2015 FACT SHEETS

Observational Assessments of Quality

Observational tools are used in QRIS to measure features of process quality in early care and education (ECE) programs. These tools are used for a variety of purposes including in assigning ratings and as a method for supporting programs' continuous quality improvement (CQI). This fact sheet provides a descriptive analysis of how observational tools are being incorporated across all currently operating QRIS in states and localities, using 2015 data from QRIScompendium.org

Observational Tools Used

Thirty-seven (93%) QRIS use observational tools for participating center-based programs (Figure 1). The Environment Rating Scales (ERS)[i] and the Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS)[ii] are used most often. Twenty-one systems use multiple tools, with CLASS and ERS, the most common combination, used in 16 QRIS. Eleven systems use other types of assessment tools including the Program Quality Assessment (n=2) and self-developed tools.

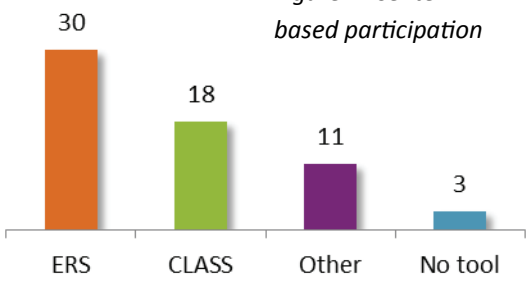

Figure 1. Center-based participation

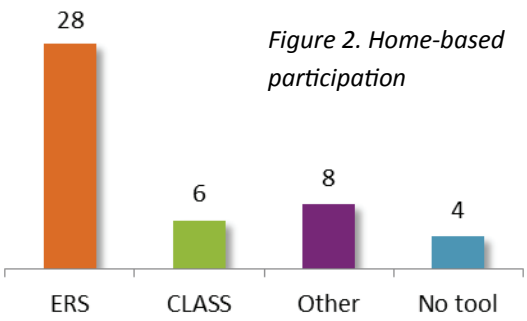

Figure 2. Home-based participation

Thirty-four (90%) QRIS use observational tools for participating home-based programs. The Environment Rating Scales (ERS) is used most often, by 28 QRIS (Figure 2). Six systems use the Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS). Seven systems use multiple tools, with both CLASS and ERS used in 4 QRIS. Eight systems use other types of assessment tools including the Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale and self-developed tools.

Observational Tool Score Ranges

For QRIS that require specific scores, a range of scores is recognized on the ERS and CLASS tools. Across the QRIS that use ERS scores in ratings, the minimum score an ECE program must receive to gain points or levels ranges from 2.5-5.0 for center-based programs and 3.0-4.5 for home based programs. The maximum ERS score recognized by QRIS ratings ranges from 4.5-7.0 for center-based programs and 4.0-7.0 for home-based centers.

For CLASS, the minimum score range for points or level in center-based programs is 2.0-5.0 and the maximum is 4.9-7.0. For home-based programs the minimum range is 3.7-5.0 and the maximum 5.0-6.0.

Observational Tool Purpose

The majority of QRIS (83%) use observational tools in center-based programs in the rating process by assigning points or levels to programs if they attain or exceed specific scores (Figure 3).

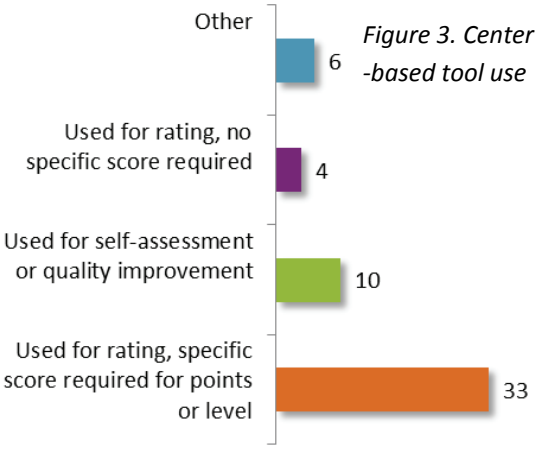

Figure 3. Center-based tool use

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Ten QRIS (25%) use observational tools for self-assessment purposes and/or quality improvement. An additional ten systems (25%) use observational tools either in the rating process with no specific score required, or for other reasons.

