

Executive Summary

Charter Oak State College and the Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE) on behalf of the Early Childhood Education Cabinet entered into a memorandum of agreement on November 2007 to administer and coordinate an interim quality process to establish a common baseline of quality in Connecticut and support the approval and dissemination of quality improvement grants. This Project was to set the stage for the implementation of a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for early care and education programs in Connecticut.

The activities of the ECERS-R Project included coordination of ECERS-R Assessments, review of Quality Improvement Plans (QIP) and Quality Enhancement Applications (QEA), dissemination of funds, and collection of data related to the Assessments. This included the development of all systems and materials required to produce reports and collect data. The Project concluded on September 10, 2009.

The decision regarding which classrooms should be required to participate in the ECERS Project was made on January 11, 2008 by the CT Early Childhood Cabinet. Classrooms that were already accredited under the new NAEYC standards were exempt from participation, thus this cohort represents a limited percentage of all classrooms involved in School Readiness.

Classrooms that were required to participate in the ECERS-R Project were:

- Sites that accepted 6 or more additional children and are accredited under the old NAEYC criteria or are in a Head Start, NEASC, or AMS approved program, or
- Sites that accepted 1 or more children and were new to the School Readiness system and in process of initial NAEYC accreditation (3-year window for accreditation).

Additional classrooms volunteered to participate in the Project through the local School Readiness liaisons during the spring and summer of 2008. In August 2008, the ECERS Collaborative Management Team (CMT) reevaluated the program and budget. As a result only those classrooms that must have an ECERS because of School Readiness requirements would be assessed. A waiting list of 92 volunteer classrooms was established however no volunteer classroom assessments were performed after September 2008.

Each classroom that was assessed using the ECERS-R Assessment and received a score below 5 was required to apply for Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) funds up to but not to exceed \$5000. During the first six months of implementing the Project, classrooms scoring 5 or above could complete a Quality Enhancement Application (QEA) for funds up to, but not to exceed, \$5000. A decision to reduce the QEA amount to \$500 was made in July 2008. As of November 2008 QEA awards were discontinued.

The variety of proposed improvement strategies in both QIPs and QEAs were very broad. Some classrooms needed educational materials while others requested classroom sinks or playground fencing. Some distributed funds equally between materials, training, and smaller improvements such as classroom observation mirrors. Some classrooms had additional sources for items such as training or consultants and thus did not need to request QIP funds for certain improvement strategies. These resources included school nurses, School Readiness facilitators, Accreditation Facilitation Project support, and the Training Wheels Project. QIP reviewers approved an application so long as all deficiencies were adequately addressed.

Each classroom that received a QIP award was reassessed with a follow-up ECERS upon completion of the improvement strategies. Some classrooms received a partial assessment in which the rater only scored those items that were low on the original assessment. Other classrooms received a full assessment since these were in the “3-year window” for NAEYC Accreditation and must have a full ECERS each year until Accreditation is achieved.

Since establishing a base line of quality in this limited group was the primary mission of the project it was not designed as a research project. However, so much interesting data was collected that the Collaborative Management Team made of representatives from the CT Early Childhood Cabinet, CT State Department of Education, and staff from Charter Oak State College, determined that it would be wise to request the assistance of Dr. Walter Gilliam of the Yale Child Study Center to interpret the results of the Project’s activities. His findings concluded:

1. There were no statistically significant differences between the three groups (07/08 required classrooms, 08/09 required classrooms, and the volunteer classrooms) suggesting at baseline that classrooms in each of the three groups were in roughly equivalent need of quality enhancement efforts.
2. There were significant differences in the three groups in three of the seven ECERS-R domains. Voluntary classrooms outscored both required groups in Personal Care Routines, Parents & Staff, and Program Structure.
3. A small but significant correlation was found between a teacher’s level on the CT Charts-A-Course Career Ladder and the baseline ECERS-R score however there was no clear discernable pattern to suggest a minimum Charts-A-Course threshold for determining a particular ECERS-R score.
4. Three domain areas emerged as relative weaknesses across all three groups. These are Space & Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, and Activities.
5. Because different procedures were used on Follow-up Assessments there are some challenges to interpreting the data. Partial assessments may lead to over-inflated posttest scores. Dr. Gilliam used the data from complete follow up assessments to determine that there were significant gains from pretest to posttest on the total score and all domains.

