



Providing Quality Preschool Education is Hard Work

In July of 2012, the Cortez area preschools were selected to participate in the Colorado School Readiness Program. This project provides services that help the early learning facilities attain quality programs that promote academic success and social and emotional wellbeing. The preschools in Cortez recognize that the early years of a child's life are very important. The first five years of development is a very critical period. Providing a quality environment is of utmost importance in a child's growth; at least 85% of a person's emotional and intellectual abilities are formed by the age of five. Children who receive high-quality care demonstrate greater social skills in school and in later life, excel in reading and math, have better attendance records in school, enjoy school more, and are more motivated to learn. Youth who receive quality care in their early years have a higher graduation rate and are more likely to pursue schooling after high school and earn higher income throughout life. Research shows that investing in early learning programs results in significant short, mid and long term benefits.

Participation in the Colorado School Readiness Program shows a commitment to providing quality care for children and paves the way for achievement in school as well as success in later life. The state of Colorado provides school readiness participants coaching and a detailed quality performance profile that identifies strengths and areas for improvement in the overall programs of preschools. Any program that boasts a Qualistar banner outside of their building, or displays a 1, 2, 3 or 4-star certificate on their wall, has worked very hard to achieve the rating and is dedicated to providing the best learning environment for your child.

The rating process is intensive and examines all aspects at work in a learning environment. The schools work to achieve the highest standards adopted by specialists in the field of early childhood. The components within the rating scales support best practices for early childhood learning. Teachers attend workshops that enhance their teaching, practice interactions that promote positive self-esteem in young children, prepare their classroom and structure their day so that each child experiences success in the classroom. After months of preparation, a Qualistar Rater comes to the school; information about the learning environment is collected and assessed by these trained observers. The rater spends several hours in each classroom collecting information and evaluating four components of the program. Many environmental factors are examined, ranging from the health and safety of the program to the teacher

and child interactions. Other pieces that make up the rating include family partnerships, training and education, group sizes, and adult/child ratios.

The process of providing outstanding care for our children is continuous; every day with every child is important in their overall development. Every year that a facility participates in the program enhances the overall quality of the program. Nine schools in Cortez have signed up to participate in the school readiness program, and school readiness sites are evaluated once a year in a six year cycle. A school may earn provisional status or a score that gives them 1, 2, 3, or 4 stars. When choosing a place to care for your child, a Qualistar rating gives assurance that the school is committed to working towards obtaining or maintaining an environment that will promote your child's physical, academic and social growth.

When you walk your child through the door of a facility that participates in the Qualistar rating process, you know that the director and teachers at the school are committed to your child and his or her future, and they deserve praise for the hard work and commitment that have gone towards earning their rating.

Written by Patricia Nelson, MECC's former School Readiness Coordinator/ Coach and Quality Improvement Specialist