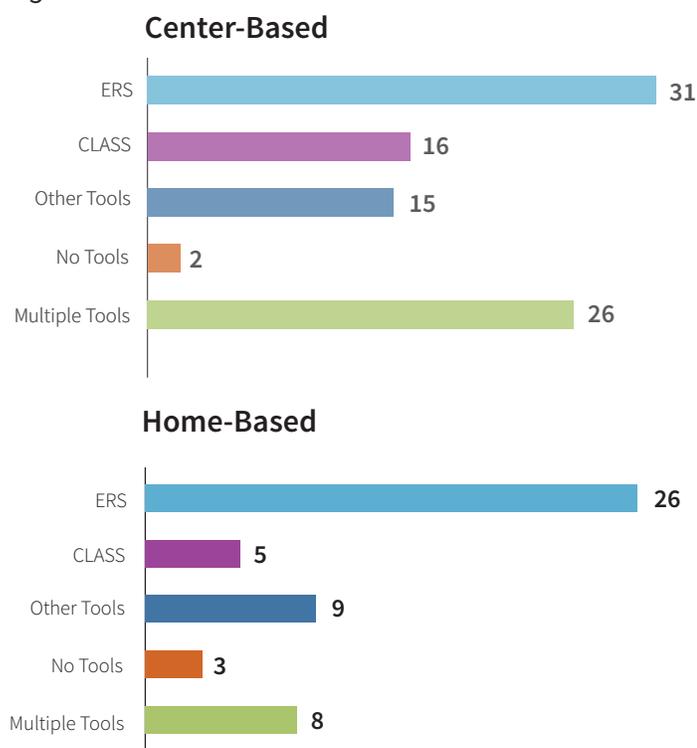Observational tools are used in QRIS to measure features of process quality in early care and education (ECE) programs. This fact sheet provides a descriptive analysis of how observational tools are being incorporated across all currently operating QRIS in states and localities.[1]

OBSERVATIONAL TOOL TYPES

The majority of QRIS incorporate observational tools, and many use more than one tool. There are two sets of tools used most often: the Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS)[2] and the Environment Rating Scales (ERS)[3]. Some QRIS use other observational tools that are published or self-developed. Examples of other tools include state or QRIS-specific tools, the Program Quality Assessment (PQA)[4], health and safety checklists, the Program/Business Administration Scale (PAS/BAS)[5], and general environment checklists. Several QRIS use multiple tools, most often the CLASS and ERS together. Figure 1 shows the types of observational tools being used in center- and home-based ECE.

Figure 1

Center-Based

ERS	31
CLASS	16
Other Tools	15
No Tools	2
Multiple Tools	26

Home-Based

ERS	26
CLASS	5
Other Tools	9
No Tools	3
Multiple Tools	8

PURPOSES OF OBSERVATIONAL TOOLS

QRIS use observational tools for different purposes. Most QRIS (73%) use them in the rating process by assigning points or levels to programs if they attain or exceed specific scores. Other QRIS (27%) do not require specific scores for ratings and use observational tools for self-assessment purposes and/or quality improvement.

Figure 2

27%

73%

Specific Score used for Rating

Self-Assessment/ Quality Improvement
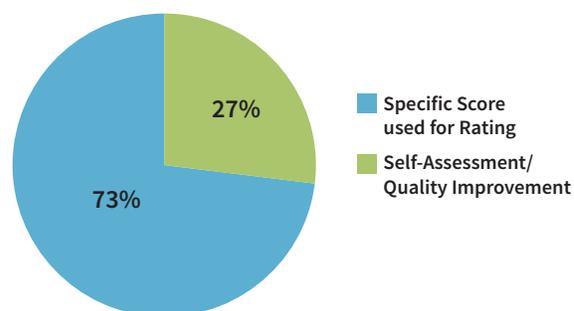
For QRIS that require specific scores, a range of scores is recognized on the ERS and CLASS tools. Across the 32 QRIS that use ERS scores in ratings, the minimum score an ECE program must receive to gain points or levels is 3.56, on average, ranging from 2.5-5.0. The maximum ERS score recognized by QRIS ratings is 5.58 on average, ranging from 4.0-7.0. These averages and ranges apply across all ERS tool versions for both center- and home-based programs (i.e., ECERS-R, FCCERS-R, and ITERS-R).

Across the 21 QRIS that use CLASS scores in ratings, the minimum score an ECE program must attain is a 3.58 on average, ranging from 2.0-5.0. The maximum score recognized in ratings is 5.60 on average, ranging from 5.0-7.0. These averages apply across all CLASS tool versions for center-based settings (i.e., Infant, Toddler, and Pre-K CLASS). Three QRIS use specific CLASS sub-scale scores. These systems make provisions for programs to score lower on the Pre-K Instructional Support subscale (which has

lower scores on average) and higher on the other subscales.

ADMINISTRATION OF OBSERVATIONAL TOOLS

The administration of observational tools varies across QRIS. QRIS typically only observe a subset of classrooms in center-based programs. 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). 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 of the tools included in QRIS (89%) are used to observe preschool-age environments and many (78%) are used to observe infant and toddler environments. Fewer QRIS (26%) use observational tools in school-age settings (Figure 3).

Figure 3
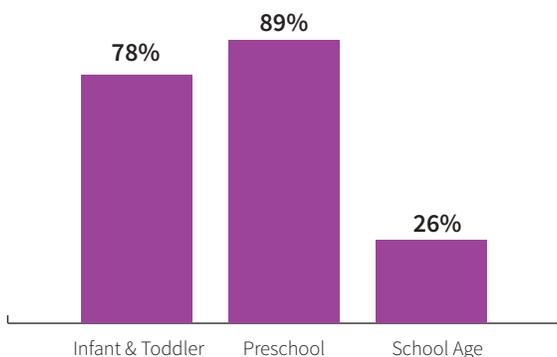
QRIS also determine when and how often a program is observed. On average, ECE programs are observed every two years, ranging from twice a year to every three years. Some QRIS only conduct observations once or do not specify a particular frequency.

[1] The Build Initiative & Child Trends. (2014). A Catalog and Comparison of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) [Data System]. Retrieved from http://qriscompendium.org on June 9, 2015.

[2] Pianta, R.C., La Paro, K.M., & Hamre, B.K. (2008). Classroom Assessment Scoring System. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.

[3] Harms, T., Clifford, R.M., & Cryer, D. (2005). Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Rev. Ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

[4] High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. (2003). Preschool Program Quality assessment (2nd ed.). Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

[5] Talan, T.N. & Bloom, P.J. (2004). Program Administration Scale. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Talan, T.N. & Bloom, P.J. (2009). Business Administration Scale. New York, NY: Teachers College Press