

June 2011



# better beginnings

EVERY CHILD DESERVES OUR BEST

UAMS

ARKANSAS DIRECTORS QUALITATIVE  
SURVEY REPORT

Full Report

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The UAMS Evaluation Team conducted a series of interviews with child care directors across the state to discover incentives and barriers to entering and progressing in Better Beginnings. Our team randomly selected participants and non-participants in Better Beginnings and successfully conducted 74 interviews across center-based programs, family child care programs, and school-age programs. We interviewed 41 participating and 33 non-participating providers.

#### Praise for Better Beginnings

**A majority of directors, participating and non-participating, perceive a positive influence of Better Beginnings on their own program or on child care throughout the state.** Non-participating directors, even when their knowledge was limited, held a positive perception of state-provided training and believe Better Beginnings will improve the quality of care in participating programs. Participating directors made positive comments about training, the responsiveness of Better Beginnings staff, and the helpfulness of Technical Assistance (TA) for quality efforts. **Participating directors reported benefits of Better Beginnings for their programs, staff, and families.** Financial benefits for programs included availability of grants, increased parent interest in rated programs and improved business practices. Directors also reported improved staff behavior, reduced staff turnover, having better qualified staff, and better staff-child interactions. Benefits for children were improved child behavior and increased opportunities for activities in the classroom; benefits for parents included tax credits and improved involvement.

#### Concerns and Difficulties with Better Beginnings

While perceived as positive overall, there were also concerns and difficulties with participating in Better Beginnings. **The most frequently reported concerns for non-participants were time requirements and general costs.** Other concerns related to the Environmental Rating Scales and learning environment requirements, perceptions of inadequacies of TA and training, and fairness and reliability of assessment. **Two-thirds of directors in Better Beginnings rated programs reported difficulty with the application and/or assessment process, most often expressing that the requirements were unclear or confusing.** Other difficulties expressed were related to the PAS/BAS, redundant or unnecessary paperwork, time required to complete the application, and difficulties with TAPP.

#### Suggestions for Better Beginnings

Both non-participating and participating providers were offered the opportunity to make suggestions for improving Better Beginnings. **For all providers, the most commonly suggested improvements were to increase funding and training availability.** In addition to the request for additional funding, participating providers recommended the timing of funding (for instance, prior to rating to get into the system) and payment of vouchers be changed (for example, to increase the number of vouchers or the rates given to providers). Both groups of directors requested greater availability of trainings: in timing, location, and content (usually specific to family child care and school-age providers). **Participating providers suggest**

**greater clarity in the criteria used for ratings.** Nearly one-quarter of the participants commented about assessment process with requests to decrease the pressure related to assessment and improve assessor demeanor and reliability. Other requests were greater availability of TA, expansion of marketing efforts across the state, and more one-on-one support and encouragement.

#### Provider Uses of Financial Resources

We asked participating directors how they were using Better Beginnings grants. **Grants were most commonly used for classroom materials or to pay for staff professional development training.** Other uses of grant money were playground equipment, college coursework, indoor facilities or furniture, CDA, bonuses for teachers, and other items such as insurance and child assessment tools.

The vast majority of directors of non-participating programs and participating programs stated that additional support would be helpful to them in considering application to Better Beginnings. **Funding for tangible physical needs related to the environment were most frequently reported by non-participating and participating providers:** classroom materials, playground improvements, and indoor facility and equipment improvements. **Directors from both groups of programs also reported the need for financial support to cover increased staff costs,** though directors in participating programs reported greater need in this area. Specifically, directors reported needing funding to cover training and formal education, as well as increased staff wages and benefits.

#### Recommendations

The director interviews point to potential areas where quality improvement efforts should be focused:

1. **Promote an equitable team approach.** Providers desire greater encouragement and synchronized assistance; they are grateful for opportunities to learn from and network with experienced child care providers and trainers. There are multiple efforts that could be undertaken to set an encouraging tone, help establish relationships between providers and staff, and dispel misconceptions about Better Beginnings: 1) highlight the experience of specialists, technical assistants, and assessors and expand accessibility to those staff through trainings and technical assistance; 2) engage representatives from all types of care in training and promotion efforts; and 3) establish reliability for the overall Better Beginnings rating.
2. **Simplify.** Directors consider the process overly time-consuming. Efforts should be made to use providers' time efficiently. Eliminating multiple verifications and observations of specific criteria and providing an online application are areas where time savings could be derived.
3. **Clarify.** Directors are unclear about multiple aspects of Better Beginnings. Broadly, there is confusion around how Better Beginnings relates to Quality Approval. More specifically, there is continued uncertainty about the process of being rated, and providers want to know why and how assessors make decisions around Better Beginnings and Environmental Ratings. It is also recommended that communication between stakeholders be improved to facilitate sharing of the most up-to-date and accurate information. Greater transparency in the rating process at the overall rating and at the individual assessment level (ERS/Administration Scales), as well as coordinated and timely dissemination of changes that impact providers is encouraged to prevent frustration and perceptions of inequities in the system.

4. **Enhance Financial and Marketing Supports.** Providers in Arkansas are clear in their need for additional financial resources, and interviews lead us to believe that lower funding availability at the highest level of Better Beginnings is a disincentive to progress. Reorganizing the way existing funding is allotted to programs across the levels, providing higher subsidy payments for higher-level programs that serve children at risk, and increasing funding aimed at program staff are financial incentives that could be investigated in Arkansas.

## PART 2

## PROVIDER INTERVIEWS

The UAMS Evaluation Team conducted a series of phone interviews with child care directors across the state to discover incentives and barriers to entering and progressing in Better Beginnings. The Arkansas Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) provided contact information for all licensed child care providers in Arkansas. Our team used a number generator to randomly select programs and then created call lists for two groups: programs participating in Better Beginnings and programs not participating. To ensure that different types of care were represented, we further divided each of two groups into three sub-groups: center-based programs, family child care programs, and school-age programs.

Our team successfully conducted 74 interviews. We attempted phone calls to 175 child care providers; 85 agreed to interview. Of those 85, 11 did not attend their scheduled interviews and could not be reached to reschedule. Twelve directors declined to participate. Other directors either did not answer, did not respond to messages, or had numbers that were disconnected.

We advised respondents that interviews would be recorded and transcribed by UAMS staff and that names and identifying information would be kept confidential. As an incentive for participation, each respondent was mailed a \$15 Wal-Mart gift card to use for his/her program after the interview had been conducted.

Table 1. Qualitative Interview Participants

	Family-Based	Center-Based	Infant-Toddler	Early Childhood	School-Age
Participating	7 (17%)	33 (45%)	34 (46%)	39 (53%)	15 (20%)
Non-Participating	12 (36%)	21 (28%)	28 (38%)	29 (39%)	20 (27%)
Total	19 (26%)	54 (73%)	62 (84%)	68 (92%)	35 (47%)

We interviewed a total of 41 providers that are participating in Better Beginnings. Programs that had rolled into Better Beginnings because of status in the former system, Quality Approval, but stated

intention to continue participation in Better Beginnings were included in the participating group regardless of completion of the new rating process. For non-participants, we interviewed a total of 33 providers (see Table 1 for Program Characteristics). Our original intent was to interview equal numbers of participants and non-participants, but we were pleased to find that some programs classified as non-participants on our contact lists had recently submitted applications to receive a rating.

Interviews for participating and non-participating providers were designed to acquire similar core information. Some questions differed as it was assumed that participating providers would have greater general knowledge of the Better Beginnings standards.

After we completed the qualitative interviews, we transcribed each one. Then we coded transcripts into categories based on recurring themes. During the coding process, the unit of analysis was all word groups or sentences that related to each of the identified themes. Important recurring themes (e.g. barriers and supports needed to increase participation) were identified. Working from these themes, we compiled data to reflect common perceptions.

## NON-BETTER BEGINNINGS PROVIDERS

Three interviews were conducted in person to pilot the interview questions for appropriateness of content and clarity. Questions were refined based on feedback from pilot provider directors. While the questions varied slightly, interviews from the pilot providers are included in this report. The questions for non-participants addressed these topics (see Appendix 1 for interview protocol):

- Characteristics of the program
  - Type of care (Family, Center)
  - Number and ages of children served
  - Accreditations
  - Intent to participate in Better Beginnings
- Use (or willingness to use) state supports
- Concerns about Better Beginnings and recommended changes
- Whether Better Beginnings will increase quality of care
- How additional financial support for quality improvement would be used
- Incentives to increase participation in Better Beginnings

### Non-Better Beginnings Respondent Characteristics

As seen in Table 1, 38% served infant-toddlers (birth-2 years), 39% served children in early childhood (3-5 years), and 27% served school-age children (kindergarten and older). Providers served a wide range of children in number<sup>1</sup>, but averaged 41 children per director. In terms of accreditations, three providers

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<sup>1</sup> The range of number of children served is not being reported as outliers on the low- and/or high-end could potentially jeopardize the anonymity of subjects.

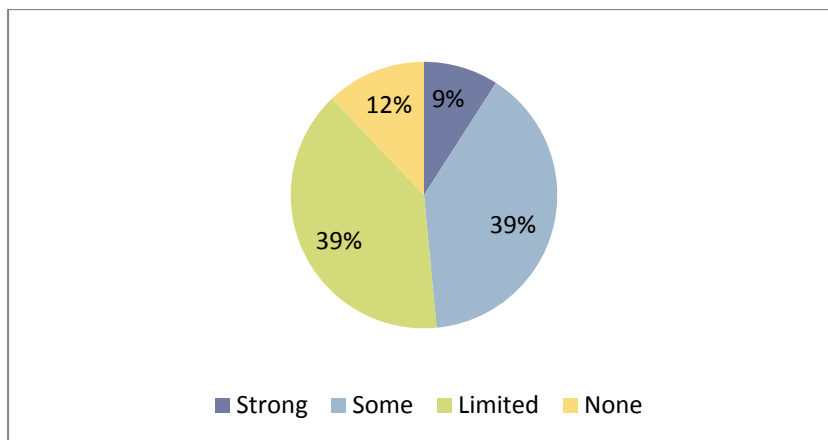
reported Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) accreditation<sup>2</sup> and two identified themselves as ABC programs.

We coded director knowledge of Better Beginnings according as one of the following:

- None: completely unfamiliar with Better Beginnings.
- Limited: knows that there is a new quality system but is unfamiliar with standards or system processes.
- Some: has looked at the components or has attended a training where it was discussed but has limited recall of details.
- Strong: has carefully reviewed the system or has applied and has good recall of details.

Nearly half of the directors (48%) had strong or some knowledge. A little more than half had limited or no knowledge of the system (see Figure NonBB.1). Family child care and school-age providers were less aware of Better Beginnings than center-based providers. Some providers also report not knowing of state childcare supports available. As one director stated, “I have been around this for years but I’m still finding things...like technical assistance and things, I didn’t know.”

Figure NonBB.1. Non-Better Beginnings Provider Knowledge

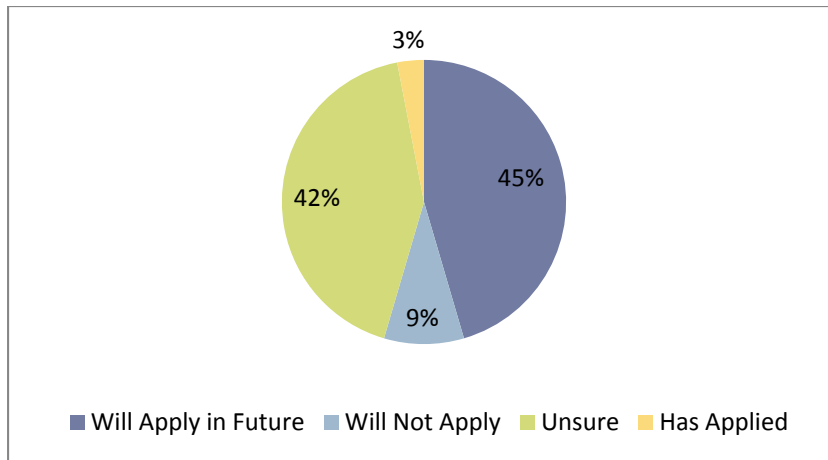


We asked directors about their plans to apply to Better Beginnings. Many directors (45%) expressed intent or interest in future participation. Nine percent were sure that they would not participate, and 42% were unsure whether they would participate in the future (see Figure NonBB.2).

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<sup>2</sup> Information about reciprocity of Better Beginnings with particular accrediting bodies was unknown until after interviews were completed.

