Secondary data is the data used by the researcher that was initially gathered for a

different purpose (Glaser, 1963). Primary data is data collected directly by the researcher for the immediate purpose of the study. Data collection for this multi-case study followed a progressive design over a six-month period from October 2014 to March 2015. The three sources of data—a document review (secondary data), interviews (primary data), and secondary analysis from the QRIS Online Compendium (secondary data)—were collected over the six-month timeframe. Concurrently, documents were gathered from a web-based search and qualitative interviews were conducted. Additional documents for the review were collected from the interview participants. Following the data collection, a secondary analysis was completed on the 2014 QRIS Online Compendium. The 2014 QRIS Online Compendium is a relatively new resource that provides information about QRIS in the United States. Data found in the compendium was reportedly collected through self-report by staff in each state. Partners in this compendium are the BUILD Initiative, The Early Childhood Challenge Collaborative and Child Trends.

Data analysis was conducted over a two-month time frame. Data from the document review and interviews were triangulated, or checked against the findings, in the secondary analyses. Categories for analysis were formed deductively from the research questions. Next, the findings were merged using an analytic strategy to create in-depth individual descriptions of each state's onsite assistance system (Yin, 2010). This was followed by an analytic technique known as cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2014).

Selection of Cases and Participants

The cases used in this analysis were individual U.S. states with statewide QRIS programs. As of 2014, thirty-eight states had implemented a statewide QRIS (BUILD, 2014). A sample size of ten states, or approximately 25% of states with a QRIS, was chosen for this research. Using a small case sample (less than twenty cases) allowed for a more clinical approach to completing a cross-case synthesis of specific states' QRIS systems (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). States considered to be early adopters of QRIS were identified by the date when the QRIS first became operational statewide according to information in the *Compendium of QRIS and Evaluation* (Tout, Starr, Soli, Moodie, Kirby, & Bowler, 2010). All ten cases ranged in time of implementation from nearly seventeen to ten years.

The implementation science framework informed the decision to select ten early adopters of QRIS for this research. Under the implementation science framework, it is assumed that it takes several years to implement a well-constructed and a well-defined program (Metz & Bartley, 2012). The states with an older QRIS (early adopters) were selected as targets because it was hypothesized that their onsite assistance systems would be more developed than later adopters' systems. It was believed that examining more developed systems for onsite assistance would allow for more in-depth study and would offer a greater range of supports to study. In addition, because these systems were older, many of them had experienced changes such as a redesign (eight of the ten states with older programs had implemented at least one redesign). A guiding hypothesis was the expectation that the redesign of the QRIS

helped to enhance the systems of onsite assistance. Thus, while these newer systems would hypothetically be in an earlier stage of implementation than those in more recently initiated programs, this would be the second time they had implemented QRIS, leading to a better defined system for onsite assistance. This assumption helped in the selection of the ten states used for this case study.

Since the structure of each system may drive the ability of onsite assistance providers to do their jobs, system features of each state were designated to further define the structure of each system for supplementary analysis. While many system features could have been selected, the following were chosen in order to best protect the anonymity of the individual respondents and their states:

- the managing agency for the QRIS (multiple agencies within the state, higher education institutions, or CCR&Rs, which could be composed of a network or many local organizations),
- the type of managing agency (centralized, one main agency overseeing the system, or diffuse with many agencies participating in the system),
- year of last revision,
- the rating structure of the QRIS (block, points, or hybrid).

These data were obtained from the Online Compendium and from the participant interviews. For managing agency of the 10 states, six had multiple agencies or organizations managing the onsite assistance, two were managed by higher education entities and two were by CCR&R networks. The ten states were evenly split by type of managing agency with five being diffuse and five centralized. All of the states had

revisions to their QRIS with the exception of two states. Five states utilized a block rating structure, two states used points and three states employed a hybrid approach.

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

The selection of data for this study was driven by the desire to produce an “in-depth coverage of the cases” (Yin, 2014, p. 959). To that end, the data collection strategies included document reviews, interviews with knowledgeable respondents, and a secondary analysis of the QRIS Online Compendium.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the beginning of this study, approval for the use of human subjects was obtained from the University of Delaware’s Institutional Review Board. All participants provided consent prior to participation (see Appendix A for the consent form). Wherever possible every effort was made to maintain the confidentiality of participants and to de-identify each state used in this analysis.

Use of NVivo Software as a Tool

To increase the usefulness of the data, QSR International’s NVivo computer software was used (Bazely, 2007). This software assisted with managing the data, generating ideas, and querying the data (Bazeley, 2007). The use of tools such as NVivo can help increase the rigor of qualitative work (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

Principles of Data Collection

Five principles of data collection were used throughout this case study: multiple sources of evidence, triangulation, a case study database, a chain of evidence, and care with the use of electronic sources of evidence. These principles maximized the three main sources of evidence (Yin, 2013). The following is an explanation of how these principles were enacted in this research:

1. Multiple sources of evidence were used in this study, including a document review, interviews, and the QRIS Online Compendium, allowing for data triangulation.
2. A case study database of all documents and interview transcripts was created using QSR International's NVivo computer software. The database included a log of how participants were contacted, which documents were found with particular web searches, and which documents participants provided.
3. All sources of evidence were tracked using Excel and then entered into the case study database.
4. Care was exercised when using data from electronic sources. This included cross checking documents found online with participants' versions of documents to account for any older documents that were available. This ensured that the latest copies of documents such as policy and procedural manuals were obtained as data.

Document Review

The document review for this study focused on job descriptions and policy manuals for QRIS generally or, if available, for a given onsite assistance system in particular. This focus was intended to uncover information about how QRIS onsite assistance systems work and the activities and supports available for onsite assistance

providers. Documents were located for review in two ways. First, a web search of public documents was conducted. Search terms included (a) the name of each state's QRIS as obtained from the *Compendium of QRIS and Evaluation* (Tout et al., 2010), (b) the CCR&R for each state, and (c) the terms *technical assistance*, *consulting*, *mentoring*, and/or *coaching*. Additional links to relevant documents and websites about onsite assistance were often found after visiting a state's QRIS website.

A total of seventy-two documents were located from the initial web search. This number included web pages that were not PDFs or Word documents but that provided relevant information inked to the research questions. After the initial document review, a total of sixty-two documents from the web search were deemed applicable to this study. I eliminated ten documents for the following reasons:

- Some documents had multiple versions available, so the most up-to-date version was used and the other discarded.
- Documents that originally were thought to provide relevant information about the onsite assistance system were removed if they only had information about the QRIS.

The average number of documents used in the review per state from the web search was seven, with the minimum being six and the maximum being nine.

In addition to conducting a web search for public documents, I requested that each interview participant share any policy and procedural manuals, job descriptions, or other relevant documents that would be helpful in answering the research questions. Seven of the ten interview participants provided thirty-two additional such documents

for this study. The average number of documents obtained from participants was 4.5, with a minimum of one and a maximum of eight documents per participant. However, there was some overlap between the documents found online and the documents that the participants provided and many of the documents provided were inapplicable for reasons such as they were older versions (determined by dates listed in the document). Thus, twenty-two documents from participants were used and ten were excluded. In total, ninety-four documents were used in the document review. The average number of documents per state was nine, the minimum was seven, and the maximum was thirteen.

All of the documents were reviewed using the same method of content analysis, which included reviewing the text of each document and completing the process described below. First, each document was read through completely. During this first reading, the following categories of information were entered into NVivo:

- the type of document (e.g., policy manual, procedural manual, or job description);
- the date of the document; and
- how the document was obtained (e.g., through the web search or from a participant).

All documents were stored in NVivo.

Interviews

The interview participants were individuals who had historical knowledge of their state's QRIS system and a statewide perspective about onsite assistance supports in QRIS. In order to locate these participants, contact information for administrators was obtained from BUILD Initiative's QRIS National Learning Network (<http://qrisnetwork.org/>), which provides an updated list of contact information for each QRIS administrator as well as an alternative contact. All contact information was verified with each state's QRIS website prior to initial contact. Next, each selected state QRIS administrator was asked to identify the individual with statewide responsibility for the QRIS onsite assistance system. Then, the suggested individual was contacted following IRB procedures and a letter of consent was sent to each participant, which was then signed and returned.

In several instances, when there was no response from the primary contact, a second person was contacted to assist with finding a participant. All ten states identified a participant for the interviews. In one state, the participant indicated a follow-up respondent who could answer questions about training onsite assistance providers. Information from this respondent was gathered through an email conversation and added as a document for review in the analysis. The ten interview participants all held leadership positions within each state and worked in some capacity with the onsite assistance system within their state's QRIS. Examples of the positions they held included regional or state director of CCR&R, manager of quality enhancement initiatives, positions within state agencies that provide oversight or

support to the QRIS, and manager of QRIS positions within professional development teams for the state. The average amount of time they had held their positions at the time of the interviews was six years, with one participant holding her position for fifteen years (the maximum) and one having been in her position for one year.

Questions in the interviews were open-ended to allow participants to generate their own answers (see Appendix A for the interview protocol). Each interview was recorded and transcribed for analysis and stored in NVivo after transcription. Prior to the interviews, the interview protocol was piloted by sending a request to individuals in three states that were not going to be sampled for this dissertation study. One respondent replied and participated in the pilot. The results of the pilot were positive, as the participant was able to fully answer all questions in the interview without confusion. One change that was prompted from the pilot was to clearly stress to participants that the questions were referring to onsite assistance in the QRIS in particular.

Secondary Analysis

Data elements from the QRIS Online Compendium were collected to include more information about the system. Information from data elements regarding QRIS programs, onsite assistance, and other general information were compiled. Table 1 illustrates each data element that was collected.

Table 1 Data Collected From the QRIS Online Compendium

Area of data	Individual data element collected
Program information	QRIS name Date first operational Rating structure Hybrid Point Block
Onsite assistance	Onsite assistance provider types Length of onsite sessions Total duration of onsite assistance Quality improvement provider job title Required training or approval for onsite assistance provider Use of standardized process in provision of onsite assistance
Provider data systems	Data included in the data system

Data Analysis: Strategy and Technique

The analytic strategy employed for the data analysis involved developing a framework for individual case descriptions (Yin, 2013). In case study research, a descriptive framework is used when data are collected on specific topics for the purpose of describing a phenomenon (Yin, 2013). The descriptive framework for this case study consisted of sections that reflected the main themes of the study based on its research questions. After the sections were created, the data were categorized accordingly and compared across the multiple sources of evidence to create the individual case descriptions. Data from the document review, interviews, and secondary analysis were included in this categorization, which was used based on Miles and Huberman's (1994) concept of data reduction, whereby data is organized into smaller, more meaningful categories.

For this case study, information was collected to describe the system of, activities performed by, and supports for onsite assistance providers in QRIS. Thus, these dimensions (system, activities, and supports) were used as the sections for the descriptive framework. Cataloging, or placing evidence from the data into these sections, was done manually in NVivo. Table 2 displays the research questions as well as the sections and subsections of the descriptive framework into which the data were categorized. Terminology for all subsections is explained following the table.

Comments about the system were categorized under the larger section of *system*. This included any descriptive reference to the onsite assistance system. This information was sub-categorized as follows:

- *System description*—How onsite assistance was organized in the state. This included references to funding, contractors, etc.
- *Caseload*—How many and with what types of programs onsite assistance providers worked.
- *Length of time*—How long onsite assistance providers had spent working with programs.
- Who the onsite assistance provider *works with* when they advise a program.
- *Terminology*—The terms used to describe the onsite assistance provider.