The findings are promising but not conclusive. At baseline, 2.2% of all classrooms scored inadequate, 76.7% scored in the minimal range, 20% were good, and 1.1% were excellent. At follow-up the proportions were 1.1% inadequate, 44.4% minimal, 50% good, and 3.3% excellent.

Dr. Gilliam and the Collaborative Management Team agree that there are several caveats to consider in interpreting the data collected in the ECERS Project. Because of the nature of the types of classrooms that were assessed it is impossible to determine whether or not the data can be generalized to a larger body of early childhood education, child care programs, or even of other School Readiness classrooms. There was no control group for comparison to determine specifically if the QIP awards were the stimulus for improvement. And, finally, there was a concern that some classrooms saw a financial incentive to scoring low in order to apply for funds. Dr. Gilliam's complete report is included in the Appendix.

This quality improvement initiative required preschool staff to focus their approach to planning and implementing improvement strategies. Using the QIP award as a "carrot" to encourage a close examination and understanding of each quality indicator was very effective. One director reported that "just working on the QIP with my teachers has already generated many changes." The follow up assessment was the "stick" that provided high motivation for staff to implement truly effective improvement strategies. Any future plans for quality enhancement initiatives should focus on targeted interventions with accountability built into the system.

History and Purpose of the Charter Oak State College ECERS-R Project

Charter Oak State College and the Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE) on behalf of the Early Childhood Education Cabinet entered into a memorandum of agreement on November 2007 to administer and coordinate an interim quality process to establish a common baseline of quality in Connecticut and support the approval and dissemination of quality improvement grants. This Project was to set the stage for the implementation of a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for early care and education programs in Connecticut.

The activities of the ECERS-R Project included coordination of ECERS-R Assessments, review of Quality Improvement Plans (QIP) and Quality Enhancement Applications (QEA), dissemination of funds, and collection of data related to the Assessments. This included the development of all systems and materials required to produce reports and collect data. Although the contract was signed in November 2007 the project did not start until February 2008 with the hiring of a coordinator and project assistant. The Project concluded on September 10, 2009.

ECERS-R Project Participants

The decision regarding which classrooms should be required to participate in the ECERS Project was made on January 11, 2008 by the CT Early Childhood Cabinet. Classrooms that were already accredited under the new NAEYC standards were exempt from participation, thus this cohort represents a limited percentage of all classrooms involved in School Readiness.

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Additional classrooms volunteered to participate in the Project through the local School Readiness liaisons during the spring and summer of 2008. In August 2008, the ECERS Collaborative Management Team (CMT) reevaluated the program and budget. As a result only those classrooms that must have an ECERS because of School Readiness requirements would be assessed. A waiting list of 92 volunteer classrooms was established for when funds might be available however no volunteer classroom assessments were performed after September 2008.

Data was collected on three categories of classrooms: 1) those required to have an ECERS in the fiscal year of 2007/08; 2) those required to have an ECERS in 2008/09, and; 3) volunteer classrooms from the spring/summer of 2008. Please see Dr. Walter Gilliam's report for more detailed descriptions of each group.

Each classroom that was assessed using the ECERS-R Assessment and received a score below 5 was required to apply for Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) funds up to but not to exceed \$5000. During the first six months of implementing the Project, classrooms scoring 5 or above could complete a Quality Enhancement Application (QEA) for funds up to, but not to exceed, \$5000. A decision to reduce the QEA amount to \$500 was made in July 2008. As of November 2008 QEA awards were discontinued.

ECERS-R Project Management Team

The ECERS-R Project at Charter Oak was overseen by a Collaborative Management Team (CMT) with representatives from the Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE), the Early Childhood Education Cabinet, and Charter Oak State College. The ECERS-R Project CMT met regularly throughout the Project to determine project policy and direction. The CMT also reviewed budgets, approved program procedures, and reviewed those classrooms who applied for arbitration of their ECERS-R scores.

ECERS-R Project Development

The ECERS-R Project staff devised all forms, processes, data collection and paper management systems. This was performed quickly as there were 140 classrooms required to have an ECERS between February and June 2008. Most systems were well established by June of 2008, but improvements continued throughout the Project. Examples of improvements include:

- Communication with programs was increased by the implementation of an electronic Director's Survey in September 2008.
- ECERS raters began using a Profile Form designed in EXCEL which featured automatic computation of classroom scores in June 2008.
- The QIP/QEA reviews were changed from twice monthly meetings at Charter Oak State College to scanning and emailing to raters in August 2008 to improve review time.
- Training and Inter Rater Reliability Procedures were altered to improve rater skills and new rater training procedures were implemented in November 2008.

