



2015

ANNUAL REPORT

OUR IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

3,137

**PROFESSIONALS
TRAINED**

174

TRAININGS

296

**COLLEGE
SCHOLARSHIPS**

**AWARDED TO EARLY CARE AND
EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS**

7%

**TURNOVER
RATE FOR
SCHOLARSHIP
RECIPIENTS**

COMPARED TO THE INDUSTRY AVERAGE OF 30%

“Before the importance of early childhood education was widely understood, Qualistar was a leading voice for high-quality early learning environments. That vision to ensure all children have access to exceptional care and education continues today.”

Christine Benero, President and CEO, Mile High United Way

1,902

**HEALTH & SAFETY
QUESTIONS ANSWERED**

12,400

**CHILDREN IMPACTED
BY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
TRAININGS**

\$262,143

**AWARDED FOR CAPITAL
IMPROVEMENT GRANTS**

893

**ASSESSMENTS COMPLETED
THROUGHOUT COLORADO**

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

This is a time of transformation within Colorado's early care and education system. What started 15 years ago is now a reality. With Colorado Shines, the state's new quality rating system that is tied to licensing, quality is no longer optional.

Decades of research show us that early experiences affect the development of a child's brain architecture – the foundation for all future learning, behavior and health. A weak foundation impairs brain architecture and these negative effects last through adulthood. Colorado must support all children to build a strong foundation for learning and development.

Our state looks a lot different than it did 15 years ago when Qualistar Colorado formed to solve a problem – low child care quality. While extensive investment in the early care and education system has taken place, the goal then and the goal now is the same – support more programs to improve their quality leading to better outcomes for children. With the advent of Colorado Shines, the Qualistar Rating™ has been retired; however, Qualistar will continue to be instrumental in driving quality improvement across the state. This is and always has been our mission. We will do this through targeted programs and services that improve teacher and program quality, and by supporting public policy that will incentivize quality improvement.

Our work is girded in assessment (completing almost 1,000 per year), and we are expanding our work to ensure every child has a highly skilled teacher. We're strategically improving teaching practice with meaningful training opportunities, technical assistance and access to post-secondary education.

Qualistar is also advancing quality in the field through original research and reporting. Our statewide research informs decision makers at the Capitol and in local



We know that with access to high-quality child care all children will enter the K-12 school system ready to succeed.

communities. Additionally, with new data on personnel challenges, such as high turnover and low wages, we're advocating for policy solutions to build a stronger workforce. Children thrive when they have secure relationships with their teachers and Qualistar wants to ensure that talented teachers stay in the field and are fairly compensated for their work.

That's what you'll see from us in the future, and I look forward to reporting on these successes.

However, this annual report is a look back on the milestones we have reached and the people we have served. It also signals a sea change. Qualistar has a proud history in quality assessment and now, using assessment as the foundation, we're building a future in quality improvement.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K. Harris'.

Kathryn V. Harris
President and CEO
Qualistar Colorado

QUALIFIED TEACHERS

Children thrive when they have secure, attached relationships with teachers who understand child development and are sensitive to their needs. Qualistar strives to professionalize the early care and education workforce to ensure every child has a teacher prepared to support their academic and emotional growth.



In everyday conversations it is common to talk about the adults who work in child care centers or preschools as caregivers or babysitters, but these professionals are teachers. In the first five years of a child's life, when 90 percent of brain development occurs, early care and education teachers help children develop fine and gross motor skills, learn their numbers and letters, and develop social and emotional skills.

According to an Institute of Medicine and National Research Council report published in spring 2015, "...the adults who provide for the care and education of young children bear a great responsibility for these children's health, development and learning." Given this responsibility, the researchers called for increased post-secondary education requirements for the early care and education workforce.

2,260
PROFESSIONALS

Since 1998, Qualistar has awarded T.E.A.C.H. scholarships to 2,260 professionals.

 **97%**

97 percent of T.E.A.C.H. scholars said they would not have taken college classes without a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship.

\$14.07/hr

Early care and education teachers earn an average of \$14.07 per hour*. This low hourly rate makes it difficult for teachers to afford required college classes.

