



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

Learning Environment, Developmental Domains, and Assessment

Infants and toddlers are strongly influenced by the people, environments, and routines they experience each day. This is particularly true for very young infants who depend on adults to support them as they explore their environment. The physical environment, group size, daily schedules, plans, and routines must foster the establishment of small intimate groups in which relationships with trusted caregivers can develop.¹

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 found in **learning environment, developmental domains addressed in learning activities, and observation/assessment methods to track children's development** 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 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>.

¹ Lally, J. R. (2000, March). Infants have their own curriculum: A responsive approach to curriculum planning for infants and toddlers. *Head Start Bulletin, Issue 67*. Retrieved from http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/ecdh/eecd/Curriculum/Definition%20and%20Requirements/edudev_art_00032_071005.html.

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.

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 the States' 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://occrisguide.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>.

Learning Environment for Infants and Toddlers

The learning environment standards in licensing and QRIS differ. In general, licensing regulations require that child care centers have daily planned activities and support infant's exploration of the environment, while QRIS generally rely on the Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) as a measure.³ QRIS standards build on the foundation of licensing, so States with a QRIS rely on licensing to cover some aspects of providing a supportive environment for infant and toddler development and do not include those specific requirements in their QRIS standards.

As shown in Table 1, about half of the States require a primary caregiver for infants and toddlers in their licensing requirements. Research has shown that limiting the number of adults with whom an infant interacts fosters reciprocal understanding of communication cues that are unique to each child. This leads to a sense of trust of the adult by the infant that the infant's needs will be understood and met promptly.⁴

Early Head Start programs must encourage the development of secure relationships in out-of-home care settings for infants and toddlers by having a limited number of consistent teachers over an extended period of time [1304.21(b)(1)(i)].

(§ 1304.21 Education and early childhood development is available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1304/1304.21%20Education%20and%20early%20childhood%20development.htm>)

³ Information about environment ratings scales is available from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at <http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/>.

⁴ Cassidy J., Shaver, P., eds. 1999. *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research and clinical applications*, 671-87. 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press.

Table 1: Learning Environment Standards for Infants and Toddlers

Program Standards for Infants and Toddlers	Number of States with Standards	
	Licensing (N=50)	QRIS (N=36)
Primary caregiver for each infant and toddler	24	1
Written plan of daily learning activities for infants and toddlers	36	10
Actively encourage and support infants’ exploration of the environment	14	4
Use ITERS to assess the learning environment	0	28

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: Learning Environment Standards in Each State* that shows which set of program quality standards—child care licensing or QRIS—contain the specific content for each State.

Developmental Domains Addressed in Learning Activities

State licensing regulations often include requirements that learning activities align with the domains of child development, such as social, physical, cognitive, emotional, language/literacy, and cultural development. Table 2 shows that almost three-quarters of States address multiple developmental domains in child care licensing requirements.

Early Head Start programs are required to:

Support the social and emotional development of infants and toddlers by promoting an environment that:

- (i) Encourages the development of self-awareness, autonomy, and self-expression; and
- (ii) Supports the emerging communication skills of infants and toddlers by providing daily opportunities for each child to interact with others and to express himself or herself freely. [1304.21(b)(2)]

Promote the physical development of infants and toddlers by:

- (i) Supporting the development of the physical skills of infants and toddlers including gross motor skills, such as grasping, pulling, pushing, crawling, walking, and climbing; and
- (ii) Creating opportunities for fine motor development that encourage the control and coordination of small, specialized motions, using the eyes, mouth, hands, and feet. [1304.21(b)(3)]

(§ 1304.21 Education and early childhood development is available at

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1304/1304.21%20Education%20and%20early%20childhood%20development..htm>)

The way State QRIS standards address child development in learning activities is a bit different. About half of the state QRIS include a specific alignment with the states’ infant-toddler learning and development guidelines (ELGs).⁵ Through this alignment programs are expected to develop their curriculum and learning activities based on the ELGs. There is one State QRIS (Texas) that does not have alignment with ELGs but does have standards that programs must address developmental domains in their learning activities. It should be noted that most of the States with QRIS standards that do not have alignment with ELGs use the ITERS, which includes subscales that address in some capacity the developmental domains mentioned above .

