



Comparison of State Licensing and QRIS Standards for Infants and Toddlers in Child Care Centers:

Health Services, Nutrition, and Disabilities

Program quality standards protect the health and well-being for all children in early care and education programs. This is done by requiring programs to collect and track information about each child's health status through physical exams, immunization records, and routine health checks. State program standards recognize that nutritious food is the foundation for growth and development of a healthy body. For infants and toddlers, program standards focus on feeding as a time for developing secure attachments to their adult caregivers and social connections with their peers.

Children with physical, developmental, mental, emotional, behavioral, or medical needs may require different levels of care than other children their age. Inclusive child care environments provide important personal and social experiences for children with disabilities and increased social skills and understanding for typically developing children. State program quality standards can provide guidance for child care providers to establish environments that support all children's growth and development.

Program quality standards reflect the structure and practices of programs needed to provide safe, legal, and effective services to infants and toddlers.¹ It is important to not confuse program standards with learning and development guidelines that describe what infants and toddlers need to know and be able to do, and standards for practitioners that describe what early childhood teachers/providers must know and be able to do to work effectively with young children.

Program quality standards describe the expectations for the characteristics or quality of early care and education settings.

Two types of state program quality standards were reviewed and analyzed for this brief: **child care licensing regulations** and **QRIS standards**. This document has been developed to help inform States about current program quality standards about **health services, nutrition, and caring for children with disabilities** in center-based settings.

State **child care licensing regulations** help protect the health and safety of children in out-of-home care. Licensing is a process administered by State governments that sets a baseline of requirements below which it is illegal for facilities to operate, unless they are legally exempt from licensing. States have laws and statutes that give them the authority to regulate child care providers, regulations that include the minimum requirements with which facilities must comply, and policies to support the enforcement of those requirements. Child care licensing regulations cover the broadest content, the largest number of children ages birth to school-age, and largest population of providers in the States. Unless a program falls under one of the legal exemptions, it must comply with licensing regulations in order to operate legally in the States. The information for this brief about licensing was collected

¹ Throughout this brief, the term "program standards" is generally used to describe the expectations for settings. "Licensing regulations," "QRIS standards," and "Head Start Performance Standards" are the terms used for those specific types of program standards.

from the regulations posted on the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (NRC) Web site at <http://nrckids.org/STATES/states.htm>.

QRIS standards are used to assign ratings to programs that participate in QRIS, which is a systemic approach used by a growing number of States to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care programs. These standards provide parents and the public with information about each program's quality. States typically use licensing regulations as the starting point or base of the system, upon which higher levels of quality standards are built. Currently, 36 States have a statewide QRIS model. There are additional States that have a pilot or field test of a QRIS underway, are engaged in planning to develop a QRIS, or operate multiple local QRIS models. The information about QRIS standards was compiled from documents found on State Web sites. The document, *QRIS Quality Standards Web Sites* (2013), by the National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, has links to all States' QRIS standards, at https://occqrisguide.icfwebsiteservices.com/files/QRIS_Standards_Websites.pdf.

Head Start Program Performance Standards are federal regulations that all grantee and delegate agencies must maintain in the provision of Head Start services. Within these standards are specific requirements for Early Head Start programs that serve infants and toddlers, ages birth to three years. Throughout this brief, there are blue text boxes with summaries of the requirements for Early Head Start programs in these content areas. The Head Start Program Performance Standards are available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements>.

Health Services

All States include standards about children's health status (immunizations and/or physical exams) and medical emergencies in their child care licensing regulations. Several States also require the use of a health consultant.² As shown in Table 1, there are significantly fewer States that have standards about children's health in QRIS. QRIS standards are built on a foundation of licensing, and the States rely on licensing to monitor those aspects of care. There is a growing number of QRIS that include standards about conducting screenings of children to assess health and development. Mental health services is a component of Early Head Start that neither licensing nor QRIS address at this time.

² A child care health consultant is a licensed health professional with education and experience in child and community health and child care and preferably specialized training in child care health consultation. *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs*. 3rd Edition (2011), by American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, and National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education, has recommendations related to the use of child care health consultants at <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/1.6.0.1>.

