QRIS Compendium
2016 Fact Sheets

NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Quality Assurance

Early Childhood
National Centers

Rating Structures and Processes

QRIS define both structures and processes to assign quality ratings to programs. The specific requirements States have put in place to guide the rating process often depend on the structure of the system, whether it is based on points, levels, or both, and the individual steps programs must take prior to receiving ratings. This fact sheet provides a summary of the types of QRIS rating structures being used and summarizes the common features of the rating process for the 41 QRIS in the United States.

> This fact sheet is one of a series about the state of quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) in the United States. In 2016, there were 41 fully operational QRIS in the United States.[1] Data are from the QRIS Compendium (http://QRIScompendium.org), a catalog of the QRIS operating in the United States as of October 31, 2016.[2]

Rating Structures

♦ The most common type of rating structures used in 2016 were block structures (19 QRIS, 46 percent), as shown in Figure 1. Block structures require programs to meet all the standards at one level before moving to the next level.

♦ Six QRIS (15 percent) use a points structure, which allows for multiple pathways to higher levels of quality based on the programs' ability to meet cut-off scores.

♦ Sixteen QRIS (39 percent) are hybrid structures with both block and point features. Seven of these are structured as blocks at early levels and points at later levels.

  ▪ Four are largely point-based systems with some specific requirements.

  ▪ Two are a mix of points and blocks at all levels.

  ▪ Three additional QRIS (Nevada, New Hampshire, and South Carolina) each have their own unique hybrid structures.

Since 2014, two States have changed their rating structures. **Virginia** changed from a point structure to a block structure. Delaware, went from a statewide block system in 2008 to a hybrid system in 2012. Delaware uses points-based standards and thresholds for the environment rating scales (ERS), and in 2014 to 2016 phased in further modifications to add more required elements.

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[1] State with a QRIS: AR, AZ, CA, CO, DE, FL (3 localities), GA, IA, ID, IL, IN, KY, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MS, MT, NC, ND, NE, NH, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, UT, VA, VT, WA, WI. While most QRIS operate at the state level, three represent separate counties in Florida (Duval, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach). The California QRIS, while represented in the Compendium as one system, is implemented at the county level and does not include all counties in the state.

[2] Data compiled in 2014 and 2015 from http://QRIScompendium.org are used to show change in the number of QRIS with specific features. These data are supplemented by an earlier version of the Compendium titled *Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations*, which was released in 2010. Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/compendium-of-quality-rating-systems-and-evaluations. Publicly available details about QRIS standards and implementation and interviews with QRIS administrators also inform the fact sheet.

**Figure 1: Number of QRIS with Rating Structure Types, 2016**

- Block
- Hybrid
- Points
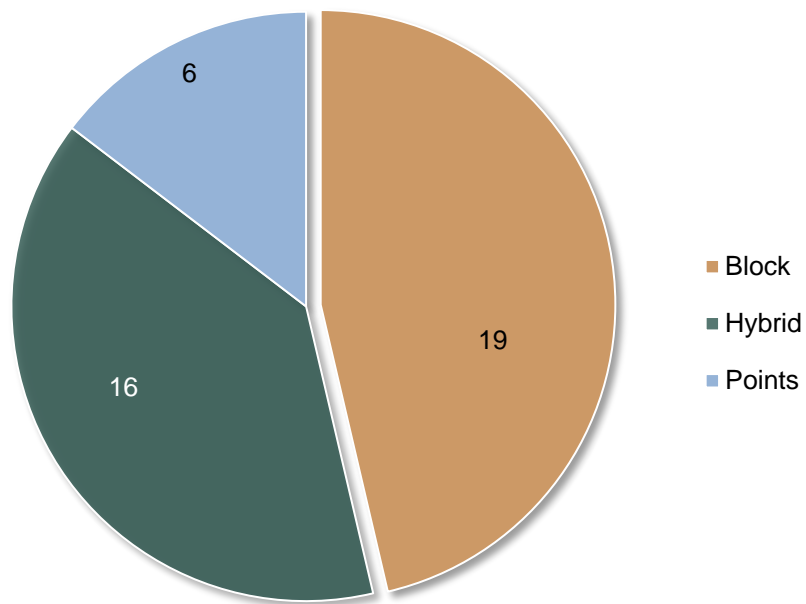
Note: N = 41 QRIS

Rating Levels

♦ The number of levels QRIS use to rate programs ranges from three to six.