Table 2 Framework Sections and Subsection

Research question	Section of framework
What onsite assistance models are states using for QRIS?	System System description Caseload

	Length of time
	Work with
	Terminology
	Turnover rate
	Selection criteria
In what types of activities do the various onsite assistance providers engage?	Activities
	Do in the job
What supports exist for the various QRIS onsite assistance providers to help them do their jobs?	Supports
	Activities tracked
	Learn KSAs
	Supports: model, policy, procedural manual
	Training
	Supervision

- *Turnover rate*—The average or percentage rate of onsite assistants who left their positions and why (e.g., whether they left due to funding cuts, were fired, or left for another reason).
- *Selection criteria*—The requirements and job expectations of the onsite assistance provider. This included information about educational qualifications and required experience for their jobs.

Comments about the activities of onsite assistance providers were included under the larger framework of *activities*. Information in this section was further categorized into the following subsection:

- *Do in the job*—The activities that onsite assistance providers engaged in on the job. This could be with teachers, administrators or other job duties as explained in their job description and in their efforts to help improve quality.

The supports for onsite assistance providers to do their job were categorized under the larger section of *supports* and into the following subsections:

- *Activities tracked*—The activities of the onsite assistance providers that are tracked.
- *Learn KSAs*—How onsite assistance providers learned the knowledge, skills, and abilities for their job.
- *Supports: model, policy, procedural manual*—Supporting documents such as a description of the model used when providing onsite assistance, policy and procedural manuals, etc.
- *Training*—Any required training for the onsite assistance provider.
- *Supervision*—How onsite assistance providers are supervised.

Next, individual descriptions of each case were created. Each individual case description focused on providing a rich, in-depth view of the system, activities, and supports for onsite assistance in QRIS. These descriptions were created based on analytic notes generated from the triangulation of all data sources in the descriptive framework. Tables 3–4 display the data sources triangulated to generate the description of the system, activities, and supports. When triangulating the data, wherever possible, information from the interviews and document review were checked against the data from the QRIS Online Compendium.

Table 3 illustrates the data sources triangulated for information on the state QRIS, such as name, start date, rating structure, managing organization, and onsite assistance partners. These data were included to help contextualize each state’s QRIS. In addition, data sources for the elements of the onsite assistance system (e.g., caseload, length of time onsite assistance providers worked with programs, who the onsite assistance provider worked with, the turnover rate of onsite assistance

providers, terminology used in the title of the onsite assistance provider, and selection criteria used for the onsite assistance provider) are provided.

Table 3 Data Sources for Describing the Onsite Assistance Systems

	Data collection method		
	Interview	Document review	Compendium
Name of QRIS	X	X	X
Start date	X		X
Rating structure			X
Managing organization	X	X	X
System partners	X	X	X
Caseload	X		X
Length of time	X	X	X
Who they work with	X	X	
Turnover rate	X		
Terminology	X	X	X
Selection criteria	X	X	

The data sources triangulated for information about the activities of onsite assistance providers included the interviews and the reviewed documents. Table 4 illustrates the data sources triangulated for information about the supports for onsite assistance providers, which were categorized into training and supporting documents (such as policy and procedural manuals), supervision, and activities tracked.

Table 4 Data Sources for Supports for Onsite Assistance Providers

	Data collection method		
	Interview	Document review	Compendium
Training	X	X	X ^a
Supporting documents	X	X	
Supervision	X	X	
Activities tracked	X	X	X
Learn KSAs	X	X	

^aThere was limited information in the QRIS Online Compendium about training. However, information was gathered from the data element *Required training or approval for onsite assistance provider* to indicate the required approval or training needed for the position.

The analytic notes for each case included a summary of the case, information that pertained to each research question, and other pertinent, unique aspects of the individual cases (Stake, 2010).

Analytic Technique

Following the individual case summaries, a cross case synthesis was conducted (Yin, 2013) using three analytical techniques. First, individual case studies were

reread (Stake, 1995). Next, categories were selected to find commonalities and differences across the cases. Eisenhardt (1989) suggested selecting these categories based on the research problem. Since the descriptive framework used to generate the individual case descriptions was created directly from the research questions, the same sections and subsections were used for the cross-case synthesis.

Finally, evidence was then compiled into word tables (Miles & Huberman, 1994) from findings in all ten individual case descriptions for the following sections: systems, activities, supports, and their subsections. This allowed for the clear display of differences and commonalities between the findings and across cases (Stake, 1995). Commonalities were identified when findings across cases shared similar features in particular sections or subsections. Differences were identified when findings across cases had dissimilar features. A review of the word tables (Miles & Huberman, 1994) helped to produce tentative assertions based on the findings. Additional assertions were found with the help of NVivo software. Word frequency searches were conducted for the *activities* and *supports* sections to find trends in the data across cases. Decisions on all final assertions were made based on the ability of the assertion to connect to the research questions guiding the study (Stake, 2010).

In order to further explore each state's system of onsite assistance, I grouped the states by some of the features of each state's system in order to look for patterns:

- the managing agency for the QRIS (multiple agencies within the state, higher education institutions, or CCR&Rs, which could be a network or many local organizations),

- the type of managing agency (centralized, one main agency overseeing the system, or diffuse, with many agencies participating in the system),
- year of last revision,
- the rating structure of the QRIS (block, points, or hybrid).

In order to accomplish this, each case's description of the system, activities and supports were placed into word tables with the system features. Next, a review of the word tables (Miles & Huberman, 1994) looked for patterns across the system features to form assertions.

Addressing Design Challenges: Validation and Reliability

Validity in qualitative research has, historically, referred to trustworthiness and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Subsequently, Creswell (2013) used the term *validation* to focus on the idea of a process or procedure. In general, validation refers to “the attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings” (Creswell, 2013, p. 249). The procedures used to ensure validity in this study included triangulation, the use of rich, thick descriptions (Creswell, 2013), and member checking. Triangulation involves the use of multiple sources of evidence (e.g., a document review, interview, and secondary analysis) and the corroboration of evidence (e.g., comparison of the findings from the document review and interview to evidence from the secondary analysis). The use of rich, thick descriptions, meanwhile, “allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). The use of rich, thick descriptions also

provides the researcher with a detailed description of the case under study. Further, rich descriptions help readers to transfer the evidence to other contexts to determine if the findings are applicable (Creswell, 2013). In addition, member checking was conducted, with interview participants contacted and asked to review the individual case descriptions for accuracy.

Specifically, in the context of case study research, Yin (2013) argued on behalf of the need to address both construct and external validity. One could argue that construct and external validity are connected under the overarching concept of validation as defined by Creswell (2014). However, to clearly explain the procedures and steps used to address validity in a study, construct and external validity are generally described separately. Construct validity includes the “identification of the correct operational measures for the concepts being studied” (Yin, 2013, p. 1625). For this study, the use of multiple sources of evidence and data triangulation addressed concerns about construct validity by “encouraging convergent lines of inquiry” (Yin, 2013, p. 1655).

Next, external validity is the extent to which a study’s findings can be generalized to other settings or cases. The use of replication logic in this multi-case study helped to account for external validity. Yin (2013) explained that the replication logic used in a multi-case study is similar to the replication logic used in multiple experiments. After a finding is uncovered in one experiment, it is important to attempt to replicate the finding in another experiment. For the finding to be considered strong, such duplication is imperative (Yin, 2013). A multi-case study design can use

replication logic with the careful selection multiple cases that are predicted to yield similar findings or anticipated to have different results.

Qualitative Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research is often referred to in terms of the reliability of the codes (*categories*, in the study) used for data analysis (Creswell, 2013). Three procedural steps suggested by Gibbs (2007) were taken to account for the reliability of the categories: (a) all transcripts and documents that were categorized were double-checked for mistakes, (b) the data were frequently compared with the categories' original definitions to avoid a "drift in the definitions," and (c) the categories were cross-checked with another researcher to ensure agreement (Creswell, 2003). The other researcher (an expert in qualitative research at a mid-Atlantic University) categorized the data using definitions provided and their categorizations were then crosschecked against the researcher's categorizations of the same data. It became apparent, in this process, that the definition of "length of time an onsite assistance provider worked with a program" was not clear. The other researcher needed clarification of the definition when categorizing the data. The definition was discussed, clarified, and adapted. Yin (2013) stated that reliability in a case study design means that the "operations of a study—such as the data collection procedures—can be repeated, with the same results" (p. 1630). To this end, the chain of evidence used to build the database for this case study was maintained in NVivo (Yin, 2013).

Chapter 4

CROSS-CASE SYNTHESIS FINDINGS

Chapter 4 discusses the findings from this cross-case synthesis, which are arranged into the three sections: system, activities, and supports. The case study literature suggests the following ways, used in this chapter, of displaying information about individual case studies: word tables (Creswell, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1984), narrative text (Miles & Huberman, 1984), and quotes of varying length (Creswell, 2009). In addition, as explained in Chapter 3, the findings are compared in tabular form to the system features of each QRIS.

Research Question One: What Onsite Assistance Models Are States Using for QRIS?

The findings on the system models, which included findings related to terminology, selection criteria, caseload, length of time onsite assistance providers work with programs, who they are working with, and the turnover rate, were compiled to help answer the first research question. Table 5 below shows the sources and types of data used for these findings.

Table 5 Data Sources and Types for Describing the Onsite Assistance Systems

	Data collection method		
	Interview (primary data)	Document review (secondary data)	Compendium (secondary data)
Managing organization	X	X	X
System partners	X	X	X
Caseload	X		X
Terminology	X	X	X
Selection criteria	X	X	
Length of time	X	X	X
Who they work with	X	X	
Turnover rate	X		

Systems Organization

The onsite assistance systems used in the states identified for participation in this study are structured in three different ways. Some are structured as a managed network of CCR&R agencies running onsite assistance systems (e.g., in State J and State E). Others are structured as higher education agencies (e.g., in State F and State I). Still other systems consist of multiple agencies working with multiple funding streams to provide onsite assistance (e.g., in State A, B, C, D, and H). Thus, the systems of onsite assistance across all ten cases are complex and intricate. The intricacies of the systems are further evident in the terminology used for onsite assistance providers, the selection criteria or qualifications for becoming an onsite assistance provider in each system, the caseload (how many and what types of programs onsite assistance providers are assigned), the length of time that onsite

assistance providers work with programs, the individuals with whom they work, and their turnover rate.

Terminology Varies

States used variable job titles for onsite assistance providers. This was typically due to the different purposes/strategies of onsite assistance and the different initiatives or organizations that onsite assistance providers address, which reflects the kind of work the various providers do. The study participant from State G shared that because onsite assistance providers deliver different types of onsite assistance, they use different titles:

So because we have different types of technical assistants, we have different titles. So we have a ... TA consultant, we have a child care health consultant, [and an] infant/toddler specialist. And we have regular staff technical assistance consultants.

The participant from State C stated that the titles used in that state for onsite assistance providers are typically not consistent with the definitions used by NAEYC and NACCRA, although there is a push to use the NAEYC/NACCRA definitions more often:

I've been trying to promote shifting in our state to the national definitions the NAEYC has created, but we haven't made that shift in our state, so technical assistance is really, in our state, considered more of the very focused, targeted approach [that] the NAEYC would probably refer to as consultation. And "coaching" is what State C tends to use more broadly.

