

# Quality Rating and Improvement System

## Rater Guidelines

### **PRIOR TO THE OBSERVATION**

#### ***Establish a three-week window for the observation:***

The local coordinator will establish the three-week window, block out dates, and inform you of these dates. If you are unable to complete the assessment during the timeframe given, contact your coordinator as soon as possible. As a rater, you are responsible for selecting the actual date of the observation and relaying that information to your coordinator.

#### ***Contact the Director to confirm the 3-week window:***

At least one week prior to the beginning of the 3-week window, raters should call the Director to confirm the weeks of possible observation, block out dates, and the time you will be arriving at the center. The classrooms are randomly selected when the rater arrives at the center. All classrooms within the toddler and preschool age range may be observed. Teachers should be notified that their class may be selected. Confirm the ages of the children in these classrooms so you may identify what tool(s) will be needed. Inform the Program/Center Director that you will need a copy of the classroom daily schedule on the day of the observation.

#### ***Preparing for the visit:***

- Verify the address, directions and phone number
- Record the Program/Center Director's name
- Gather ECERS-R/ITERS-R, PreK CLASS, and TODDLER CLASS scales
- Select blank score sheets for each instrument
- Take pencils, measuring tape, clipboard, and a probe
- Carry handwashing procedures and meal guidelines
- Include playground information to use with the ERS
- Leave your purse and other personal items in the trunk of your car

### **OBSERVATION GUIDELINES**

#### ***Random selection of classroom(s) to be observed:***

Use the random selection form when choosing which classrooms to be observed. One out of every three classrooms will be observed; i.e. if there are four classrooms serving 3- and 4-year-olds, two will be assessed. If there is more than one classroom for 3- and 4-year-olds, each classroom will be assigned a number. Ask the director to pick a number for the age group and that will be the classroom observed on that day. (Be mindful that this may provide some anxiety for the center/program Director.) At least one classroom for each relevant age group must be observed. If a program only has one classroom for 3-year-olds, one for 4-year-olds and

one class room for Toddlers **all** will be observed even though that is more than one out of every three classrooms. When multiple classrooms need to be evaluated, the Star Quality Rating process will take more than one day.

**Daily schedule:**

Ask the Director to give you a copy of the selected classroom's daily schedule. This schedule will be for you to use during the observation.

**Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality:**

A conflict of interest is defined as *any relationship between a Star Quality Rater and a program, which could interfere or be perceived to interfere with the Rater's ability to exercise objectivity in the rating process*. Raters should recuse themselves from an assignment due to conflict of interest if they:

- are/were employed by the program;
- serve(d) as a mentor, consultant, or evaluator in the program;
- have a close relative who is/was employed by the program or is/was a mentor, consultant, or evaluator;
- are or have served on the program's Board of Directors, or have a relative in that position;
- have a monetary or personal interest in the outcome of the program's Star rating;
- have a close personal relationship with individuals involved in the program; or
- have any relationship that might compromise the objectivity of the ratings process.

Confidentiality is holding in trust any confidential information or documents you receive through the observation. Any information received will be used for the purposes of this observation and will not be disclosed to any third party without approval from the participating provider.

Complete the *Conflict of Interest Waiver and Confidentiality Form* and submit it to your local coordinator 5 days prior to your observation.

**Securing your materials:**

Be aware of all your materials at all times. It is very easy to leave an instrument laying on a bookcase or shelf while completing other components of the observation. Be sure score sheets are always out of the teachers view and that you have all materials, especially the score sheets, when leaving the room.

**Arrival time:** Arrive no later than 8:30, although it may be necessary to arrive earlier depending upon the hours of the program/center. Allow enough time to conduct a complete observation.

***Dress code:***

Dress professionally and comfortable. Wear comfortable shoes as you could be standing for long periods of time; you will be sitting on the floor and bending over to count materials. Remember that you are representing the Virginia Star Quality Initiative.

***Cell phone and other electronic devices:***

Leave your cell phone or PDA's in the car. This way you will not be tempted to respond to a call, text or email. If you are on the phone or texting, you cannot be actively observing the classroom.

***Meeting the Director:***

Upon your arrival at the center, introduce yourself to the Director. Let the Director know how long you anticipate being at the center. Ask the Director if she will be available after you complete the observation to answer some questions. Ask the Director what bathroom you should use and if there are any specific policies, you need to know about.

***Explaining the process to the Director:***

Let the Director know you will be in the classroom and following the children for the entire observation.

***Eating and drinking while at the center:***

Raters should refrain from eating any food served at the center. Some centers have strict restrictions concerning food brought into the center. The rating can take 6-8 hours. During that time the rater may need to eat a snack and continue with the rating task.