Early Head Start programs are required to:

- Make a determination as to whether or not each child has an ongoing source of continuous, accessible health care [1304.20(a)(1)(i)].
- Obtain from a health care professional a determination as to whether the child is up-to-date on a schedule of age appropriate preventive and primary health care which includes medical, dental and mental health [1304.20(a)(1)(ii)].
- Perform or obtain linguistically and age appropriate screening procedures to identify concerns regarding a child's developmental, sensory (visual and auditory), behavioral, motor, language, social, cognitive, perceptual, and emotional skills [1304.20(b)(1)].
- Establish and implement policies and procedures to respond to medical and dental health emergencies with which all staff are familiar and trained [1304.22(a)].
- Secure the services of mental health professionals on a schedule of sufficient frequency to enable the timely and effective identification of and intervention in family and staff concerns about a child's mental health [1304.24(a)(2)].
- Mental health program services must include a regular schedule of on-site mental health consultation involving the mental health professional, program staff, and parents [1304.24(a)(3)].

(§ 1304.20 Child health and developmental services, § 1304.22 Child health and safety, and § 1304.24 Child mental health are available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1304.>)

Table 1: Health Services

Program Standards for Infants and Toddlers	Number of States with Standards	
	Licensing (N=50)	QRIS (N=36)
Keep information about children's health, including a source of health care, physical exams, and/or immunizations	50	3
Have policies and procedures for responding to medical emergencies	50	0
Employ a health consultant	17	3
Conduct screenings of all children to assess children's health and development	1	14
Make referrals to families for additional health services based on the results of the screenings	4	9
Offer a regular schedule of on-site mental health consultation involving a mental health professional, program staff, and parents	0	0

N = Number of States with statewide standards, and includes the District of Columbia. Idaho does not have statewide licensing requirements, so it is excluded from those data. Arizona, the District of Columbia, and Kansas have QRIS, but their full standards are not available online, so they are excluded from the data except for cases when there was data available from previous research.

See the Appendix for *Table A: Health Services Standards in Each State* that shows which set of program quality standards—child care licensing or QRIS—contain the specific content for each State.

Nutrition for Infants and Toddlers

Nutrition for infants and toddlers is an area where state licensing regulations contain detailed requirements. All States require child care centers to adhere to specific nutritional requirements for the food they serve to children, with many States requiring programs to follow the USDA guidelines for feeding infants and toddlers. Most States’ requirements about how to feed infants include the storage and use of breast milk, as well as some with guidelines for mothers who wish to breastfeed on site. As shown in Table 2, some QRIS include standards about nutrition, but rarely do they include specific requirements about feeding infants.

Early Head Start programs are required to identify each child's nutritional needs. For infants and toddlers, that includes current feeding schedules and amounts and types of food provided, including whether breast milk or formula and baby food is used; meal patterns; new foods introduced; food intolerances and preferences; voiding patterns; and observations related to developmental changes in feeding and nutrition. This information must be shared with parents and updated regularly [1304.23(a)(3)].

(§ 1304.23 Child nutrition is available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1304/1304.23%20Child%20nutrition..htm>.)

Table 2: Nutrition

Program Standards for Infants and Toddlers	Number of States with Standards	
	Licensing (N=50)	QRIS (N=36)
State has requirements for child care programs about nutrition.	50	9
State has requirements for programs about breastfeeding or feeding breast milk to children in care.	43	3
State has requirements for programs about how to feed infants.	49	2

N = Number of States with statewide standards, and includes the District of Columbia. Idaho does not have statewide licensing requirements, so it is excluded from those data. Arizona, the District of Columbia, and Kansas have QRIS, but their full standards are not available online, so they are excluded from the data except for cases when there was data available from previous research.

See the Appendix for *Table B: Nutrition for Infants and Toddlers Standards in Each State* that shows which set of program quality standards—child care licensing or QRIS—contain the specific content for each State.

