The purpose of this technical research note is to extend an early childhood program quality model first proposed by Gwen Morgan (1979). In that model, regulatory and non-regulatory interventions were proposed that would influence the overall quality of early childhood programs. This research note will only focus on the regulatory side, but it will attempt to depict the relationships amongst these interventions in mathematical and graphic terms (see Figure 1).

The advantage in this approach is to begin to tie the empirical data being generated by jurisdictions as they collect and analyze the data from licensing, quality initiatives, QRIS systems, accreditation, and Caring for Our Children standards. Although the graphic below and the relationship between the various standards are depicted in a linear fashion, it has been demonstrated that this linear relationship is not as smooth as it appears. The Regulatory Compliance Law of Diminishing Returns is an example of the non-linear relationship between licensing and program quality (Fiene, 2020).

The idea that possibly a step wise progression in moving from licensing to QRIS to accreditation may be more appropriate. Only with the use of the new empirical evidence emerging from these systems will we be able to confirm such a model. For now, what we know is that the move from licensing to QRIS in a linear fashion may not be as smooth as depicted in figure 1. In order to ensure a smooth transition as depicted in figure 1, additional standards, such as from a Pre-K program may need to be introduced.
In figure 1 above, licensing is broken down into the major categories of low, mid, substantial (sub), and full regulatory compliance levels. This progression is depicted as a linear relationship with program quality; however, based upon the Regulatory Compliance Law of Diminishing Returns this is not usually the case. The progression is linear in moving from low to mid to substantial but it decreases or plateaus in moving from substantial to full. QRIS is depicted as a five star system (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5) but in some jurisdictions it may only be a four star system. And lastly is accreditation (acc) which is usually tied to the highest QRIS star level.

Three other program quality interventions need to be considered in this depiction: 1) professional development, 2) Pre-K programs, and 3) Caring for Our Children standards. All these quality interventions have a value added, strengthening effect on the relationship depicted in figure 1.