



## District of Columbia Infant/Toddler Quality Observation Data Collection and Quality Assurance Protocol

The District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE) has contracted with School Readiness Consulting (SRC) to conduct observations in all center-based programs with infant and toddler classrooms that entered into and maintained the Provider Agreement for Subsidized Child Care Services with OSSE, regardless of whether or not the center has an eligible child enrolled during the time of the observation. SRC will also observe non-subsidized center-based programs with infant and toddler classrooms that elect to participate in Capital Quality, DC's redesigned Quality Rating and Improvement System. In alignment with SRC's current professional practices, OSSE has developed the following protocols to ensure that SRC uses comprehensive systems and procedures to implement a valid, reliable and high-quality observation process. The observation process involves:

- (I) A scheduling system;
- (II) Observations conducted in center-based programs with infant and toddler classrooms;
- (III) Training, certification and ensured reliability of observers (also known as data collectors);
- (IV) Data confidentiality and integrity, and
- (V) Established guidelines for mandated reporting.

These procedures ensure that the observations are carried out with the highest level of data integrity and the process is open and transparent for all involved. The District of Columbia ITERS-R observation data collection and quality assurance protocols are described in more detail below:

### **(I) Scheduling Observations**

Every classroom (serving children ages birth-36 months) in programs that entered into and maintained the Provider Agreement for Subsidized Child Care Services with OSSE, regardless of whether or not the program has an eligible child enrolled during the time of the observation, will be observed.

Observations are scheduled in accordance with the following:

- (A) SRC receives a list of participating programs from OSSE that has the facilities' license numbers, Capital Quality group numbers and program administrators who will serve as the primary contact persons for the observations.
- (B) Each Capital Quality Group (e.g., Pilot and Group 2, Group 3, etc.) is observed within an eight-week time-period.
- (C) Centers are sent a survey requesting they share 'do not visit' dates, along with the ages of all enrolled children.
- (D) ITERS-R observations are scheduled randomly using an automated generator and are conducted within a two week observation window. Providers receive email notification of



their observation window at least two weeks before the first business day of the observation window.

- (E) The exact date of the observation is sent to providers via email at least one week before the scheduled observation. It is the responsibility of the provider to make other staff members aware of the observation.
- (F) Observations are cancelled on days with weather related delays and are rescheduled as close to the original date as possible.

## **(II) Conducting Observations**

Once the observation is scheduled, the observation is conducted in accordance with the following:

- (A) Observations begin at approximately 8:30 a.m. so that most observations can include at least one meal/snack; nap/rest; and at least one child being dropped-off. In the event that these activities are not observed, additional questions will be asked during the provider interview.
- (B) The ITERS-R observation usually takes between three and four hours, but not less than three hours.
- (C) ITERS-R observations focus primarily on the environment and experiences that children typically encounter on an average day. Any adults, including volunteers, who work with the children daily (or almost daily), for a substantial part of the day will be considered in scoring.
- (D) Nearly all of the activities that take place during a typical day are observed for scoring. These include meals and snacks, language arts and/or academics, free choice, transition times and other routines such as diapering/toileting and nap. When necessary, observers may follow the children and provider outside to code an activity (e.g., for a walk or science discovery lesson).
- (E) Materials will also be reviewed and sometimes measured, including books, manipulatives, art and music supplies, diapering/toileting stations, feeding/meal areas, cleaning supplies, signage, parent information, outside and indoor open play areas, playgrounds, supply areas and other things required by the metric.
- (F) The observation will include a 30-40 minute provider interview. If there is an associate caregiver, separate from the provider, s/he may be interviewed as well.
- (G) If a provider is on extended medical leave during the scheduled observation and:
  - Has plans to return to the program by Dec. 1, 2018: The observation will be rescheduled. Attempts will be made to return to the program after the provider has been back in the program for at least two weeks.
  - Will not return by Dec. 1, 2018: Programs that have a long-term substitute who has been providing instruction for at least two weeks will be observed.
  - A long-term substitute has not been identified or has not been in the program for at least two weeks: OSSE will follow-up with individual providers regarding additional next steps.