Materials and strategies developed for the Project:

Administration:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project Budgets• ECERS Project Working Data Collection• ECERS Project Score Sheet (detailed record of classroom scores)• Paper file tracking and management systems• Classroom Coding Systems
Program Support:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Classroom Information Form• Electronic Director's Survey• Workshop: How to Develop a Quality Improvement Plan Using the ECERS-R• Workshop: An Overview of the ECERS-R• Tech Tips for Completing a QIP or QEA (website)• Attendance at School Readiness Liaison Meetings• Regular group email correspondence• Availability for telephone and email assistance• Delivery of ECERS Summary Reports in a timely manner (usually within 48 hours of the assessment)

QIP/QEA Process:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COSC Rater Review Instructions for QIP/QEAs • QIP/QEA Rater Review Forms (word and EXCEL) • QIP/QEA Award Approval Letters • QIP/QEA Final Report Due Notices • QIP Application Form • QEA Application Form • QIP Final Report Form • QEA Final Report Form • QIP/QEA Eligibility Letter Form
Raters:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COSC ECERS-R Agreement Form • COSC ECERS-R Rater Guidelines • COSC Inter Rater Reliability Procedures • COSC ECERS-R Cover Sheet • COSC ECERS-R EXCEL Profile Form • COSC ECERS-R Summary Report • Rater Payment Authorization Forms • Training for bilingual raters • Coordination ECERS Train-the-Trainer with Lisa Waller of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, North Carolina.
Website:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posted in January 2008 and updated throughout the Project • www.charteroak.edu/ecers

ECERS-R Project - The Process

The process from initial assessment to follow-up assessment can be divided into four areas: 1) initial assessment; 2) QIP/QEA application and review; 3) QIP/QEA final report, and; 4) follow up assessment - if required.

Initial Assessment

1. Assignment of classroom to an ECERS Rater
 - Project staff determined rater availability
 - Project staff confirmed conflict of interest status between rater and site and rater to School Readiness Liaison
 - Project staff confirmed assignment with rater
2. Rater arranged visit to classroom site
 - Confirmed a one-week “window” 3-4 weeks later when a classroom should expect the visit
 - Inquired about any special events scheduled during this window that would prevent an observation of a typical day.
3. The classroom was assessed during a 3-hour observation.
 - The rater completed the summary and profile reports
 - Reports submitted electronically to Project Coordinator, School Readiness Liaison, and program director within 48 hours of the observation.
 - All reports had to be submitted before proceeding to the next assignment.
4. Once the summary and profile reports were received the Project staff:

- Emailed link for the Director's Survey to the program director
 - Posted a letter to the program director stating the program's eligibility for QIP/QEA funds with a description of the application procedure.
 - Entered classroom scores into data collection system
5. The payment to a rater for a full ECERS-R assessment was \$550. Submission of the reports initiated a rater payment authorization.

The first step of classroom assignment often took multiple telephone calls and emails. School Readiness Liaisons were sent an email listing the name of the rater and the classroom site with a 48-hour period to respond if there was any conflict of interest. If there were no conflicts the rater was contacted to continue the process. If a conflict was identified the process was restarted with a different rater. Many of the raters were also consultants or trainers so this step was very important. There was just one occasion when an assessment was redone because of a conflict of interest issue with a second rater present for an inter rater reliability check. Following this isolated incident Rater Trainers were advised to share the name of the second rater whenever an inter rater reliability check was performed.

QIP/QEA Application and Review Process

Upon receipt of an ECERS report the classroom was sent a letter indicating their eligibility for either a QIP or QEA award. This included the procedures and guidelines for making application. Classrooms were encouraged to download the application forms from the website at www.charteroak.edu/ecers where additional tips for completing the forms were also located. Classrooms were also encouraged to contact the Project Coordinator with any questions and many took advantage of this offer.

Classrooms were given 15 business days to complete either a QIP or QEA application. This was later extended to 30 days. Most classrooms requested extensions and the average time required to submit an application was 8 weeks.