Figure NonBB.2. Non-Better Beginnings Provider Interest in Participating



### Praise for Better Beginnings

While we did not ask directors directly for comments of praise for Better Beginnings, 70% of directors made statements during their interview process regarding the positive influence of Better Beginnings and related state supports. There were general positive comments (15%) such as:

*“It has certainly made us more aware and has made us take stock of our practices that we need. And we have already...upgraded our center.”*

*-Center director; intends future participation*

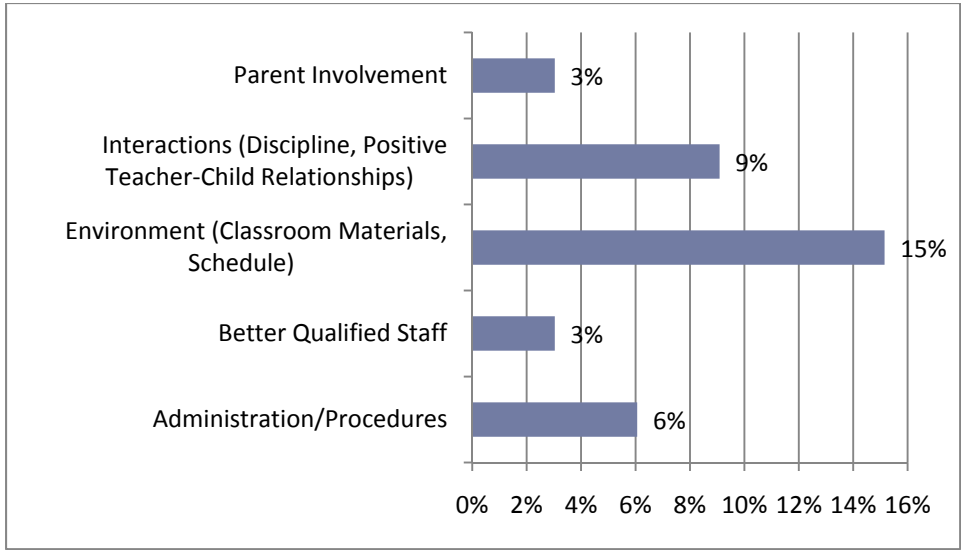
*“Better Beginnings made it where we can actually be something more than minimum licensing where we were not going to be able to be that when it was just Quality.”*

*- Center director with facility limitations; intends future participation*

Even if they did not know much about Better Beginnings, there was a positive perception of state-provided training among non-participants. Overall 49% spoke positively of training, 30% specifically mentioned the content of training was helpful, and 9% expressed appreciation for free or low-cost trainings. Although fewer respondents had used technical assistance, 24% of our sample spoke of this service in a positive light. Some (15%) specifically mentioned receiving helpful feedback, and 15% mentioned that their technical assistants were responsive.

**A majority of non-participating directors (55%) believe Better Beginnings will improve the quality of care in participating programs.** Most comments regarding improvement in quality were general in nature, but some directors stated belief that programs would make improvements of a particular kind (see Figure NonBB.3). Those areas included the classroom environment (15%), interactions between teachers and children (9%), administrative and procedural practices (6%), staff quality (3%), and parent involvement (3%).

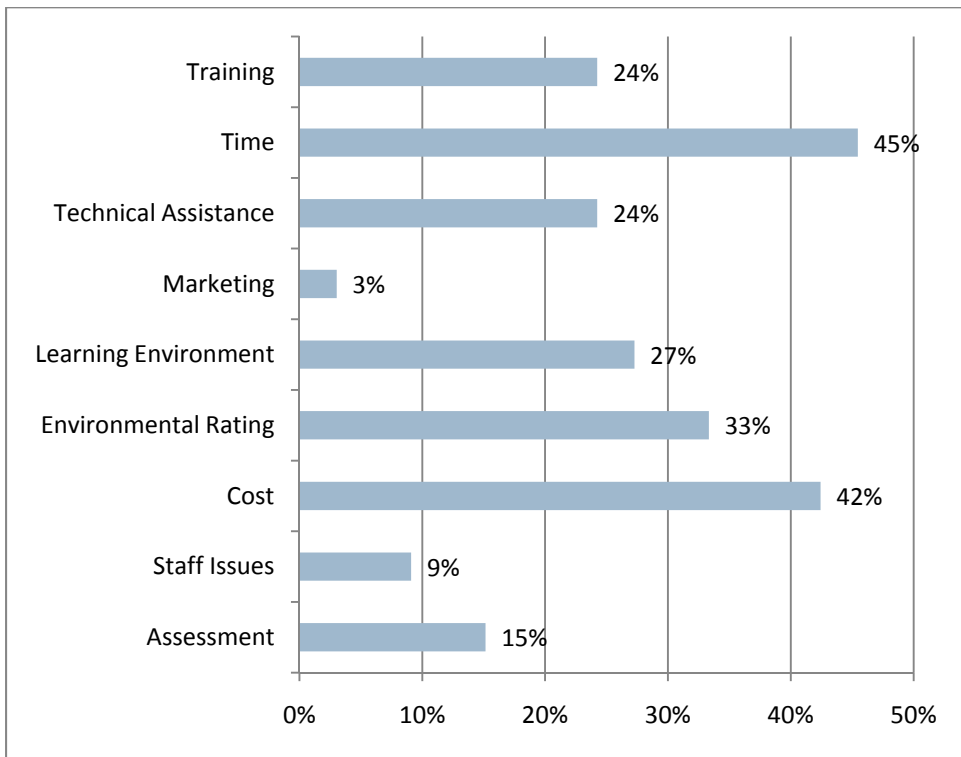
Figure NonBB.3. Non-Better Beginnings Provider Beliefs about Program Improvements



Concerns about Participating in Better Beginnings

Interviewers asked directors about concerns about participating in Better Beginnings. The most frequently reported worries related to the time required prepare for application or assessment (45%), costs related to participating (42%), and concerns over the Environmental Rating Scales (33%). Figure NonBB.4 shows the additional areas where directors reported concerns.

Figure NonBB.4. Non-Better Beginnings Provider Concerns about Participation



- Time (45%)**

*“There’s just a lot more paperwork to do and I just don’t plan on putting out the time to do it.”*  
 -Non-participating Family Child Care Director

*“I’m just worried about the time consumption, quite honestly, with all the paperwork, because, like I said, I already have so much paperwork to do anyway, I’m not sure with the time requirements is kind of what’s concerning me.”*  
 -Non-participating After-school Program Director
- Cost (42%)**

*“The money involved to get your center ready outweighs the money that might be coming in, and it’s just a big stressful thing if you don’t have the money to get your center qualified.”*  
 -Non-participating Center Director
- Environmental Rating Scales** – Concerns related to areas of assessment such as Personal Care Routines, Interaction, Activities, and Schedule (33%).

*“We are struggling with the fact that most of our morning needs to be free-play, or not free play, but free time to access the centers for the whole class, rather than our circle time that we have each day. Our program provides for a music class, a separate music class each day, so the children actually leave their classroom and go to music for fifteen minutes per morning. And they have a fitness class once a week that takes them out of the classroom for a twenty minute period. And those little segments of time really get into the substantial portion of the day requirement. It has also affected our outside playtime. We are not able to have our outside play time as much as we would like to and as much as we are used to.”*  
 -Center director preparing for future participation

*“I’m familiar with ECERS and ITERS, and the problem is with children with developmental delays...it is very expensive to have all of the components that they require....that and just being required to have certain things in your classrooms that might not necessarily be the things that are needed for those children..”*  
 -Non-participating Center Director
- Learning Environment** – Concerns relate to whether Better Beginning learning environment requirements align with parent or school expectations, pedagogy, and curriculum (27%).

*“They expect everyone to do the same thing. Sit in a chair—kids don’t do that. And they only have a short time to be a child. When they start school, they’re expected to be a big kid immediately. They need to be a kid. They need to have that opportunity to learn through play.”*  
 -Non-participating Center Director
- Technical Assistance** – includes lack of availability, feedback, and responsiveness of staff (24%)

*“Yes, I e-mailed her, and she has not e-mailed me back. I guess she’s getting so many emails; she’s tied up with what she’s doing.”*  
 -Non-participating Center Director
- Training** – includes variety of content and location as well as time of sessions and general availability (24%)

*“I mean, don’t give us a meeting through the week. I don’t trust anyone to come in and watch my kids.”*

*Non-participating Family Child Care Director*

*“The first session was about teachers at school and parents taking their children to school—not to daycare, but to schools. I really couldn’t figure out what that had to do with me at all. You know, they really need to address it more—the seminars and things—from our aspect as being the child care provider. But see they haven’t been in our shoes so they don’t know.”*

*- Non-participating Family Child Care Director*

*“It was helpful, but it applied more to private daycares because with us just having after school, a lot of it did not apply to me, so I was having to sit through it until they to anything that dealt with, you know, just a school-based program.”*

*-Non-participating School-Age Director*

- **Assessment** – Directors made statements that included pressure, assessor demeanor, and reliability (15%).

*“I think any time you bring someone into your home when you’ve got these kids, it is utter chaotic. And then you feel like you can’t say, ‘you have to go to time out,’ or whatever, and someone’s sitting here, and they think they can just go wild.”*

*-Non-Participating Family Child Care Director*

*“The ECERS came out—they helped me set up my classroom. During that time they’ll have different people come out and one person will tell you one thing and another person will tell you something else, so I wanted someone else to come out and look at it. And they set it up the way they wanted to set it up, but when the next person came out they changed it.”*

*-Non-participating Center Director (intends future participation)*

*“When you’re in an office and you don’t deal with children day in and day out, it is very hard...honestly there needs to be a person that comes in and evaluates need to be a person that works with children...She was from Quality but she really discouraged me from even wanting to be quality....I hear a lot of people say that they don’t even want to do it because, you know, I don’t know—the way ladies act when they came in.”*

*-Non-participating Family Child Care Director*

- **Staff Issues** – relate to the knowledge and responsiveness of Better Beginnings specialists (9%)

Other concerns that fell outside the broad themes described above included:

- **Lack of common knowledge across departments/agencies that deal with child care**

*“I would say I’ve noticed that the state licensing personnel don’t know a lot about Better Beginnings and Better Beginnings don’t seem to be necessarily aware of what’s required by state licensing.”*

*-Non-participating Center Director (intends future participation)*

- **Changes to and understanding the Better Beginnings system**

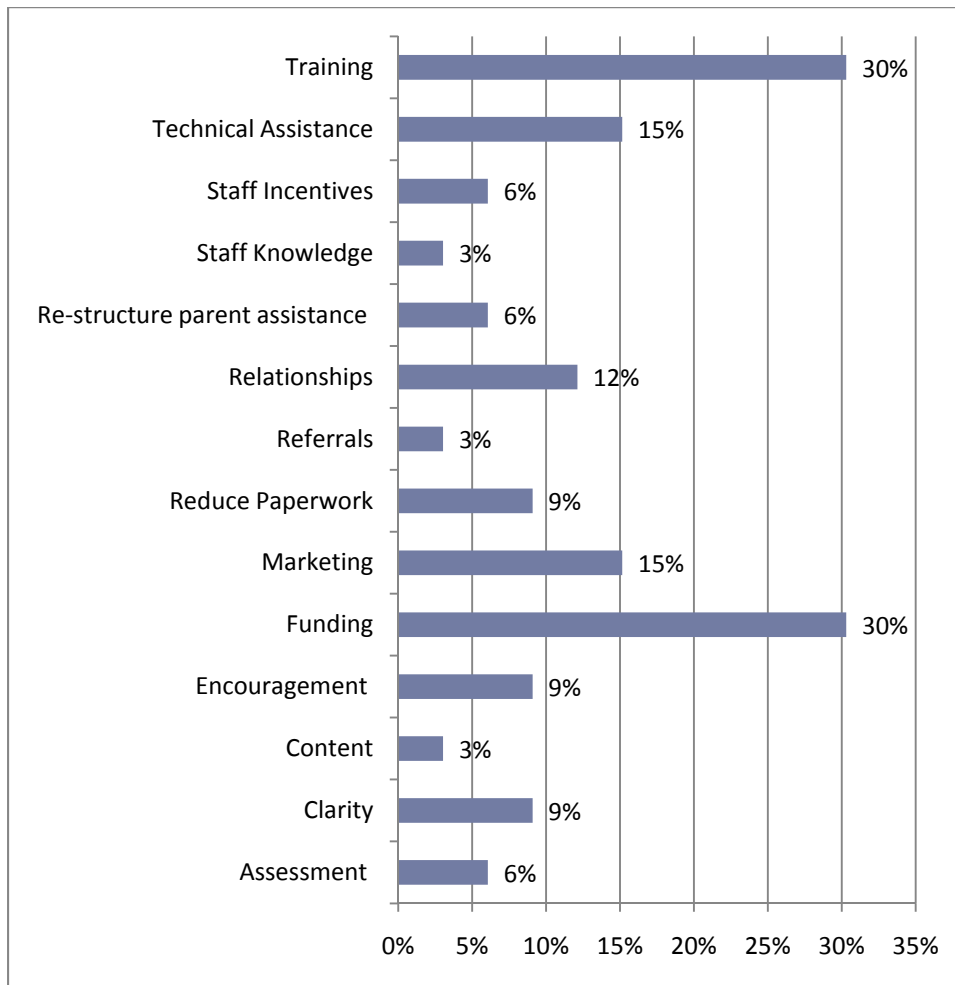
*“And she went through this program and it sounded like it was going to be a nightmare, I mean, just like taxes....for every year you don’t understand your taxes they started changing the law for your taxes.”*

*- Non-participant Family Child Care Director reporting conversation with a participant*

Suggestions for Improvements to Better Beginnings

The primary question opened to suggestion was, “If you could change anything about Better Beginnings, what would you change?” Other recommendations that arose in response to other questions were also included in this category. Figure NonBB.5 provides themes related to suggestions for improvements to Better Beginnings.

Figure NonBB.5. Non-Better Beginnings Provider Suggestions for Improvement



**The most commonly reported suggestions for improvements were related to an increase in funding (30%) and trainings (30%) available to providers.**

Suggestions coded within the training theme include a desire for greater availability of trainings at convenient times and locations (18%) and requested content changes, such as trainings specific to family child care and school-age providers (12%).

Other common suggestion themes were related to greater availability of technical assistance (15%); marketing changes, usually to expand marketing efforts across the state (15%); the desire for more one-on-one support, coded as “relationships” (12%); and encouragement (9%).

