

Common Categories of QRIS Quality Standards

This material was developed under a previous contract with the Office of Child Care. While these materials are up to date, the National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement plans to issue an Information Product later this year that will update and/or expand on these materials. The National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement does not endorse any non-Federal practice, organization, publication, or resource.

About QRIS

A quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. Similar to rating systems for restaurants and hotels, QRIS award quality ratings to early and school-age care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards. By participating in their State's QRIS, early and school-age care and education providers embark on a path of continuous quality improvement. Even providers that have met the standards of the lowest QRIS levels have achieved levels of quality that are beyond the minimum requirements to operate.

QRIS are composed of five common elements: (1) standards; (2) accountability measures; (3) program and practitioner outreach and support; (4) financial incentives; and (5) parent/consumer education efforts.

Common Categories of Standards

QRIS standards are used to assign ratings to programs that participate in QRIS, providing parents and the public with information about each participating program's quality. States typically use licensing standards as the starting point, or base, of the system, on which higher levels of quality standards are built. Every QRIS contains two or more levels of standards beyond licensing, with incremental progressions to the highest level of quality as defined by the State. Systems vary in the number of levels and number of standards identified in each level. The types of standards used by QRIS to assign ratings are based on research about the characteristics of programs that produce positive child outcomes.

The following is a sample of **common categories of standards** used by States to assign quality levels to participating programs. Included within the categories are examples of criteria for meeting these standards. Although the standards are typically based on research, there is considerable variance across States.

I. Staff Qualifications and Professional Development

The following are examples of criteria:

- Obtaining a Child Development Associate credential or an A.A., B.A., or M.A. degree in early childhood education or a relevant field;
- Receiving additional credit hours in early childhood education;
- Increasing staff/director qualifications;
- Increasing the number of staff training hours;
- Obtaining a level on a State career path/lattice;

- Participating in a State registry system;
- Obtaining a membership in a professional organization;
- Requiring approval of training that is counted to meet a standard;
- Participating in professional development/growth activities; and
- Developing professional development plans.

II. Learning Environment/Curriculum

The following are examples of criteria:

- Reading to children 15 minutes per day;
- Providing developmentally appropriate materials;
- Implementing weekly developmentally appropriate lesson plans;
- Minimizing children’s transitions throughout the day;
- Arranging space by interest areas;
- Limiting the use of TV/videos to 2 hours per week;
- Requiring increased physical activity and more nutritious foods;
- Using culturally diverse materials and books;
- Using early learning guidelines to shape program activities;
- Requiring an identified curriculum that meets specific guidelines;
- Increasing the focus on social and emotional well-being;
- Requiring developmental screening and/or assessment of children in care; and
- Using the Early Learning and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO), Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and other instruments in addition to the Environment Rating Scales.

III. Administration

The following are examples of criteria:

- Providing annual performance evaluations;
- Holding monthly staff meetings;
- Allotting planning time to staff;
- Developing written job descriptions;
- Developing written personnel policies;
- Maintaining list of staff positions, salary, and tenure;
- Providing staff benefits;
- Using core competencies for hiring and staff evaluation;
- Having an annual budget;
- Having a financial record-keeping system;

- Having an annual reconciled financial plan;
- Having an annual financial review conducted by a certified public accountant; and
- Using the Program Administration Scale (PAS) and Business Administration Scale (BAS) as assessments of the program's administration.

IV. Parent/Family Involvement

The following are examples of criteria:

- Organizing a parent advisory board;
- Providing a bulletin board or newsletter;
- Holding conferences and meetings;
- Developing and distributing a parent handbook/written program policies;
- Developing a parent resource center;
- Developing and distributing a parent satisfaction survey;
- Welcoming families at all times;
- Maintaining a list of community resources and referring parents to resources as needed;
- Completing the Strengthening Families self-assessment and planning tool;
- Developing and implementing a written system for sharing daily events; and
- Providing parents with consultation prior to children's enrollment.

V. Licensing Compliance/Status

The following are examples of criteria:

- Having no substantiated complaints;
- Having no licensing citations;
- Having a license in good standing;
- Having a limited number of noncompliant occurrences; and
- Having no serious noncompliant occurrences.

Other Common Categories Of Standards

Other common categories of standards include the following:

- Child-staff ratios and group size;
- Meeting other program standards, such as Accreditation, Head Start Performance Standards, and prekindergarten standards;
- Identifying criteria specific to infant and toddlers and school-age children;
- Utilizing consultants to improve the quality of care;

- Staff compensation;
- Program evaluation;
- Health and safety measures; and
- Caring for children with special needs.