* Leading Colorado's Early Care and Education Workforce, Qualistar Colorado, April 2016

This is where Qualistar's T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® program has been making strides.

"Twenty years ago, when I opened a child care center, I didn't think I'd ever go back to school," Cheryl Gould, the administrator of Rocky Mountain Children's Discovery Center in Cañon City and a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipient, says. "Without T.E.A.C.H., I would not have received my associates degree in Early Childhood Education and would not be sitting in college classrooms learning about child development while earning my bachelor's degree today."

Since 1998, Qualistar's T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® program has awarded college scholarships to early care and education teachers and directors, paying for 90 percent of their tuition as well as rebates for textbooks, mileage and internet access, and paid release time to help balance work, school and family obligations. After the program, T.E.A.C.H. recipients receive a bonus and make a commitment to stay at their current child care program. These incentives are

one reason there is only a 7 percent turnover rate among T.E.A.C.H. recipients, compared to the staggering 30 percent industry average.

"The incentives are huge, but it's really about becoming a better educator," Cheryl says. "College opened my world to brain development, age-appropriate behaviors and the importance of play."

Cheryl also encourages her teaching staff to continue their educations as well. In fact, every semester Rocky Mountain Discovery Center supports two to three teachers enrolled in the T.E.A.C.H. program.

Higher levels of education for the early care and education workforce is one critical step in professionalizing the field and gaining the recognition these teachers deserve. "We are responsible for future generations, especially when it comes to social and emotional development," Cheryl adds. "If we help children now, their success in school and in the future improves dramatically."

"Through T.E.A.C.H. we do more than invest in educators. We're creating an opportunity for every child to have skilled and committed teachers."

*Susan J. Steele, Executive Director,
Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation*



HEALTHY, SAFE PRACTICES

A child's health, safety and well-being are of the utmost importance. Qualistar's advocacy and training ensure children are safe and early care and education professionals utilize best practices in supporting a child's social-emotional and physical health.



In 2015, in an effort to prevent cases of sudden unexpected infant death, the Colorado Department of Human Services issued new safe sleep guidelines for early care and education programs.

Qualistar advocated for updates to the safe sleep rules and worked with Boulder County to adapt a teacher training to ensure the entire field understood the rule changes. We worked with our network of child care health consultants and 17 local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) offices to train the teachers and assistant teachers who work with infants. Overall, more than 950 educators were trained on safe sleep practices in 2015.

Training is just one part of Qualistar's statewide health and safety work. **Our team advocates for high standards, seeks funding to keep trainings free or low cost, and our staff nurse answers complex clinical questions.** HERE'S HOW WE IMPACTED SAFE SLEEP:

ADVOCACY

Qualistar's health experts and stakeholders weighed in on what is best for infants and what is best practice for professionals.



SUPPORT

Qualistar secured funding from state and national organizations in order to develop and provide the trainings at no cost.



OUTREACH

Qualistar launched a mail, email and social media educational campaign to promote Colorado's new safe sleep rules and training requirement.



TRAINING

Qualistar adapted a state-approved safe sleep protocol and trained more than 100 trainers to deliver the content to the state's early care and education professionals.

“High-quality early childhood education is critical to young children developing the emotional security, social competence and intellectual capacity they need to succeed in school and to become healthy and productive adults.”

*Elsa Holguín, Senior Program Officer,
Rose Community Foundation*



“Once we had the first two people prepared to offer safe sleep trainings, the demand skyrocketed,” notes Lauren Powers, the Professional Development Program Coordinator of the Early Childhood Council of Larimer County.

Using a train-the-trainer model, Qualistar’s Healthy Child Care Colorado master trainer trained others in the content and prepared them to train teachers. The Larimer County CCR&R was able to offer additional trainings, ultimately training 220 professionals who work with infants. “We came back to our programs and had all the resources and materials we needed,” Lauren says. “There were so many updates and new information, but we were prepared.”

Particularly at such a busy time for the people and organizations supporting providers through the new Colorado Shines process, Lauren says that “having a complete safe sleep training packaged and delivered made our lives so much easier.”