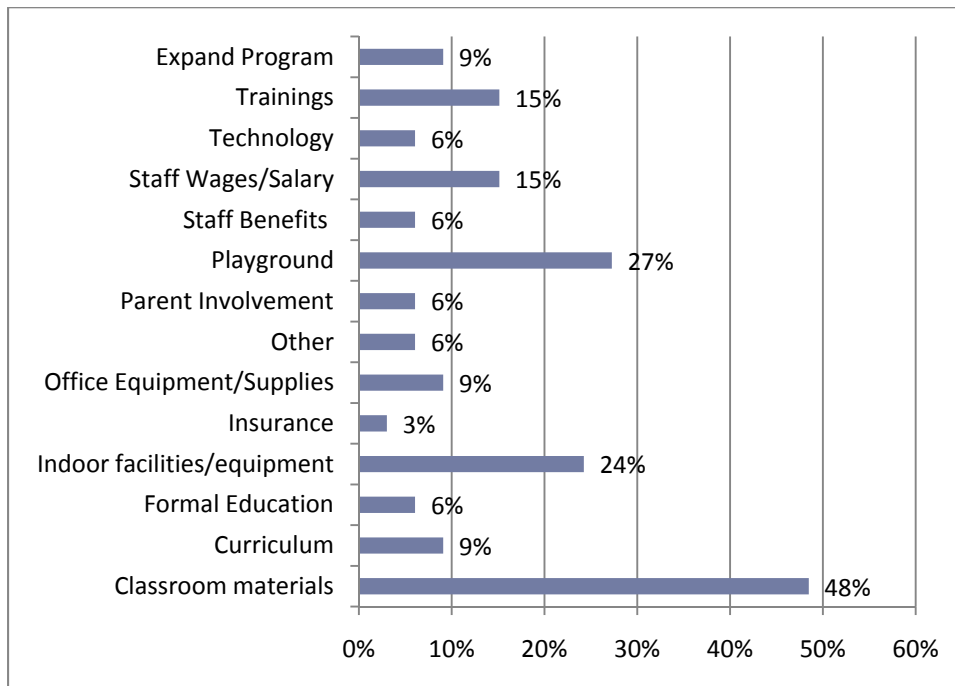
*“I have things in the mail about it, but until I talked to my DHS lady, I really wasn’t aware of how it would help us. And like I said, that’s why we really haven’t followed through. Because we’re not just a day care here. We have more than that to go on, so I’m sure more education for the general public would really help centers”*

*-Non-participating Montessori Center Director*

Uses for Financial Support

We asked directors, “If you had additional financial support from the state, how would you use it?” The vast majority (91%) of the participants stated that additional support would be helpful to them in considering application to Better Beginnings. Commonly reported themes are presented in Figure NonBB.6.

Figure NonBB.6. Non-Better Beginnings Provider Uses for Financial Supports



Funding for tangible physical needs related to the environment were most frequently reported: classroom materials (48%), playground improvements (27%), indoor facility and equipment improvements (24%) and office equipment/supplies (9%). Directors also reported the need for financial support to cover increased

staff costs that participation would require. Specifically, directors reported needing funding to cover training (15%) and formal education (6%), as well as increased wages (15%) and benefits (6%) for staff. Finally, there were less frequently reported uses for funds related to parent involvement (6%), program expansion (9%), purchasing curricula (9%), and technology needs (6%).

Some providers also mentioned that non-financial incentives related to increased promotion of their programs and Better Beginnings would motivate them to participate.

*“If we meet standards or participate with you guys, having references to us. Generally in the school time we’re full...over summer time...any additional help that you can get to get people in the door....”*

*-Non-participating School-Age Program Director*

## PARTICIPATING PROVIDERS

As completed with non-participating directors, pilot interviews with directors participating in Better Beginnings were conducted in person to test the interview questions for appropriateness of content and clarity, and questions were refined based on feedback. While the questions varied slightly, results from pilot interviews are included in this report. The questions for Better Beginnings participants addressed these topics (see See Appendix for full interview protocol):

- Characteristics of the program
  - Type of care (Family, Center)
  - Number and ages of children served
  - Accreditations
- Benefits gained from Better Beginnings participation
- Use and helpfulness of technical assistance
- Use of financial supports
- Ease and difficulty of application, assessment, and Better Beginnings components
- Recommended changes
- How additional financial support for quality improvement would be used
- Incentives to increase participation in Better Beginnings
- Level goal, timeline, and impediments to achieving higher levels (for lower-level providers)

### Participants in Better Beginnings: Respondent Characteristics

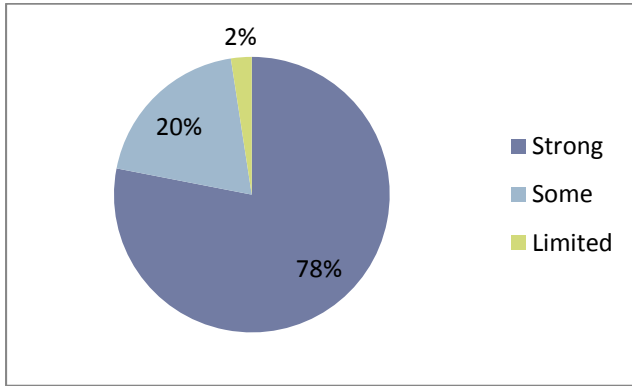
As seen in Table 1, 46% served infant-toddlers (birth-2 years), 53% served children in early childhood (3-5 years), and 20% served school-age children (kindergarten and older). Providers served a wide range of children in number<sup>3</sup>, but averaged 105 children per director. In terms of accreditations, one provider

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<sup>3</sup> The range of number of children served is not being reported as outliers on the low- and/or high-end could potentially jeopardize the anonymity of subjects.

reported National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation. Thirteen providers identified themselves as ABC programs (32%), and three were Head Start Providers (7%).

Figure BB.1. Better Beginnings Provider Knowledge



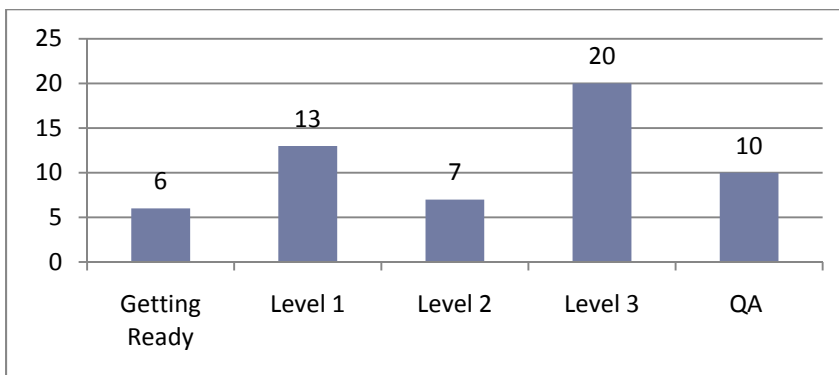
We coded director knowledge of Better Beginnings using these criteria:

- Limited: knows that there is a new quality system but is unfamiliar with standards or system processes.
- Some: has looked at the components or has attended a training where it was discussed but has limited recall of details.
- Strong: has carefully reviewed the system or has applied and has good recall of details.

Nearly all of the directors (98%) had strong or some knowledge of the system (see Figure BB.1). Usually directors with some but not strong knowledge worked in large programs or agencies where multiple staff members divided tasks for application and assessment preparation.

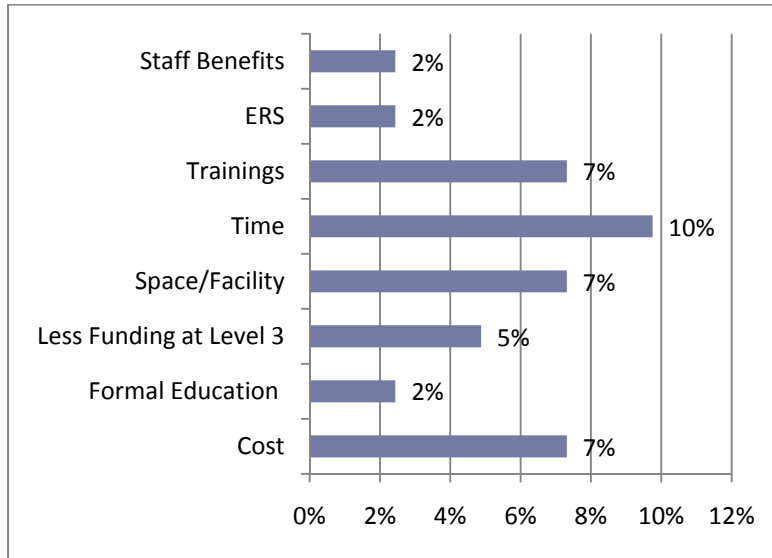
As part of the selection process, we sampled programs to attain interview feedback across the spectrum of providers in the Better Beginnings system (see Figure BB.2). Some directors managed programs split between multiple levels within the QRIS, so the number of programs represented does not equal the number of directors interviewed. The greatest representation within the system is of Level 3, as providers from the previous Quality Approval system (QA) were entered into Better Beginnings at that level.

Figure BB.2. Better Beginnings Provider Levels



We asked directors about their plans to apply to higher levels of Better Beginnings. Many directors (68%) expressed intent or interest in future application to higher levels. We also asked providers about their timeline for making an application for a higher level. There was a wide range of times provided from 1 month to 2 years; programs averaged 6 months as a timeline to apply to higher levels.

Figure BB.3. Better Beginnings Provider Impediments to Higher Levels



As a follow-up question, we asked directors of any known impediments to applying for a higher level of quality. Twelve directors (29%) reported some hindrances (see Figure BB.3). The most commonly reported impediments to higher quality were time to apply (10%), costs for materials (7%), cost for trainings (7%), and issues with the space, building, or furnishings (7%). There were also directors who reported willingness to stay at lower levels of quality because of relative ease to accomplish and access to higher grant amounts (5%).

*“...everybody gets the same amount of money and it doesn’t matter if you’re one, two, or three. I think if they made a difference in the incentive grant with the level you were, it would encourage more people to do a higher rating. And you know, part of my toying with this is because I know other programs that are settling for a one and they’re still getting the same incentive grant that I’m getting and I’m doing all this work at home.”*

*-Participating Center Director*

Changes and Benefits Related to Better Beginnings

We asked providers about the changes they have made to their programs as a result of Better Beginnings and if they have seen any direct benefits of participation. A majority (76%) of directors reported making changes to their programs (see Figure BB.4). The most commonly reported changes that directors reported were to classroom materials (34%) and organizational/administrative practices or procedures (32%).

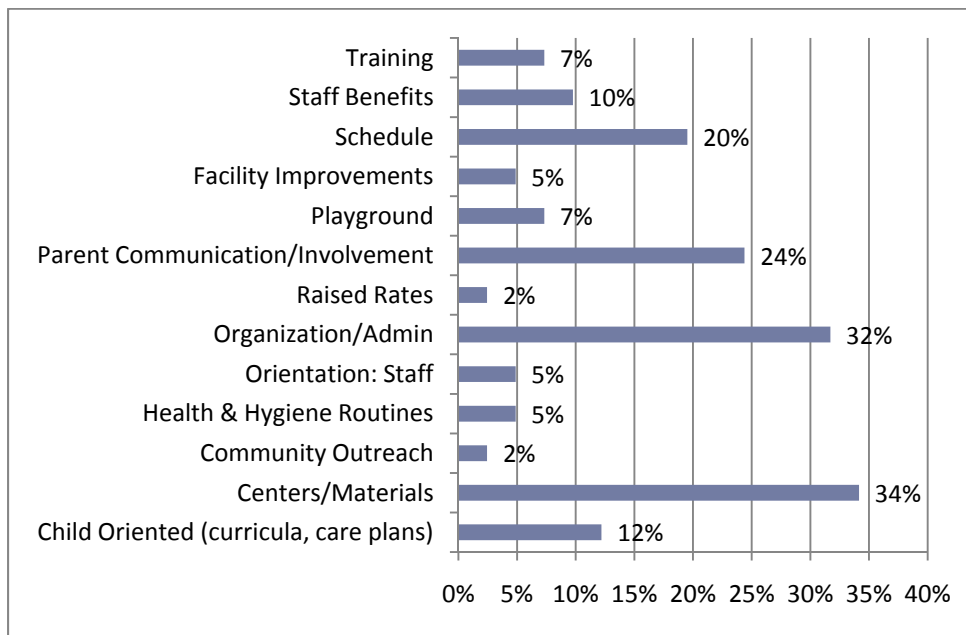
*“We’ve gotten a lot better with orientating our new staff to the building as opposed to the agency as a whole.”*  
*-Participating Center Director*

Directors also reported changes in communication with parents and parent involvement activities (24%).

*“It did kind of open our eyes to some different things that we can do for parental involvement that we’re going to implement in the next school year.”*  
*-Participating Center Director*

There were adjustments made that were directly related to children in their care, such as changing the schedule (20%), and purchasing curricula and creating care plans (12%).

Figure BB.4. Better Beginnings Provider Program Changes



As a result of participation, 88% of directors report some benefit of Better Beginnings for their programs, staff, and families. Figure BB.5 details areas where directors report benefits. The financial incentives provided by the state are the most commonly reported benefits of Better Beginnings, including parent use of tax credits (37%) and quality and professional development grants (32%). An indirect financial incentive for directors was increased parent interest in rated programs (20%).