Other states are also in the process of defining the terminology, as the participant from State H shared:

Well, sometimes they're called mentors . . . Then, there are others depending on the stage and the need for the provider . . . providing technical assistance. It's like, where do they put them? . . . They're in the process of figuring out and identifying the difference . . . So I think it is technically some mentoring, some consulting, and sometimes it's just technical assistance. It is kind of a moving target, I think . . .

Selection Criteria: Qualifications

Across all of the cases, onsite assistance providers are required to hold a Bachelor's degree in ECE or a related field such as family services, child development, child psychology, or elementary education. However, two states stipulated that a Master's degree is the minimum level of education required within specific organizations. Several indicated that a Master's degree was preferred. As a selection criterion, experience was also stressed throughout several cases, such as State D:

We have been able to hire people who came through the field of early childhood in various ways. Some of them actually were Head Start teachers or ran a family childcare at home, or worked for the Council for Professional Recognition that issues CDA credentials. We've had people, we've looked for people specifically that understood the work that child care providers do each and every day . . . We just have been so lucky in finding those people, because that's made such a difference in the way they're accepted by, you know, the folks that are doing the important work in the field.

Experience preferences ranged from general statements that “experience is required” or “valued” to a specific number of years, ranging from two to six.

Additionally, there was evidence in the document review of the specific KSAs that served as the selection criteria in some cases. These selection criteria included the following:

- PITC certification or willingness/ability to successfully complete Modules I–IV upon hire;
- Knowledge of the Environment Rating Scales (ITERS) and the pyramid model, (CSEFEL, 2012) preferred;
- Knowledge of economic, cultural, and societal challenges of ethnically diverse communities;
- Demonstrated knowledge and ability in the operation of child care operations; and
- Skilled at training and workshops.

Caseload: Typically Undetermined

Seven of the ten participants did not define specific caseload numbers. In some states, caseload is assigned based on the geographic region served. However, three of the participants in this study were able to provide caseload numbers (i.e., the number of programs or classrooms assigned to individual onsite assistance providers). Some states define caseload by the number of classrooms overseen while others use the number of programs. A caseload is commonly a mix of program types (e.g., center-

based and family child care), but is defined in a variety of ways across cases. Table 6 illustrates the data on how a caseload was described in all ten states.

Table 6 Onsite Assistance System Caseload Descriptions

State	Caseload (number of programs and program type)
A	Numbers depended on the type of onsite assistance provided, from 160 to 1,100 facilitates. However, caseload numbers shrink when providing more intensive services onsite. Included a mixture of program types.
B	Numbers depended on what initiative the onsite assistant works for. Some had 14 classrooms and others a much higher caseload. Caseload includes a mixture of program types (center-based and family child care).
C	Numbers specified by state councils; included a mixture of program types.
D	Numbers for one organization depended on the geographic assignment of the onsite assistant provider. Another organization stipulated 20 programs per full-time employee. A mixture of program types, with some specifically targeted to high-need areas.
E	About 50 programs, including a mixture of program types. *
F	Number of programs is about 75; includes a mixture of program types. *
G	Numbers difficult to ascertain due to the existence of part-time and full-time onsite assistance providers; a mixture of programs.
H	Numbers not clear; typically included a mixture of programs, but some concentrated only on family childcare.
I	Numbers are consistent across the state at 30–40 classrooms; typically includes a mixture of program types.*
J	Calculated by dividing the number of programs by the number of consultants in each region; included a mixture of program types.

* Note: These states had a clearly defined number for caseload

Length of Time: Determined by Programs Goals

Overall, the length of time that onsite assistance providers generally worked with programs was not determined. One of the states (State G) had a set amount of time that onsite assistance is provided to programs, but this length of time, in most states, was dictated by the needs of the programs. For example, the participant from State I stated that the length of time

really depends on the site's goals. There may be a program that says, "I really just want to get my... [rating]" and that could take them two years, it could take them six months. There may be a program who wants to go all the way to 5 ... and that might take four years or more, though we are committed to continuing the onsite consultation as long as the program has the desire and . . . we still have sufficient funds.

Similarly, State I's consultant guide stated,

Therefore ... consultants will spend the majority of their time working directly with ... programs. . . . Consultants will visit each participating site in their caseload at least twice per month and more frequently as needed. . . . Consultants will communicate with the Senior Program Manager and/or Program Manager regarding the needs of individual programs and schedule visits accordingly. . . . Consultants will continue to visit and provide virtual support to participating programs until those programs have reached their desired... level...

Some states track the time spent in programs, and one participant (State E) noted an average length of time spent working with programs of fourteen hours. Several states were in the process of discussing how to track length of time spent for onsite assistance according to the needs and the type of onsite assistance provided. As the participant from State H explained, "It's really pertinent to have us think about the

dosage, that is also the dosage in the context of the goals.” Table 7 summarizes the length of time onsite assistance was provided across all ten states.

Table 7 Length of Time Onsite Assistance Is Provided

State	Description of length of time
A	Undetermined; depended on the type of onsite assistance. Typical coaching activities lasted between 6 weeks and 9 months.
B	Undetermined; varied according to the initiative.
C	Undetermined; varied based on the funds structured in the individual councils.
D	Undetermined; provided according to the program’s needs.
E	Undetermined; visits last at least 1 hour and as frequent as once every 6 weeks.
F	Determined by the estimate in the TA plan. Amount of time varied according to what level the program was aiming for but averaged 14 hours when combining the levels together.
G	40 hours over 6 months for most onsite assistance providers but could vary by type of onsite assistance and/or the needs of the program, pending approval.
H	Undetermined; depended on the program’s goals and the onsite assistance strategies used.
I	Undetermined; provided according to the program’s needs.
J	Undetermined; provided according to the program’s needs.

Who Providers Work With When Providing Onsite Assistance

Across all states, the onsite assistance provider worked with both administrators and classroom teachers. Typically, this was due to the nature of the onsite assistance provided and the needs of the program. For instance, if the onsite assistance provider is working on a particular subscale of the Environment Rating Scale that involves room arrangement, he or she will work with the teachers in the

classroom. However, several states placed emphasis on onsite assistance providers working with administrators to help create sustainability after the onsite assistance ends. As the participant from State F explained,

We typically expect them to work with the directors. But they do occasionally work with teachers in specific classrooms if there are, you know, if the director has specific things that they want the TA to work on in a classroom with that. But our main focus is to work with the director to teach them how to observe their classrooms and that kind of thing. Hopefully they will be able to carry that out with their staff. That's our model, but we do occasionally work individually with teachers.

The participant from State I clarified that state's focus on administrators:

The work that the consultants do is on a program level. When they go into the program, their first contact is [with] the designee—that's usually the director, the administrator, whoever had signed the letter of agreement as the ... designee—and they really work closely with that director. And through that director or the administrator, they'll go into the classroom. They'll do modeling. They'll work directly with the teachers but almost always that director's by their side because of the goal of sustainability. When they leave, that leader of that program has the tools they need to keep the quality where it is.

Table 8 illustrates, by state, the individuals with which the onsite assistance providers typically worked.

Turnover: No Clear Data

Overall, states did not have data on turnover rates for onsite assistance providers, but participants indicated a generally low turnover rate. Discussing the reasons for turnovers, the participant from State B stated that onsite assistance

Table 8 Individuals Onsite Assistance Providers Work With

State	Position
A	Administrators and teachers.
B	Administrators ^a and teachers (mostly directors).
C	Administrators and teachers, depending on the needs of the program.
D	Administrators and teachers; administrators were the first contact before moving on to work with teachers.
E	Administrators and teachers; more success reported with the administrators.
F	Administrators and teachers; the expectation was to mostly work with administrators but sometimes with teachers.
G	Administrators and teachers.
H	Administrators and teachers.
I	Administrators and teachers; focus on administrators for sustainability.
J	Administrators and teachers, usually starting with administrators

^aThe administrator is the director of a child care center or the owner of a family child care program.

providers are sometimes prompted to leave due to concerns over funding for their positions:

I mean, I know that there are specialists that are still with the project that, you know, have never left, but each time we've had a funding crisis, people have thought, "Hmm, this is what I worry about every year," and then [have] gone [on] to find other things.

The participant from State J, meanwhile, reported that turnover increased when new expectations were put into place for onsite assistance providers:

It's less than 50%. That's for sure . . . I would say since the new contracts three years ago, we probably did have a little bit more of a switch because the expectations are higher as far as them having the degree and stuff. We did have a little turnover there.

Despite these reasons for turnover, according to participants, turnover was low because of job flexibility, benefits, and the passion of the individuals participating in the type of work.

As the participant from State A explained,

We give them a lot of autonomy in providing their technical assistance, as long as they're meeting their goals and keeping their data entered, they're fairly autonomous. We do bring them together twice a year to meet as a whole group and within their regions they meet monthly. They do have a good support system there. We don't really do anything specific. I think it's between that and being a good employer and the job market not being the greatest.

The participant from State I explained the low turnover as resulting from the rewarding nature of the job and the passion it evokes:

I've only lost one consultant and was actually just about to transfer to a similar position in another department, which is really exciting. What we're hearing is people see this ad for this position and they're just excited about it. It really speaks to the people's passion who want to improve things in the state. We've also really hired many people from around the country. There's something in this QRIS work that sparks the interest of a lot of folks who are passionate in the field. So far we've had really good retention rate.

Although the turnover rate is low, turnover remains a significant concern given the individualized knowledge required of onsite assistance providers.

As the participant from State G indicated, there are concerns about how to replace onsite assistance providers when they retire:

What we do worry about, though, is we have a lot of older TA consultants who have been with the system for over 10 years, and it's a

real concern where that experience is going and replacing those leaders . . . Yeah and it's really hard to build an experienced TA consultant. It takes a pretty big set of skills.

System Features

System features of each state QRIS were compared to the findings collected about the variables within the first research question. The purpose of this investigation was to discover patterns in the descriptions that may be attributed to the following system features of QRIS systems:

- the managing agency for the QRIS (multiple agencies within the state, higher education institutions, or CCR&Rs, which could be a network or many local organizations);
- the type of managing agency (centralized, one main agency overseeing the system, or diffuse with many agencies participating in the system);
- year of last revision; and
- the rating structure of the QRIS (block, points, or hybrid).

All data about system features used was considered secondary data, as it was compiled from online material.

Managing Agency

CCR&R and higher education all had a centralized type of agency and a rating structure that was block or hybrid.

Type of Agency

Six states including State G, utilized multiple agencies and were categorized as having a diffuse system for onsite assistance in their QRIS. However, it is important to note that state G had built in policies to help standardize the supervision and management of onsite assistance across agencies.

Rating Structure

The two states with QRIS organized through a CCR&R utilized a hybrid rating structure. The two states with QRIS organized by managing organizations used a block rating structure. All systems using a points rating structure had multiple agencies providing onsite assistance.

Year of Last Revision

No notable patterns or findings emerged from an examination of the year of last revision.

Table 9 illustrates the system of onsite assistance findings with the other system features used in this analysis. The table is organized to show the patterns that emerged between the QRIS rating structures and the states' managing organization models.