♦ Figure 2 shows that five-level systems are the most common, used by 25 QRIS (61 percent).

♦ Four-level systems are the second-most common, used by 9 QRIS (22 percent).

Figure 2: Number of Levels in QRIS, 2016

NUMBER OF LEVELS IN QRIS, 2016

- 3 levels
- 4 levels
- 5 levels
- 6 levels
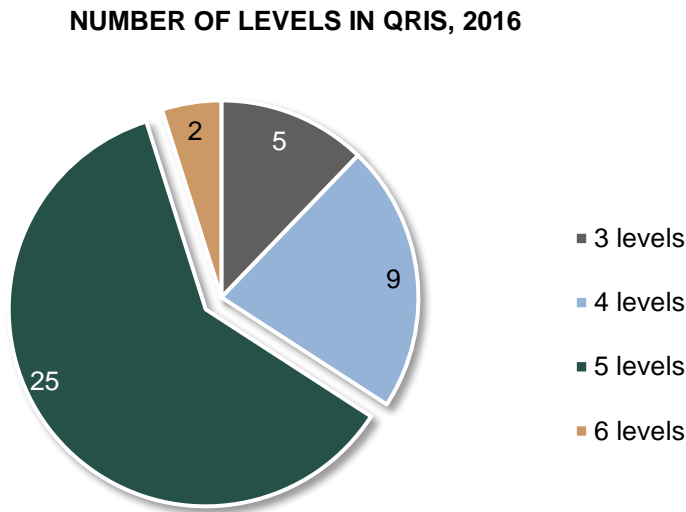
Note: N = 41 QRIS

Rating Process

Rating processes commonly involve submission of an application (in 95 percent of QRIS) and supporting documentation (in 85 percent of QRIS).

♦ Approximately half of QRIS (51 percent) require a self-assessment, up from 45 percent in 2015.

♦ In 23 systems (56 percent), programs apply for a particular rating level.

Most systems (36 QRIS; 88 percent) provide assistance to programs in preparing or submitting the required documentation, up from 32 QRIS (80 percent) in 2015.

♦ In half of the QRIS (21 of 41 QRIS), programs attend an orientation before submitting their rating applications.

Alternative Pathways to Ratings

Alternative pathways to rating involves awarding points or levels to certain types of programs, for example school-based, accredited, or Head Start programs, based on other standards they have met that are not in the QRIS. A crosswalk between standards from the other sector and the QRIS is often completed to ensure the alternative pathway meets the standards of the QRIS.

♦ Approximately half of QRIS have some form of alternative rating process, recognizing or giving credit for quality assessed in other systems (20 of 41 QRIS).

♦ Of these, the most common process involves an automatic or accelerated rating for accredited centers (19 QRIS, 46 percent) or family child care homes (16 QRIS; 39 percent).

♦ A smaller number (7 QRIS; 17 percent) have automatic or accelerated processes for school-based early childhood programs.

Verification of Quality Indicators

QRIS commonly include onsite observations to collect information for the rating (35 QRIS; 85 percent) or to verify self-reported information (17 QRIS; 41 percent). The average time from program verification to notification of a rating is 5 months, varying from immediate notification of rating for systems that include an automatic pathway to rating up to 18 months.

Who Assigns Ratings

♦ Twenty-three QRIS (56 percent) have one or more individuals working at the QRIS managing agency who are responsible for reviewing rating documentation and assigning program ratings.

♦ In nine systems (22 percent), an external individual is responsible for assigning the ratings.

♦ Three QRIS (7 percent) have rating processes that are partially or fully automated.

♦ The remaining systems either have a combination of internal and external raters or a process unique to their systems.

Data Systems and Automation

♦ Most QRIS (39 QRIS; 95 percent) use a data system to collect and manage the data about programs participating in the QRIS. Data systems are used to meet a variety of goals, including

  ▪ Federal and state reporting requirements (38 QRIS; 93 percent),

  ▪ Evaluation of the system (37 QRIS; 90 percent), and

  ▪ QRIS program implementation (30 QRIS; 73 percent).