The process of review and approval was as follows:

1. QIP/QEAs were logged in. Submissions were accepted by post, fax, and email.
2. Each QIP/QEA was reviewed to determine if the plan adequately addressed each of the deficiencies identified in the ECERS summary report by the Project Coordinator and an ECERS rater (not the one who performed the initial assessment).
 - If the proposed strategies were adequate the application was approved.
 - If the strategies were not adequate the classroom was asked to resubmit the application.
 - Suggestions for improvement were shared with the classroom by the Project Coordinator.
 - Classrooms had an additional 30 days to resubmit the application.
3. QIP/QEA applications were reviewed as a complete entity. The overall package of improvement strategies needed to be deemed adequate to affect change in ECERS Scores.

4. Once approved the classroom was mailed an award letter.
 - Listing the amount of the award
 - Identifying the date the final report was due.
 - Payment of the award followed the letter under separate mail.

Final Reports

Each award approved by the ECERS Project included the requirement to submit a Final Report once improvement strategies were completed. This report needed to include documentation such as copies of receipts, purchase orders, or invoices indicating that the funds were used as intended.

1. The QIP/QEA award letters indicated a date due for the Final Report based upon the timeline included in the QIP/QEA application.
2. Both QIP and QEA Final Report forms were available for downloading from the www.charteroak.edu/ecers website.
 - QEA Final Reports required:
 - Documentation of how funds were spent (receipts, invoices, etc.)
 - Brief description of the improvements that were made
 - A brief consultant report (if a consultant was used in the strategies)
 - QIP Final Reports required:
 - Documentation of how funds were spent (receipts, invoices, etc.)
 - Detailed description of the specific improvements as it related to each item identified as deficient (scoring below 5) in the Summary Report
 - A brief consultant report (if a consultant was used in the strategies)
3. If a Final Report was not received by the date indicated in the award letter the following steps were taken:
 - A “Final Report Due Notice” was mailed to the program
 - A second “Final Report Due Notice” reminding the program that if no report was received the program would be asked to return the funds. A copy of the second notice would be sent to the local School Readiness Liaison.
 - Emails were sent directly to the program with a copy to the School Readiness Liaison (this last strategy to collect Final Reports was the most effective).

Collecting Final Reports was a challenge. At the start of the Project classrooms could indicate as much time to complete improvement strategies as each thought necessary. Requests ranged from 2- 6 months. As the Project moved into the second year it was clear that long periods of time could no longer be offered. Each classroom was given 2 months to complete the work. Each situation was unique but common delays included:

- Payments arrived 1-2 weeks after the award letter was delivered.
- Classrooms in multi-site programs or with off-site fiduciary agents experienced delays in internal communications.
- Summer closings caused delays in prompt reporting.
- Delivery of purchases took longer than 2 months (if materials were back ordered).
- Scheduling and completing training or consultation activities took longer than 2 months.

A minimum of four months would seem to resolve many of these issues. Some improvement strategies can be implemented swiftly and easily – purchase of books and furniture, or a truck load of mulch. Other strategies such as training in using new materials or employing consultants require longer and more intensive work and are more difficult to complete within a brief period of time.

Follow-up Assessments

Each classroom that received a QIP award was required to have a follow-up ECERS-R assessment. The only exceptions were 30 classrooms receiving QIPs in the last months of the Project. Follow-up assessments were to score those items on the Scale that fell below 5 on the original assessment. It was thought at the start that a follow-up would take less time to perform and therefore the rater fee was reduced. In reality the follow-ups often took as much time as full assessment depending on the type and quantity of items to score. There was a wide range (15-41) in the number of items to score in follow-ups. Items such as room arrangement or activities were relatively simple to score while items in language and reasoning took the full 3 hours.

Follow-up assessments were assigned to a rater different from the one scoring the original assessment. The CMT discussed this policy as there were some who felt that it would be best to have the original rater revisit the classroom as she would be in the best position to determine improvements. The CMT felt that having a different rater prevented a possible bias from impacting the follow-up score and that the practice strongly encouraged high inter rater reliability and objectivity.

1. The process follow-up assessment matched the process for initial ECERS-R assessment.
2. Any follow-up assessment that needed more than 29 items rescored was performed as a full ECERS-R assessment.
3. A classroom that received a QIP, needed a follow-up assessment, AND was also on the 08/09 SDE ECERS Required List had a full ECERS-R assessment.
4. The payment to a rater for a follow-up ECERS-R assessment was \$300. If a rater was asked to perform a full assessment (more than 29 items) the fee was \$550.

