OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

District of Columbia 2024 Environment Rating Scales (ERS):
Family Child Care Environment Rating Scales-Third Edition (FCCERS-3) Quality Observation
Data Collection and Quality Assurance Protocols

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) has contracted with an external vendor, School Readiness Consulting (SRC), to conduct observations in all child development homes and child development expanded homes participating in Capital Quality, DC's quality rating and improvement system and/or the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund in 2024.

These facilities include all child development homes and child development expanded homes that have entered and maintained the Provider Agreement for Subsidized Child Care Services with OSSE, regardless of whether the child development homes and child development expanded homes have an eligible child enrolled during the time of the observation. It also includes non-subsidized child development homes and child development expanded homes that elect to participate in Capital Quality and/or the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund.

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 child development homes and child development expanded homes;
(III)   Training, certification and processes for ensuring on-going 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 FCCERS-3 observation data collection and quality assurance protocols are described in more detail below:

(I)   Scheduling Observations

Observations are scheduled in accordance with the following:

(A)   Every child development home and child development expanded home (serving children ages birth to school age) that entered and maintained the Provider Agreement for Subsidized Child Care Services with OSSE will be observed, regardless of whether the child development home and child development expanded home has a child eligible for subsidy enrolled during the time of the observation.

(B) Every child development home and child development expanded home (serving children ages birth to school age) that participates in Capital Quality and/or the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund will be observed.

(C) SRC receives a list of participating programs from OSSE that has the facilities' license numbers and facility administrators who will serve as the primary contact persons for the observations, which is based on the information in the Division of Early Learning Licensing Tool (DELLT).

(D) Each participating facility is observed within a 20-week period.

(E) Child development homes and expanded homes are sent a survey in which they must indicate all home caregivers/associate home caregivers who will be observed as a part of the observation and the ages of all enrolled children as of the first day of the observation timeframe, June 10, 2024. In addition, they have the opportunity to indicate "do not observe" dates that they want to be considered during the scheduling process.

    (1) "Do not observe" dates are days on which the site does not want observations to occur for reasons including, but not limited to, field trips, professional development days and days on which other observations or testing are scheduled.

    (2) "Do not observe" dates must be limited to no more than 15 school days during the observation window

(F) FCCERS-3 observations are scheduled randomly, with an automated random number generator, and are conducted within a two-week observation window for each facility. Facilities receive email notification of their observation window at least two weeks before the first business day of the observation window. Two-week observation windows may include "do not observe" dates, though actual observations will not be scheduled on "do not observe" dates.

(G) 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.

(H) When observations are cancelled on days with weather-related delays or other unplanned emergencies that impact the typical day experienced by the observed students (e.g., home caregiver/associate home caregiver illness), they will be rescheduled as close to the original date as possible. Observations shall not be cancelled for reasons that OSSE considers to be planned in advance, including, but not limited to, field trips.

(II) Conducting Observations

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

(A) Observers aim to arrive between 8 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. but will begin the observation between 8:30 a.m. and 9 a.m., so that most observations can include at least one meal/snack, nap/rest and at least one child being dropped-off.

    (1) For facilities that provide only out-of-school-time programming (i.e., before and after care), observations will occur in the afternoon. Observers will aim to arrive 10-30 minutes prior to the beginning of the after care program so that the observation can include children's transition to the after care program.

(B) The FCCERS-3 observation usually takes between three and four hours, but not less than three hours.

(C) FCCERS-3 observations focus primarily on the environment, child-home provider interactions 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. Working with children daily or almost daily includes interaction on a consistent and frequent basis.

(D) All of the activities with children that take place during a typical day, if observed, may be used 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 or counted, 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 FCCERS-3 measure.

(F) If a home caregiver/associate home caregiver is on extended leave during the scheduled observation and:

- o *The home caregiver/associate home caregiver has plans to return to the facility two weeks before the scheduled FCCERS-3 observation:* The observation will be rescheduled and may take place outside of the original observation window. Attempts will be made to return to the facility after the home caregiver/associate home caregiver has been back in the facility for at least two weeks.

- o *The home caregiver/associate home caregiver will not return two weeks before the scheduled FCCERS-3 observation AND there is a long-term substitute in place:* Facilities that have a long-term substitute who has been providing care and education for at least two weeks will be observed. The provider should share the context for the observation during the long-term substitute's orientation to the classroom assignment, so they are aware and part of the process.

- o *The home caregiver/associate home caregiver will not return two weeks before the scheduled FCCERS-3 observation, AND a long-term substitute has not been identified or has not been in the child development home/expanded home with that group of children for at least two weeks:* The observation will be rescheduled and may take place outside of the original observation window. Attempts will be made to return to the facility after the home caregiver/associate home caregiver has been back in the facility for at least two weeks.

- o *The home caregiver/associate home caregiver will not return three weeks before the observation window closes, AND a long-term substitute has not been identified or has not been in the classroom for at least two weeks:* Observations will not take place.

(G) Each section of the score sheet will be completed in its entirety, which includes, but is not limited to, a numeric score and a written justification for each numeric score for each subscale and total score. Ratings of "NA" must clearly be recorded in the absence of numeric scores.

(III) Training, Certification and Reliability of Observers

(A) Observers must have a bachelor's degree and priority of hiring will be given to candidates who have experience in early childhood education.

(B) All observers must 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 (see additional information about mandated reporting below).

(B) Observers receive training on ERS administration and scoring from the Environment Rating Scales Institute (ERSI) of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute/University of

North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Two additional days of training are provided by SRC for review and practice on ERS metrics.

(C)   Observers are Master Coders if they have trained in person with ERSI and reached a minimum average of a 90 percent agreement (within one point) to consensus scores with an ERSI coder across three visits. Master Coders will support the other observers during certification and reliability visits.