Qualistar secured funding to allow CCR&R offices across the state to provide the trainings for free or at a low cost, an important benefit when child care programs must act quickly to train multiple employees. In addition to CCR&Rs,

Qualistar also prepared child care health consultants and Early Childhood Council trainers to deliver the training and make the program widely available in English and Spanish.

 **1,902**
HEALTH AND SAFETY QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Qualistar’s **Healthy Child Care Colorado** Coordinator,

who is a registered nurse, provides technical assistance to programs and professionals across Colorado. In 2015, she answered 1,902 clinical questions.

 **12,400**
CHILDREN IMPACTED

In 2015, Qualistar provided “**I am moving, I am learning**” training at no cost to 348 teachers, impacting more than 12,400 children.

QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Decades of early learning and design research show that the quality of a learning environment impacts educational outcomes and social-emotional development. Qualistar provides capital improvement grants to early care and education programs so they can make facilities improvements that impact children's learning and development.



Ask a family member what they look for when choosing a child care program for their child and they'll talk about the teachers. They might talk about the classroom layout and the number of books available. They might even tell you about the diversity of the teaching staff. What families may not mention, or even notice, is the kitchen where meals and snacks are prepared.

At Family Star Montessori Northwest in Denver, the kitchens are a part of the classroom. "So much happens during meal time," Monica Roers, Executive Director of Family Star, says. "We value family-style dining. Children serve themselves from a bowl of fruit or a bowl of spaghetti, and they sit around the table to have a conversation with their classmates at meal time. In addition, we foster independence and responsibility in children. As children at Family Star learn to feed themselves, they also learn to bus the tables and help clean after every meal and snack."

WHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS MATTER

Alfredo Esguerra, who runs Little Giants Learning Center in Commerce City, eloquently explained the importance of learning environments when he applied for a Qualistar capital improvement grant. Alfredo wrote that "Over the years, the appearance of the floors has become an eye sore and it has reached a point that it makes the place look unattractive

and counters the appeal of the educational experience. Children might not notice or care about the condition of the floors, but it creates a mindset of carelessness and poverty."

Indeed, Alfredo is correct in that high-quality learning environments convey a sense of value while creating a setting in which children are able

“Children might not notice or care about the condition of the floors, but it creates a mindset of carelessness and poverty.”

*Alfredo Esguerra, Owner,
Little Giants Learning Center*



Family Star, like most early care and education programs, didn't have the maintenance funds needed to update the four kitchens that serve its eight classrooms. "You have an HVAC emergency in one section of the building, and routine maintenance like replacing the countertops becomes less of a priority," Monica says.

Since launching our capital improvement grant program in 2007, Qualistar has awarded more than \$2.6 million for nearly 220 projects across the state.

With a grant from Qualistar's capital improvement program, Family Star was able to update the cabinets and countertops in its kitchen, replacing particle board cabinetry and laminate that was peeling away. "It's not just

unsightly," Monica says. "These deteriorating conditions can become unsafe."

With construction completed during a holiday break in December 2015, teachers returned to work and hugged Family Star's facilities manager. With a small investment, it is now easier to prepare meals, clean and involve children in the entire meal process.

"Making facility improvements is really a resource issue," Monica adds. "The tuition we collect and our other sources of operating revenue do not always give us the flexibility we need to make investments to our facilities that can dramatically improve quality."

to thrive. Projects that may not be considered essential, such as replacing too-bright lighting, can dramatically change a child's learning experience.

Environmental psychology and architectural research have shown a correlation between school design and both student achievement and teacher retention. **Children need well-designed spaces to promote active learning** and, in an

industry challenged to retain experienced teachers, facilities can contribute to a positive work environment and enhanced job satisfaction.

The importance of building capacity and having a safe playground or fence is widely understood, but the message learning environments convey to children – especially the most vulnerable – is equally as important.

ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

High-quality professional development is essential for early care and education professionals. Qualistar develops engaging professional development models and trainings tailored to adult learning styles to ensure that every child has an effective teacher.



Photo Courtesy of the Denver Art Museum

Stephanie and Roger Olson, the owners of and primary teachers at Kids' Castle family child care program in Aurora, and Sandy Schneweis, their assistant teacher, are committed to professional development. For this teaching team their own continuing education is, as Stephanie puts it, "the best way to grow as educators and support the families who rely on us."

