



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

Family Engagement

From the moment of birth, infants are dependent on the adults in their lives to have their needs met. This continues throughout childhood, but it is the most critical in the first few years of life. When children spend time in an early care and education setting outside their home, it is important that the child's parents, and any other family members who play a significant role in the child's life, have strong relationships with the other adults caring for the child. Child care programs can begin to build this relationship by having multiple ways for families to engage in their child's program and learning experience. Research shows that parent and family engagement in a child's early learning experiences has a positive, long-term effect on outcomes.¹

Family engagement can be accomplished through many varied strategies and approaches and goes beyond simply allowing parents to have access to the program when their child is onsite. It is important to proactively encourage parents to participate in the program by offering opportunities during the day as well as through other avenues, in the event that the parents' schedules do not allow them to come during the day. These might include volunteer activities for parents, parent participation on committees or projects, parent surveys soliciting feedback, family events, and regular parent teacher conferences, for example.

Program quality standards reflect the structure and practices of programs needed to provide safe, legal, and effective services to infants and toddlers.² 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 **family involvement in the classroom/program, family communication and education, and family support and resources** for the care of infants and toddlers 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

¹*Family Engagement, Diverse Families, and Early Childhood Education Programs: An Integrated Review of the Literature* (2009), by Linda C. Halgunseth and Amy Peterson, National Association for the Education of Young Children, and Deborah R. Stark and Shannon Moodie, Pre-K Now. Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/research/FamEngage.pdf>.

² 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.

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 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 their 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>.

Family Involvement in the Classroom/Program

In comparing standards about family involvement in the classroom, licensing and QRIS differ. Licensing regulations focus on providing opportunities for parents to volunteer in the classroom. As shown in Table 1, QRIS include volunteering, but also encourage further involvement by seeking input from parents and offering a variety of opportunities to interact with other families and contribute to the program.

Early Head Start programs are required to:

Provide parents with opportunities to participate in the program as employees or volunteers [1304.40(d)(3)].
Provide opportunities to include parents in the development of the program's curriculum and approach to child development and education [1304.40(e)(1)].

(§ 1304.40 *Family partnerships* is available at

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1304/1304.40%20Family%20partnerships..htm>.)

Table 1: Family Involvement in the Classroom/Program

Program Standards for Infants and Toddlers	Number of States with Standards	
	Licensing (N=50)	QRIS (N=36)
Invite parents to volunteer in the classroom and/or other aspects of the program	28	19
Invite parent input in curricula, education approaches, and/or nutrition for infants and toddlers	8	22
Offer a variety of opportunities for interaction with parents throughout the year	2	20
Invite parents to serve on program committees and contribute to policy making and other decisions	3	11

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: Family Involvement in the Classroom/Program Standards in Each State* that shows which set of program quality standards—child care licensing or QRIS—contain the specific content for each State.

Family Communication and Education

Table 2 shows that state licensing regulations often include communication with families about the development of infants and toddlers. Communication with families is primarily in the form of a daily report or summary of the child’s eating, sleeping, and voiding patterns, but can also include details about their daily activities and any signs of illness or changes in behavior. QRIS standards for communication with families focuses more on regular meetings with parents and opportunities to provide parent education.

Early Head Start programs are required to provide opportunities for parents to enhance their parenting skills, knowledge, and understanding of the educational and developmental needs and activities of their children and to share concerns about their children with program staff [1304.40(e)(3)].

(§ 1304.40 Family partnerships is available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1304/1304.40%20Family%20partnerships..htm>.)

Table 2: Family Communication and Education

Program Standards for Infants and Toddlers	Number of States with Standards	
	Licensing (N=50)	QRIS (N=36)
Hold parent/teacher conferences for parents of infants and toddlers	15	28
Conduct regular, ongoing and/or written communication with parents of infants and toddlers on topics such as, learning and development, feeding and nutrition, and/or behavior and mental health	27	4
Provide educational opportunities on a variety of topics for the parents of infants and toddlers	4	24

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: Family Communication and Education in Each State* that shows which set of program quality standards—child care licensing or QRIS—contain the specific content for each State.

Family Support and Resources

At this time, no States include standards about family support in their licensing regulations. As shown in Table 3, about 40 percent of QRIS have standards about supporting parents in identifying and accessing additional services in the community. A recent trend in QRIS is incorporating the Strengthening Families™ approach, developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), in their Standards. Strengthening Families is a research-based, strategy to increase family strengths, enhance child development, and reduce child abuse and neglect. The 10 States including Strengthening Families in their QRIS are either implementing self-assessment tools for programs to use to determine how well they are implementing seven Strengthening Families Program Strategies or requiring Strengthening Families’ training.

Early Head Start programs are required to:

- Work collaboratively with all participating parents to identify and continually access, either directly or through referrals, services and resources that are responsive to each family's interests and goals [1304.40(b)(1)].
- Follow-up with each family to determine whether the kind, quality, and timeliness of the services received through referrals met the families' expectations and circumstances [1304.40(b)(2)].
- Make no less than two home visits per program year to the home of each enrolled child [1304.40(i)(2)].