For home-based ECE programs, 28 (82%) QRIS use observational tools in the rating process by assigning points or levels to programs if they attain or exceed specific scores (Figure 4). Less than a fifth, 6 QRIS, use observational tools for self-assessment purposes and/or quality improvement. An additional eight systems use observational tools either in the rating process with no specific score required, or for other reasons.

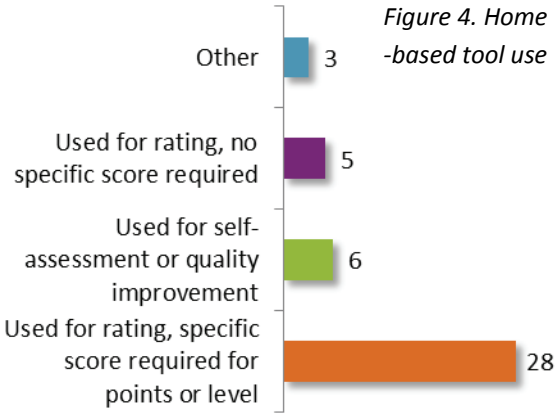

Figure 4. Home-based tool use

Observational Tool Administration

The administration of observational tools varies across QRIS. QRIS typically only observe a subset of classrooms in center-based programs. QRIS do not always administer observational tools with every age group. Often because of the cost, but also due to QRIS participation rules, the ages of children served, and whether a tool is appropriate or validated for use with particular age groups. Most commonly, QRIS randomly select classrooms to receive observations after certain parameters are met (e.g., that a certain percentage of classrooms or at least one classroom is observed in each age group).

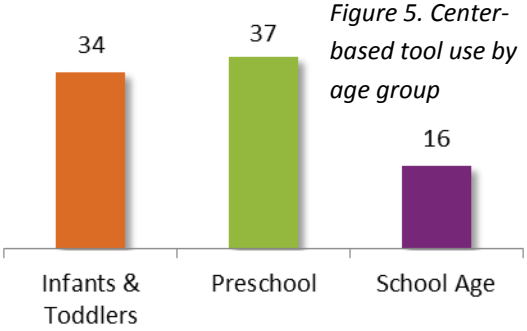

Figure 5. Center-based tool use by age group

For center-based programs, all 37 QRIS (100%) that use observational tools observe preschool-age environments and another 34 QRIS (92%) are used to observe infant and toddler environments (Figure 5). Sixteen QRIS (43%) use observational tools in school-age settings. For home-based programs, 32 QRIS observe preschool-age environments (94%) and 31 infants and toddlers (91%) (Figure 6). Twelve QRIS (35%) use observational tools in school-age settings.

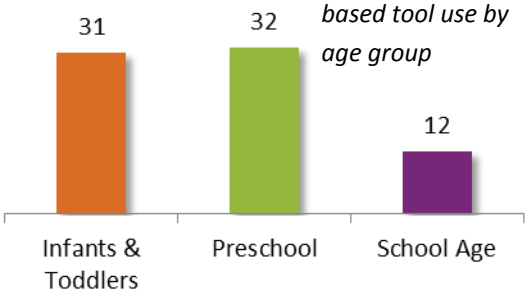

Figure 6. Home-based tool use by age group

Reliability

QRIS use different reliability processes to ensure that the observers administering the tools are doing so in a consistent manner. The most common method used to ensure reliability is the one recommended by the tool's author. For ERS, 21 QRIS are using their recommended reliability test which is 85% agreement with consensus scores. For CLASS, 9 QRIS are using the recommended initial reliability, which is 80% agreement with consensus. The most common ongoing reliability check periodicity occurs between every 6 and 10 visits, for 18 QRIS.

[i]Harms, T., Clifford, R.M., & Cryer, D. (2005). Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Rev. Ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
[ii]Pianta, R.C., La Paro, K.M., & Hamre, B.K. (2008). Classroom Assessment Scoring System. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.

Data from this fact sheet come from QRIScompendium.org, a catalog of all of the Quality Rating and Improvement Systems operating in the United States and its associated territories. The data reflects these 40 systems as they were on October 31, 2015.

This fact sheet was prepared by staff from Child Trends.