**(III) Training, Certification and Reliability of Observers**

- (A) Observers must have a bachelor's degree, and SRC prioritizes candidates who have experience in early childhood education.
- (B) All observers have passed a background check, have a current negative tuberculosis screening and receive training on their role as mandated reporters for child abuse and neglect.
- (C) Observers receive one-day training on ERS administration and scoring from the Environment Rating Scales Institute (ERSI) from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute/University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- (D) Two additional days of training are provided by SRC for review and practice on ERS metrics and on project-specific protocols, such as procedures to follow when on-site at programs, professionalism in conducting observations and mandated reporting of potential child abuse and neglect.
- (E) Before observing independently, observers participate in at least three certification visits with an ERSI-reliable SRC Master Coder. To attain certification to conduct observations for this project, observers must reach an average of an 85 percent agreement (within one point) to consensus scores with the SRC Master Coder across three visits.
- (F) Every 15<sup>th</sup> observation, observers receive an additional reliability visit with an ERSI-reliable SRC Master Coder. The observer must achieve 85 percent agreement (within one point) to consensus scores with the Master Coder on this observation. If an observer does not meet 85 percent agreement, they will receive additional guidance from SRC and must meet the 85 percent agreement requirement on a subsequent observation with an ERSI-reliable SRC Master Coder before resuming observations independently. In the event that an observer does not meet the 85 percent agreement requirement during a reliability visit, the SRC Master Coder's ERS scores will be used for that classroom's observation score.

**(IV) Data Confidentiality and Integrity**

- (A) All observation notes are recorded on hard-copy score sheets and forms during the observation. Observers use these notes to determine item-level scores.
- (B) Once observers finish scoring the items, all scores are entered in an online database. Observers are required to deliver their hard copies to SRC's project data team. Observers are prohibited from making any copies.
- (C) A data coordinator reviews the data weekly to ensure score alignment between hard copies and the database. All errors (if any) are corrected and observers are contacted if needed.
- (D) Once the observation window is complete, the hard-copies are stored in a secure, locked cabinet and no team member is permitted to remove them from the office. Similarly, all data files are stored on a protected computer in a protected space for data and analysis.
- (E) Scores are reviewed for errors a second time during data analysis to ensure the highest level of data accuracy.

#### **(V) Mandated Reporting**

- (A) All observers receive training to identify incidents and signs of child abuse and neglect.
- (B) If an observer witnesses or suspects mistreatment of a child, the observer is required to end the observation and call the SRC project manager.
- (C) If the incident meets DC's child abuse and neglect criteria, the observer will contact the DC Child and Family Services Agency.
- (D) If an incident is reported, SRC will notify OSSE within 24 hours of the incident being reported.

#### **(VI) Appeals Process**

Centers have the right to appeal their scores if they believe that the process for observations detailed above was not followed.

- (A) To request an appeal, programs must follow the following steps:
  - (1) Submit a detailed written appeal including but not limited to the name of the classroom(s)/teaching team(s) the program is appealing; the section of the Data Collection and Quality Assurance Protocol the program believes was not followed; and documentation to support the program's position. The appeal can be submitted to [Mahlet.Getachew@dc.gov](mailto:Mahlet.Getachew@dc.gov) within 10 days of the observation, but no more than 10 days after the date the program level report was sent by SRC.
  - (2) Appeals should be directly related to a suspected inconsistency in the process. Please note that changes that occurred in the program after the observation date cannot be considered in the appeals process.
- (B) Upon receiving your appeal, OSSE will review the program's observation documents (e.g., observer notes and report from the day of the visit) and interview SRC, alongside the ERS manuals, scoring booklets, and observation protocols, to determine if the observation complied with this Protocol.
- (C) If OSSE finds that the initial observation did not comply with this Protocol, OSSE may schedule a second observation. In that case, OSSE will require SRC to send a different observer to conduct the second observation and, upon the completion of the second observation, SRC will issue an updated program-level report with the new scores.