*“We have a lot less [child] turnover. We’re staying full—we’re at full capacity for longer. We usually expect a dip in enrollment in the summertime, and we’re not anticipating as great a dip for this summer.”*  
*-Participating Center Director*

There were also reported benefits relating to staff, such as improved staff behavior (29%), reduced staff turnover (10%), better qualified staff (7%), and better staff-child interactions (7%):

*“Interactions mainly. Some are using the ITERS and ECERS more, and all of the indicators about their interactions with the kids and how they sit with them and care for them, and stuff like that, has really increased the relationships between the teachers and the children and also has cut down on disciplinary problems.”*

*-Participating Center Director*

*“I think that we do have less staff turnover because I think people are seeing the opportunity for more training and for professional development and they’re more satisfied.”*

*-Participating Center Director*

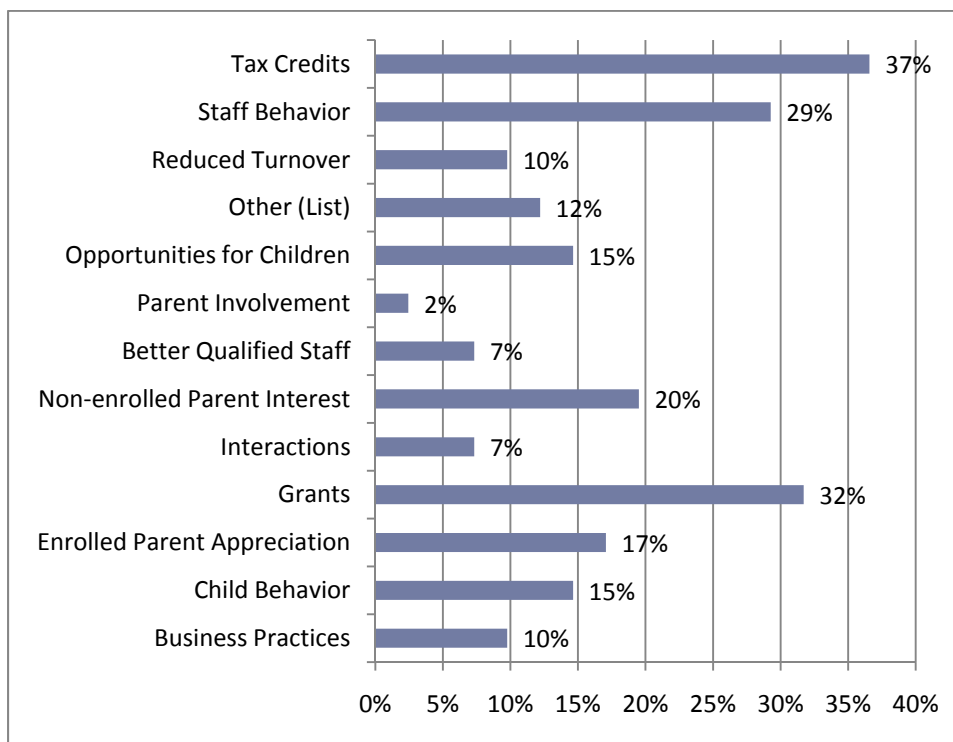
There were also benefits for the children in care with 15% reporting improved child behavior and 15% reporting increased opportunities for children as relates to activities and materials in the classroom.

*“I feel like the calmness—it’s just a better experience for them. It’s kind of like a home away from home. We don’t have the high strung, wondering what activity we’re going to do or that fear of being dropped off. It’s comfortable for them and they just seem very relaxed.”*

*-Participating Center Director*

Additional benefits were discussed such as appreciation from parents (17%), parent involvement (2%), improved business practices (10%), and others (12%) that included improved nutrition program, relationships with others in the community, and increased voucher receipt.

Figure BB.5. Better Beginnings Provider Benefits



## Praise

Although we did not specifically ask for praise, we coded responses that were positive toward Better Beginnings. The majority of participants (73%) expressed praise related to the following categories:

- **General positive comments (39%)**

*"It really has made the world of difference with my school. If we could have done it from day one 18 years ago, we definitely would have. But I think it's a wonderful thing."*  
-Participating Center Director

- **training content (32%)**

[Interviewer:] *"Can you tell me what you find most helpful about those trainings?"*  
[Director:] *"Mostly the resources. They'll give you an overview of it, but then they tell you where to find more information. So, it's nice to know where to go to get help."*  
-Participating Center Director

*"They like it. I try to choose the classes that are...beneficial a whole lot to the children, which all of them is, but you have some that you want to attend more than others, especially with behavior."*  
-Participating Center Director

- **responsiveness of support staff (15%)**

*"Those [ABC] ladies down there do everything they can to help us, they are awesome. That's with ABC, yes. To me, that and the BAS, those go hand in hand because us keeping up with our finance records that way, that's going to help us with our Better Beginnings."*  
-Participating Family Child Care Director

- **availability of online trainings (7%)**

We asked participating directors whether they had used Technical Assistance for quality improvement efforts. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of participating providers used technical assistance and nearly all (90%) of those who used TA believed that it was helpful as they worked towards Better Beginnings.<sup>4</sup>

*"I think [the onsite support] was able to answer questions. We were able to get the girls the materials and kind of the scales and things of what they needed to do. But I think they just had a lot of hidden fear as to what they had heard about it...just some kind of misbeliefs on it as far as, 'We have to teeth brush or we aren't going to pass,' or, 'I do certain things and I'm not going to pass.' It was not that at all, it would just affect that score a little bit. That has calmed their fears."*  
-Participating Center Director

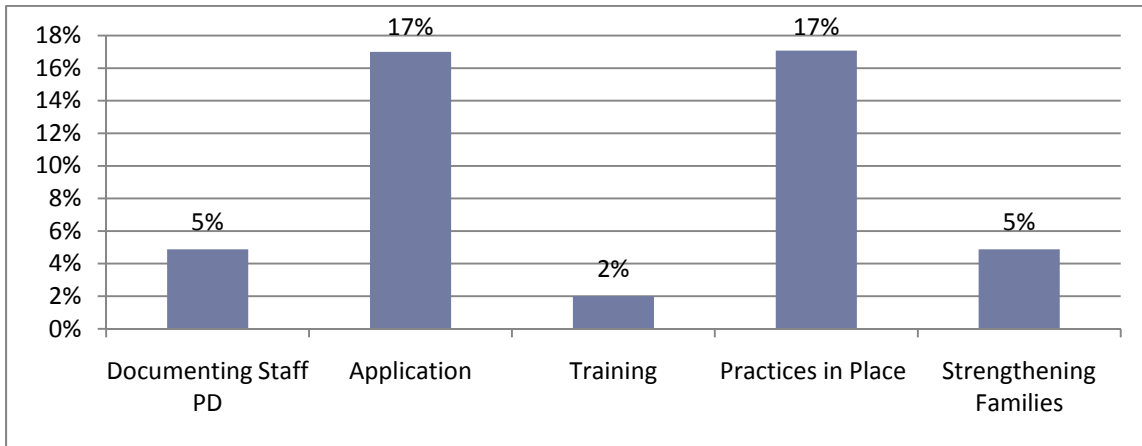
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<sup>4</sup> Some directors reported their experiences surrounding TA specifically for Better Beginnings, but most related experiences with TA related to the ERS and the former Quality Approval system.

### Director Perceptions of Ease/Difficulty

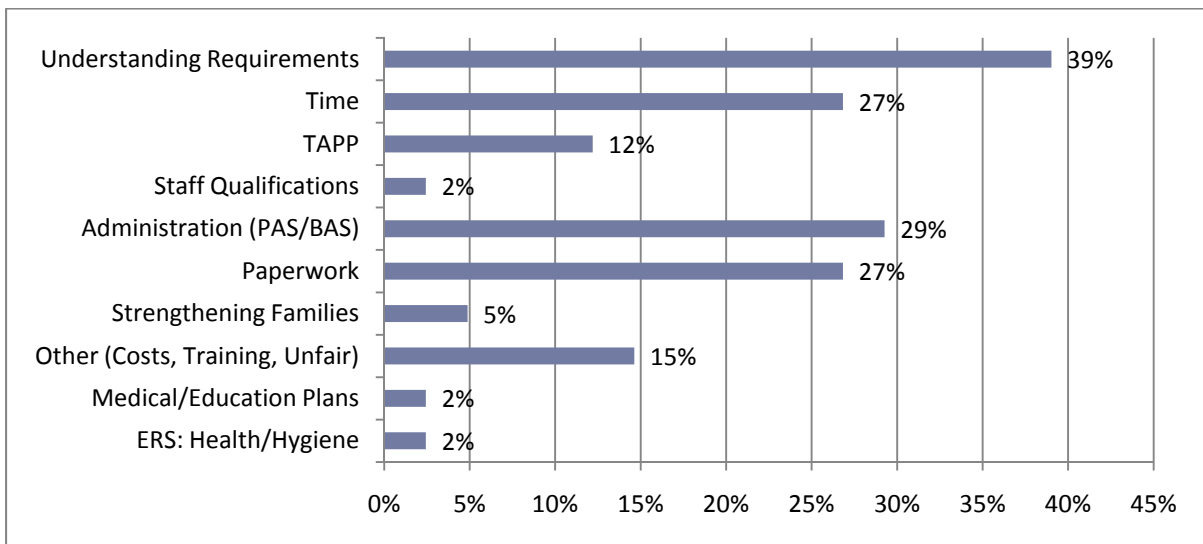
We asked directors whether there were elements of the application and assessment process that were particularly easy or difficult. When difficulty was reported, we asked what changes could be made to address the problem. Fifteen (37%) directors reported areas of ease with the application (see Figure BB.6). Most commonly directors report ease because they have practices that coincide with the Better Beginnings requirements already in place (17%) and ease of the application process (17%). Some directors also stated that Strengthening Families (5%), documenting staff professional development (5%) and training (2%) were easy to accomplish.

Figure BB.6. Better Beginnings Provider Ease with Application/Standards



Directors also commented on difficulties with Better Beginnings (68%, see Figure BB.7). While some directors were satisfied with the clarity of the application process, a greater number of directors (39%) reported that the requirements were unclear or difficult to understand.

Figure BB.7. Better Beginnings Provider Difficulty with Application/Standards



Directors commented on the following difficulties:

- **Understanding requirements (39%)**

*“When we went to our PAS training, we were told three different things in three different classes.”  
-Participating Center Director*

*“I mean I had to call constantly saying, ‘What does this mean? What are you wanting from me in this section?’... And it was stuff that I had, it’s just the way it was worded and the way it was written, to me it was horribly hard to fill out.”  
-Participating Center Director*

- **The PAS/BAS (29%)**

*“The PAS. That is the bane of my insanity...I either have to do the PAS stuff and let my daily work suffer, or do my daily work and let the PAS suffer. So, basically I have to do a lot of this PAS stuff on my own time!”  
-Participating Center Director*

*“...the one that I have the hardest time with is the PAS. Because, like I said before, it’s so time consuming and when I’m taking more work home at night, I’m thinking, you know, I could be visiting with my family instead of working on the computer...I know that we won’t have another on-site visit for next year and then when it comes, you know, you have the option when they come back of not doing the visit and just taking a lower score—I mean less stars, you know. I don’t know, I am toying with that and I am kind of going back and forth, because you hate to go from a 3 to a 1 or a 2, but it is an awful lot of work. I think it’s more work than one director can actually put together and I don’t have an assistant director. I have a part-time or I have an afternoon supervisor, but, you know, I’m the only one that does the office administration.”  
-Participating Center Director*

- **Paperwork (27%)**—coded when directors made general comments about applications and documentation being redundant or unnecessary

*“I went to some of the first trainings, and they said it was going to be kind of combined where you didn’t have to fill out so many papers and applications and they would just, you know, do it kind of like when one came out, maybe that person would do both, or something like that. It’s not the people coming out; it’s just the paperwork you have to do to get them to come out.”  
-Participating Center Director*

- **Time (27%)**—coded when directors commented that the process (including general paperwork and PAS/BAS documentation) was too time consuming.

*“Right now tier 1 is doable...you know, I’m the director and I’m doing pretty much all I can do right now and with all the paperwork and documentation and all that stuff, there’s no way I can do it all on my own and do what I’m doing right now...I’ll probably just apply for tier 1 and stay there...That would be fine with me as long as it’s okay with ABC and we can do that, that’s fine.”  
-Participating Center Director*

- **TAPP (12%)**—Difficulties include time to have trainings recorded for certification.
- **Strengthening Families (5%)**—Comments about lack of understanding of requirements or accessing training for Strengthening Families standards.
- **Staff Qualifications (2%)**—The requirements in this particular component were too difficult.
- **Medical/Educational Plans (2%)**—It was unclear how to document these areas properly for the application.
- **Health/Hygiene on ERS (2%)**—Comments related to difficulty with handwashing, sanitizing, and diapering practices.
 