***Explaining the process to the classroom teacher:***

Introduce yourself to the teacher(s) in the classroom. Make them feel at ease by explaining that you will be writing rapidly during the time you are there which is roughly 4-5 hours. Explain that you are not able to join in activities and that you will try to be as unobtrusive as possible. Explain that once the observation is completed you will need to ask them a few questions about things you are unable to see during the observation. Let the classroom teacher(s) know that you will be looking for materials and counting items so they may see you open doors and cabinets the children access. Inquire if there is a specific chair you can use during the observation when you need to sit down.

***Talking to the teacher during the observation:***

Raters should be as quiet as possible and refrain from asking the teacher questions until the teacher interview at the end of the observation.

***If children approach:***

Children often want to know who is visiting in their classroom. Briefly tell them your name and that you are "writing down all the fun activities that you are doing in your classroom". Raters should refrain from participating in classroom activities, assisting children in the bathroom and serving meals. At no time should the rater be left alone with the children. Raters may not be counted in the staff to child ratio.

***Positioning yourself in the classroom:***

The CLASS instrument requires the rater to hear and observe language and communication between children and staff and children and their peers. Therefore you will need to move from time to time to be close to the “action”. Try not to distract the teacher when doing so. When the children go outside or to another area of the building, raters should follow them.

***Opening cabinets:***

Materials that are in plain view and accessible to children constitute the materials to be counted as materials located in the classroom. When the teacher is interviewed, she may indicate that materials are in locked cabinets for rotation. Ask the teacher or director to see the materials.

***Facial expressions and body language:***

Remain objective and focused during your observation. Be careful about negative body language as well as your facial expressions.

**COMPLETEING THE OBSERVATION**

***The 4 cycles of CLASS:***

Only 1 cycle of your CLASS observation should be scored during routine care (i.e. meals, transitions/bathroom breaks, etc.); the other 3 cycles should be scored during whole group, small group, individual choice time or center times. Remember that the CLASS observation may not be scored during outside time.

***Interviewing the classroom teacher:***

At the end of your observation, you will need to ask the Lead Teacher questions about the items you did not observe. Refer to your ECERS-R scale. The page with the items “notes for clarification” also includes suggested questions for indicators that are frequently not observed. Ask open questions. For example: “Are the children permitted to use the computer? If yes, for how long?”

Remember to not interrupt the teacher during class time with questions. Wait until the end of the observation. A good time is when the children are down for their naps.

***Interviewing the Director for the Parents and Staff subscale:***

Several of the indicators found in the subscale *Parents and Staff* can be observed during your observation. Familiarize yourself with these indicators; this will keep the interview process with the Director to a minimum. All other indicators will be scored through interviewing the Director or the Staff in charge for the day. Refer to your ECERS-R scale. The page with the items “notes for clarification” also includes suggested questions for these indicators.

***Thanking the Teacher(s) and the Director:***

Thank the teacher(s) for allowing you to come into her/his classroom. Thank the center/program Director after the interview session for their participation in the QRIS program. Refrain from offering any information on the outcome of your visit. Explain they will receive a summary report of the observation as soon as the information has been reviewed. The star rating should be assigned within 45 days after all selected classrooms in the program have been assessed.

***Leave with all your materials:***

Check to make certain you have all materials with you before leaving the center. Any materials left behind opens up the possibility of the center reviewing score sheets!

***Reviewing the score sheets and determining final scores for ECERS/ITERS:***

After the observation, you need to review your ECERS-R/ITERS-R score sheets. Use your *All About The ECERS* book to determine your final scores. Check to verify you have circled the correct score based on the indicators you have selected. Transfer your final scores onto the ECERS/ITERS Excel Profile Scores Sheets ([www.earlychildhood.virginia.gov/](http://www.earlychildhood.virginia.gov/)). You will also need to transfer your final CLASS scores to the Excel CLASS Scoring Summary. Remember to SAVE!

**THE SUMMARY REPORT**

The summary report should be written as soon as possible once the visit is completed and prior to conducting another observation at another location. Written summary supports should be submitted within 10 days to your local coordinator.

Reports should not include your personal opinion in any way. Technical writing should be clear and concise. “I observed” should be used throughout the report as this assists the rater in not using inappropriate or biased comments. Your report is a “running record” of what you observed which is very different from how you “felt” about the observation. Indicate when information was obtained during an interview.

The names of the classroom teachers should not be used (except in the Program Information section); “Lead Teacher” and “Assistant Teacher” are appropriate. Refer to the children as children, *not* students, when writing your summary report. Be detailed but not redundant. If multiple classrooms are observed, refer to specific classrooms as “Classroom A” or “Classroom B”.

Proofread your report for content, grammar, spelling and syntax. Remember this is a document that will be reviewed by many people. Your language should be positive. Be specific and give examples when needed to paint a detailed picture of the observation. Do not complete a 2<sup>nd</sup> program observation until you have finished the summary report on the 1<sup>st</sup> center you rate. This will enable you to write a “clear” report without confusing observations you have seen in multiple classrooms.

***Submitting the report:***

After you have written your report and reviewed for content, grammar, spelling and syntax, and reviewed and confirmed your ECERS/ITERS and CLASS scores, electronically submit your written report to your local coordinator within 10 days of the observation.