Table 2: Developmental Domains Addressed in Learning Activities/Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers

Program Standards for Infants and Toddlers	Number of States with Standards	
	Licensing (N=50)	QRIS (N=36)
Alignment with infant/toddler learning and development guidelines (e.g., learning activities are based on ELGs)	2	17
Address multiple developmental domains in the learning activities for infants and toddlers	36	17*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Social development 	33	18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Emotional development 	31	18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Physical development (i.e., gross motor and fine motor) 	36	18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cognitive development 	30	18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Language development (i.e., communication with infants/toddlers) 	29	18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cultural development (e.g., providers need to understand the child’s family culture and/or speak the child’s language) 	18	13

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.

*Developmental domains are addressed in QRIS through alignment with the early learning and development standards.

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

⁵ Links to each State’s early learning guidelines is available in the document, *State/Territory Early Learning Guidelines* (2011), by the National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement at https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/075_1301_state_elgs_web_0.pdf.

Observation and Assessment of Children

Child assessment includes activities (observations, portfolio development, and appraisal of performance using multiple indicators) that measure and track a child’s learning and development. At the program level, the results inform classroom practice, curriculum development, and learning activities. Results are typically shared with parents and are also used to address the needs of individual children.

Very few States include the observation and assessment of children in licensing requirements; however, most of the States with a QRIS have standards regarding child assessment. Instead of requiring specific assessment tools, the QRIS tend to have criteria related to observing and documenting children’s development and using the results to inform families and improve practice. Table 3 provides the number of States with standards about observation and/or assessment in their standards.

Early Head Start programs are required to collect information on each child's functioning in these areas: gross and fine motor skills, perceptual discrimination, cognition, attention skills, self-help, social and receptive skills and expressive language. [1308.6(d)]

(§1308.6 *Assessment of children* is available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1308/1308.6%20%20Assessment%20of%20children.htm>)

Table 3: Observation and Assessment of Children

Program Standards for Infants and Toddlers	Number of States with Standards	
	Licensing (N=50)	QRIS (N=36)
Use observation and/or assessment methods to document children’s development	4	25
Share assessment results with families	4	20
Use assessment results to individualize curriculum or improve practice	4	19

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: Observation and Assessment 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 the which set of program quality standards—child care licensing or QRIS—contain the specific content for each State.

Table A

Table A: Learning Environment Standards in Each State

STATE	Primary Caregiver	Learning Activities Plan	Infants' Exploration of Environment	ITERS Used to Assess Learning Environment
AK	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
AL	Licensing		Licensing	
AR		QRIS	Licensing	QRIS
AZ ^{1,2}		Licensing		
CA		Licensing		
CO				QRIS
CT		Licensing	Licensing	
DC ²				QRIS
DE	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	QRIS
FL		Licensing	Licensing	
GA		Licensing		QRIS
HI	Licensing	Licensing		
IA	Licensing	Licensing		QRIS
ID				QRIS
IL	Licensing	Licensing		QRIS
IN	Licensing	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	
KS ²				QRIS
KY		Licensing QRIS		QRIS
LA		Licensing QRIS		QRIS

Table A: Learning Environment Standards in Each State

STATE	Primary Caregiver	Learning Activities Plan	Infants' Exploration of Environment	ITERS Used to Assess Learning Environment
MA		Licensing QRIS	Licensing	QRIS
MD	Licensing	Licensing QRIS		QRIS
ME		QRIS		
MI	Licensing			
MN		Licensing		
MO	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
MS				QRIS
MT	Licensing QRIS	Licensing		QRIS
NC	Licensing	Licensing		QRIS
ND		Licensing		
NE	Licensing			
NH	Licensing	Licensing		QRIS
NJ	Licensing		Licensing	
NM		Licensing		QRIS
NV	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	QRIS
NY		Licensing	QRIS	QRIS
OH	Licensing	Licensing QRIS		QRIS
OK	Licensing			QRIS
OR		Licensing		
PA		Licensing		QRIS
RI	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	QRIS
SC		Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	QRIS
SD		Licensing		