Table 9 Models of States' Managing Agency and Rating Structure

States	Managing Agency	Type of Agency	Rating Structure	Caseload	Selection Criteria	Length of Time	Works With	Turnover Rate
F	Higher Education	Centralized	Block	75 programs	BA needed and experience	Based on Programs needs	Teachers and Administrators	Unknown but assumed to be low
I	Higher Education	Centralized	Block	30 to 40 classrooms	BA needed, master's preferred, and experience	Based on Programs needs	Teachers and Administrators	Unknown but assumed to be low
A	Multiple	Diffuse	Block	Not defined	BA needed and experience	Based on Programs needs	Teachers and Administrators	Unknown but assumed to be low
D	Multiple	Diffuse	Block	Not defined	BA needed and experience	Based on Programs needs	Teachers and Administrators	Unknown but assumed to be low
G	Multiple	Centralized	Block	Not defined	BA needed and experience	Based on Programs needs	Teachers and Administrators	Unknown but assumed to be low
E	CCR&R	Centralized	Hybrid	50 programs	BA needed and experience	Based on Programs needs	Teachers and Administrators	Unknown but assumed to be low
J	CCR&R	Centralized	Hybrid	Not defined	BA needed and experience	Based on Programs needs	Teachers and Administrators	Unknown but assumed to be low
C	Multiple	Diffuse	Hybrid	Not defined	BA recommended, sometimes master's, and experience	Based on Programs needs	Teachers and Administrators	Unknown but assumed to be low
B	Multiple	Diffuse	Points	Not defined	BA needed and experience	Based on Programs needs	Teachers and Administrators	Unknown but assumed to be low
H	Multiple	Diffuse	Points	Not defined	BA needed and experience	Based on Programs needs	Teachers and Administrators	Unknown but assumed to be low

Research Question Two: In What Types of Activities Do the Various Onsite Assistance Providers Engage?

Findings about the activities of onsite assistance providers were compiled from the interviews (primary data) and the document review (secondary data) to help answer the second research question.

The activities that onsite assistance providers do in their jobs are varied, differing from provider to provider within and across states. Many times, their activities are specifically geared toward the initiative they work for or the agency by which they are employed. For instance, in some cases, participants indicated that the activities of onsite assistance providers often varied from provider to provider because several different funding streams supported their positions. In some states, for example, if a position is funded as part of an infant/toddler initiative, then the provider works primarily with activities to increase the quality of infant/toddler care. By contrast, if the onsite assistance provider works at an agency funded to increase program quality, this more general purpose might require the provider to engage in activities that span multiple areas of the program (e.g., infant/toddler care, curriculum, administration, etc.).

Consistently, across all states, the exact activities that onsite assistance providers engaged in while onsite were not clear and their descriptions were general. However, seven participants articulated very clear processes in which onsite assistance providers would engage while working with programs. For instance, the activities of

onsite assistance providers are often guided by the particular phase in the program's rating cycle when the providers are working with the program. For example, when a program first enters QRIS, the onsite assistance provider may observe the program prior to conducting an assessment. The provider may then conduct a mock assessment and build relationships to learn about the strengths of the program. After the mock assessment, the onsite assistance provider may provide feedback and help to create a quality improvement plan.

Several participants mentioned that the activities that onsite assistance providers engage in depend on the individuals with whom they are working in the ECE organization. For example, the participant from State J noted that onsite assistance providers work with the director to complete the QRIS application but with classroom teachers when they begin preparing a program for the Environment Rating Scale assessment.

Across states, activities fell into two categories: (a) activities typically conducted onsite and (b) activities that could be conducted offsite. Offsite activities include outreach activities such as advocacy efforts and talking on the phone or communicating over e-mail. Onsite assistance providers also engage in off site administrative tasks such as managing paperwork, collecting data about their work, and entering data into different types of data management programs. Some onsite assistance providers attend advocacy meetings and other state and system meetings relevant to their work in the QRIS. For some states, attending these meetings is required.

Further investigation into onsite activities included looking for the presence of multiple types of activities, such as process oriented and content activities. Process orientated activities include aspects of how the providers did their job and content activities are examples of what they were doing in those jobs. Across all cases, there was very little information provided about the content of the activities for onsite assistance. However, two specific tools or assessments were used across programs: Both the Environment Rating Scales (Harms et al., 1998) and the pyramid model from the Center for Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (2012) were heavily referenced. Also, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS, Hamre & Pianta, 2007), the Program Administrators Scale (Talan & Bloom, 2004), and Business Administrator Scale (Talan & Bloom, 2009) are used in a few states.

Process oriented activities that onsite assistance providers engaged included the following:

- Building relationships with the program staff.
- Developing a plan and setting goals to improve the program quality, including an informal observation of the program (either a mock assessment or a formal assessment of the program such as the Environment Rating Scales), a discussion with program administration about the strengths or goals of the program, and a review of the QRIS quality standards or other state documents that outline best practices. Sometimes, the early learning guidelines created by the states are used to revise the curriculum.
- Modeling new skills to teachers.
- Providing feedback, often after an assessment.
- Answering questions to understand the QRIS.

- Facilitating training.
- Helping to create a professional development plan

Other activities that were not as common across states included the following:

- Helping programs find additional funding.
- Determining staff qualifications for positions.
- Helping programs to comply with licensing requirements.
- Helping programs and staff to solve problems.
- Monitoring compliance with quality standards.

System Features

System features of each state's QRIS were compared to the answers from the second research question, concerning the activities of onsite assistance providers. The purpose of this investigation was to discover descriptive patterns that would align with the system features of the QRIS across cases. All data about system features used was considered secondary data, as it was compiled from the online compendium. Below, the most important findings that emerged are shared (see Table 10 and 11).

State Agency

All states where the QRIS was funded through the Department of Human Services had clearly articulated processes for onsite assistance providers working with programs.

Managing Agency

All states managed by a CCR&R or higher education entity had clearly articulated processes for working with programs.

Type of Agency

All states using a centralized managing agency had clearly articulated processes for working with programs.

Rating Structure

All block (except for one) and hybrid cases had clear processes for working with programs.

Year of Last Revision

No patterns were found when examining the year of last revision.
(see Tables 10 and 11).

Table 10 System Features and Activities Typically Onsite

States	Managing Agency	Type of Agency	Rating Structure	Clear Process	Building a Relationship	Working on or setting goals	Providing Feedback /advice	Helping to understand the QRIS	Modeling	Facilitating Trainings	PD assistance	Working with an Assessment Tool	Working with the ERS as tool
A	Multiple	Diffuse	Block	X		X	X			X	X	X	X
B	Multiple	Diffuse	Points				X			X		X	X
C	Multiple	Diffuse	Hybrid	X		X	X		X	X		X	X
D	Multiple	Diffuse	Block					X		X	X		X
E	CCR&R	Centralized	Hybrid	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
F	Higher Education	Centralized	Block	X	X	X	X					X	X
G	Multiple	Centralized	Block	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
H	Multiple	Diffuse	Points			X	X	X		X	X	X	X
I	Higher Education	Centralized	Block	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
J	CCR&R	Centralized	Hybrid	X		X		X	X	X		X	X

Table 11 System Features and Activities Typically Offsite

States	Managing Agency	Type of Agency	Rating Structure	Outreach	Outreach: Advocacy	Outreach: Promoting QRIS	Administrative Tasks: Data entry, paperwork	Talking on the phone or email	Attending Meetings
A	Multiple	Diffuse	Block	X		X	X	X	X
B	Multiple	Diffuse	Points		X	X	X		X
C	Multiple	Diffuse	Hybrid				X		
D	Multiple	Diffuse	Block	X	X	X	X	X	X
E	CCR&R	Centralized	Hybrid	X	X		X		X
F	Higher Education	Centralized	Block	X		X	X	X	
G	Multiple	Centralized	Block	X	X		X		X
H	Multiple	Diffuse	Points			X		X	
I	Higher Education	Centralized	Block				X	X	X
J	CCR&R	Centralized	Hybrid	X	X	X	X		X

Research Question Three: What Supports Exist for the Various QRIS Onsite Assistance Providers to Help Them Do Their Jobs?

Evidence from the supporting documents and models, the activities tracked, supervision, training, and KSA learning for onsite assistance providers were compiled from the interviews, document reviews, and the online compendium to help answer the third research question. Table 12 below illustrates the data sources used for these findings.

Table 12 Data Sources and Types for Supports for Onsite Assistance Providers

	Data collection method		
	Interview (primary data)	Document review (secondary data)	Compendium (secondary data)
Training	X	X	X ^a
Supporting documents	X	X	
Supervision	X	X	
Activities tracked	X	X	X
Learn KSAs	X	X	

^aThere was limited information in the QRIS Online Compendium about training. However, information was gathered from the data element *Required training or approval for onsite assistance provider* to indicate the required approval or training needed for the position.

Supporting Documents or Models

Across all cases, documents existed that described the job of onsite assistance providers, ranging from operational manuals that explained the organization and operations of the QRIS to policy and procedural manuals that explained the QRIS or

that were specific to onsite assistance, lists of competencies that described the KSAs needed for onsite assistance providers, and other state-specific documents.

Consistently, participants referenced documents that were found in the document review and categorized as general QRIS manuals, which are provided for programs in QRIS and offer information about the requirements, standards, applications, and a variety of other case-specific information about the system. Some participants indicated that various contracting agencies set their own policies and provided their own procedural manuals or supporting documents for onsite assistance. Other states had one general policy and procedural manual for onsite assistance providers across the QRIS.

The use of specific frameworks and models for onsite assistance providers was limited. However, one state, State E, stressed the use of a published model commercially available in a manual. In addition, several states outlined onsite assistance procedures and expectations in a manner that could be considered a model (e.g., State F, State J, and State G).

One supplementary supporting document for onsite assistance providers is the list of competencies that several states had developed as a self-assessment tool. Table 13 shows a comparison of onsite assistance models, policies, procedural manuals, and other documents that help support the job of onsite assistants across provider types. Overall, States F, G, J, C, B, H, and I had the most comprehensive supporting documents specifically designed to help onsite assistance providers do their jobs. State A's supporting documents were unclear, as a framework for that state was not

obtained for this study. State H, State E, and State D were each planning to create additional supporting documents at the time of this study. A consistent finding from the interviews, however, was that there is a need across states to redesign existing supporting documents or to create new supporting documents.

Table 13 Models and Policy and Procedural Manuals for Onsite Assistance Providers

State	Document
A	Program manual, expectations document, framework for onsite assistance.
B	TA competencies, initiative-specific policy and procedural manuals.
C	Coaching competencies, modes of coaching, coaching roles, coaching website with tools and resources, a credential for coaching.
D	Program guidebook, rubric for childcare centers. R&R in the process of creating a manual for onsite assistance. Quality assurance staff had a binder with resources.
E	Commercial coaching model, developmentally appropriate statements for the Environment Rating Scales.
F	Operational manual, essential functions document, policy and procedural manual, policy revised statement, framework for professional development, competencies.
G	PD framework, career resource guide, TA policy and procedural manual, TA definitions document, TA guiding principles document, competencies.
H	QRIS application requirements, documents such as competencies.
I	Consultant guide, planning time grants documents, early learning guidelines.
J	Website with resources for consultants, including a Statewide Child Care Consultant Manual, credential information, competencies, and webinars.