♦ Most QRIS (36; 88 percent) also use the data systems to facilitate the rating process.

♦ Online applications (21 QRIS; 51 percent) are the most common way that the rating process is automated by data systems, followed by assignment of rating (19 QRIS; 46 percent) and verification of documentation (18 QRIS; 44 percent).

Receipt of Rating Level

♦ In 56 percent of QRIS (23), programs apply for a specific rating level.

♦ Programs receive the rating they qualify for without applying for a specific level in 14 (34 percent) of systems.

♦ Three (7 percent) of systems provide a choice for programs to apply for a specific rating level, or let the system determine their rating level based on their application and documentation.

♦ In two QRIS (North Dakota and Virginia), programs must progress sequentially through the rating levels, starting with entry at the first level.

Length of Time Rating Is Valid

All QRIS have a length of time ratings are valid before programs are required to get re-rated. The most frequent length of time program ratings are valid is 3 years, ranging from 1 to 5 years, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Length of Time Program Ratings Are Valid, 2016

Legend:
- Other
- Varies based on rating level
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
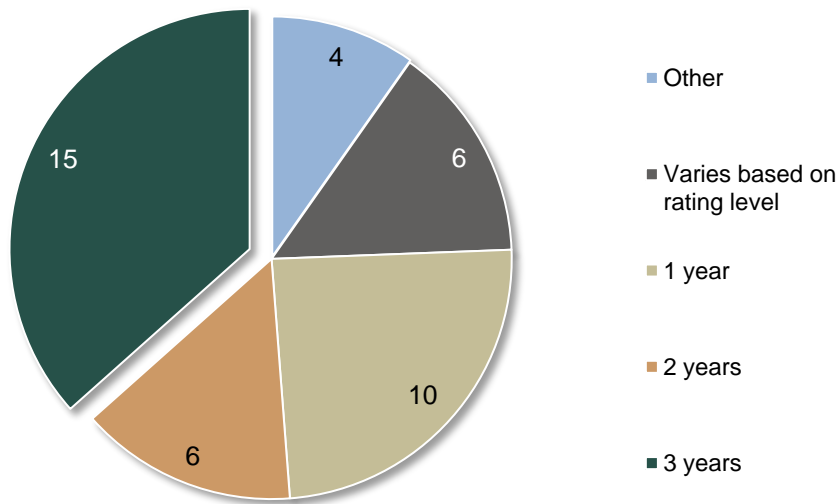
Note: N = 41 QRIS

Re-rating and Appeals

Most QRIS (35; 85 percent) use a similar rating process for designating initial ratings and for re-rating programs.

♦ The most common reasons for re-rating to occur before a program's rating expires are change of director, change of location, teacher turnover, and licensing violations, as shown in Figure 4.

♦ Thirteen (32 percent) QRIS allow programs to request new ratings before their current ratings expire.

♦ Examples of other causes of re-ratings include a program requesting a re-rating at a higher level or failing to provide required paperwork between rating periods.

♦ Most QRIS have an appeal process (37; 90 percent).

Figure 4: Causes for Re-rating to Occur Before Rating Expires, 2016

Category	Value
Change of location	23
Licensing violation	18
New director	7
Teacher turnover	6
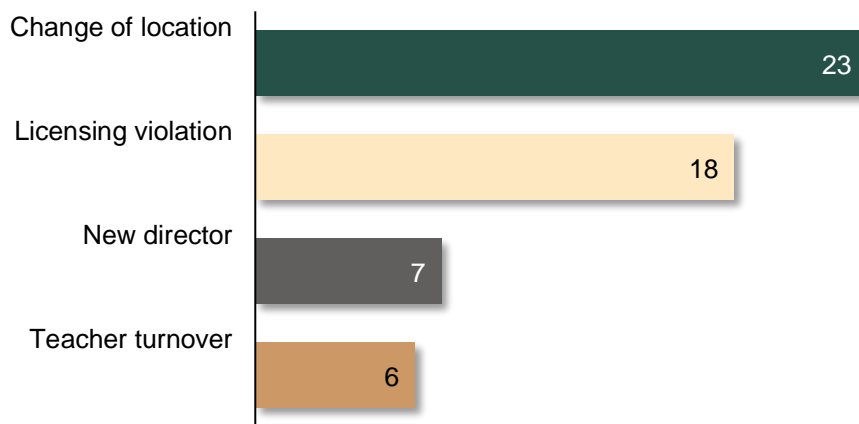
Note: N = 41 QRIS. Some are in multiple categories.