(§ 1304.40 Family partnerships is available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1304/1304.40%20Family%20partnerships..htm>.)

Table 3: Family Support and Resources

Program Standards for Infants and Toddlers	Number of States with Standards	
	Licensing (N=50)	QRIS (N=36)
Support parents in identifying and accessing any additional services in the community	0	15
Conduct home visits with parents of infants and toddlers	0	1
Use the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment tool to assess family engagement practices and policies or complete Strengthening Families training	0	10

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: Family Support and Resources 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: Family Involvement in the Classroom/Program Standards in Each State

STATE	Volunteer in Classroom	Input on Program	Opportunities for Interaction	Parent Committees
AK				
AL				
AR				
AZ	Licensing			
CA				
CO	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	
CT	Licensing	Licensing		
DC	Licensing QRIS	QRIS		
DE	Licensing	QRIS	QRIS	
FL				
GA	Licensing QRIS			QRIS
HI				
IA		QRIS		QRIS
ID	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	
IL	Licensing QRIS	QRIS		
IN	Licensing	Licensing QRIS		
KS				
KY			Licensing QRIS	
LA				QRIS
MA	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
MD	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	

Table A: Family Involvement in the Classroom/Program Standards in Each State

STATE	Volunteer in Classroom	Input on Program	Opportunities for Interaction	Parent Committees
ME	Licensing QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
MI	Licensing QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	
MN				
MO				
MS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	
MT	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	
NC	Licensing QRIS			Licensing
ND	Licensing	Licensing		
NE				
NH	Licensing		QRIS	
NJ	Licensing	Licensing		Licensing
NM	Licensing QRIS			
NV	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
NY	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	
OH	Licensing QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	
OK	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS
OR				
PA	Licensing	QRIS		
RI	Licensing	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
SC				
SD				
TN	Licensing	QRIS		QRIS
TX	Licensing QRIS		QRIS	QRIS
UT				
VA	Licensing	Licensing	QRIS	

Table A: Family Involvement in the Classroom/Program Standards in Each State

STATE	Volunteer in Classroom	Input on Program	Opportunities for Interaction	Parent Committees
VT	Licensing QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	
WA	Licensing			
WI	Licensing	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
WV	Licensing			
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.

Table B**Table B: Family Communication and Education Standards in Each State**

STATE	Parent/Teacher Conferences	Ongoing Communication	Educational Opportunities for Families
AK			
AL			
AR		Licensing	QRIS
AZ ¹		Licensing	
CA			
CO	QRIS		QRIS
CT			
DC ¹	QRIS		QRIS
DE	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	
FL			
GA	QRIS		QRIS
HI		Licensing	Licensing
IA	QRIS	Licensing	
ID	QRIS		QRIS
IL	QRIS	Licensing	
IN	Licensing QRIS	Licensing	
KS ¹		Licensing	
KY			
LA	QRIS		QRIS
MA	Licensing QRIS	Licensing	QRIS
MD	QRIS	Licensing	QRIS
ME	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
MI	QRIS	Licensing	QRIS
MN	Licensing	Licensing	QRIS
MO			
MS	QRIS	Licensing	Licensing QRIS
MT	QRIS		QRIS

Table B: Family Communication and Education Standards in Each State

STATE	Parent/Teacher Conferences	Ongoing Communication	Educational Opportunities for Families
NC	Licensing QRIS		Licensing
ND		Licensing	
NE			
NH	QRIS		
NJ	Licensing		
NM	QRIS		QRIS
NV	QRIS	Licensing	QRIS
NY	Licensing QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
OH	Licensing QRIS	Licensing	QRIS
OK	Licensing QRIS	Licensing	Licensing QRIS
OR		Licensing	
PA	QRIS		QRIS
RI	Licensing QRIS	Licensing	
SC	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	QRIS
SD			
TN	QRIS	Licensing	QRIS
TX	QRIS	Licensing	
UT		Licensing	
VA	Licensing	Licensing	
VT	Licensing		QRIS
WA		Licensing	QRIS
WI	Licensing QRIS		QRIS
WV	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: Family Support and Resource Standards in Each State

STATE	Community Services	Home Visits	Strengthening Families Assessment
AK			
AL			
AR	QRIS		QRIS
AZ ¹			
CA			
CO			
CT			
DC ¹			
DE			
FL			
GA	QRIS		QRIS
HI			
IA			
ID	QRIS		QRIS
IL	QRIS		
IN			
KS ¹			
KY			
LA	QRIS		
MA	QRIS		QRIS
MD	QRIS		
ME	QRIS		
MI	QRIS		
MN	QRIS		
MO			
MS			
MT			
NC			
ND			
NE			
NH			QRIS

Table C: Family Support and Resource Standards in Each State

STATE	Community Services	Home Visits	Strengthening Families Assessment
NJ			
NM		QRIS	
NV			
NY			QRIS
OH	QRIS		
OK	QRIS		
OR			
PA	QRIS		
RI			QRIS
SC			
SD			
TN			
TX			
UT			
VA			
VT	QRIS		QRIS
WA	QRIS		QRIS
WI			QRIS
WV			
WY			

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.