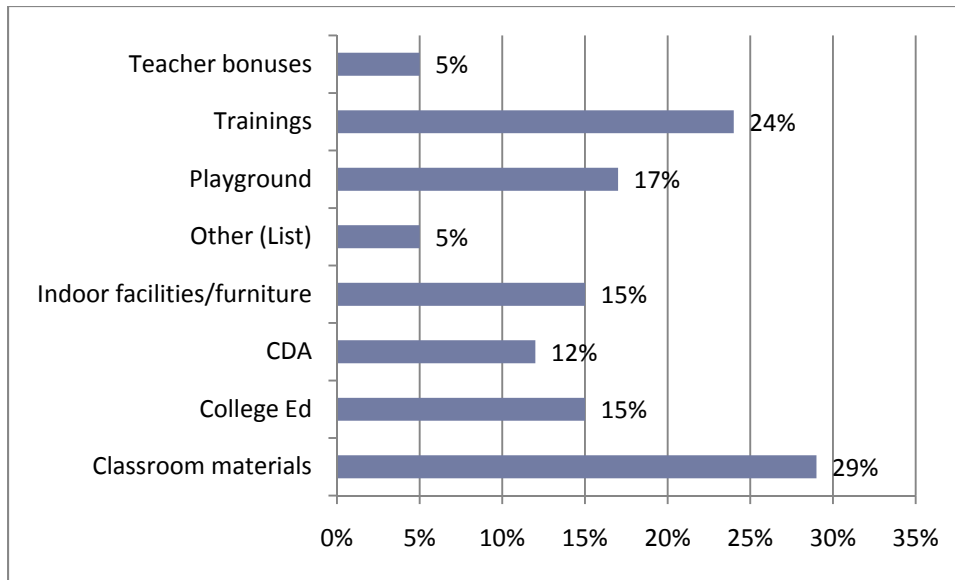
*“When you’ve been doing a job for 15 years and then you’re asked to jump through hoops and spend time doing things like not letting coat sleeves touch each other and not letting sheets touch each other, you know, while I understand that hygiene and health is important, you know, when you have children that are sitting beside each other and hugging each other—that their coats hang together and touch—just seems pretty silly to be spending the money and time that we’ve had to spend making sure they don’t touch anymore.”*

*-Participating Center Director*
- **Other Difficulties (15%)**—Comments were coded when they did not fit into common themes. Statements included that the process was too costly, that training was too difficult to attain, and that the assessment process was unreliable.

### Grant Use

We asked directors whether they had received Better Beginnings grants and how they were using those funds. A few programs were choosing not to apply for grants although they qualified. Grants were most commonly used for classroom materials (29%) or to pay for staff professional development training (24%). Other uses of grant money were playground equipment (17%), college coursework (15%), indoor facilities or furniture (15%), CDA (12%), bonuses for teachers (5%), and other items (5%) such as insurance and child assessment tools.

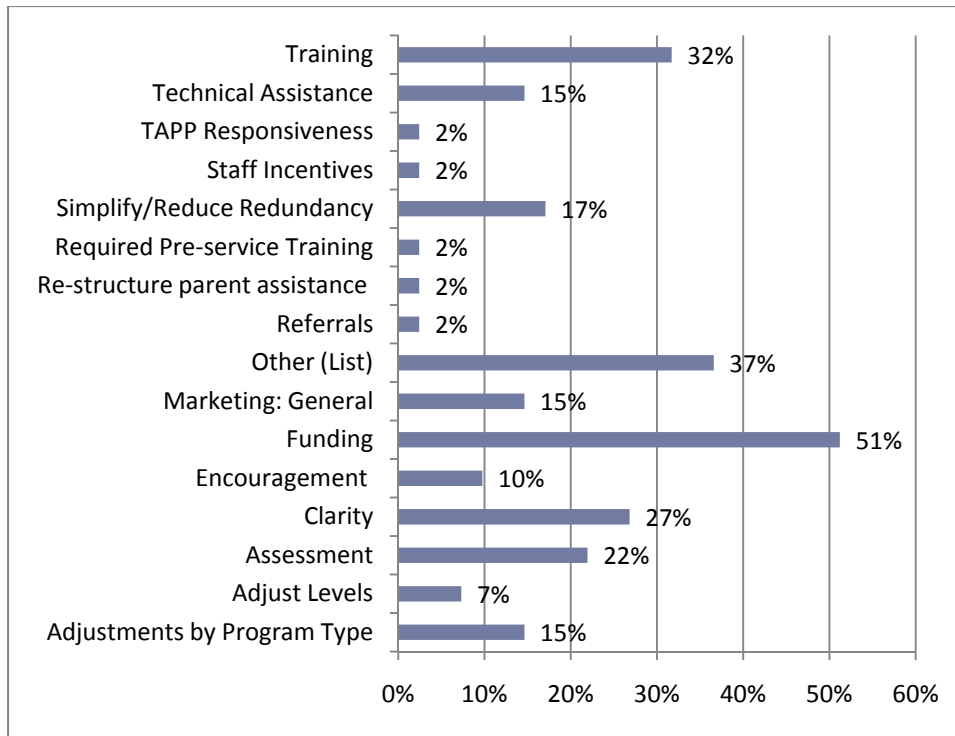
Fig. BB.8. Better Beginnings Provider Use of Grants



### Suggestions

Nearly all (90%) of providers had suggestions to improve Better Beginnings and/or address provider concerns (see Figure BB.9). The area where the greatest number of providers suggested changes was in funding, where half of the participants requested modifications (51%). In addition to general comments about funding (7%) and the request for additional funding (22%), providers made suggestions regarding the timing of funding, such as requesting grants prior to rating to get into the system (15%), and suggestions regarding payment of vouchers, such as to increase the number of vouchers or the rates given to providers (7%). A large number (32%) of participants also made suggestions regarding training: the largest percentage of providers (17%) said there should be greater availability of trainings in general; another 7% stated there should be greater availability within the content of the trainings. The third largest suggestion (27%) of the sample was to improve clarity of the system and to better define certain criteria. Nearly one-quarter of the participants made comments about the assessment process itself (22%), with some suggesting ways to decrease the pressure related to assessment (7%), some making suggestions for improved assessor demeanor (7%), and some suggesting improvements in assessor reliability (5%).

Figure BB.9. Better Beginnings Provider Suggestions for Application/Standards



- Increase Financial Support (51%)**—requests for increased funding or adjustments in the increments of funding allotted for each level.

*“I also think that since this is the only grant money that they have now...and it goes down the higher you go up the ladder. That needs to increase. I mean it does because you’re working really hard and everything else has increased, and I can’t increase in prices and so, I mean, I have to cut back somewhere, and my employees are taking the brunt of it. To keep quality people you’re going to have to help us pay for them...”*

*-Participating Center Director*

*“We can budget whatever we want, but say \$1,000 a year, that’s not a lot. Because kids are hard on things and the high quality materials. You can buy two high-dollar things and you’re done for the rest of the year. So that to me, if someone is running a good, high quality center, they need more grant money and stuff to keep up their quality.”*

*-Family Child Care Participating Director*

*“It didn’t make sense for me to jump into this program and go into the second or third level even though I could have possibly done this...You need to start fresh on the first level so you would actually know what was going on. And the biggest grant money was in level one. I didn’t like the fact that my parents were stifled. Because I was level one, they weren’t able to get that 20% discount on state. It was only for the higher levels. That wasn’t fair to my parents. And here I am the only family daycare home that had Better Beginnings status, but yet my parents couldn’t get the 20% discount at the end of the year because I had to be two or above. And I thought that*

*was unfair because if you're going to work for it, parents should benefit. That's why I'm able to bring parents in. Here I am, I've become accredited and I get these parents in here and I say, 'Well, I'm accredited.' Well, what does that mean? I didn't see any difference in the rates. I went Better Beginnings, but the rates are adjusted by [the county], so it doesn't matter that I'm Better Beginnings."*

*-Family Child Care Participating Director*

*"Some of our teachers really have that initiative to get those degrees so that they can be lead teachers, but they don't have the money to do that. So we would need more, you know, if we could get help getting more education behind the teachers for the ones that have the motivation then the center's value would increase by that, just getting those educated teachers in."*

*-Participating Center Director*

- **Expand or Improve Training (32%)**—primarily to increase the availability of trainings in different regions at more times, but also to adjust content.

*"And you didn't offer me that family daycare environmental rating scale, but you want these people to apply for Better Beginnings, but you aren't offering them the course...It's being taught in the Northern part of Arkansas. We aren't going to pack up and drive for 8 hours, you know."*

*-Participating Family Child Care Director*

*"I would say to continue to offer as much training availability as possible...Maybe adding more training classes...If you don't get right in there, it's filled up, you know, fast and you can't—you just have to wait. And so, that's the area that probably we need the most help on...We can't really afford to pay them a lot to drive somewhere else."*

*-Participating Center Director*

- **Improve Clarity (27%)**—making standards or processes more understandable.

*"Maybe if they gave like a subtitle of what they're looking for and its somewhere else they can give you a reference note like, 'this is what we're looking for, do this and this and this.' That would help explain the question a lot better and what you're looking for so you won't have to call them and ask them. Maybe a reference guide of what they're looking for on the questions."*

*-Participating Center Director*

*"I would make it more clearly understood to the person filling out the forms exactly what you want the first time because...it took me a while, and it almost stopped me in the process because I was so frustrated with their system and overwhelmed..."*

*-Participating Family Child Care Director*

- **Improve Assessment Experience (22%)**—improve reliability of assessors or allow more open exchange between assessors and program staff to lessen intimidation and to prevent error

*"So, that to me I think would help tremendously—is just to be able to discuss what they have scored you low on, so that you could have the opportunity to say, "Well, can I show you where this is at in the classroom?"*

*-Participating Center Director*

- **Simplify and Reduce Redundancy (17%)**—reduce redundancy and simplify application and assessment procedures and documentation

*“And, I would take a look at the PAS, P-A-S book, and say, ‘Now, what have you asked me for?’ Because, there is a parent involvement piece...and that sometimes is repetitive to ‘What do you do for communities and parents?’*

*-Participating Center Director*
- **Make Adjustments for Program Type (15%)**—changes to standards or policies to improve fit for a particular type of program (part-time, after-school programs, Montessori, family child care, Medicaid facilities, etc)

*“Some more flexibility for unique programs or for DDS centers. Maybe some separate guidelines, just flexibility and understanding that there’s going to be differences in some of the agencies. Because yes, we’re a quality program, but we may have children isolated because they do have autism, and they do need to sit at this particular area because of their sensory needs.”*

*-Participating Center Director*
- **Expand Technical Assistance (15%)**—more onsite assistance with documentation and targeted hands-on training.

*“I would allow time spent with the TAs be counted toward continuing education because my staff gathered more information from a day with [TA] than from 20 hours of workshops.”*

*-Participating Center Director*
- **Improve Marketing (15%)**—changes in the frequency or message of Better Beginnings marketing and parent outreach.
- **Provide Encouragement (10%)**—more positive feedback or more friendly interactions with staff involved in state child care supports

*“When someone’s coming out to look all over your records and you’ve got to do this and this, it makes you nervous. You want to do everything right. I do. And it does get you down when you’re not doing something right. You know what I’m saying? That, I think, needs to be addressed more. For people to understand that they aren’t doing it to hinder them, they’re doing it to help them.”*

*-Participating Family Child Care Director*

*“We’ve never got praise...it kind of makes you not want to try after you’ve done it for four years and try to get quality.... But, it would be helpful if they would get some of the assessors that had a more positive outlook, I guess you would say, because instead of everything being like on a straight or positive tune, everything, all the feedback, would be on a negative...it’s a lot to ask of the teachers and then to get negative feedback from the assessors, it’s just, it kind of is too much.”*

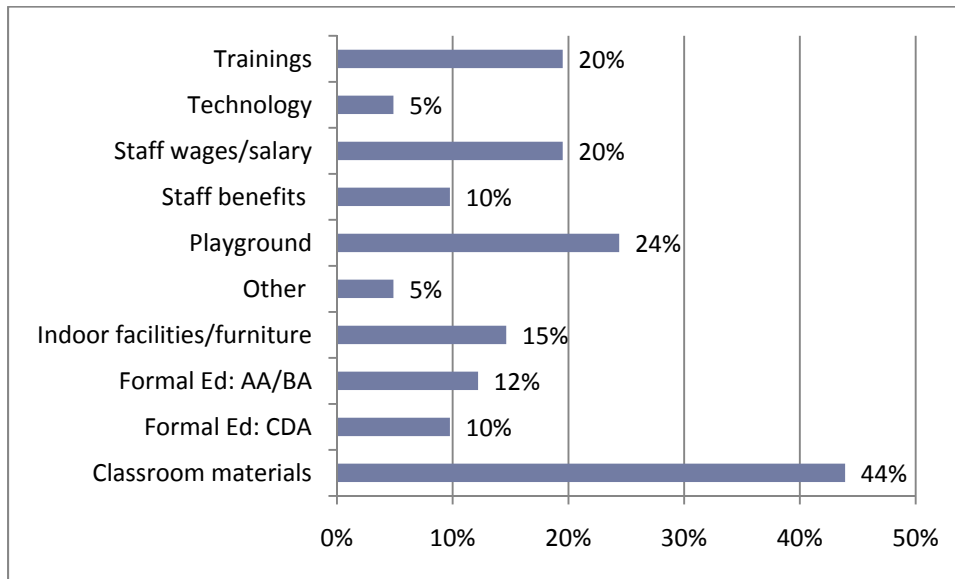
*-Participating Center Director*

- **Adjust Levels** (7%)—reduce stringency of standards or to reduce the gap from one level to another.

Uses for Financial Support

As with non-participating providers, we asked directors of Better Beginnings programs, “If you had additional financial support from the state, how would you use it?” The vast majority (88%) of the participants stated that additional support would be helpful to them in preparing for or maintaining their Better Beginnings rating (themes are presented in Figure BB.10).

Figure BB.10. Beginnings Provider Uses for Financial Supports



Funding uses for participating providers were similar to those of non-participating providers. Funding for tangible physical needs related to the environment was frequently reported: classroom materials (44%), playground improvements (24%), and indoor facility and equipment improvements (15%). Participating directors also reported greater need for financial support to cover increased staff costs. Specifically, directors reported needing funding to cover training (20%) and formal education (22%), as well as increased wages (20%) and benefits (10%) for staff. Less frequently reported uses for funds related to technology (5%) and other (5%; specifically child assessment materials and external facility development) needs.