Caring for Children with Disabilities

There are many States that have child care licensing regulations that address the development of activity plans or accommodating existing plans for children with disabilities. More than one-third of QRIS include this standard. As shown on Table 3, few States address other aspects of caring for children with disabilities in licensing or QRIS. This is an area of focus for Early Head Start programs³ where state standards are not comparable.

³ The blue text box only includes a small sample of the Early Head Start standards about caring for children with disabilities. See Section 1308 for the full set of performance standards in this content area at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1308>.

Early Head Start programs are required to:

- Develop a disabilities service plan providing strategies for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities and their parents [1308.4(a)].
- Include children with disabilities in the full range of activities and services normally provided to all Head Start children and provisions for any modifications necessary to meet the special needs of the children with disabilities [1308.4(c)].
- Arrange or provide special education and related services necessary to foster the maximum development of each child's potential and to facilitate participation in the regular Head Start program unless the services are being provided by the LEA or other agency [1308.4(h)].

(§1308.4 Purpose and scope of disabilities service plan is available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1308/1308.4%20Purpose%20and%20scope%20of%20disabilities%20service%20plan..htm>.)

Table 3: Caring for Children with Disabilities

Program Standards for Infants and Toddlers	Number of States with Standards	
	Licensing (N=50)	QRIS (N=36)
State requires programs to develop activity plans or accommodate existing plans for children with disabilities so that all children can actively participate.	21	13
State requires programs to develop a disabilities service plan aligned with ISFP for each child with disabilities.	10	7
State requires programs to provide information about community resources to families of children with disabilities.	3	6
State requires programs to have materials and equipment that are appropriate for children with disabilities.	11	2
State has requirements that facilities must be accessible to individuals with disabilities.	6	1

N = Number of States with statewide standards, and includes the District of Columbia. Idaho does not have statewide licensing requirements, so it is excluded from those data. Arizona, the District of Columbia, and Kansas have QRIS, but their full standards are not available online, so they are excluded from the data except for cases when there was data available from previous research.

See the Appendix for *Table C: Caring for Children with Disabilities Standards in Each State* that shows which set of program quality standards—child care licensing or QRIS—contain the specific content for each State.

Appendix

The following tables show which set of program quality standards—child care licensing or QRIS—contain the specific content for each State.

Table A

Table A: Health Services Standards in Each State

STATE	Health and Developmental Screenings	Referrals for Health Services	Children’s Health Status	Medical Emergencies	Health Consultant	Mental Health Consultant
AK			Licensing	Licensing		
AL			Licensing	Licensing		
AR			Licensing	Licensing		
AZ ¹			Licensing	Licensing		
CA			Licensing	Licensing		
CO			Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
CT			Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
DC ¹			Licensing	Licensing		
DE	QRIS	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
FL			Licensing	Licensing		
GA	QRIS		Licensing	Licensing		
HI			Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
IA			Licensing	Licensing	QRIS	
ID						
IL	QRIS	QRIS	Licensing	Licensing		
IN			Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
KS ¹			Licensing	Licensing		
KY			Licensing	Licensing		
LA	QRIS	QRIS	Licensing	Licensing		
MA	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing QRIS	
MD	QRIS	QRIS	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
ME	QRIS		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
MI	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing QRIS	Licensing		
MN	QRIS	QRIS	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
MO			Licensing	Licensing		

Table A: Health Services Standards in Each State

STATE	Health and Developmental Screenings	Referrals for Health Services	Children’s Health Status	Medical Emergencies	Health Consultant	Mental Health Consultant
MS			Licensing	Licensing		
MT			Licensing QRIS	Licensing		
NC			Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
ND			Licensing	Licensing		
NE			Licensing	Licensing		
NH			Licensing	Licensing		
NJ			Licensing	Licensing		
NM	QRIS	QRIS	Licensing	Licensing		
NV	QRIS	QRIS	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing QRIS	
NY	QRIS		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
OH	QRIS		Licensing	Licensing		
OK			Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
OR			Licensing	Licensing		
PA	QRIS	QRIS	Licensing	Licensing		
RI	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
SC			Licensing QRIS	Licensing		
SD			Licensing	Licensing		
TN			Licensing	Licensing		
TX			Licensing	Licensing		
UT			Licensing	Licensing		
VA			Licensing	Licensing		
VT			Licensing	Licensing		
WA	QRIS		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
WI			Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
WV			Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
WY			Licensing	Licensing		

Notes:

¹Arizona, the District of Columbia, and Kansas have QRIS, but their full standards are not available online, so they are excluded from the data except for cases when there was data available from previous research.