The Excel score sheets for ECERS/ITERS and CLASS will be submitted electronically to the hub.

***Site Evaluation:***

Complete the QRIS Site Evaluation ([www.earlychildhood.virginia.gov/](http://www.earlychildhood.virginia.gov/) after completing the observation. Submit the completed form electronically to your local coordinator. This will complete the packet for the site observation.

***Discussing the report with the Star Mentor:***

The Mentor and Director will receive an official copy of the Summary Report. At this time, the Mentor will be contacting you to schedule a meeting to review the content of the report. This meeting can be either in person or via phone. The purpose of this meeting will be to discuss any questions in regards to the report that will assist in the development of the facility's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

**MULTIPLE CLASSROOMS TO BE OBSERVED IN THE SAME PROGRAM**

Programs that have multiple classrooms to be observed will be observed by the same rater whenever possible. This will allow summary reports to have one writing "voice".

**RATING THE SAME PROGRAM**

A rater should not rate the same program 2 years in a row. Please inform your local coordinator if you have received the same rating assignment as you did in the previous year.

***FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS******What months will the observation take place?***

All centers will now be on a revolving two-year cycle from the time they receive their Official QRIS STAR rating. Exceptions: if a star rated program changes physical locations the environment will be reassessed. Some localities have the funds available to do annual "check up" visits in the year centers are not receiving official QRIS ratings. Observations will take place from October 2009-May 2010 and October 2010-May 2011.

***What do you do if the Director is not there?***

Inquire to find out who is in charge in the absence of the Center/Program Director. You will need to ask for all the necessary information required of the Center/ Program Director (i.e. randomly selecting a classroom, providing a daily schedule for the classroom to be observed and being available for the interview questions at the end of the observation.) If you are able to conduct the observation, but the person who is in charge cannot answer the questions, you may then email or phone the Director the following day. If there is not someone left in charge,

it will be difficult to continue with an observation. At this point, you should contact your local coordinator as soon as possible.

***What do you do if there is a substitute teacher?***

If the person left in charge of the classroom is the assigned classroom assistant teacher or a “classroom floater”, then continue with the observation. You will note this information in the “Program Information” section of your summary report. If a substitute has been called to fill-in and they are not at the center on a regular basis, then you may ask to select a different classroom to observe. If there are no additional classrooms, you will need to arrange to complete the observation on a different day to get a “typical” day in the life of the classroom.

***What if I cannot finish my observation in one day?***

By careful pacing of your observation, this should not be a problem. If you absolutely cannot finish because the program only meets for 3 hours a day, then you will need to go back for a second day to complete your observation. The second day should also fall within the 3-week window for the observation. If this is not possible, contact your local coordinator to advise you.

***What if I get sick during the observation?***

You must stop the observation and notify your local coordinator as soon as possible. You would need to schedule a new 3-week window (if it has expired). You would begin a new observation upon your return to the center.

***What if I observe neglect or child abuse during the observation?***

Mandated Reporting laws require that professionals who deal with children report suspicious circumstances suggestive of child maltreatment to child protective services. In addition to requiring professionals to report, the laws generally outline penalties for failure to report. Mandated reporters should not wait for a child to spontaneously tell them about abuse. It is not the reporter’s task to substantiate the abuse, only to report reasonable suspicion. The Child Protective Services Hotline number for Virginia is: 1-800-552-7096.

***What is a “non-typical” day?***

This can occur when a field trip has been unexpectedly planned or the daily hours of the program have been reduced due to an early dismissal. This can also occur when the children are sent outside so that ratios can be met. You want to observe a “typical day” and none of the above examples would allow you to do that. Check to see if there is another classroom you could observe that day. If not, explain this to the Director and inform your local coordinator.

***How many children must be present to complete an assessment?***

At least 2/3 of the children enrolled in a classroom should be present on the day of the observation for you to experience a “typical day”. At this time, you may ask to observe another classroom of the same aged children or return on another day. You would need to notify your local coordinator of this change.

***Who do I contact if I have a question about any part of the rater process?***

You may contact the Master STAR Quality Rater that is supporting you.

***Who do I contact if I have a question about ERS or CLASS?***

You may contact the Master STAR Quality Rater that is supporting you. Contact information is included in the back of this manual.

***What if the center/program I have been assigned to rate is one that I personally feel is a competing program/center of mine?***

This would definitely be considered a “conflict of interest”. You would notify your local coordinator and refrain from rating that program/center.

***What if the center offers me a gift (like chocolate or hand lotion)?***

All raters should refrain from accepting any gifts.

***What if the Director asks how they did on the observation?***

Raters are observers only. Please explain that the observation is only a part of the four Standards in the QRIS. Tell them they will receive a comprehensive report that their mentor will aid them in reviewing.

***What if the program that I rated contacts me to provide technical assistance?*** Refer the program/center to your local coordinator or assigned mentor.