As noted in item 2 above, a follow-up assessment that needed more than 29 items rescored was performed as a full ECERS-R assessment. There were 24 classrooms in this category. There were an additional 55 classrooms that received a full assessment on follow up. These were classrooms that appeared on the 08/09 SDE ECERS Required List. Since these rooms would need both a follow-up because of receiving a QIP award and a full assessment to meet the requirements of SDE it was determined that a single full assessment was sufficient.

ECERS-R Raters

Raters who contracted with Charter Oak State College ECERS-R Project to perform assessments signed an agreement that included the following statements:

- I will only contract to administer the ECERS-R in programs in which I do not have a personal or professional relationship.
- I will maintain confidentiality for all aspects of the program that I observe and review.
- I will spend a minimum of 3 hours observing in the classroom.
- I will administer the ECERS-R, write, and submit the report to Charter Oak State College ECERS-R Project within 48 hours and before assessing another classroom.
- I will administer no more than 3 ECERS-R ratings per week.
- I will be available for at least 6 site visits per year for ECERS-R administration.
- I will maintain my reliability certificate by participating in a reliability check with an ECERS-R Trainer once per year and achieving 85% reliability, and by accompanying another rater on a visit for a reliability check once every 3 months.

The Project instituted several innovations in preparing raters and maintaining high inter-rater reliability scores. In previous years a new rater participated in a 6-hour training and went into the field with a Rater Trainer to practice scoring. A Rater Trainer took 3 trainees at a time in simulated field assessments. When the new rater's scores averaged 85% or above he/she was deemed sufficiently reliable to perform ECERS assessments in School Readiness classrooms. The new rater would repeat the field experience in a simulated assessment with a Rater Trainer once a year, also in a simulated assessment, to maintain reliability.

The ECERS-R Project strengthened these procedures as seen in the schedule below. New raters completed the procedure above but also went on 3 additional "shadow" experiences in a 1:1 ratio with a Rater Trainers to gain additional experience. Yearly inter rater reliability checks were increased to quarterly checks in a real classroom assessment. These strategies helped to establish an average rate of 93% reliability throughout the last year of the Project.

The ECERS-R Project planned regularly scheduled opportunities for raters to meet for training purposes and to discuss questions regarding the intricacies of scoring. These included meetings, chat rooms, regular exchanges of group email, and individual telephone calls.

ECERS-R Project Training Schedule for New Raters

1. Attend 3-hour presentation "Overview of the ECERS-R"
2. Attend 3-hour presentation on ECERS-R Scoring Procedures
3. Field experience:
 - a. 3 on-site rating experiences with qualified ECERS-R Trainer while performing a real (not simulated) classroom assessment).
 - b. Trainee must achieve a minimum inter rater reliability score of 85% to continue to the next step.
4. Three additional Field Experiences or Shadow Experiences (new since September 2008)
 - a. 2 on-site rating experiences with a qualified ECERS-R Trainer
 - b. 1 on-site rating experience where the rater takes the lead and the trainer provides consultation and support.

Inter Rater Reliability Procedures

1. All raters must have an inter rater reliability check four times yearly.
2. All inter rater reliability checks are conducted by a qualified ECERS Rater Trainer.
3. All raters must maintain a minimum inter rater reliability score of 85% to continue receiving assignments to perform a rating.
4. If a rater does not achieve the minimum score of 85% she/he will have two more inter rater reliability checks. The average score of these 2 visits must be 85% or above.

Managing quarterly reliability checks has been a challenge as have the shadow experiences. The raters are independent consultants or employed by an agency that permits them to use their time to this purpose. Scheduling is a challenge among these busy people and snow storms and illness increase the difficulties. Only the trainer received compensation for this time. The trainer was paid in full for the observation and summary report with an additional \$50 for the time it took to conduct the reliability check. The rater did not receive any compensation for this professional responsibility. While we insisted on four yearly checks most raters managed three. The three training “shadow” experiences created barriers to successful completion of the training. The one bilingual rater who completed the process holds a senior management position and thus had some flexibility but it delayed moving her into independent assignments. Two shadow experiences would be adequate if the reliability scores remain above 85%.