The Olsons and Sandy are part of the growing momentum to ensure that early care and education professionals are highly trained before entering the classroom and that they enhance their teaching practices throughout their careers. Qualistar's Art Symposium, held in partnership with the Denver Art Museum, was particularly eye-opening for the Olsons.

Guided by the Colorado Competencies for Early Childhood Educators and Administrators, **Qualistar creates and delivers trainings that prepare teachers to provide exceptional learning opportunities to children.**

We use data from our assessments of early care and education classrooms to identify where gaps in knowledge exist in order to develop trainings to fill those gaps.


3,137
TRAINED
TEACHERS &
DIRECTORS

through local partnerships with Child Care Resource and Referral agencies.

Qualistar trained 3,137 early care and education teachers, directors, coaches and child care health consultants. This total is in addition to the trainings Qualistar sponsors

174
TRAININGS



In addition to the trainings conducted by our Child Care Resource and Referral partners, Qualistar offered 174 in-person and webinar trainings across the state on a variety of topics, including business practices for

family child care, nutrition, physical activity and the STEAM Symposium.

“During the Art Symposium, we were both so amazed by creative art expression. We left and immediately went to a book store and bought children’s books about artists,” Stephanie says. “On Monday we were teaching art at another level, giving children the opportunity to express themselves.”

Through our Symposium series, Qualistar partners with large cultural organizations such as the Denver Art Museum, Denver Museum of Nature and Science and the Denver Public Library as well as early education leaders, including RAFT Colorado, Lakeshore Learning and Kodo Kids, to bring educators the latest tools and practices to teach S.T.E.A.M. – science, technology, engineering, art and math – concepts to children ages birth to 5.

The content of each training is connected. “With art, we saw children progress in math and language,” Roger, who also attended Qualistar’s Science Symposium, says. “There are so many different concepts and skills required, so children are working their fine motor development and decision making in addition to cultural awareness and creative expression.”

Inspired by the Art Symposium, Kids’ Castle mounted a gallery exhibit of children’s artwork at a nearby library. Kids’ Castle also partnered with the Denver Art Museum, which hosted three gallery exhibits featuring the children’s artwork.

“Art has changed how we teach,” Stephanie says. “We can use art to address challenging behaviors and engage children. It gives children the tools they need to express themselves and their feelings.”

“In my family, we call child care school because everything is education based. My daughter brings home her projects and I can see that her teachers have gone above and beyond. I have zero doubt that she’ll be ready for kindergarten.”

Amanda Peden, whose daughter attends Kids’ Castle



RELIABLE QUALITY ASSESSMENTS

Assessments are the foundation on which teachers and educational leaders can improve the quality of care and education they provide to children and their families. Qualistar's broad range of reliable assessment tools provide the framework needed to invest strategically in quality improvement.



More than 15 years ago, a group of business leaders, shocked by new research that showed child care in Colorado was mediocre at best, made a pioneering effort to reliably measure quality. In the process these leaders created the Qualistar Rating™, one of the first quality rating systems in the country.

With the advent of Colorado Shines, the Qualistar Rating for early childhood programs has been retired. Colorado now has a required statewide quality rating system, which marks a significant milestone – quality is no longer optional

SCHOOL-AGE ASSESSMENT

In 2015, Qualistar partnered with the Cherry Creek School District to pilot Qualistar's school-age quality assessment for programs that care for and educate children outside of normal school hours. **Now, the Qualistar School-Age Rating is available statewide.**

During the first year, Qualistar conducted assessments for all 43 of Cherry Creek's before- and after-school programs, measuring multiple facets of each program, including student engagement, staff education and qualifications, as well as the programs' choices in age-appropriate activities.

"We are proud to be the first school-age programs in the state to earn the Qualistar

School-Age Rating," Sarah K. Conley, Cherry Creek School District's Extended Child Services Coordinator, says. "The journey encouraged and fueled our staff to provide students with even more rich, meaningful opportunities during out-of-school time."