Table B

Table B: Nutrition Standards for Infants and Toddlers in Each State

STATE	Nutrition	Breastfeeding or Feeding Breast Milk	Infant Feeding
AK	Licensing		Licensing
AL	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
AR	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
AZ ¹	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
CA	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
CO	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
CT	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
DC ¹	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
DE	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
FL	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
GA	Licensing QRIS	Licensing	Licensing
HI	Licensing		Licensing
IA	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
ID	QRIS		
IL	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
IN	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
KS ¹	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
KY	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
LA	Licensing		Licensing
MA	Licensing QRIS	Licensing	Licensing
MD	Licensing QRIS	Licensing	Licensing
ME	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
MI	Licensing QRIS	Licensing	Licensing
MN	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
MO	Licensing		Licensing
MS	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
MT	Licensing	Licensing QRIS	Licensing

Table B: Nutrition Standards for Infants and Toddlers in Each State

STATE	Nutrition	Breastfeeding or Feeding Breast Milk	Infant Feeding
NC	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
ND	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
NE	Licensing	Licensing	
NH	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
NJ	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
NM	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
NV	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS
NY	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing
OH	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
OK	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
OR	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
PA	Licensing		Licensing
RI	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
SC	Licensing QRIS	Licensing	Licensing
SD	Licensing		Licensing
TN	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
TX	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing QRIS
UT	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
VA	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
VT	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
WA	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
WI	Licensing QRIS	Licensing	Licensing
WV	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
WY	Licensing		Licensing

Notes:

¹Arizona, the District of Columbia, and Kansas have QRIS, but their full standards are not available online, so they are excluded from the data except for cases when there was data available from previous research.

Table C

Table C: Caring for Children with Disabilities Standards in Each State

STATE	Service Plan	Community Resources	Program Accommodations	Appropriate Materials and Equipment	Facility Accessibility
AK	Licensing		Licensing		
AL					
AR	QRIS		Licensing		Licensing
AZ ¹	Licensing		Licensing	Licensing	
CA					
CO	Licensing			Licensing	
CT					
DC ¹					
DE	Licensing		Licensing QRIS	Licensing	
FL					
GA			Licensing QRIS		
HI			Licensing	Licensing	
IA				Licensing	
ID		QRIS	QRIS		
IL	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS		
IN	Licensing		QRIS	QRIS	
KS ¹			Licensing		
KY					
LA		QRIS			
MA	Licensing		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
MD	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS		
ME			Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
MI			Licensing	Licensing	
MN	Licensing		QRIS	Licensing	
MO					
MS	Licensing		Licensing		Licensing
MT			QRIS		
NC					
ND			Licensing		

Table C: Caring for Children with Disabilities Standards in Each State

STATE	Service Plan	Community Resources	Program Accommodations	Appropriate Materials and Equipment	Facility Accessibility
NE				Licensing	
NH			QRIS		
NJ					
NM	QRIS	Licensing			Licensing
NV		QRIS	Licensing QRIS		
NY	QRIS		QRIS		
OH			Licensing		
OK			Licensing		
OR	Licensing				
PA	QRIS	Licensing			
RI	Licensing		Licensing		
SC		QRIS			Licensing
SD					
TN		Licensing	Licensing		
TX	QRIS		Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	QRIS
UT					
VA			QRIS		
VT			Licensing		
WA			Licensing		
WI					
WV					
WY			Licensing		

Notes:

¹Arizona, the District of Columbia, and Kansas have QRIS, but their full standards are not available online, so they are excluded from the data except for cases when there was data available from previous research.