Training for Established Raters

1. Twice yearly meetings
2. Regular email communication
3. Chat room experiences
4. Question/Answer session with Lisa Waller, Environment Rating Scale Institute (ERSI), North Carolina.

Training for ECERS-R Rater Trainers

1. Yearly inter rater reliability check with Lisa Waller (ERSI)
2. Three additional checks with other Rater Trainers

The Number of Raters Required

The number of raters under contract changed as the Project progressed. At the start there were 22 raters who had completed the original training under CT SDE guidelines and had met the 85% reliability requirement. During the first 7 months 252 initial ratings were performed. The average number of ratings per month was 36 but some raters did no ratings at all while one rater managed 48 ratings. All raters are independent contractors and some had greater availability than others.

In August the CMT reviewed the budget, the SDE ECERS Required List for 08/09, and current progress and determined that a reduced number of raters would be adequate for meeting the needs. The only training for new raters was to add a bilingual rater to the group for a total of 15 raters. This group also averaged about 35 ratings per month with some raters only doing 2 ratings while most did between 15-20 assessments during the entire 10 month period. There was attrition as some raters resigned or were unable to accept new assignments due to personal or

professional reasons. There were just 11 raters available to accept assignments at the conclusion of the Project. This was more than adequate to meet the needs and it is recommended that a small core group of raters available to do approximately 10 ratings a month would be the ideal for any future reinstatement of this Project.

Preschool Program and School Readiness Liaison Interactions

Good communication between preschool program staff, School Readiness Liaisons, and the ECERS-R Project was a high priority from the start of the Project. It was important to the success of the Project that School Readiness Liaisons be informed of the:

1. Rater assignments to confirm that there would not be a conflict of interest which might impact the objectivity of the ECERS-R assessment.
2. Summary and profile reports on each classroom assessed within their community.
3. Eligibility of each classroom for either a QIP or QEA award. Several School Readiness Liaisons spent many hours assisting directors in preparing these applications.
4. The final reporting responsibilities of each classroom receiving a QIP or QEA award as the liaisons also assisted in helping to complete these forms in a timely manner.

It was also very important to maintain good communication with preschool program staff to:

1. Confirm there would be no conflict of interest issues between rater and program staff.
2. Keep complete records of up-to-date contact information to improve scheduling of assessments.
3. Share information about how the ECERS-R is scored and how it can be used for planning improvement strategies.

Steps were taken throughout the Project to strengthen these connections. A group email list was created to send changes or updates on policies to all liaisons simultaneously. The Project Coordinator attended both the meetings of the Priority District and Competitive District Liaisons in the spring of 2008. Directors were asked to confirm site visit details by completing a "Classroom Information Form." Other strategies are the website, workshops, and survey.

ECERS-R Project Website

The website was created and posted in January 2008. It contained policies and procedures, contact information, and rater forms. QIP/QEA applications and Final Report forms were posted so programs could download them. Policy changes and updates were posted as they occurred. See www.charteroak.edu/ecers. (This webpage was removed August 28, 2009.)

Workshop and Tech Tips

As the first QIP and QEA applications were submitted it was clear that preschool program directors needed guidance in using the ECERS-R summary reports in planning improvement strategies. Many early submissions resulted in a request to rewrite the application to strengthen specific improvement strategies. Several School Readiness Liaisons who spent hours assisting directors in completing these applications prompted the Project Coordinator to develop a sheet of "tech tips" to guide directors in understanding the process. These tips were posted on the

website. In the fall of 2008 a workshop titled “How to Develop an Improvement Plan Using the ECERS-R” was delivered five times in locations around the state and hosted by a local School Readiness Liaison. Evaluation feedback was positive.

I just want to tell you that I have been reading the evaluations from the conference. I honestly thought that some people might think that QIP was a “less fun” workshop, but you must have made a huge impact! All of the feedback was very positive, and all of the comments addressed how much was learned. Several have already taken a new look at classrooms and made changes. Imagine the impact that can be had just in offering a workshop about the ECERS and what to look for in the classroom. I am very thankful for the meaningful learning and impact you brought to Bridgeport.

Lee Helmerich, School Readiness Liaison

Arbitration Process

True disputes regarding ECERS scores were few. Most concerns were related to program directors and teachers lack of familiarity with the tool. The Project Coordinator responded to questions and would talk with both the program director and the rater to determine where the challenges were. Much time was spent in explaining the purpose of the tool, how scoring is performed, and what specific items require to score well.