According to the Afterschool Alliance, nearly one in four families has a child enrolled in an after-school program. Families rely on before- and after-school programs as well as summer camps to keep their children safe. They also recognize the role such programs can play in promoting physical activity, boosting academic skills and supporting healthy social-emotional development – the intangible skills that children need for success in the classroom and throughout their adult lives.

“Early care and education programs can help fix the workforce problems we face in Colorado. Businesses must take action to promote a strong early childhood system that supports not only today’s workforce but also prepares the workforce of tomorrow.”

Cary Kennedy, Former State Treasurer



and quality assessment is a key component of quality improvement.

While discussing her school’s experience with Colorado Shines, Deb Deverell, Head of School at Paddington Station Preschool in Denver, explains that “observation is the platform we use to strengthen the education we provide. When we did our Colorado Shines assessment, it was stressful. We were one of the first programs in the state to try this new system. The assessment reflects best practice in early childhood education, so we’re committed to it.”

For the team at Paddington Station, a once-every-three years Colorado Shines assessment is not enough. “We do self-assessments periodically and we take advantage of assessments that supplement Colorado Shines, such as conducting a playground audit, delving into the Program Administration Scale to further reflect on our practices, and providing time to further understand the CLASS® Assessment that looks for indicators that teachers are fostering strong language and literacy development,” Deb says.

The CLASS® Assessment that Qualistar conducted at Paddington Station was illuminating for Deb and her

teaching staff. “I wasn’t surprised that in the CLASS® Assessment we scored well in interaction, teacher support and the classroom environment, but I was surprised that our teachers had room for improvement in instructional support for children.” Further research revealed that these scores are reflective of a nationwide trend.

Following each CLASS® Assessment, Qualistar offers a quality improvement plan so school leaders know where to start their quality improvement journey. Qualistar provides the same level of detailed analysis for each of our assessments, including assessments of child care center business practices, family child care homes and school-age programs.

For the team at Paddington, the beginning meant investing in a three-fold strategy: professional development, purchasing high-quality learning materials and coaching that explored ways to enhance instructional support for children.

“We don’t do assessment as a marketing tactic. It’s about the kids,” Deb says. “As educators, we owe children the very best start in school.”

AN EARLY INVESTMENT WITH LIFELONG RETURNS

Thanks to the following organizations, companies and individuals who support Qualistar's work.

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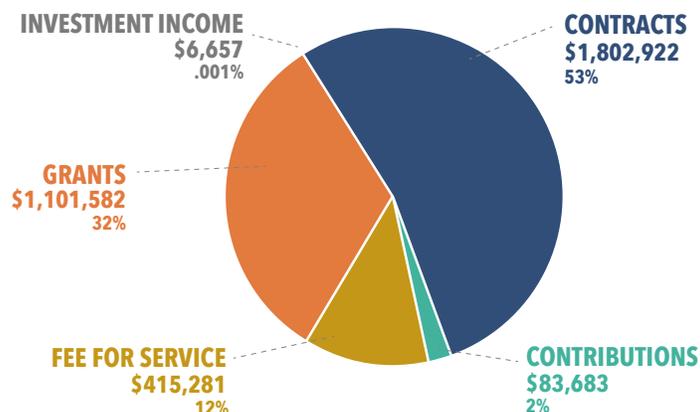
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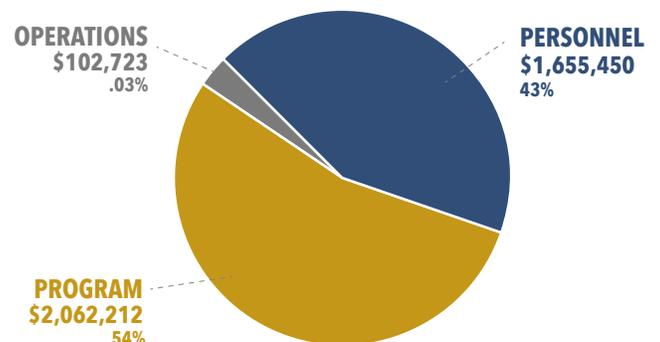
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Fiscal year ended June 30, 2015

REVENUE



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