

Child Care NEWS BRIEF



Child Care Services Newsletter

Greetings from your partners at the TN Department of Human Services, Child Care Services Team!

We hope this newsletter finds you well as we begin winding down the days of summer! This edition of the monthly newsletter will be focused on our transformation efforts as we progress toward future state. In light of the devastating flooding event that took place in our mid-state region, I am including information on Emergency Preparedness as a reminder of the importance to prepare and maintain up-to-date emergency plans. We greatly appreciate our child care provider partners and all that you do for the children and families of Tennessee.

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Update

As a reminder, over the past 2 years, the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) Child Care Team has been working with you to make progress on our transformation journey. Our transformation journey is grounded in our "WHY Statement" - Every family should have access to QUALITY care for children and adults. This basic statement guides all our work and reinforces our three primary goals for Tennessee's child care system: **Improve Quality, Increase Access, and Strengthen Business Efficiency.**

A big part of our transformation is based in redesigning our Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), which was launched 20 years ago. When launched in 2001, Tennessee's Star Quality Program was one of the first child care quality rating programs in the country. Over the years, this program has significantly helped to raise awareness about the importance of quality child care and has assisted many agencies in improving their programming. By redesigning the quality assessment and rating program, Tennessee will again be a pioneer in supporting quality early care and education. You have been a part of visioning this future state through focus group sessions and information captured through routine engagements.

We are so excited that our journey with you continues! On August 30-31, 2021, our leadership team led three focus group sessions with some selected child care providers and quality partners to share a high-level view of the new QRIS process, including the five big ideas that are the basis for the QRIS change. We also reviewed plans for monitoring and engaged the group to get input and feedback on a few questions that will assist in developing policy.

We were thrilled with the very positive feedback and constructive suggestions that we received. The providers in attendance seemed genuinely excited about the new structure as well as our new approach in building strong relationships that will foster quality improvement. Below are just a few of the comments received during the Focus Group sessions held last week.

"Thank you for listening to us and the voice of the providers!"
 "I really appreciate the change in process and I am so happy we are focusing on relationships. Collaboration and cooperation between Licensing Consultant and provider is key to quality care. Thank you!"
 "So far it sounds wonderful. Almost too good to be true!"
 "I am excited about the new tool!"
 "This is definitely moving in good direction and I look forward to working in this arena!"

We have incorporated "your voice" in informing the development of the new structure. We are engaging with you as partners to drive quality so that every child has the opportunity for successful outcomes and is empowered to thrive! The main areas for change are listed below as a refresher for how we are structuring the QRIS process.

Five Big Ideas for Quality Improvement

1. Big Idea #1

Recommendation: Merge licensing and quality assessment roles and provide ongoing engagement in all licensed programs to gain a more accurate picture of program quality.
Action Completed: The Department implemented a staff reorganization in Winter/Spring 2021 and created the role of Licensing Consultant. The Licensing Consultant will serve as monitor/evaluator/supporter.

2. Big Idea #2

Recommendation: Identify "Essential Quality Indicators" that include teacher-child interactions and health and safety practices as markers of program quality.
Actions Completed: Indicators most reflective of successful child outcomes and best practices in Tennessee based on Tennessee Early Learning Standards, Caring for Our Children, and Reflective Practice are used as key elements in tool development.

3. Big Idea #3

Recommendation: Offer relationship-based quality improvement supports that vary in type, content, and intensity based on a program's needs and strengths.
Actions: TDHS will use a relationship-based approach to support providers in meeting basic licensing expectations and in continuous quality improvement.

Through our ongoing visits and observations, TDHS staff would provide regular feedback to all agencies about how to strengthen quality across the essential quality indicators.
 Based upon monitoring and evaluation results, agencies will be connected with resources to strengthen program quality, consistent with level of need.

4. Big Idea #4

Recommendation: Provide financial supports that reinvest in quality through improvement grants and progress-based incentives.
Actions: Financial supports will be invested using deliberate strategies to support quality improvement.
 Specific consideration will be given for how to incentivize quality improvement in programs serving low-income children.
 Specific consideration will be given for how to incentivize quality improvement for all programs regardless of the ranking at which they start.

