

District of Columbia 2023 Environment Rating Scales (ERS): Infant/Toddler Rating Scales-Third Edition (ITERS-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 center-based facilities with infant and toddler classrooms participating in Capital Quality, DC's quality rating and improvement system, in 2023.

These facilities include all center-based facilities serving infants and toddlers that have entered and maintained the Provider Agreement for Subsidized Child Care Services with OSSE, regardless of whether the center has an eligible child enrolled during the time of the observation. It also includes non-subsidized center-based facilities with infant and toddler classrooms that elect to participate in Capital Quality.

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 facilities with infant and toddler classrooms;
- (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 ITERS-3 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 facilities that entered and maintained the Provider Agreement for Subsidized Child Care Services with OSSE, regardless of whether or the facility has an eligible child enrolled during the time of the observation, or that elects to participate in Capital Quality, will be observed.

Observations are scheduled in accordance with the following:

- (A) SRC receives a list of participating facilities from OSSE that has the facilities' license numbers, Capital Quality group 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).
- (B) Each Capital Quality participant is observed within a 20-week period.

- (C) Centers are sent a survey requesting they provide “do not visit” dates, and the ages of all enrolled children as of the first day of their Capital Quality observation timeframe, June 26, 2023.
- (D) Only classrooms in which the majority (51 percent or more) of the children are younger than 36 months as of the first day of their Capital Quality observation timeframe will be observed.
- (E) ITERS-3 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.
- (F) 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.
- (G) 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) 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.
- (B) Upon their arrival, observers will confirm the age of each child on the enrollment roster (using the date of birth). If the observer arrives in a classroom and confirms that the majority (51 percent or more) of the children are 36 months or older on the date of the observation, the observation will be cancelled. OSSE reserves the right to reschedule the ITERS-3 observation at any point during the observation window.
- (C) The ITERS-3 observation usually takes between three and four hours, but not less than three hours.
- (D) ITERS-3 observations focus primarily on the environment, child-teacher 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.
- (E) 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).

- (F) 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 ITERS-3 measure.
- (G) If a lead teacher is on extended leave during the scheduled observation and:
- **Has plans to return to the facility three weeks before the observation window closes:** 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 teacher has been back in the facility for at least two weeks.
 - **The teacher will not return three weeks before the observation window closes and has a long-term substitute:** Facilities that have a long-term substitute who has been providing care and education for at least two weeks will still be observed.
 - **The teacher 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 may not take place.
- (H) 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. 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 support the other observers during certification and reliability visits.
- (D) Each observer is screened for fidelity (by the vendor) 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.
- (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 ITERS-3), the Master Coder's ERS scores will be used for that classroom's observation score.

- (F) Once every 30 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 ITERS-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 classroom'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 being "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 Environment Rating Scales Institute, Inc. 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) Teacher identification numbers are used in place of teacher names, which are removed from all reports.
- (B) 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.
- (C) All observation notes are recorded on hard-copy score sheets and forms during the observation. Observers use these notes to determine item-level scores.
- (D) An observation shall not occur where there is a conflict of interest including, but

not limited to, previous employment or prior existing relationships, whether known or unknown. 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.

- (E) After each observation, all scores (and notes) are entered in a secure online database. Observers are required to deliver their hard copies to the vendor. Observers are prohibited from making any copies.
- (F) A data coordinator hired by the vendor reviews the data weekly to ensure score alignment between ITERS-3 hard copy score sheets and the database. All errors, if any, are corrected and observers are contacted if needed. All ITERS-3 score sheets will also be scanned and stored in the database.
- (G) Once the observation window is complete, the ITERS-3 hard-copy score 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 ITERS-3 score sheets) are stored on a protected computer in a protected space for data and analysis.
- (H) Scores are reviewed by the vendor 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 vendor's 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, the vendor will notify OSSE within 24 hours of the incident being reported.

(VI) Appeals Process

Facilities 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 Protocol the facility believes was not followed; and documentation to support the facility's position. The appeal can be submitted to Appeals.OSSE@dc.gov within 10 days after the date the program-level report was sent.
 - (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 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.

- (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 Part III E) to conduct the second observation, and upon the completion of the second observation, the vendor will issue an updated program-level report with the 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.