System Features

System features of each state's QRIS were compared to the descriptions in supporting documents. The purpose of this comparison was to help discover patterns of documents provided that may be attributed to the system features of QRIS across cases. These data about system features were considered secondary data, as they were compiled from the online compendium.

Type of Agency

In general, the findings indicated that when the managing agency was centralized, there were more supporting documents available for the job of onsite assistance.

Rating Structure

All states utilizing a hybrid system were considered to have comprehensive supports (defined as – supporting documents for onsite assistance providers that exceeded the QRIS manual and included additional documents such as competencies or specific manuals that helped to define the job of onsite assistance provider). States that used a block rating structure all had QRIS manuals for onsite assistance providers and multiple supporting documents (except for State A, which may have more documents available, but they were not obtained for this study).

Managing Organization

No patterns or findings emerged from examining the managing agency.

Year of Last Revision

No patterns or findings emerged from examining the year of the last revision to the QRIS.

Table 14, organized to show the patterns that emerged from an examination of the rating structures of the QRIS programs, illustrates the findings in relation to the system features of the QRIS.

Activities Tracked

All states tracked some activities for onsite assistance providers and some participants were able to provide rich details about the data being tracked, whereas others were vague about the tracking of activities. Some of the data that were tracked included the activities of onsite assistance providers (e.g., a full description of the activities), the length of time spent working with programs, and the nature of the work (e.g., the type of assistance, such as phone, e-mail, or onsite, and location of onsite assistance, such as in infant/toddler rooms, at a preschool, etc.). Some states also tracked planning time and the individuals with which onsite assistance providers were working onsite.

Table 14 Rating Structure and Supporting Documents

States	Managing Agency	Type of Agency	Rating Structure	Specific Onsite assistance manual	QRIS Manual	Competencies for Onsite Assistance Providers	Additional Documents specific to Onsite assistance	Planning or creating additional documents	Considered to have Comprehensive Documents Available
E	CCR&R	Centralized	Hybrid				X	X	
J	CCR&R	Centralized	Hybrid	X	X	X	X		X
I	Higher Education	Centralized	Block	X	X		X		X
F	Higher Education	Centralized	Block	X	X	X	X		X
B	Multiple	Diffuse	Points			X	X		X
A	Multiple	Diffuse	Block		X		X		
D	Multiple	Diffuse	Block		X		X	X	
C	Multiple	Diffuse	Hybrid			X	X		X
G	Multiple	Centralized	Block	X	X	X	X		X
H	Multiple	Diffuse	Points			X	X	X	X

Some discrepancies emerged from a triangulation of the data about the activities that states tracked for onsite assistance providers. For instance, according to the QRIS Online Compendium, seven states collected data on case management for onsite assistance. However, there was no clear definition of what case management means within the QRIS Online Compendium. As a result, the data were difficult to triangulate with the information provided by the participants and the document review.

One important finding is that all the states' participants referenced either plans for enhanced data collection or the desire to track more specific onsite assistance activities and providers' use of time. Some even talked about the importance of using these data to inform changes in the onsite assistance system. One particular change mentioned repeatedly in the interviews was the need for a reallocation of caseloads for onsite assistance providers.

Table 15 shows the activities tracked for onsite assistance providers and the collection method used for the tracking. The following states were confirmed to have a statewide database that collects specific information about onsite assistance: State G, State J, State F, State E, and State I. Table 15 also designates where additional discrepancies were found in a triangulation of the data. Specifically, there were discrepancies between the participant's report of the presence of a statewide database and the online compendium's reporting in State B, State J, and State C.

Table 15 Activities Tracked for Onsite Assistance Providers

State	Activities tracked
A	Type of work and the individuals they worked with; written case notes logged after each visit.
B	The regulatory system ^a tracked some data, but additional tracking capabilities being developed.
C	Data-tracking practices vary by organization; the state did not track activities
D	Quality assurance staff data collected biweekly; additional data collection areas and methods being defined. R&R staff tracked with whom they are working, the time and duration of their cases, and the nature of their work.
E	A targeted technical assistance form completed after each visit to track with whom they worked, facility information, type of onsite assistance, the number of hours, delivery information, and the Environment Rating Scales.
F	A database used to track activities, use of time, type of assistance, and the subscale from the Environment Rating Scale focused on during the visit.
G	A database tracked planning time, e-mail and telephone use, the role of the individuals with whom providers are working, and travel time.
H	Activities tracked by some onsite assistance organizations.
I	A database tracked time spent; plans underway to enhance tracking capabilities.
J	Statewide Child Care Resource and Referral Database tracking time spent onsite and some tracking of activities. ^b

^aThis system was not mentioned by the participant but was found in the QRIS Online Compendium.

^bThis system was not found in the QRIS Online Compendium. The compendium references an internal Excel database.

^cThe QRIS online compendium references new databases currently in development. These databases include case management data for onsite assistance.

Supervision of Onsite Assistance Providers

Of the participants interviewed, 80% reported the use of supervision strategies such as onsite visits or shadowing. Supervision practices included meetings, performance evaluations, phone calls, reviews of plans, and collection of onsite assistance data. One state's participant stressed the inclusion of reflective supervision as the overarching focus of supervision. A participant from another state reported the use of videotaping for supervision in one particular agency. Throughout the states, the supervision process typically varies by organization or agency. Only one state reported using the onsite assistance provider's case data to help evaluate and participate in the supervision process (State E). Four state administrators referenced specific documents and self-assessment tools used in the supervision process (see Table 16 for a list of the documents). Table 17 summarizes the supervision process for the cases in each state. Across the cases, States A, E, F, I, and J had implemented systems of supervision that were clearly articulated in the interviews.

Table 16 Documents for Supervision of Onsite Assistance

State	Strategies for supervision
C	Coaching Competencies Self-Assessment
F	Rubric for Essential Functions and Job Standards
G	Consultant Summary Form: Self-Assessment
H	Competencies Self-Assessment Tool

Table 17 Supervision of Onsite Assistance

State	Strategies for supervision
A	The state program had a manager and two assistants. Each assistant supervised the onsite assistance providers directly in the field at least once a quarter, with monthly meetings or training and evaluation of hours each month.
B	Different supervision strategies utilized by the different agencies/initiatives providing onsite assistance. One initiative used some videotaping of onsite assistance visits.
C	Dependent on the council.
D	The state organization had a quality assurance supervisor responsible for supervision, onsite visits, and weekly conference calls. Work summaries collected but not evaluated.
E	Site coordinators and management staff did onsite visits with providers and made follow-up phone calls to childcare providers.
F	Performance evaluations and self-assessments conducted annually. Audits on files conducted semiannually. Supervisors shadowed onsite assistance providers at least once per year for each job function. Onsite inter-rater reliability measured on the Environment Rating Scales once per quarter. Reliability based on the standards measured once per year. The university completed a mid-year check-in and a yearly evaluation. The Outlook calendar could be checked. After a rating cycle closes, a follow-up call was conducted.
G	Strategies included onsite visits with the provider, scheduled reviews, informal calls to programs during the onsite assistance process, a self-assessment form, reviewing all associated cases and forms, attendance at required meetings/trainings, and reviewing action plans for programs.
H	One organization used meetings and phone calls and reviewed data.
I	Three program managers supervised and supported onsite assistance providers in the field, conducted weekly phone conferences, shadowed providers, tracked their time monthly (e.g., indirect and direct services, travel, and prep time), and engaged in reflective supervision at all levels, from leadership and management to onsite assistance providers.
J	Supervision conducted by childcare consultant supervisors; 10% of visits onsite observed by the supervisor. Performance evaluation of the job description facilitated once per year with goal setting.

Training

All states reported training onsite assistance providers. Some states provided comprehensive training (which included orientation, on-going training and was a developed training plan clearly focused on onsite assistance providers, overtime, to support their job) and specific training built around predetermined topics while in others training was emergent based on the needs of onsite assistance providers. The predetermined topics were usually derived from the available training that early childhood providers (teaches and directors) were required to complete. A few participants (e.g., States E and I) referenced the expectation that all onsite assistance providers need to be trained in all PDs that exist for QRIS programs. Other states generated new training when onsite assistance providers requested it or when it was determined that new training was needed.

As an example of emergent training, in one state, onsite assistance providers were struggling to create documents that met the ECE program staff's reading level. Thus, the onsite assistance providers requested that the state (State J) create a readability webinar to help onsite assistance providers when creating documents for the programs they work with. In another state, there was a need to facilitate more training on cultural competence since the demographics of the programs that the onsite assistance providers were working with varied widely (State G) and the cultural background of the program staff was often different from the cultural background of the onsite assistance providers.

Training was delivered in a variety of modes: face-to-face, webinar, and a hybrid of face-to-face and online training. Specialized credentials, endorsements, and certificates were available and, in six states (States B, G, F, C, J, and H), were required. Table 18 shows a comparative summary of required training. States A, E, F, I, G, and J had comprehensive training programs for onsite assistance providers, as demonstrated by a structured orientation process, ongoing training, and in some cases a required credential, endorsement, or certificate.

System Features

System features of each state QRIS were compared to the description of activities tracked for onsite assistance providers, supervision, and training. The purpose of this investigation was to help uncover patterns in the descriptions of these activities attributable to system features of the QRIS across cases. Data about system features used were considered secondary data, as they were compiled from the online compendium.

Managing Organization

States that used a CCR&R and a higher education entity to manage the onsite assistance system had statewide databases that clearly articulated supervision processes and comprehensive training plans.

Table 18 Supervision of Onsite Assistance

State	Listing of types of trainings
A	Staff working for the state complete an intensive orientation process that is set in stages and that included training for the Environment Rating Scales. Staff also trained in using a framework. This framework and other topics followed up on and clarified at monthly meetings. The staff at the other contracting agencies did not have as many training opportunities.
B	Training varied depending on the agency. Each initiative had its own comprehensive training and orientation processes. Communities of practice for onsite assistant providers (self-selected groups, typically of people working as TAs) existed across the state. The state university offered training on topics such as the Environment Rating Scales and had a TA endorsement process.
C	The only consistent training was on the Environment Rating Scales. Other training varied by council. A consortium offered trainings across the state. A higher education coaching certificate, expected to become a requirement, was available.
D	Staff in the CCR&R attended training on job expectations, coaching, mentoring, communities of practice, reflective practice, QRIS systems, and collaborative work with QRIS partners.
E	Management staff trained new staff on specific topics. New staff attended train-the-trainer sessions covering topics such as health and safety, creative curricula, conscious discipline, CSEFEL, early learning standards, programs for infant toddler care, STEM, cultural competence, etc.
F	Orientation (for the 2 weeks a mentor is assigned), Environment Rating Scales reliability training, and 2 days of PD each year (last year, the training was on reflective practice). Each provider must complete hybrid online and face-to face training on adult learning and the technical assistance process.
G	The state agency created the orientation training and all contracting agencies administer it. This included meetings with peers, supervisors, and local organizations and recorded training with reflection sheets reviewed with a supervisor. Onsite assistance providers credentialed through PQAS.
H	Training was agency-specific. Some training had been completed around systemic work in the QRIS.
I	Orientation, shadowing visits, comprehensive new-hire checklist, and 6 or more train-the-trainer sessions.
J	Comprehensive orientation with a checklist of training required, as was yearly training on the Environment Rating Scales. Three-level credentialing provided through the state university. Webinars used at an onsite assistance provider's request.