Most child care directors we interviewed believe Better Beginnings will improve the quality of childcare in participating programs. Because of Better Beginnings participation, some directors are already reporting greater staff stability and performance and improvements in child behavior and learning. Yet many directors are still considering how the rewards weigh against additional cost and effort to participate. The qualitative interviews point us to steps DCCECE can take to make the QRIS more appealing to providers. Recommendations fall into four categories: Promoting an Equitable Team Approach, Simplifying, Clarifying, and Enhancing Financial and Marketing Supports.

## 1. PROMOTE AN EQUITABLE TEAM APPROACH

Directors appreciate that Better Beginnings presents quality in steps rather than an all-or-nothing endeavor. However, some directors feel that the state child care system is more interested in penalizing than partnering with them to achieve better care for children. They also perceive some inequities in their relationship with state-employed or state-contracted child care specialists. Some believe that those helping them are less experienced or out of touch with the day-to-day demands of child care yet still wield more power.

Providers desire greater encouragement and synchronized assistance from various state specialists and partners. They are grateful for opportunities to learn from and network with experienced child care providers and trainers, especially when those opportunities have practical hands-on applications.

### **1A. Highlight Accessibility and Experience of Specialists, Technical Assistants, Trainers, and Assessors**

*Example: Host “Meet and Greets” across the state*

Mississippi QRIS staff host lunches around the state and invite all child care staff in the area to come and get to know them. The meet-and-greet environment sets a friendly tone and is a good opportunity to establish relationships and dispel common misconceptions about the QRIS (for example, that not meeting individual elements of PAS/BAS and ERS will knock you out of the system, or that children in rated programs play but don’t learn or learn but don’t play).

*Example: Introduce a “Better Beginnings Team” website section*

Include a stable section on ARBetterBeginnings.com that provides information about Better Beginnings specialists, technical assistants, ERS assessors, and PAS assessors with three types of information: 1.) photos and highlights of team members’ relevant experience, especially when it has involved working directly with children; 2.) a flow chart of how team members work together or independently in the Better Beginnings process; 3.) a directory outlining whom to call with various concerns.

*“I mean, I have people teaching me that have never even had children or kept children. So, I’ve had a lot more experience than a lot of them have.”*  
-Non-participating Family Child Care director

*“I think if every center had a list of who to call for what, rather than, ‘Well, I know so and so knows about this,’—and I’m sure it’s not an easy task with as many questions as there are out there—but I think that to have some sort of directory with names, numbers, emails, that sort of stuff. I think that would be really helpful to directors.”*  
-Center Director

*Example: Periodic Site “Listen” Visits*

Send Better Beginnings specialists across the state on periodic site visits to see how Better Beginnings is working, to listen to providers, and to commend staff directly for their successes. These visits will also be an additional feedback loop to help DCCECE steer policy decisions.

*“I think if we had that feedback, not just coming in and evaluating us and saying, ‘Here’s your score. Yes, you passed,’ or, ‘No, you didn’t.’ That’s a lot of pressure on a classroom teacher. I mean a lot. Whereas if they got someone coming in and telling them that they’re doing a good job and what you’re doing, I think that would mean a lot, too.”*  
-Non-participant Director

### **1B. Engage Participants in Training and Promotion Efforts**

*Example: Continue mentoring program*

Mentees and mentors appreciate having someone to call and talk through questions or concerns about the system. Some directors appear to be more comfortable calling another director than the Better Beginnings office to get answers.

*Example: Enlist directors of rated programs to help facilitate Better-Beginnings related trainings*

Even in trainings where directors thought a trainer wasn’t very experienced or offering helpful information, directors value the opportunity to talk to other directors. To increase buy-in to Better Beginnings, ensure that a participating director is either offering Better Beginnings trainings or is at least on hand to speak briefly or to help facilitate. Directors occasionally hear negative or false things about Better Beginnings. We want to make sure they hear the positive, accurate information from other directors.

*Example: Establish model sites*

Several Level 3 directors expressed interest in offering their sites as models. Encouraging cross-visitation would give high-level directors another outlet to feel praised and offer yet another avenue for providers to motivate one another. Model sites could serve as locations for the Meet-and-Greets suggested in 1A.

### **1C. Engage all Types of Care in Negotiating Appropriate Standards for Continuous Quality Improvement**

DCCECE made adjustments to Better Beginnings policies after meeting with representatives and reviewing crosswalks from Head Start agencies and ABC programs. These adjustments eliminate the time and cost of Better Beginnings review when those groups are already independently reviewed more stringently in comparable areas. We recommend that similar discussion and review be offered to School-Age programs, Family Child Care programs, and programs serving children with developmental disabilities.

*Example: Adjust standards to the needs of school-age programs*

School-age providers were much less aware of Better Beginnings than other groups. We believe there is some hesitation on the part of some school-age program leaders to promote school-age participation because they do not believe the current standards are an appropriate fit to the priorities and demands of their programs. The choice of YPQA, which is now thought to more in-step with school-age goals than SACERS, is welcomed by some. However, there are still requirements that may not be a good fit, such as the use of portfolios or what is accepted for training and qualifications.

*“Most of my workers are early education majors and they work around their classes, so it’s not hard to get those to work for me, but as far as getting someone with a CDA or an early childhood degree—that’s almost impossible for me to do since I only go for 3 hours or less....But if they could come up with some standards that were not quite as rigid?*

*Maybe the girls that are doing, or the boys that are doing elementary education counting their education hours as more training than what they’re originally doing.”*

*-School-Age Director*

*Example: Review suitability of ERS for programs serving children with developmental disabilities*

Directors report that practices recommended by the ERS do not always work well for children with developmental delays and disabilities. Some directors report that this is merely because scheduling demands conflict with Medicaid billing requirements. Other directors suggest that ERS requirements, such as allowing free access to materials or allowing children to choose activities, are not appropriate for all the children they serve. The existing literature demonstrates that outcomes are better for children cared for in inclusive settings.<sup>5</sup> We do not want programs discouraged from working with children who have delays because individualization for them prevents achievement of good ERS scores. We would like to see a supplemental assessment for inclusive learning environments used in tandem with the ERS or additional guidance for ERS assessors in how to inquire about and assess situations of individualization.

**1D. Establish Reliability for Better Beginnings Ratings**

DCCECE has invested in establishing the reliability of ERS assessors. We recommend that safeguards also be built into the Better Beginnings overall rating as well. Better Beginnings is a high stakes system that will affect the reputation of child care programs and the disbursement of state funds. Again, Pennsylvania is a model where reliability visits are conducted on an ongoing basis. These reliability visits occur at every fifteenth designation, during which two designators independently complete the rating of a provider during the same visit. The results are compared to determine reliability to the assessment.

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<sup>5</sup> Spiker, D., K. Hebbeler, et al. (2011). Measuring quality of early care and education programs for children with disabilities. In M. Zaslow, I. Martinez-Beck, K. Tout & T. Halle (Eds.), *Quality measurement in early childhood settings* (pp. 229-256). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brooks Publishing Co.

At the level of the QRIS, this reliability process could be used to identify standards that need to be better clarified. At the level of the actual assessment, the process can help identify elements of the rating process that need to be better defined or whether additional training or support is needed for assessors.<sup>6</sup>

While the state has made improvements that have led to greater reliability of environmental assessments across the state, some dissatisfaction from old experiences are still being shared. Including a reliability process to ensure programs are rated consistently and equitably would promote general faith in the fairness of the system for providers and provide a wealth of information for the state's continuous quality improvement effort.

### **1E. Expand Technical Assistance**

Technical Assistance (TA) is valued by Arkansas directors. Assistants help clarify questions related to PAS and ERS assessments and provide good suggestions and encouragement to overcome barriers to progress in the system. Providers in all kinds of programs are discouraged that other types of visits to their programs mainly point out deficiencies. Increased TA will help directors feel more supported in their efforts and better praised for accomplishments.

Evaluations of other states' QRIS show that TA is an effective means to increase provider participation in professional development and can have an impact on overall quality of a center. In Washington, a treatment group of providers in the QRIS received more coaching than the control group. The treatment model improved center teachers' enrollment in education and training courses and improved the quality of centers by 1.5 points ERS.<sup>7</sup> In Palm Beach County, Florida, staff that worked with a coach were more likely to attend workshops and conferences, to earn college credits, and to work with a career advisor. When coaching duration (not intensity) was longer, providers reported more improvement of job skills.<sup>8</sup> Similar TA success was found in Pennsylvania's QRIS evaluation, where TA significantly improved the odds of a program advancing levels.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Example: Have a TA visit following assessment*

Expanding the outreach of TA would be a cost-effective way to increase provider participation and satisfaction with Better Beginnings. In spring of 2011, DCCECE and our team discussed the possibility of technical assistants talking through assessment results rather than the report being mailed to the provider. We think this follow-up visit would help providers frame results in more positive light. This follow-up visit could also be used to set goals for how grants will be used.

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<sup>6</sup> Sirindes, P. (2010). Demonstrating Quality: Pennsylvania Keystone STARS 2010 Program Report. Research and Evaluation Unity, Office of Child Development and Early Learning, PA Departments of Education and Public Welfare. Accessed at <http://www.pakeys.org/uploadedContent/Docs/Demonstrating%20Quality%202010.pdf> on 6/21/2011.

<sup>7</sup> Boller, K., R. Blair, et al. (2010). The Seeds to Success Modified Field Test: Impact Evaluation Findings. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. accessed at [http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/earlychildhood/seeds\\_to\\_sucess\\_impact.pdf](http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/earlychildhood/seeds_to_sucess_impact.pdf) on 6/21/2011.

<sup>8</sup> Shen, J., W. Tackett, et al. (2009). Second Evaluation Report for Palm Beach County Quality Improvement System. Accessed at <http://cache.trustedpartner.com/docs/library/000238/Download%20Second%20Evaluation%20Report%20for%20Palm%20Beach%20County%20Quality%20Improvement%20Center.pdf> on 6/21/2011.

<sup>9</sup> Sirindes, P. (2010).

*Example: Pilot several TA approaches to see what is most effective and feasible*

States are implementing QRIS TA in different ways. For example, Better Beginnings partners can consider bi-weekly phone calls, monthly in-person TA, or TA on request or automatic TA for all to see which approach has the best effect for QRIS participants. We know that staffing capabilities may be limited, but the desire for personal targeted assistance is clear, and other QRIS states have reported TA to be an effective incentive to participation.

### **1F. Expand Availability of Trainings**

When Better Beginnings originally rolled out, professional development grants were only available for college coursework. Policy has since been changed to allow grants to be used for the cost of clock hours as well. This is a helpful change, and directors who are aware of it are grateful. Until standards can shift to an emphasis on college coursework for greater pre-service education and continuing professional development, the TAPP system should investigate feasibility of expanding trainings.

*Example: Offer trainings in more locations*

Many directors report that trainings they need are overbooked or far away, making them prohibitively time-consuming and expensive to attend. A few were particularly disheartened after driving long distances for trainings that did not teach them anything new. There would be greater willingness to participate in more training hours if sessions were more accessible.

*Example: Offer more program-specific trainings*

Family child care and school-age directors reported more trouble with training requirements than center-based directors. Family providers have trouble finding substitutes and getting away from home during the week. School-age programs often have staff that are in college or have other jobs, so they have trouble finding time and money to get staff trained. Second, these groups do not think there are enough sessions that are applicable to their needs. They report attending trainings geared primarily toward center-based early childhood education just to get in the hours they need for licensing. To engage more family child care and school-age directors, TAPP can expand the number and variety of trainings that are offered on weekends and evenings and that are targeted specifically to each group.

*Example: Continue expanding online offerings*

Directors are thankful for the increased number of trainings being offered online. These trainings save them time and money, especially in areas of the states where fewer live training options are offered.

## **2. SIMPLIFY**

### **2A. Simplify**

Directors must often work overtime to prepare for a rating, especially for Levels 2 and 3. They would appreciate some steps being streamlined.

*“I think they required too much information for an application. When I look at an application, I think it should be something simplified. Your proof is in your ECERS report that you passed for quality rating...for someone who has passed, it is a lot of repetitive information over and over.”*

*-Participating Center Director*

*Example: Eliminate multiple verifications of written posted schedules.*

In the current process all teachers sign to verify presence of posted schedules for initial application, then an ERS assessor verifies presence of posted schedules in one-third of the classrooms, finally posted schedules are observed in every room by a program reviewer. A posted schedule is not an indicator backed by research<sup>10</sup>, and as such, reducing the number of times it is documented would make the process easier without detriment to children.

*Example: Eliminate multiple observations of interest centers.*

For similar reasons, it is also not imperative that the number of interest centers be observed in every room by a program reviewer when this item has been previously verified in unannounced visits to a random sampling of rooms by an ERS assessor.<sup>11</sup>

*Example: Eliminate multiple verifications of family involvement and supports.*

We support increased training in protective factors and the potential usefulness of the Strengthening Families online trainings and self-assessment. However, family supports are examined in the ERS and the BAS/PAS and support for social-emotional development in the ERS.<sup>12</sup> What is expected for a Strengthening Families action step is not well defined in the current standards. The intent was to leave room for director choice, but directors are confused by it and have requested guidance in this area. We recommend that the Strengthening Families model continue to be emphasized in professional development, but that Better Beginnings rely on the standardized items related to family and social-emotional supports in PAS or the ERS rather than require documentation for a third item.