QRIS Showcase: Colorado Shines

In 2012 Colorado developed a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System that embedded licensing as the first level of quality. This system became known as Colorado Shines. Colorado Shines is the result of several years of collaborative design from early childhood stakeholders across the state and country. A design committee comprised of early childhood professionals, data specialists, advocates, business leaders and national research experts coordinated the Colorado Shines framework. The final version of the Colorado Shines framework was published In September 2013.

The Colorado Shines is a system for assessing, enhancing, and communicating the level of quality in early care and education programs. This QRIS provides a quality framework for rating all licensed child care programs serving children birth to five using a common set of research-based standards, specifically for incentivizing and supporting programs to maintain and increase quality over time. Licensed programs were first evaluated using the new Colorado Shines quality standards in February 2015

The Colorado Shines QRIS is a block and point system. The first two levels of the system are blocks, and levels three through five are points based. Licensed family child care and center-based programs serving children prior to kindergarten gain automatic entry into the system at level one. In addition to having a license in good standing, level two programs conduct a quality self-assessment, develop a quality improvement plan, enter all staff into the Professional Development Information System, and all staff members complete online training. A Colorado licensing specialist confirms compliance with level two requirements.

One of Colorado Shines' goals in converting to a hybrid structure was to make initial entry into the system seamless with licensing. Programs can experience the benefits of participating in the system without undertaking any additional effort beyond licensing. The strategy has been effective in moving programs to level two and higher. Colorado's Early Childhood Councils have been key in providing outreach to providers and connecting them to benefits such as technical assistance and financial supports. Another goal of the hybrid system was to make the indicators at levels three through five very flexible in terms of which elements programs choose for earning points.

Programs applying for ratings at levels three through five must earn a foundational score on the environment rating scale (ERS) and points in the following areas: learning environment, family partnerships, leadership/management and administration, workforce qualifications, and child health. When a program requests a rating at levels three through five, the Colorado Shines rating administrator will contact the program to provide an orientation to the rating process. The main components of the rating process include an onsite ERS observation, an onsite quality indicators observation, document submission to the QRIS system, and staff and parent surveys. Programs submit documentation online into the Colorado Shines technology system with annotation explaining what indicator elements are supported by the documentation. For example, a program might upload its written policies and procedures to meet an indicator for leadership/management and administration or a flyer for a family event to meet a family partnerships indicator. A Colorado quality rating specialist reviews a program's documentation, data from the observation, and workforce data to calculate a final rating. The time from a program's request for rating to receipt of final rating is typically 3 months, but priority is given to programs that serve a high number of children with high needs. Ratings are valid for 3 years.

Programs can also earn a rating level based on an alternative pathway. An alternative pathway is reserved for programs that have worked towards improving program quality by becoming accredited by a Colorado Shines-approved accrediting organization or through a local certificate program or non-accrediting alternative pathway (qualifying school districts and Head Start programs (grantees and delegates only)). Programs that are recognized by an alternative pathway within Colorado Shines can attain a Level 2, Level 3, or Level 4 quality rating. A rating received through an alternative pathway are valid once the program has been recognized by an approved accrediting body and the program completes the alternative pathway requirements within Colorado Shines. The rating will be in effect as long as the Colorado Shines eligibility and the accreditation or non-accreditation requirements are maintained.

References

The Build Initiative & Child Trends. (2016). *A Catalog and Comparison of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems* (QRIS) [Data System]. Retrieved from http://qriscompendium.org/

Mathematica Policy Research Inc. & Child Trends. (2010). *Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations*. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from
https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/compendium-of-quality-rating-systems-and-evaluations

The National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance (ECQA Center) supports State and community leaders and their partners in the planning and implementation of rigorous approaches to quality in all early care and education settings for children from birth to school age. The ECQA Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

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