Type of Agency

All states with a centralized managing agency had statewide databases, clearly articulated supervision processes (meaning the participant or the supporting documents clearly outlined a process for supervision), and comprehensive training plans.

Rating Structure

All states that utilized a hybrid rating structure either had a statewide database or were developing one. Almost all states that utilized a block and hybrid rating structure had clearly articulated supervision processes, a confirmed statewide database, and comprehensive training processes. Further, 67% of the cases that reported a required certification or endorsement for onsite assistance providers were states with a block or hybrid rating structures.

Year of Last Revision

No significant patterns or findings emerged from an examination of the last year of QRIS guideline revisions.

Table 19 illustrates the findings with the system features of the QRIS examined. The table is organized to show patterns that emerged within the state's QRIS rating structures.

Table 19 System Features and Supports

States	Managing Agency	Type of Agency	Rating Structure	Statewide Data base	Planning for enhanced data collection	Clearly Articulated Supervision Process	Self-assessment tool used in supervision	Comprehensive Training Plan	Required Certification or Endorsement
A	Multiple	Diffuse	Block			X		X	
D	Multiple	Diffuse	Block		X				X
I	Higher Education	Centralized	Block	X		X		X	
G	Multiple	Centralized	Block	X		X	X	X	X
F	Higher Education	Centralized	Block	X		X	X	X	X
E	CCR&R	Centralized	Hybrid	X		X		X	
J	CCR&R	Centralized	Hybrid	X		X		X	X
C	Multiple	Diffuse	Hybrid		X		X		X
B	Multiple	Diffuse	Points		X				X
H	Multiple	Diffuse	Points				X		X

Learning KSAs

In the majority of interviews, participants indicated that onsite assistance providers learned the KSAs needed to do their jobs through training. It was not clear if this training was facilitated pre-service or in service. However, participants indicated that KSAs were also learned on the job.

Additionally, three participants referenced the use of communities of practice as a forum that helped onsite assistance providers learn KSAs. In these communities, onsite assistance providers come together in a group to discuss their work, creating another vehicle to help teach the KSAs required for their positions. As the participant from State B noted, “We also have communities of practice throughout the state where all of our TA consultants are coming together to support each other and to talk about best practices.”

Moreover, several participants stressed the importance of a list of competencies created for onsite assistance providers. In many cases, these competencies were discussed as tools that helped to clarify the KSAs for the position of onsite assistance provider. Although specific competencies differed from state to state, all of the competency domains could be aligned between the states into the following over arching competency areas: Professionalism and Ethics, Adult Learning Principles, Relationship Building, Communication and Guiding or Facilitating Change.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

The focus of most QRIS research has been on validation studies (Yazejian & Iruka, 2015). Although several studies in the ECE literature have emphasized support for onsite assistance providers, only a few have examined onsite assistance in the context of QRIS (Smith et al., 2010, Smith et al., 2012; Isner et al., 2011). However, onsite assistance continues to be of interest for researchers in the context of QRIS (Yazejian & Iruka, 2015) and many researchers have recommended additional studies on the topic. This qualitative study built upon the work of previous studies to provide more detailed information and descriptions of the systems of onsite assistance, the activities in which providers engage, and the supports for onsite assistance providers in QRIS.

In all methodologies, there are inherent assumptions woven into each research study. As noted in Chapter 3, a methodological assumption shaped the approach to selecting a method (case study) and the participants for this study. For instance, ontological assumptions framed each participant's individual understanding of or perspective on the onsite assistance system as they shared their understanding of what they considered the present model of onsite assistance to be, what activities they thought onsite assistance providers engaged in, and what supports they thought existed for onsite assistance providers. Their multiple perspectives helped to better describe

their very different state systems for onsite assistance. Further, the research's epistemological assumption was that any understanding about onsite assistance systems would be derived from participants' words. Taking a relativist perspective, there are various realities having many meanings and thus, findings were conditional to the participant's observation (Yin, 2013). It was apparent that different perspectives from different QRIS helped to better illustrate and understand the complexities within systems of onsite assistance. Thus, the resulting description of the onsite assistance systems was subjective in many ways. However, the participants' subjective knowledge led to better understanding and a more precise description of these systems.

The participants interviewed for this study had vast knowledge about their intricate systems of onsite assistance within QRIS. However, it is important to note that just because they did not mention an aspect of the system, such as a specific activity or a support, does not prove that this aspect did not exist. As with much research, this study provides a glimpse of what a reality is understood to be. The hope was that through valuing the words of the participants in this study, while remaining cognizant of my perspective, the participants' knowledge of reality would provide answers to the three research questions:

1. What onsite assistance models are states using for QRIS?
2. In what types of activities do the various onsite assistance providers engage?

3. What supports exist for the various QRIS onsite assistance providers to help them do their jobs?

What Onsite Assistance Models Are States Using for QRIS?

A model “includes a description of components, structural design or representation of something, oftentimes a system” (Merriam-Webster, 2015). The first research question addressed the models for onsite assistance that states are using in QRIS. To understand all models, it is important to understand how they are individually operated and governed. To that end, the models explained in this study include their overall structure, the managing agency of the system, and a description of the components of the various characteristics of the model, such as the following:

- the terminology used to describe the roles of onsite assistance providers,
- the caseload assigned to providers,
- selection criteria,
- how long the onsite assistance provider works with programs,
- who they work with, and
- the turnover rate of onsite assistance providers in the system.

The findings showed that the design, or model, of the state systems for onsite assistance is structured by three different types of managing organizations. Thus, there are three different categories or types of models that early adopters tended to use for their onsite assistance systems at the time of this study:

- CCR&R's (States J and State E),
- higher education agencies (States F and I), and
- management by multiple agencies (States B, H, C, G, D, and A).

The prevalence of a multiple agency model for managing onsite assistance validates the supposition of Isner et al. (2011) that systems of onsite assistance may include many onsite assistance providers simultaneously providing support for different purposes. In many states, especially those that include systems with multiple agencies managing onsite assistance for various purposes, there could be multiple onsite assistance providers in a program at once, but other states (e.g., State D and State G) are working to better align their multiple agencies to prevent programs from becoming confused or overwhelmed by helping to clarify the various onsite assistance providers' roles through new policies.

The onsite assistance providers in these the systems who were interviewed for this study used variety of terminology. Indeed, across all ten cases, there was not a consistent term used for onsite assistance providers. However, in many cases, the term used reflected the terminology that NAEYC/NACCRA uses as an umbrella term: technical assistance. Onsite assistance providers were called technical assistants, consultants, specialists, coaches, and mentors. Other terms include coordinator, quality assurance staff, quality coordinator, and others. The reason for the different terminology for onsite assistance providers is not clear. However, some participants indicated that the terms were reflective of the activities in which the specific onsite

assistant provider engaged. In these cases especially, the terminology describing the onsite assistant provider was linked to the definitions that NAEYC/NACCRA created and described what the providers were expected to be doing in their jobs.

The findings for this research on the selection criteria for the various onsite assistance providers in these systems echoed the findings from Smith et al. (2010): The majority of states required at least a bachelor's degree, with only two states stipulating a master's degree preferred. A new finding was that participants in this sample stressed the importance of experience in early childhood education settings as a vital selection criterion.

Caseload, meanwhile, was defined in two different ways throughout the states: either by classroom or by program. However, there were only three states (States F, E, and I) that clearly articulated a specific number of programs assigned to each onsite assistance provider. State F assigned seventy-five programs, State E had fifty programs, and State I stipulated thirty to forty classroom assignments to each onsite assistance provider. Across states, the caseloads for onsite assistance providers encompassed a variety of programs in both center and family-based childcare settings.

The length of time that onsite assistance providers were assigned to work with programs was not consistent. Across cases, participants indicated that onsite assistance providers based the amount of time they worked with programs on the particular program's needs. In addition, the findings indicated that onsite assistance providers work with both administrators and teachers when providing onsite assistance.

Significantly, two cases indicated a particular emphasis on working with administrators to help promote sustainability when the onsite assistance ended.

Participants also indicated that there was not clear data on turnover rate for onsite assistance providers. However, many state participants expressed concerns about the impact that turnover, especially due to retirement, would have on the system of onsite assistance. Most of this concern was centered on the difficulties inherent in finding new onsite assistance providers because the skillset required is so broad.

In spite of the diversity found in the models of onsite assistance with regard to managing organizations, caseload, and terminology, there were several trends across states with regard to selection criteria, the length of time providers work with programs, working with administrators and teachers while providing onsite assistance, and limited turnover of the onsite assistance providers. Thus, while the systems of onsite assistance were structured in three different ways, there were many similarities between the components of the models utilized.

In What Types of Activities Do the Various Onsite Assistance Providers Engage?

The second research question focused on the activities of onsite assistance providers. Across states, there were commonalities between the descriptions of activities in which onsite assistance providers engaged. Often, onsite assistance provider's activities are dependent on where the program was in its rating cycle (the process of receiving a quality rating for each quality level in the QRIS). This finding is related to Isner et al.'s (2011) conclusion that the activities of coaches were often goal

directed. In this study, it appeared that many of the activities were aligned with the goal of guiding the program through a rating cycle. For instance, if a program has just entered the QRIS, then the provider was most likely to work on building a relationship with the staff and developing a quality improvement plan. If the onsite assistance provider was working with a program right after an assessment, it would most likely be providing feedback since it was at the end of a rating cycle.

Overall, the findings indicated assistance activities occurring in two different locations: onsite, offsite, and/or both onsite and offsite. Onsite assistance providers generally engage in activities offsite such as managing paperwork, administrative duties, data entry, facilitate training for ECE providers, planning, and other activities. Facilitating training also reportedly sometimes occurred onsite in programs. The data showed that most of the activities talked about by participants were process-oriented activities. The most commonly referenced activities included the following:

- Building a relationship with program staff;
- Developing a working plan and setting goals to improve the quality of the program, as also found in Eisner et al. (2011);
- Modeling new skills to teachers. Smith et al. (2010) found limited reports of such modeling; however, in this study, this activity was referenced by many participants;
- Providing feedback, often after an assessment;
- Answering questions to help explain the QRIS. This echoes findings from Zaslow et al. (2012);
- Facilitating training.

- Professional Development assistance, often helping to create a professional development plan.

Across all cases, there was very little information provided about what content was guiding the activities for onsite assistance except for the use of specific tools or assessments. Both the Environment Rating Scales (Harms et al., 1998) and the pyramid model from the Center for Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (2012) were used with programs, along with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS, Hamre, & Pianta, 2007), the Program Administrators Scale (Talan & Bloom, 2004), and the Business Administrator Scale (Talan & Bloom, 2009), which were used in a few states. This finding was similar to Isner et al.'s (2011) findings on the prevalence of different assessment tools utilized.

While these activities were considered to be conducted onsite, it is probable that aspects of the work were also conducted offsite. For instance, an onsite assistance provider might develop goals onsite with the help of the program director but then record them onto forms or into a database offsite. In addition, many of these activities require planning that would occur offsite (such as planning to model a specific skill to teachers). Future studies should gather more specific information on the types of activities conducted offsite and onsite and attempt to form a typology of activities to see which specific ones are utilized for skill-building, relationship-building, and even service coordination.