*Example: Provide an online application portal.*

Some directors expressed frustration at having to handwrite applications. We know that type-able applications exist, but these should be made available on the Better Beginnings website. We would also investigate setting up an online application portal to enable directors to work on, to save sessions, and to submit the application online. The portal could also provide status updates on application review and assessment scheduling as well as reminders for updating documentation and renewing program status.

### 3. CLARIFY

#### **3A. Clarify how parts contribute to the whole**

Many directors are unclear about how Better Beginnings relates to Quality Approval. Many directors still perceive Better Beginnings as a tack-on to Quality Approval rather than a new integrated system. They do not see items outside of ERS affecting the quality of care they provide to children. All trainings and guidance materials related to Better Beginnings should continue to emphasize how each element of Better Beginnings fits into an overall picture of program quality.

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<sup>10</sup> McKelvey, L., M. Chapin-Critz, et al. (2010). Evaluating Arkansas' Path to Better Child Outcomes. <http://www.arbetterbeginnings.com/downloads/FULL%20REPORT.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Appendix 3 offers crosswalks for Learning Environment standards and examples for how standards could be revised to reduce multiple verifications.

<sup>12</sup> See Technical Appendices to McKelvey et al., 2010. Appendix 4: Crosswalk of Strengthening Families, ECERS-R, and PAS. <http://www.arbetterbeginnings.com/downloads/Technical%20Appendices.pdf>

*“PAS was harder than Better Beginnings, but Better Beginnings is basically Quality and we have always had the top of our game at Quality.”*  
-Participating Center Director

*Example: Include the rationale for all standards in the Toolkit.*

Even if the rationale behind Better Beginnings standards and assessments are addressed in trainings, they are not sufficiently addressed in the Toolkit or ARBetterBeginnings.com website materials. Directors use website materials and may even access them before attending relevant trainings and to decide whether to participate.

### **3B. Clarify What Constitutes “Documentation”**

There were many uncertainties surrounding documentation of PAS items, what was needed to document Strengthening Families assessment and action plans, and meanings of ERS terms such as “many” or “substantial portion of the day.” Although these uncertainties were answered by Better Beginnings specialists or by technical assistants, some providers were waiting for applications for TA to be answered or simply desired an expanded reference guide to find answers quickly themselves.

*Example: Expand Toolkit*

The Better Beginnings Toolkit could be expanded to provide answers to questions that arise and to include more examples of documentation that will satisfy particular standards. The Toolkit should also provide guidance notes specific to ABC, school districts, DDTCS programs, school-age programs, and family child care programs. Pennsylvania’s QRIS offers providers a comprehensive guide to its standards that may serve as a model. The document “Good, Better, Best: PA’s CQI Guide to Best Practices”<sup>13</sup> provides sources of evidence that may be used to document each standard, supports recommended to meet those standards, and special considerations for programs, such as how Head Starts practices may relate to a particular standard.

*“They should have each page that says, ‘You have to provide this information and this information needs to be written in this way, and also you need to get copies to back this up or validate it’...I would make it more clearly understood to the person filling out the forms exactly what you want the first time, because then—it took me awhile and it almost stopped me in the process because I was so frustrated with their system...”*  
-Family Child Care Participating Director

Directors occasionally commented that they didn’t realize they already had documentation but called it something different than the assessment manuals or Better Beginnings guides. Directors’ input could be used to put alternate names or descriptions for documents into the Toolkit as part of Better Beginnings continuous quality improvement efforts.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.pakeys.org/docs/GBB%20-%20PAs%20CQI%20Guide%20to%20Best%20Practice%20Version%201.0.pdf> accessed 6/24/11.

### **3C. Clarify Why and How ERS Assessors Do What They Do.**

It is likely that many of directors' stated concerns about ERS assessors are based on experiences prior to reliability being established. However, directors want more interaction with assessors to diffuse tension and to clarify items that might be overlooked. All ERS trainings and preparation resources prepared within the state should include explanations of why discussion with assessors may hinder reliability. It is typically recommended that TA and assessment be carried out by separate groups to maintain objectivity.<sup>14</sup> Because one organization administers both for Better Beginnings, trainings and the Toolkit should explain safeguards that have been implemented. Examples of safeguards might include how classroom random assignments are made or how technical assistants are prevented from sharing information about programs that might bias assessors.

### **3D. Improve Communication between Stakeholders**

As a new, big system, there will no doubt be bumps in the road, and repairs will be needed to smooth the way. It is important that all stakeholders receive information and clear guidelines regarding changes to Better Beginnings in a timely way.

*Example: Give all TAPP trainers, technical assistants, and directors serving as mentors formal talking points for changes.*

Directors know that things are changing. Their frustration arises not necessarily from the change, but from the fact that they hear one thing from a trainer, another thing from a TA, and another thing from a Better Beginnings specialist. DCCECE may be able to diffuse this frustration by ensuring that all those in authoritative positions are thoroughly briefed at the same time and given official talking points for explaining changes to others.

*Example: Expand use and reach of Better Beginnings email distribution list*

Ensure that all types of stakeholders are represented on the Better Beginnings email distribution list. Use the email to advise stakeholders of changes as they arise. Directors across the state, not just those in authoritative positions, need information on changes, probably multiple times. They teach other directors, if not through formal mentorship relationships, then through casual networking. Having more information streams consistently reporting changes will prevent perpetuation of false or outdated information.

*Example: Use Better Beginnings website*

Include headlines of changes on the index page of ARBetterBeginnings.com with links to more information.

## **4. ENHANCE FINANCIAL AND MARKETING SUPPORTS**

States that achieve levels above 20% QRIS participation have more comprehensive financial supports than what Arkansas currently offers. We recommend reorganizing the way existing funding is allotted to programs in various levels and if possible, to investigate avenues for increased funding that can go to

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<sup>14</sup> Zellman, G., & Perlman, M. (2008). Child care quality rating and improvement systems in five pioneer states: Implementation issues and lessons learned. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Accessed at [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND\\_MG795.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG795.pdf) on 07/01/2011.

teacher college education and higher subsidy payments for higher-level programs that serve children at risk.

#### **4A. Increase Funding at Higher Levels**

Financial incentives for Better Beginnings participation are greater at Levels 1 and 2 than at Level 3. Poor program quality can be detrimental to child development<sup>15</sup>, so there is good reason to prioritize funding to programs new to quality improvement efforts. However, director interviews lead us to believe that lower funding at Level 3 is a disincentive to progress. Some providers that already had quality care and administrative systems implemented well enough to score a Level 3 are opting to enter at lower levels to receive increased funding, to avoid paperwork, and to avoid the pressure of assessment.

*“We are in a lower level because the funding is higher. We have so many that need and want to get their CDAs—that is my way to help them out.”*  
-Director of a lower level that could have qualified for Level 3

Those who moved directly into a Level 3 perceive this as a flaw in the system. They contend it takes high ongoing investments to maintain the well-qualified staff, equipment, furnishings, and classroom materials needed for Level 3. The amount of incentive and professional development grants are not viewed as an adequate payoff for the time that directors must spend on documentation. We recommend higher levels of funding at higher levels of quality.

There is appreciation that the new system allows programs in wherever they are. However, directors tended to speak of quality in Pass/Fail terms. All aspects of the QRIS, including financial rewards, should promote the idea of continuous quality improvement reflecting research that child outcomes continue improving as quality improves, and that there appears to be no point at which gains level off.<sup>16</sup>

#### **4B. Tax Credits for All Levels or Make Level 1 “Getting Ready”**

Some directors expressed concern that parents using Level 1 programs do not qualify for the Arkansas Early Childhood Credit. In Levels 2 and 3, directors can use the tax credit as an incentive for parents to go along with program adjustments. For instance, a family child care director we interviewed decided to begin charging for vacation time to meet upper-level BAS standards. Parents objected, but she created a chart to demonstrate that if her program is accredited at Level 3, the amount they’ll save in tax credits is greater than the amount they will pay her for two weeks of vacation.

We recommend that tax credits either be granted to all parents that pay to have their children enrolled in a rated program, or that DCCECE make a distinction between Level 1 and higher levels. In our first-year evaluation we recommended that Level 1 be called “Getting Ready” because it does not incorporate reliable assessments of program quality. Confusion over tax credits adds further support to this

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<sup>15</sup> Burchinal, M., N. Vandergrift, et al. (2010). Threshold analysis of association between child care quality and child outcomes for low-income children in pre-kindergarten programs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25(2), 166-176.

Thornburg, K., W. Mayfield, et al. (2009). The Missouri quality rating system school readiness study.

<sup>16</sup> Burchinal, M., N. Vandergrift, et al. (2010). Threshold analysis of association between child care quality and child outcomes for low-income children in pre-kindergarten programs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25(2), 166-176.

recommendation. A “Getting Ready” Level would help parents understand that directors in this level have good intentions and are moving toward Better Beginnings accreditation but would also help distinguish why the tax credits aren’t available until Level 2.

#### **4C. Professional Development and Retention Incentives Directly to Program Staff**

Arkansas directors are concerned that when teachers achieve higher levels of education, they choose to move out of early childhood education in favor of higher paying venues. Other states’ QRIS have employed incentives paid directly to program staff including bonuses and tax credits for educational accomplishments.

*“If you have that degree most people are going to take it to the public schools or take it somewhere where you are able to receive more pay and benefits than we in the private childcare industry are going to be able to pay. And so I think it is going to be unrealistic that we are going to have a lot of teachers and staff at that level because obviously it is not a high-paid or greatly benefit-heavy industry for us.”*

*-Participating Center Director*

##### *Example: Introduce wage supplements*

We recommend that DCCECE investigate partnerships to fund wage supplements for teachers who increase their education and remain employed in the same rated center. North Carolina Child Care WAGES® Project has demonstrated that success in reducing turnover and increasing the education levels of participants.<sup>17</sup> Although directors may currently choose to use grants for staff bonuses, our survey results indicate they are likelier to spend money on materials to meet ERS requirements. Previous analysis indicates that PAS items addressing benefits for staff were related to teacher behaviors that support children’s cognitive development and school readiness.<sup>18</sup> These items were cut from Better Beginnings scoring because they were thought to be too hard to achieve. We recommend investigating ways to help programs bridge this gap. A voluntary system will have a difficult time raising the qualifications of teachers if wages cannot be increased commensurate with their education level.

*“Primary would be to—when we’re sending people to all of these trainings—it would be to be able to pay them more when they did those things to keep them here.”*

*-Participating Center Director*

*“I wish there were some stipends or some kind of additional monies that were available for people who were willing to go through the TAPP training and some of the more expensive things, you know, give them a little bit of incentive to do that...even if it was just a one-time thing, that would be awesome...Because I think that once people get started with it, they really want to continue...”*

*-Center Director*

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<sup>17</sup> Child Care Wages Association. (2010). Child Care WAGES® Project Statewide Final Report Fiscal Year 2009/2010. Accessed online at [http://www.childcareservices.org/\\_downloads/WAGES\\_Statewide0910\\_full.pdf](http://www.childcareservices.org/_downloads/WAGES_Statewide0910_full.pdf) on 6/21/2011.

<sup>18</sup> McKelvey, L., et al. 2010.

*“So you make \$7.25, go back to school and pay \$1,600 to get the CDA and then you’re going to make \$7.50, you know, and you pay \$1,600 and you know you’re a single mom and you don’t have a lot of income, so the biggest thing would be if we could get more money for sending current staff back to school I think that would be very beneficial in keeping up with the Better Beginnings guidelines for staff qualifications.”*  
-Participating Center Director

#### **4D. Introduce Tiered Reimbursement Based on Level**

Require programs receiving voucher reimbursement to participate in Better Beginnings. This would help increase the quality of care for children in poverty. States that tie subsidies to a rating achieve higher rates of participation in the QRIS.<sup>19</sup> While it would appear that tiered reimbursement (offering higher rates for achieving higher QRIS levels) is a strong incentive to enhance participation, there is little existing research to determine what level of reimbursement might be effective in the context of QRIS.

#### **4E. Offer Better Beginnings Marketing Tools**

Directors reported that access to Better Beginnings-branded items would help motivate more directors to participate. Directors we interviewed mentioned banners to hang outside, flyers for parents, and info packets for governing boards. Additional resources that could be offered are customizable templates for print ads, parent/community newsletters, press release templates, and sample “elevator speeches” for directors to promote their programs as they move about in the community. Free or low-cost marketing materials for directors have the potential to fuel grassroots marketing of Better Beginnings and help directors leverage their rated status.

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<sup>19</sup> Based on our analysis of average participation rates in U.S. QRIS per incentive used reported by Tout, K., R. Starr, et al. (2010). Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations. Child Trends, Mathematica Policy Research. Accessed at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/cc/childcare\\_quality/compendium\\_qrs/qrs\\_compendium\\_final.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/cc/childcare_quality/compendium_qrs/qrs_compendium_final.pdf) on 6/21/2011.

# APPENDIX 1. NON-PARTICIPANT SURVEY PROTOCOL

As part of the evaluation of Better Beginnings, we are interested learning about your experiences with applying to and being part of the quality rating and improvement system. If you agree to participate in this interview, it should take about 20 minutes. I will ask questions related to Better Beginnings and child care issues.

The interview will be recorded on audio tape and that tape will be transcribed by a UAMS employee. For reports, the information you share with us will be compiled with the information gathered during other interviews. Efforts will be made to protect your confidentiality. The names of participants will not be recorded, nor will they be included in the transcripts made from the audio tapes. Quotes from the transcripts may be used for reporting purposes but no names will be included in any reports.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you feel uncomfortable responding to a question, you may choose not to answer. You may also withdraw at any time. We will send your center a \$15 gift as a thank you for your time, so we will ask for your contact information in order to send you the gift.