5. Big Idea #5

Recommendation: Structure the Quality Rating to help families identify programs that meet their child's needs.
Actions: The overall program score will be presented in a way that is easily recognizable and understandable to parents.
 Parents would be able to see the scoring components that contribute to an overall program rating.
 This will allow parents to look more specifically at the program aspects that are most important to their family.
 Information available to parents will represent the full picture of a program's operations, including licensure compliance, quality considerations, rules violations, and legal enforcement actions.

Our licensing rules which include the updated QRIS section are routing through the promulgation process. There are many steps in this process including the drafting process, multiple layers of review and approval, public hearings for comments and then routing through for attorney general and legislative final review and approval. [A link is included here](#) so that you may preview the rules and see information on the Notice of Rulemaking Hearings.

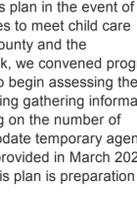
We anticipate finalization of the process around the first quarter of 2022 that aligns with our system modernization roll out. In the meantime, we are on a timeline for completion of the QRIS redesign. This too involves a multi-layered process that includes:

- rules revisions (completed and routing through promulgation process),
- aligning staffing to accommodate the new process (completed staff reorganization),
- continuing to engage providers and quality partners to "hear their voices" of what is most critical to them in the design and implementation (multiple focus groups, surveys, town hall discussions completed),
- creating the tool that includes indicators most reflective of successful child outcomes for Tennessee's children (under review and approval process),
- technology system design (e-licensing system development in process),
- communication (ongoing communication in newsletters, staff updates, WebEx discussions),
- policy development (drafting of policies to be completed September 2021),
- training (training for staff scheduled for late fall, training for providers scheduled for early 2022)
- successful transition (opportunities to utilize the tool prior to roll out for staff and provider understanding and adoption)
- and rollout (full roll out scheduled for mid-year 2022)

We will continue to provide you with information on every step of this process through the newsletters and direct communication. We are so excited to go through this journey with you!

Emergency Preparedness

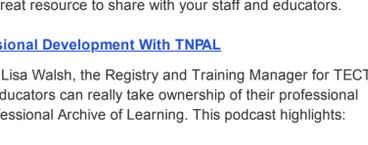
Emergency Preparedness and Child Care Services Plan



This is to provide an overview of how we respond in an emergency/disaster situations based on a very detailed emergency preparedness plan that has been approved by our Administration for Child and Families Office of Child Care federal partner and is posted on our website here: [CCS EPP 02-2021.pdf \(tn.gov\)](#). We implement this plan in the event of an emergency/disaster and follow to ensure there is a continuum of services to meet child care needs in the impacted area. The recent flooding event in Humphreys County and the surrounding area is one example of how we activate this plan. Last week, we convened program leadership and partners according to the plan (beginning on page 15) to begin assessing the needs for the community. We each carried out very specific tasks including gathering information on all child care agencies that may have experienced damage, checking on the number of subsidy enrollments, allowable space within the community to accommodate temporary agency locations, potential financial supports much like the disaster grants we provided in March 2020 for those providers impacted by the tornados. The purpose of having this plan is preparation - so we are ready to address unfortunate events.

"The [Emergency Preparedness Law](#) became effective July 1, 2013. The law requires licensed child care centers, group child care homes and family child care homes to develop a written multi-hazard plan to protect children in the event of emergencies." Our licensing team is ready to provide you with technical assistance and guidance with your own emergency preparedness plans to ensure your plans include clearly defined procedures in the event of an emergency. There is a great resource available to you on our website to assist in creating detailed and thorough plans. [Child Care Emergency Preparedness \(tn.gov\)](#) Should you need additional assistance, I encourage you to reach out to your Licensing Consultant as they are ready to support you.