In a comparison of these findings to previous studies, one contradiction emerged. Smith et al. (2012) found that talking to teachers about quality

improvements in the classroom and curriculum was the most reported activity for onsite assistance providers. This finding was not reflected in the current study. This may be due to the fact that the Smith et al. (2012) study sampled onsite assistance providers (TAs) while this study sampled state QRIS administrators with knowledge of onsite assistance.

In sum, these findings aligned with those of Isner et al. (2011) and Smith et al. (2010), who found that the activities onsite assistance providers engage in involve more than working with teachers. Further, the current study offered more information and detail about the activities of onsite assistance providers.

What Supports Exist for the Various QRIS Onsite Assistance Providers to Help Them Do Their Jobs?

Discovering what supports exist for onsite assistance providers in QRIS is recommended in many recent studies (Smith et al; 2012; Zaslow et al, 2012). This study was able to describe the following supports:

- supporting documents,
- supervision practices,
- use of activities tracked, and
- training for onsite assistance providers.

Across cases, documents existed to support and to help define the jobs of onsite assistance providers. These documents ranged from policy and procedural manuals about the specific QRIS to general manuals about onsite assistance. Isner et

al. (2011) suggested that a QRIS should create or implement a coaching manual. This study discovered four states (States I, F, J, and G) with documents that could be considered manuals specific to onsite assistance providers in the QRIS. In addition, one participant did articulate a standardized model for onsite assistance. While this study did not discover any manuals about the standardized model, these types of documents may exist.

Overall, States F, G, J, C, B, H, and I had the most comprehensive supporting documents (comprehensive meaning - supporting documents for onsite assistance providers that exceeded the QRIS manual and included additional documents such as competencies or specific manuals that helped to define the job of onsite assistance provider) specifically designed to help onsite assistance providers to do their jobs. In addition, three states (States E, D, and H) all indicated that new supporting documents were being created. It is clear that states were putting effort into creating and maintaining documents that help support the job of the onsite assistance providers.

There were some discrepancies in the QRIS online compendium with respect to whether states tracked the activities of onsite assistance providers, however. The online compendium stated that seven states in the sample had statewide databases for the management of onsite assistance. However, based on the interviews and document reviews, only five states were confirmed as having such a database (States F, E, I, J, and G).

As Isner et al. (2011) noted, meanwhile, additional information about the supervision of onsite assistance providers is needed. This study found that 80% of

participants referenced the use of onsite visits or shadowing as a supervision strategy. This is an increase from the Smith et al. (2012) finding that this strategy was used across 15% of their sample. In addition, the participants from States G, A, J, F, and E all articulated comprehensive supervision processes that involved supervision at multiple times during the year and in multiple modes.

All state participants referenced training for onsite assistance as a primary support for onsite assistance providers. Moreover, Smith et al. (2012) found that 71% of their sample required special certifications or qualifications for onsite assistance providers, and this study found that to be the case for 60% of the sample (States G, B, J, C, F, and H).

Attending training was considered the most relevant support to help onsite assistance providers learn the KSAs required for their jobs. In addition, 30% of the sample referenced the importance of communities of practice and many other participants discussed the importance of meetings to discuss strategies and other aspects of the onsite assistance provider's job. These findings are in congruence with Ryan et al.'s (2004) findings that opportunities to share strategies with colleagues are a vital job support. In addition to these two areas, participants referenced onsite assistance competencies as another tool that helped providers learn the KSAs for the job: 60% of the sample had specified these competencies at the time of this study. Future research will need to investigate the use of the communities of practice, meetings, and competencies to uncover effective strategies in these supports for onsite assistance providers.

Patterns With System Features

This study uncovered a great deal of data that helped to describe onsite assistance systems, activities, and supports. However, in some cases these systems were still difficult to untangle and clearly describe. This difficulty in clearly articulating all aspects of the onsite assistance system could be one result of the many changes that have happened in individual state's QRIS programs over time. Fluctuations in funding, with a possible increase if the state was awarded a Race to the Top Early Learning Grant or a decrease due to the economic recession of 2008, could have impacted the services available for onsite assistance to ECE programs.

In addition, some states have redesigned their QRIS programs since they first began them, and this may have affected their onsite assistance systems. Although patterns did not emerge from this sample with regard to the year of latest redesign, system element patterns could have changed over time. For instance, while the online compendium and the participants helped to identify the managing agency for onsite assistance, additional providers of onsite assistance could have been used in the past. Moreover, there could be new agencies currently contracted through the managing agency to provide specialized types of onsite assistance (Isner et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2010). While this study did not address the different types of subcontractors that might exist within systems, future studies will need to consider this.

Despite these challenges, this study was able to investigate the systems of onsite assistance as defined by the following system features:

- the managing agency for the QRIS (multiple agencies within the state, higher education institutions, or CCR&Rs, which could consist of a network or many local organizations),
- the type of managing agency (centralized, with one main agency overseeing the system, or diffuse, with many agencies participating in the system),
- year of last revision
- the rating structure of the QRIS (block, points, or hybrid).

While there were no overt patterns that could be articulated across cases, there were several thought provoking findings, especially in relation to the rating structures and managing organizations of the various QRIS programs.

Rating Structure

Interesting patterns emerged from the findings when investigating the variables in this study and the rating structure of states that utilized block and hybrid. First, all states that were managed by CCR&Rs had hybrid rating structures. In addition, both of the states managed by higher education entities used a block rating structure. The relationship between rating structure and managing agency structure cannot be determined in this study. However, it would be prudent to look for similar patterns across all QRIS programs, not just those surveyed for this study. Additionally, it was found that all cases with clearly articulated supervision processes, comprehensive training programs, comprehensive supporting documents, and a confirmed statewide database were either block or hybrid. In addition, 67% of the cases that reported a required certification or endorsement for onsite assistance providers were states with a

block or hybrid rating structures. However, it is important to note – that the states with block and hybrid structure were 80% of the sample.

In sum, states with a block or hybrid rating structure had more supports that were designed to help define the onsite assistance provider’s job and describe how to do their job. Thus, the prevalence of these supports (documents, manuals, trainings, etc.) could be considered, in essence, to be more prescriptive or controlled. In following this assumption, states with a block rating structure had the most prescriptive or controlled supports, followed by the hybrid states, and then states with a points rating structure. One hypothesis as to why the rating structure may influence the presence of more prescriptive supports lies in the theoretical definitions of quality that each rating structure encompasses.

According to the QRIS Online Compendium (2015), fifteen states use a block rating structure, twelve use a hybrid structure, and eight use a point structure. There are three additional statewide QRIS programs that have unclear rating structures as listed in the QRIS Online Compendium. Table 20 displays the percentage of both the number of states per rating structure reported nationally and the percentages found in this study.

Within a block rating structure, quality is theorized as resulting from a “cumulative and progressive” process (Lenhart, Mitchell, & Tout, 2014). Thus, programs must meet certain required quality standards at each level before building their way up to the next quality level. Within a points rating structure, quality is demonstrated through the various strengths of individual ECE programs. While

Table 20 Number of States Per Rating Structure

Rating Structure	National Numbers	Overall percentage	Study's Sample	Study's percentage
Block	15	39%	5	50%
Hybrid	12	31%	3	30%
Points	8	21%	2	20%
Undetermined	3	9%	0	0%

**Note:* Nationally there are 38 statewide QRIS, this study's sample was n=10.

typically ECE programs must complete a specified number of points in each designated quality area, programs are empowered to demonstrate quality standards based on their strengths (Lenhart et al, 2014). Finally, a hybrid structure indicates a combination of both the block and points approaches to quality improvement. Usually, programs enter into the QRIS and participate in a block rating structure—a “cumulative and progressive” approach to quality improvement—at the beginning levels, and then they have more ability to demonstrate quality through program strengths in the later levels (Lenhart et al., 2014).

Overall, programs within each one of these rating structures had varying levels of controls for how they help programs move up in the QRIS. Programs participating in QRIS with block or hybrid structures were guided to complete specific quality indicators before moving up in ratings, while programs in a point system have more choices throughout their engagement with the system. Programs participating in a hybrid rating structure have a little control at first, with a block system applied, and then an increased amount of choice and control in the later levels. Thus, it may be that

states with a block and hybrid rating structure designed more intentional (and consequently more prescriptive) supports for onsite assistance providers. Hypothetically, when designing supports for onsite assistance providers working within block and hybrid rating structures, it would be easiest to intentionally create and enact supports based on clearly defined expectations for the program's demonstration of quality. Future research should look across all QRIS programs to confirm similar findings and uncover additional features of the rating structure that may prompt the existence of increased and prescriptive supports for onsite assistance providers. Further research should also investigate what supports are most effective for onsite assistance providers according to the rating structure of each individual QRIS.

Managing Organization

All states that used CCR&R and higher education entities as managing organizations had statewide databases, clearly articulated supervision processes (meaning the participant or the supporting documents clearly outlined a process for supervision), and comprehensive training programs (which included orientation, ongoing training and was a developed training plan clearly focused on onsite assistance providers, overtime, to support their job). Perhaps having one centralized agency that manages the onsite assistance system allows for consistent supports. Attempting to standardize these supports across multiple agencies would be more challenging for states, however. Furthermore, all states that used multiple agencies to manage onsite

assistance had additional supporting documents for onsite assistance available, possibly because these states with multiple agencies needed to standardize the work of the various onsite assistance providers, as the participant from State B noted was the case for that state.

Implementation Science Framework: Findings and Future Research

The Implementation Science framework helped to guide the selection of the research questions. This study mapped components of the onsite assistance systems - caseload, qualifications, length of time-spent working with programs, and turnover - for the purpose to begin explaining how QRIS onsite assistance systems are structured. Further information was gathered about additional systems components such as managing agency, revisions to the QRIS, type of agency and rating structure. Using and Implementation Science framework, better understanding the state-specific variations of the onsite assistance systems helps to see where and how the potential drivers of program quality exist. Specifically, variations in system design or unique components of onsite assistance may affect the ability of onsite assistance providers to improve programs' QRIS ratings. This supposition stems from the ideas and assumptions about competency and organizational drivers outlined by Fixsen et al. (2013) and explained in Chapter 3.

A major finding of this study was that onsite assistance systems and providers are not defined and articulated in the same way across states. The findings indicated that there was diversity in the systems of onsite assistance in terms of their overall

organizational structure. Although the findings did not indicate whether these differences impacted the ability of onsite assistance providers to act as a driver of quality in onsite assistance, this research marks an important preliminary step to guide future research. Due to the variation between cases, future research should consider the diversity of current systems when analyzing the impact of system organization on the capacity of onsite assistance providers to serve as drivers for program quality in QRIS.

In addition, the idea of the onsite assistance providers serving as drivers assumes that these providers engage in activities designed to help programs implement new practices to meet quality standards for the purpose of making improvements. This study defined trends among the activities that onsite assistance providers engage in while onsite and offsite. However, future research is still needed to investigate how onsite assistance providers decide what activities to engage in and gather more details about these activities. It would also be important to consider whether there are typologies of activities that are used in these systems, such as skill-based, service coordination, and relationship building activities and what potential these typologies have as a driver of quality.

This study also examined the system components that help onsite assistance providers succeed in their jobs. It focused on training and coaching (specifically, supervision) as they relate to competency drivers (Fixsen et al., 2013). These findings showed commonalities across states in training and supervision practices. Participants indicated that these commonalities served as a support for onsite assistance providers.

