



## Top Ten List: Key Policy Questions for Head Start and QRIS Leaders

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The emergence of QRIS as a major strategy for states to measure and improve the quality of early care and education programs has many implications for Head Start leaders. Achieving greater alignment between the two systems is complicated not only by the state vs. local nature of the funding streams, but also by the fact that Head Start is a well-established national system, while QRIS is an emerging movement that varies dramatically across the states. Most early childhood leaders recognize, however, that synergies do exist and need to be cultivated – and that positive relationships need to be built across the two systems. Head Start leaders have an opportunity to help shape state QRIS so that they support the continued success and high quality of Head Start.

Some of the policy and political issues related to Head Start and QRIS include:

1. **Standards:** Most QRIS states have not yet crosswalked their QRIS standards with Head Start standards. What role should Head Start leaders play in making this happen?
2. **Reciprocity:** While Head Start programs are often included in a state's QRIS, there is currently little reciprocity between the two systems. Once the crosswalks are completed, how can we promote reciprocity, i.e., enable Head Start Performance Standards to serve as an alternative pathway to receiving a rating?

Similarly, can emerging state QRIS be built off of Head Start standards? What role should Head Start State Collaboration Directors play?

3. **Monitoring and Accountability:** Duplicative monitoring can frustrate providers and waste resources. How can states and the Office of Head Start better coordinate and streamline these functions so that providers only have to jump through one set of monitoring hoops?

4. **Technical Assistance and Quality Improvement Infrastructures:**  
State QRIS are creating TA infrastructures to support programs in improving quality. How should this work be coordinated with the Head Start TA Centers?

Similarly, how should Head Start professional development funding and QRIS-driven quality improvement funding be aligned? How can Head Start programs take maximum advantage of QRIS-related support systems? What should states do to make it easier to blend TA funding?

5. **Data:** many states are attempting to build early childhood quality and QRIS data into their longitudinal data systems, including those being developed by state Departments of Education. To what extent does Head Start need to be at these tables at the state level?
6. **Child Assessment:** As states get deeper into child assessments and attempt to align them with QRIS-driven incentives, how can we align state child assessments with those used by Head Start to create a more comprehensive picture?
7. **Incentives for Quality:** states are trying to tie money to their QRIS through tiered reimbursement, tax credits, and other mechanisms. What lessons does Head Start have to share about tying money to quality?
8. **Family Education:** what should states do to make it easier for families to access high-quality services? Who should decide how to give families the information they need about program quality? What can Head Start teach states about streamlining enrollment so families can access the care they need?
9. **Research and Development:** most state QRIS are not yet validated. What research would Head Start leaders like to see that would enable the most effective set of standards to be adopted across all program types?
10. **Political Considerations:** how do we reconcile the tension between Head Start as a direct federal funding stream with the emergence of state-driven comprehensive early childhood systems? How do we preserve Head Start and its many strengths while maximizing the potential of state leadership for early childhood?

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