Table A: Learning Environment Standards in Each State

STATE	Primary Caregiver	Learning Activities Plan	Infants' Exploration of Environment	ITERS Used to Assess Learning Environment
TN	Licensing	Licensing		
TX	Licensing	Licensing QRIS	QRIS	
UT				
VA ¹		Licensing	Licensing	QRIS
VT	Licensing			
WA		Licensing		QRIS
WI	Licensing	Licensing		QRIS
WV	Licensing	Licensing		
WY				

Notes:

¹Licensing standards are different for infants than for toddlers.

²Arizona, 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: Developmental Domains Addressed in Standards in Each State**

STATE	Alignment with ELGs for Infants & Toddlers	Multiple Developmental Domains Addressed	Developmental Domains Addressed in Learning Activities for Infants and Toddlers					
			Social	Emotional	Physical	Cognitive	Language	Cultural
AK		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing		
AL							Licensing	
AR	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
AZ ²								
CA								
CO								
CT		Licensing		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
DC ²								
DE	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing
FL		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing		
GA	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS
HI		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing		Licensing
IA		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
ID								
IL	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	QRIS
IN	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing
KS ²		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
KY		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing		Licensing
LA	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	
MA	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS

Table B: Developmental Domains Addressed in Standards in Each State

STATE	Alignment with ELGs for Infants & Toddlers	Multiple Developmental Domains Addressed	Developmental Domains Addressed in Learning Activities for Infants and Toddlers					
			Social	Emotional	Physical	Cognitive	Language	Cultural
MD	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
ME	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
MI		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing		QRIS
MN	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS		Licensing
MO					Licensing			
MS								
MT	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	
NC		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing		
ND		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
NE		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
NH		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
NJ		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
NM	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	QRIS
NV		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
NY	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS
OH	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	
OK		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
OR		Licensing		Licensing	Licensing		Licensing	
PA	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS	Licensing QRIS

Table B: Developmental Domains Addressed in Standards in Each State

STATE	Alignment with ELGs for Infants & Toddlers	Multiple Developmental Domains Addressed	Developmental Domains Addressed in Learning Activities for Infants and Toddlers					
			Social	Emotional	Physical	Cognitive	Language	Cultural
RI		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing QRIS
SC								
SD		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
TN		Licensing	Licensing		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	
TX ¹		Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	QRIS
UT								
VA ¹		Licensing	Licensing		Licensing		Licensing	
VT		Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing	Licensing
WA	QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS
WI	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	
WV		Licensing	Licensing		Licensing		Licensing	Licensing
WY								

Notes:

¹Licensing standards are different for infants than for toddlers.

² 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.

Table C

Table C: Observation and Assessment Standards in Each State

STATE	Child Observation or Assessment Methods	Assessment Results Shared with Families	Assessment Results Used for Curriculum and Practice
AK			
AL			
AR	QRIS		
AZ ¹			
CA			
CO	QRIS	QRIS	
CT			
DC ¹	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
DE	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS
FL			
GA	QRIS		QRIS
HI			
IA			
ID	QRIS	QRIS	
IL	QRIS		QRIS
IN	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
KS ¹			
KY	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
LA			
MA	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS
MD	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
ME	QRIS	QRIS	
MI	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
MN	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
MO			
MS			
MT	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
NC			

Table C: Observation and Assessment Standards in Each State

STATE	Child Observation or Assessment Methods	Assessment Results Shared with Families	Assessment Results Used for Curriculum and Practice
ND			
NE			
NH			
NJ			
NM	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
NV	Licensing QRIS	Licensing	Licensing
NY	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
OH	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
OK	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
OR			
PA	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
RI	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
SC			
SD			
TN			
TX			
UT			
VA			
VT	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS	Licensing QRIS
WA	QRIS	QRIS	QRIS
WI	QRIS	QRIS	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.