(D)   Each observer is screened (by the vendor) for fidelity to the data collection protocol (e.g., time of arrival, etc.) during an actual observation visit. Observers must pass the fidelity check in order to continue collecting data. Those who do not pass their fidelity check must participate in ongoing training and coaching before resuming observations. Fidelity checks are unannounced.

(E)   Before observing independently, observers participate in at least three certification visits with a Master Coder for the ERS metrics. 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 Master Coder across three visits. During the certification process (i.e., until a data collector has been fully certified on FCCERS-3), the Master Coder's ERS scores will be used for that home's or, in an expanded home, that group's observation score.

(F)   Once every 30 calendar days, observers receive an additional reliability visit (i.e., a calibration exercise) with a Master Coder. The observer must achieve 85 percent agreement within one point (on each subscale) of the Master Coder's scores on the observation. Observers who do not pass their calibration exercise will be removed from the observation team until the observer demonstrates—via a subsequent calibration exercise (as described above)—that they have met the requirements for demonstrating on-going reliability to the FCCERS-3 measure (i.e., by scoring at 85 percent or higher on the calibration exercise). Observers who fail to demonstrate on-going reliability will be required to participate in training and coaching prior to retaking the calibration exercise to be eligible to rejoin the observation team. If an observer does not meet the 85 percent agreement requirement during a reliability visit, the Master Coder's ERS scores will be used for that home's or, in an expanded home, that group's observation score.

(G)   Once every 30 calendar days, Master Coders will conduct a reliability visit (i.e., a calibration exercise) with another Master Coder. To demonstrate on-going reliability, this requires that the Master Coder achieve "calibrated" scores within one point (on each subscale) of the "calibrated" Master Coder's scores with an overall 90 percent agreement with the calibrated Master Coder's scores on the observation. Only one Master Coder will engage in a calibration exercise during each reliability check. Master Coders who do not meet the minimum 90 percent agreement threshold will be removed from the Master Coder team until the Master Coder demonstrates—via a subsequent reliability exercise (as described above)—that they have met the requirements for demonstrating on-going reliability as a Master Coder (i.e., by scoring within one point of the Master Coder's scores on each subscale, with an overall 90 percent agreement with the calibrated Master Coder's scores on the observation). Observers who fail to demonstrate on-going reliability will be required to participate in coaching and additional re-training prior to participating in a subsequent calibration exercise with a calibrated Master Coder and to be eligible to rejoin the observation team as a Master Coder. Master Coders, in all cases, will have on-going communication with associates of ERSI to get clarifications about coding, and when these are communicated, such clarifications will be provided to all observers on the ERS data collection team.

(IV) Data Confidentiality and Integrity

(A) Children's names, if collected in the process of collecting birthdates, are separated from the birthdate information and destroyed upon being submitted to the vendor. Birthdates are only collected to verify child age.

(B) An observation shall not be considered valid where there is a conflict of interest (including, but not limited to, previous employment or prior existing relationships) whether known or unknown at the time of the observation. Each observer signs a confidentiality agreement and a "conflict of interest" document listing any community-based organizations where they have had a previous relationship to ensure that they will not be scheduled to observe at any of these locations. If an observation occurred where there was a conflict of interest, the observation will be voided and a new observation may be scheduled at OSSE's discretion. Facilities that believe there is a conflict of interest may file an appeal (see Section VI for the appeal process).

(C) All FCCERS-3 observation notes are recorded on hard-copy score sheets and forms during the observation. Observers use these notes to determine item-level scores.

(D) After each observation, observers enter all scores and notes into a secure online database. Observers are required to deliver their hard copies to the vendor. Observers are prohibited from making any copies.

(E) A data coordinator hired or contracted by the vendor reviews the data weekly to ensure score alignment between FCCERS-3 hard-copy score sheets and the database. All errors, if any, are corrected and observers are contacted if needed. All FCCERS-3 score sheets will also be scanned and stored in the database.

(F) Once the observation window is complete, the FCCERS-3 hard-copy sheets are stored in a secure, locked cabinet and no team member is permitted to remove them from the office. Similarly, all electronic data files (including scanned FCCERS-3 score sheets) are stored on a protected computer in a protected space for data analysis.

(G) Scores are reviewed by the vendor for 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 vendor's project manager.
(C) If the child is in imminent danger, the observer will also contact OSSE immediately.
(D) If the incident meets DC's child abuse and neglect criteria, the observer will also contact the DC Child and Family Services Agency.
(D) If an incident is reported, the vendor will notify the provider and OSSE within 24 hours of the incident being reported.

(VI) Appeals Process

Child development homes and child development expanded homes 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, facilities 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 facility is appealing; the section of the Data Collection and Quality Assurance Protocols the facility believes was not followed; and documentation to support the facility's position. The appeal can be submitted to Appeals.OSSE@dc.gov. Appeals may be submitted from the date of a facility's first observation up to 10 business days after the date the program-level report was sent via a secure link.

(2) Appeals should be directly related to a suspected inconsistency in the process. Please note that changes that occurred in the facility after the observation date cannot be considered in the appeals process.

(B) Upon receiving the appeal, OSSE will review the facility's observation documents (e.g., observer notes and report(s) from the day of the visit, conflict of interest claims, etc.) alongside the ERS manuals, scoring booklets and observation protocols and interview the vendor, 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.

(1) In the case of a second observation, OSSE will require the vendor to send a different observer that has demonstrated reliability within the past 30 days (by the above criteria, as outlined in Section III) to conduct the second observation, and upon the completion of the second observation, the vendor will issue an updated program- level report with scores from the second observation.

(2) If a second observation is not scheduled, the observation and subsequent score will be rendered void and removed from the program-level report and dataset.