## **Better Beginnings Non-Participating Provider Questions**

1. What type of care arrangement do you provide (center, family care)?
2. How many children are in your care?
3. What ages do you serve?
4. Is your program accredited with another organization? (like NAFCC, NAEYC, for example)
5. Are you familiar with Better Beginnings, Arkansas' new quality rating and improvement system for child care?

### **IF YES,**

5A1. Do you plan to participate in BB?

5A2. Have you reviewed the BB components?

5A3. Do you have any concerns about any of the components of BB?

5A4. How do you think your concerns would be best addressed?

5A5. Do you think there will be any unwanted consequences from participating in Better Beginnings?

5A6. Have you used any of the supports the state has set up to help in your quality improvement efforts? (example; technical assistance from ASU)

5A6a. If so, what did they do that was the most helpful? Why/ why not?

5A6b. If not, do you think will you use it? Why/ why not?

5A7. If you could change anything in Better Beginnings, what would you change?

5A8. Do you think that BB will increase the quality of care provided to children? Why/ why not?

### **IF NO,**

Better Beginnings is a voluntary system where programs meet standards above licensing. For instance, Better Beginnings programs attend more professional development hours, they

meet higher standards in the learning environment, and they show documentation of their administrative practices. In return those programs get benefits. I will list some for you: financial grants, free help from technical assistants, referral agencies will recommend the programs to parents seeking child care, and parents who use these programs will receive tax credits.

5B1. Would you be willing to document your program practices and participate in additional assessments to receive these benefits? Why/why not?

5B2. Would be willing to attend additional training to receive those benefits? Why/why not?

5B3. Would you be interested in having a technical assistant work with you on an individual basis?

5B4. Do you think there would be unwanted consequences from participating in this kind of State-sponsored program?

5B5. Have you used any of the supports the state has set up to help in your quality improvement efforts? (example; trainings or technical assistance). If so, did you find them helpful?

6. If it was possible to have additional financial support from the state to improve your program, how you use it?
7. Do you know of other incentives that might get providers interested in participating in State efforts to improve care for children in Arkansas?
8. Is there anything that we have failed to ask that you think is important to understanding how the State can help providers improve their programs?

## APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT SURVEY PROTOCOL

As part of the evaluation of Better Beginnings, we are interested learning about your experiences with applying to and being part of the quality rating and improvement system. If you agree to participate in this interview, it should take about 20 minutes. I will ask questions related to Better Beginnings and child care issues.

The interview will be recorded on audio tape and that tape will be transcribed by a UAMS employee. For reports, the information you share with us will be compiled with the information gathered during other interviews. Efforts will be made to protect your confidentiality. The names of participants will not be recorded, nor will they be included in the transcripts made from the audio tapes. Quotes from the transcripts may be used for reporting purposes but no names will be included in any reports.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you feel uncomfortable responding to a question, you may choose not to answer. You may also withdraw at any time. We will send your center a \$15 gift as a thank you for your time, so we will ask for your contact information in order to send you the gift.

### **Better Beginnings Participating Provider Questions**

1. What type of care arrangement do you provide (center, family care)?
2. How many children are in your care?
3. What is your current BB level?
4. Is your program accredited with another organization (NAEYC, for example)?
5. Have you made changes because of BB that increases the quality of the care you provide? How?
6. Has your center benefitted from your participation in BB?
  - 6A. Have you had an increase in interest from parents searching for childcare?
  - 6B. Has your BB status helped you fill available childcare slots?
  - 6C. Have you seen impacts on staff behavior or turnover?
7. Have you seen any benefits of BB for the children and families you serve?
  - 7A. Have you seen an impact on child turnover rates or child outcomes?
  - 7B. Do you know if parents have used the tax credits?
8. Have you used any of the technical assistance supports that the state has set up to support your continuous quality improvement efforts? If yes, what did you find most helpful?
9. Have you used any of the financial supports that the state has set up to support your continuous quality improvement efforts? If yes:
  - 9A. How did you use the funds?
  - 9B. In what area did you make improvements?
  - 9C. What type of impact have you seen at your site because of the funds?
10. Was there anything in the application, assessment, or in meeting the criteria for BB components that you found particularly easy?
11. Was there anything in the application, assessment, or in meeting the criteria for BB components that you found particularly difficult?
12. If you could change anything in Better Beginnings, what would you change?
13. If it was possible to have additional financial support from the state, what would that be and how would it be used?

- 13A. Do you know of other incentives that might increase participation in BB?
14. Is there anything that we have failed to ask that you think is important to understanding how the State can help providers improve quality of care?

**For Lower Level BB Providers Only:**

15. What level do you hope that your center will achieve?
16. What is your timeline for making improvements? Are you planning to reapply before required?
17. Do you see any impediments to making program improvements/achieving a higher BB level?
- 17A. If so, is there information and/or process help that the state could provide to reduce the level of difficulty?

## APPENDIX 3: SIMPLIFICATION EXAMPLE

The UAMS team recommends that the Better Beginnings standards or policies look for ways to reduce the burden of documentation. In some cases, Better Beginnings programs are asked to provide proof of standards more than once, most notably in the Learning Environment component. Because some of these items are observed in the environmental assessments, we recommend that Better Beginnings staff refer to the assessment report for validation rather than require additional proof. Potential standards are offered below as examples of simplifying verification of Learning Environment standards:

Current BB Center	Potential BB Center	Current BB School-Age	Potential BB School-Age	Current BB FCC	Potential BB FCC	ERS Standards
<b>1.C.1 A</b> developmentally appropriate daily program schedule is posted in each classroom/program area.	<b>1.C.1 A</b> developmentally appropriate daily program schedule is posted in each classroom/program area  OR ECERS-R assessment report confirms indicator 34.3.2 met	<b>1.C.1 A</b> developmentally appropriate daily program schedule is posted in each classroom/program area.	<b>1.C.1 A</b> developmentally appropriate daily program schedule is posted in each classroom/program area  OR SACERS report confirms SACERS indicator 37.3 met.	<b>1.C.1 A</b> developmentally appropriate daily program schedule is posted in each program area.	x	Use ERS report rather than require teachers to sign that schedules are posted in BB application. <b>AR Min Lic:</b> There shall be a written daily routine listing developmentally appropriate activities for children” (400.1) <b>ECERS-R 34.3.2</b> Written schedule is posted in room and relates generally to what occurs. <b>ITERS-R</b> -schedule must be observed but not posted. <b>SACERS 37.3.</b> Written schedule is posted in center. <b>FCCERS-R</b> no equivalent <b>Y/YPQA</b> -no equivalent
<b>1.C.2</b> Staff develop and implement written daily plans for each group.	x	<b>1.C.2</b> Staff develop and implement written daily plans for each group.	x	<b>1.C.2</b> Caregivers develop and implement written daily plans for each group.	x	No equivalent
<b>2.C.1</b> All classrooms/program spaces have a minimum of two (2) clearly defined interest centers.	<b>2.C.1</b> All classrooms/program spaces have a minimum of two (2) clearly defined interest centers  OR ECERS-R assessment report confirms indicator 4.3.1 met.  OR ITERS-R assessment report	<b>2.C.1</b> All classrooms/program spaces have a minimum of two (2) clearly defined interest centers if not utilizing single-use spaces.  <i>Single use spaces are exempt from this requirement as long as other program spaces are available to allow</i>	<b>2.C.1</b> All classrooms/program spaces have a minimum of two (2) clearly defined interest centers if not utilizing single-use spaces.  <i>Single use spaces are exempt from this requirement as long as other program spaces are available to allow for</i>	<b>2.C.1</b> Program spaces have a minimum of two (2) clearly defined interest centers.	<b>2.C.1</b> Program spaces have a minimum of two (2) clearly defined interest centers.  OR FCCERS-R assessment report confirms that program achieved a score of at least 3 on 2 of these items: 16. Fine motor, 17. Art, 18. Music and	<b>ECERS-R</b> 4.3.1 At least two interest centers defined. <b>ITERS-R</b> (doesn't specify number of centers. From Notes for Clarification of 7.1, 7.2: “Infants require fewer, more flexible interest areas, while toddlers need a wider variety of play spaces.”) 4.7.1 Suitable space provided for different kinds of experiences...4.7.2 Materials with similar use are placed together to make interest areas. <b>SACERS 4. 4.3.</b> At least one interest center with clearly defined purpose accessible to children. 4.5. Three or more interest centers

Current BB Center	Potential BB Center	Current BB School-Age	Potential BB School-Age	Current BB FCC	Potential BB FCC	ERS Standards
	confirms that program achieved a score of at least 3 on 2 of these items: 15. Fine motor, 16. Active physical play, 17. Art, 18. Music and movement, 19. Blocks, 20. Dramatic play, 21. Sand and water play, or 22. Nature/science.	<i>for other interest center activities</i>	<i>other interest center activities</i>  OR SACERS assessment report confirms indicator 4.5 met		movement, 19. Blocks, 20. Dramatic play, 21. Math/number, 22. Nature/science  OR YYPQA assessment report confirms score of at least 3 on item III-L	defined and conveniently equipped.  <b>FCCERS-R</b> Numbers of required areas not specified. 4.5.3. Materials for different kinds of activities are usually organized by type for productive use by children <b>YYPQA-III-L-3</b> Some, but not all, interest areas contain sufficient materials for several children to work with simultaneously. Some open-ended materials are available. Some learning materials are accessible to children. <b>YPQA</b> No equivalent. Standards address interactions but not learning materials.
<b>2.C.2</b> Written daily plans for each group include all areas of development as defined in the Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework or the Arkansas Framework for Infant and Toddler Care.	x	<b>2.C.2</b> Written daily plans for each group include the Developmental Assets concepts.	x	<b>2.C.2</b> Written daily plans for each group include all areas of development as defined in the Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework or the Arkansas Framework for Infant and Toddler Care.	x	No equivalent
<b>2.C.3.</b> Staff plan and implement daily developmentally appropriate physical activities for all children.	x	<b>2.C.3</b> Staff plan and implement daily developmentally appropriate physical activities for all children/youth.	x	<b>2.C.3</b> Caregivers plan and implement daily developmentally appropriate physical activities for all children.	x	<b>ERS</b> designate that space and equipment for physical activities are available to children but do not specify staff planning or implementation of activities. <b>Y/YPQA</b> no equivalent
<b>3.C.1</b> All classrooms/program spaces have a minimum of three	<b>3.C.1</b> All classrooms/program spaces have a minimum of three	<b>3.C.1</b> All classrooms/program spaces have a minimum of three (3) clearly	<b>3.C.1</b> All classrooms/program spaces have a minimum of three (3) clearly	<b>3.C.1</b> Program spaces have a minimum of three (3) clearly defined interest centers.	<b>3.C.1</b> Program spaces have a minimum of three (3) clearly defined	<b>ECERS-R</b> 4.5.1. At least three interest centers defined and conveniently equipped (Ex. Water provided near art area; shelving adequate for blocks and manipulatives.

Current BB Center	Potential BB Center	Current BB School-Age	Potential BB School-Age	Current BB FCC	Potential BB FCC	ERS Standards
(3) clearly defined interest centers.	(3) clearly defined interest centers.  OR ECERS-R assessment report confirms 4.5.1.  OR ITERS-R assessment report confirms that program achieved a score of at least 3 on three (3) of these items: 15. Fine motor, 16. Active physical play, 17. Art, 18. Music and movement, 19. Blocks, 20. Dramatic play, 21. Sand and water play, or 22. Nature/science.	defined interest centers if not utilizing single-use spaces. <i>Single use spaces are exempt from this requirement as long as other program spaces are available to allow for other interest center activities</i>	defined interest centers if not utilizing single-use spaces. <i>Single use spaces are exempt from this requirement as long as other program spaces are available to allow for other interest center activities</i>  OR SACERS assessment report confirms indicator 4.5 met.  OR YYPQA assessment report confirms score of at least 5 on items II-K and III-L		interest centers.  OR  FCCERS-R assessment report confirms that program achieved a score of at least 3 on 2 of these items: 16. Fine motor, 17. Art, 18. Music and movement, 19. Blocks, 20. Dramatic play, 21. Math/number, 22. Nature/science	<b>SACERS</b> 4.3. At least one interest center with clearly defined purpose accessible to children. 4.5. Three or more interest centers defined and conveniently equipped. <b>FCCERS-R</b> Items 16-22 designate types of materials that may be available to children. <b>YYPQA</b> II-K-5 There are well-defined interest areas in or accessible to the program space. III-L-5 Each interest area contains sufficient materials for several children to work with simultaneously. Most of the available materials in all interest areas are open-ended. Most learning materials are easily accessible to children. <b>YPQA</b> No equivalent. Standards address interactions but not learning materials.
<b>3.C.2</b> Staff maintain a portfolio for each child.	x	<b>3.C.2</b> Staff maintain a portfolio for each child/youth.	x	<b>3.C.2</b> Caregivers maintain a portfolio for each child.	x	No equivalent
<b>3.C.3</b> Facility develops a current written curriculum plan and daily plans that include learning goals for children	x	<b>3.C.3</b> Facility develops a current written curriculum plan and daily plans that include links to ADE K-12 frameworks.	x	<b>3.C.3</b> Facility develops a current written curriculum plan and daily plans that include learning goals for children.	x	No equivalent

# UAMS



COLLEGE OF MEDICINE  
DEPARTMENT OF  
FAMILY AND PREVENTIVE MEDICINE

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS FOR MEDICAL SCIENCES

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