More research is needed to obtain the perspectives of onsite assistance providers themselves about the strengths of these supports to better understand how they potentially may drive program quality.

Evidence of practice profiles, which provide definitions of essential functions and describe the core components of a job or position (NIRN, 2015), was also investigated. For this study, practice profiles were operationalized as documents that described the essential functions or job expectations and activities that encompassed the position of onsite assistance provider. These documents provided insight into the KSAs required for these positions, but documents that could be considered practice profiles were scarce across the states, with the exception of State F, which had a comprehensive document for onsite assistance providers. However, some states had documents that clearly outlined the job expectations of onsite assistance providers in ways that could be considered to constitute the beginnings of practice profiles (e.g., State J and State G).

Six states had developed onsite provider competencies that outlined the required KSAs for the job. In addition, many states were beginning to expand their job descriptions to represent the duties of the various providers. However, the overall lack of documents such as practice profiles may indicate that the activities of onsite assistance providers were not standardized and onsite assistance innovations not implemented with fidelity.

Policy Recommendations

Policy recommendations generated from this study for all systems of onsite assistance included the creation of practice profiles to assist researchers in studying the fidelity of implementation of onsite assistance to those profiles. Practice profiles would also assist onsite assistance providers in doing their job. Further, the creation of specialized onsite assistance policies and procedural manuals (State F and State I are examples) will help to standardize the job of onsite assistance providers, as would an increase in tracking activities.

For statewide QRIS programs with multiple agencies managing onsite assistance, it is also important to look for opportunities to work between multiple agencies to create comprehensive supports that standardize the roles of all provider (State B's creation of a TA endorsement is an example). It is also important to create policies and documents that help to reduce confusion and program overload (for example, State D mapped the documents in the system and State G created central policies).

Limitations

The findings of this study reflect only the ten cases analyzed and cannot be generalized to all onsite assistance systems in QRIS. Further, some conflicting data were found. Typically, conflicts occurred when the Online QRIS Compendium had information on partners for onsite assistance and databases that were not mentioned in the interviews or found in the document review. This finding calls into question the

accuracy of the data from the online compendium and/or the participants' responses about the use of partners and databases. Further, it was difficult to triangulate data about the activities and supports for onsite assistance because the online compendium lacked information about these areas. The online compendium appears to be updated annually (latest update listed at the bottom of the website) and as QRIS are changing rapidly, this may account for some of the discrepancies in the data.

In addition, the case samples used in this study were limited to ten statewide QRIS. Additional system features of the QRIS—such as its relationship to licensing, and the size of the state—were not considered in the sample selection. Consideration of these features is recommended for future studies to help discover the intricacies that influence how states model onsite assistance systems. Further, the sample for the interviews did not include onsite assistance providers themselves. Thus, although valuable data were collected from administrators about the activities and supports for onsite assistance, future studies will need to include the perspectives of onsite assistance providers and their direct supervisors in order to further understand what activities they engage in (if they match the activities administrators identified) and what they consider to be essential supports for their job.

Conclusion

The multiple systems for onsite assistance within QRIS are still developing. In many ways, these systems are like live organisms whose health and growth depends on what sustains and guides them: the funding and organization of the QRIS, the

management of the onsite assistance system, and the ECE program's needs. Many QRIS programs in this study had been redesigned or were having aspects of their onsite assistance systems recreated. Some were expanding due to increased funding (especially from the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant). Others were scaling back their services due to a lack of sustained funding.

This study built upon research on onsite assistance in QRIS and set the stage for more rigorous studies in the future. As Tout and Maxwell (2013) stated, “It is impossible for any one study to provide all the answers—but a collection of research will enable us to learn more about QRIS and support states’ efforts to continually improve the quality of programs for young children” (p. 1). The descriptions of the system, activities, and supports of onsite assistance providers afforded in this study contribute a much-needed preliminary look at the complicated phenomena of onsite assistance in QRIS. However, onsite assistance systems are complex phenomena and require additional research. Future studies should include other stakeholder perspectives and use additional data sources to reveal more about the activities and supports for onsite assistance providers.

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Appendix A

COMMUNICATIONS WITH PARTICIPANTS

Email to Administrators of QRIS

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Delaware and for my dissertation I am conducting phone interviews about onsite assistance for programs (sometimes called coaching or technical assistance) in QRIS. It is expected that this interview would take about 20 to 30 minutes. During this time we will talk about the system of onsite assistance for QRIS programs and supports that exist for the providers of onsite assistance (coach/technical assistants). Would you please help me identify the most knowledgeable person in your state to participate in this interview? The person identified would need to have a statewide perspective about onsite assistance and historical knowledge of the states QRIS. All participants will be given a 25\$ gift certificate for participation in this interview. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you for your assistance,

Kelley J. Perkins
Ph.D. Candidate
University of Delaware

Email to Respondent Identified from QRIS Administrator

Dear _____,

I received your name from _____(name of administrator), they suggested that you would be able to participate in a phone interview about onsite assistance in your states QRIS. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Delaware and for my dissertation I am conducting phone interviews about onsite assistance for programs (sometimes called coaching or technical assistance) in QRIS. It is expected that this interview would take about 20 to 30 minutes. During this time we will talk about the system of onsite assistance for QRIS programs and supports that exist for the providers of onsite assistance (coach/technical assistants). All participants will be given a 25\$ gift certificate for participation in this interview. Attached to this email is a consent form that describes the study and your participation. Please sign this form, scan and email the form back to me or fax to the following number _____.

When would be convenient to set up this phone interview?

Thank you for your assistance,

Kelley J. Perkins
Ph.D. Candidate

Appendix B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Intro: Interviewer says: *Hello, thank you for taking the time to speak with me over the phone about your QRIS. I received your consent form, thank you for agreeing to be a part of this study.*

Research Question One: What onsite assistance models are states using for QRIS?

Intro: Interviewer says: *Often, Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) use staff that provides onsite assistance to programs and/or home based programs. I want to ask you a few questions about how the personnel support for QRIS programs is organized in your state.*

Q1: Tell me about how the QRIS onsite assistance system is organized...

Prompt:

Tell me about your QRIS system

Q2: Do the providers of onsite assistance work directly for the state or does the state contract out for these services?

Prompt:

If contracting, describe how this works?

Can you tell me if the services are coordinated or do the contract agencies determine how services will be provided?

Q2a. Does more than one agency offer these services?

Q2b. How do the services differ according to the agency?

Q3. What kind of caseload do the various onsite assistance providers have?

Prompt:

Center based programs only?

Family childcare only?

Mix of center and family child care?

Head Start only?

Q3a. Who do the onsite assistance providers work with?

Prompt:

Do they work with teachers? Directors? Assistant Teachers? Owner/operators?

Q3b. Do the onsite assistance provider's roles differ according to what agency/contractor they work for?

Q3c. Do the onsite assistance provider's roles differ according to the person they are working with?

Prompt:

Different role with Directors? Teachers? Assistant Teachers?

Owner/operators?

Q4. What are the different types of onsite assistance providers called?

Prompt:

Coach? Technical assistant? Consultant? Others?

Do some onsite assistance providers have multiple titles?

Q5. How long do the various types of onsite assistance work with programs?

Q6: Tell me about how the system for onsite assistance in your QRIS has changed over time...

Prompt:

If using contractors – have they changed? Increased contractual partners?

Decreased?

Are there more or less onsite assistance providers state-wide since the beginning of the system?

Have the types and roles of onsite assistance changed over time? If so, what has prompted those changes?

Research Question Two: What types of activities do all the various onsite assistance providers engage in?

Intro: Interviewer says: *Next, I would like to ask you a few questions about the jobs of any and or all of the different types of onsite assistance provider.*

Q7: Tell me about what the various onsite assistance providers do in their job....

Prompt:

What supports do they offer programs?

Can you tell me about other things they do as well?

Q8: Tell me about what the different onsite assistance providers do when they work with programs...

Q9: Tell me about the selection criteria used for each type of onsite assistance provider job...

Prompt:

What are the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to be an onsite assistance provider for each different type?

Q10: Can you tell me about the turnover rate of the different types of onsite assistance providers in your state?

Prompt:

If the respondent indicates a high turnover- How are staff recruited?

If the respondent indicates a low turnover- What are the practices being used to retain the different staff? Are practices the same across agencies?

Q11: Can you describe to me how the various onsite assistance providers are supervised?

Prompt:

Does the supervision differ according to the agency/contractor?

Observations by supervisor?

Video-taped sessions?

Evaluation of hours spent with programs?

Reflective supervision sessions?

Q12: Tell me about how what the different types of onsite assistance providers do has changed over time...

Prompt:

Are their responsibilities more defined now? How?

Have documents that demonstrate how they do their job, such as job descriptions, and policy or procedure manuals changed over time? If so, how?

Research Question Three: What supports exist for the various QRIS onsite assistance providers to help do their jobs?

Intro: Interviewer says: *Often different supports designed by the system or organization helps an individual complete their job successfully. I am going to ask you a few questions about what supports your QRIS has to help onsite assistance providers do their job.*

Q13: Tell me about the supports that are available to help the various onsite assistance providers do their job...

Prompt:

Is there a model, policy or procedural manual for the various onsite assistance providers?

Q13a. How do the different onsite assistance providers learn the knowledge, skills and abilities needed for their job?

Q13b. What kind of training do onsite assistance providers receive?

Prompt:

Pre-service training?

Training while in the field?

If you are not familiar with the different models and trainings needed for the various onsite assistance providers, could you recommend a person with each contracted agency that could help answer these questions?

Q14: Tell me about how the activities and use of time is tracked and reviewed for onsite assistance providers...

Prompt:

Is time tracked for: Onsite, planning, email, telephone, travel, gathering resources, professional development?

If yes, how is it tracked?

Is time tracked for activities like: instructing for specific content, modeling, observation or reflection?

If yes, how is it tracked?

Is time tracked for who the various onsite assistance providers are spending their time with onsite?

If yes, how is it tracked?

If the use of time or activities is tracked: Who reviews the data collected?

Is the data used to inform the system?

How?

Q15: Tell me about how the supports for onsite assistance providers has changed over time...

Prompt:

Have the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to be an onsite assistance provider changed over time?

Have the trainings needed for their positions changed over time?

Have data collection practices for time use and activities changed over time?

How has the data about time use and activities helped to change the onsite assistance system over time?

Interviewer says: *Thank you for answering these questions; I have a few more background questions about you and your role.*

Q16: What is your role in the QRIS?

Q17: What date did you start in this position?

Q18: What is your educational background?

Prompt:

- Bachelors Degree
- Bachelors with some graduate credits
- Master's Degree
- Ph.D.

Q19: What is your degree in?

Interviewer says: *Thank you again for your time.*

Appendix C
IRB APPROVAL LETTER



RESEARCH OFFICE

210 Hullihen Hall University of Delaware
Newark, Delaware 19716-1551
Ph: 302/831-2136
Fax: 302/831-2828

DATE: October 9, 2014
TO: Kelley Perkins
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [657025-1] A Description of Onsite Assistance Systems and Supports within Early Adopters of State Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS).

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION:

APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE:
October 9, 2014

EXPIRATION DATE: October 8, 2015

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # (6,7)

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks

have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office. Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Farnese-McFarlane at (302) 831-1119 or nicolefm@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.