TNPAL Reminder



The Tennessee Professional Archive of Learning (TNPAL), launched by the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) as a free online resource to better support professional development for early childhood professionals working in TDHS-licensed child care agencies, recently celebrated a new milestone with over 10,000 users registered!

If you haven't already created your account, TNPAL is waiting for you! Visit [www.tnpal.org](#).
 This single web-based portal is designed to collect and preserve completed trainings, accomplishments, credentials, education, certifications, and awards. These features and functions empower not only early childhood professionals but also support verification by directors and TDHS. Child care agency directors are encouraged to support TNPAL registration for all program employees.
 CCR&R has released an episode on Lean Into You highlighting TNPAL. Below are the links to review this podcast specific to the benefits of utilizing TNPAL titled "Level Up Your Professional Development with TNPAL". This is a great resource to share with your staff and educators.

CLICK HERE: [Level Up Your Professional Development With TNPAL](#)

In a recent episode of *Lean into You*, Lisa Walsh, the Registry and Training Manager for TECTA engages in conversation about how educators can really take ownership of their professional development with the Tennessee Professional Archive of Learning. This podcast highlights:

- 1) What TNPAL is and how it works.
- 2) Why TNPAL is an invaluable tool in a child care setting.
- 3) How TNPAL makes fulfilling licensing requirements easier for directors.
- 4) How TNPAL empowers educators to view their work with young children as a career.

If you would like to find out more about the TNPAL system, or to register today, visit [www.tnpal.org](#).

Signing up is easy! Early childhood professionals may create a TNPAL account using a web browser on any computer, phone, or tablet. Follow the steps below to set up your account today:

SIGNUP FOR TNPAL IN SIX EASY STEPS

- Step 1**—Navigate to [www.tnpal.org](#), then click "Start Now" on the homepage.
- Step 2**—Fill out your information:
 Name
 Email – If you use an email you use for training, such as TECTA, TCCOTS, or TN CCR&R, be sure to use the same one.
 Password
- Step 3**—Confirm your email address using the confirmation link sent to your email.
- Step 4**—Login using the information you entered. On the congratulations page, be sure to write down or save your TNPAL ID for future use when registering for trainings. (Don't worry, you can always find it in your personal profile.) Visit a quick and helpful [TNPAL Video](#) to learn more.
- Step 5**—Complete your employment, education, certifications, credentials, and community service sections of your TNPAL profile.
- Step 6**—Now you're ready to associate your profile with your child care agency. Click on "My Profile" and under the "Employment" tab, visit the three vertical dots under the action section on the right side of the page. Choose "Request Staff Role" and confirm your request. An orange hourglass indicates you are waiting to be verified. You are now registered for TNPAL!

Important Note for Directors: You will be able to associate educators registered for TNPAL to your agency. It is important that once educators request a role to connect to your agency, you approve the request. Follow the steps below to manage the approvals for the educators in your agency.

HOW TO MANAGE TNPAL AS A DIRECTOR

- Step 1**—Navigate to [www.tnpal.org](#) and login to your account.
- Step 2**—Make sure that you have been approved as a director for your center. (You can request this role when adding your employment by navigating to "My Profile" from the sidebar and selecting the Employment tab.)
- Step 3**—When creating their TNPAL/account, educators need to specify and request their role as a Director for your agency/center/home on this same tab when adding their employment.
- Step 4**—Once approved, a director may navigate to the Director Dashboard by clicking the "Silhouette Icon" in the top right of the screen and selecting "Director" from the dropdown menu.
- Step 5**—From the Director Dashboard, you may click on the "Requests" button to approve or deny role requests from educators. You may also manage existing roles by selecting the "Staff Management" button. For a video on this process, click this [link](#).

Guided registration support to assist directors with registering your staff is available from both CCR&R and TECTA, and addition TNPAL tutorial videos may be found [here](#).

TDHS is committed to promoting early childhood environments that are safe, healthy, and educationally rich. Thank you for offering Tennessee families learning opportunities and environments that will help their children thrive.

Find helpful videos and news when you follow

@TNHumanServices.