The process for asking that a score be amended was as follows: 1) the program director put the request in writing and provided any necessary documentation to support the claim; 2) sent this to the Project Director who took the request to the next meeting of the ECERS Project Collaborative Management Team; 3) the Team reviewed all documentation and determined a response.

There were 410 initial assessments and 172 follow-up assessments with just 3 formal arbitration requests. One resulted in an amended summary report (no change in score) and 2 resulted in an increase - a score improved from 4.2 to 4.22 and the other improved from 5.8 to 5.9. All cases lead to clarification in details on ECERS requirements and this information was shared with raters thus improving their skills.

Director’s Survey

The Director’s Survey was developed in the summer of 2008 and implemented in September. When Charter Oak State College received a completed ECERS summary report, the email link to the survey was sent to the director of the program where the classroom was located. This included both new ECERS assessments and follow-up ECERS assessments. Many directors have multiple classrooms and were likely to respond to the first invitation but not the succeeding ones. The survey was useful in creating an avenue for communication between directors and the Project. One director telephoned within seconds of having been sent the survey link. “I figured you were sitting at your desk and I have several questions!”

The responses received indicate a need for technical assistance. Many program directors do not have a clear understanding of the purpose of the tool or how to use it for program improvement. The full collection of survey responses is included at the end of this report but here are a few of the issues that have generated comment:

- Confusion on how to use ECERS-R as preparation for accreditation. The ECERS was used in the development of NAEYC accreditation materials and is an excellent tool for preparation. Many sites awaiting an accreditation visit were advised to have the ECERS-R performed to fine tune their classrooms and to allow staff to become comfortable with being observed.
- Confusion regarding how the ECERS-R is scored. One respondent asks why the rater cannot interview the director prior to leaving the site. Information is collected during the on-site visit and the report is completed off site. Raters had instructions to complete the report within 48 hours of the visit and prior to beginning the next assignment – thus explaining why raters were only permitted to perform 3 assessments in a one week time period.
- Confusion on technical aspects of scoring such as “substantial portion of the day” where materials may be present in a classroom but the schedule does not permit extended access to these items. This is a common misunderstanding.
- Confusion regarding a rater’s role as observer or consultant. The CMT felt it was difficult for raters to maintain objectivity and offer technical assistance. Therefore raters were instructed not to include recommendations for improvement as this should be the role of consultant or technical advisor.

A few directors expressed dissatisfaction with the scheduling of visits. The CMT felt strongly that giving a one-week-window to each classroom was the best policy. Classrooms had an opportunity to tell the rater if there were any special events (picture day, field trips, etc.) that would prevent the observation of a typical day. Visits were not complete surprises like a licensing spot inspection. Raters preferred the flexibility in scheduling the actual date of the visit. And finally, it decreased the likelihood of classrooms “prepping” for the observation by planning special lessons, removing challenging children, and placing extra staff in the room to increase teacher/child ratios.

It is interesting to note that many telephone calls from directors indicated incredulity about rater comments. “That didn’t happen!” There are many examples where raters observed actions that were missed by teachers. There was the child who went to the restroom and was not missed; the child who urinated unobserved out of doors; the child who dropped his pizza on the floor and continued to eat it; the child choking a playmate; and many more examples. Raters are trained to be objective and to write detailed comments documenting the reason for the score. It is possible that a rater may miss details of an activity but it is unlikely that there would be a reason to invent something.

ECERS Project Response to Low Scoring Classrooms

The ECERS scoring system defines classroom quality in the following manner:

Scores of 1-2.9 = Inadequate Quality

Scores of 3-4.9 = Minimal Quality

Scores of 5-6.9 = Good Quality

Scores of 7 = Excellent Quality

Classrooms scoring in the inadequate range were of particular concern to the ECERS-R Project Collaborative Management Team (CMT). Fortunately the number of classrooms that scored in this range on initial assessment was low, only 6 (1.4%) of the 410 initial assessments. There was only 1 in this range in the 172 follow up assessments.

The Project staff reported low scoring classrooms to the CMT on a regular basis and also made periodic reports to the SDE School Readiness Team. Low scoring classrooms were encouraged to make prompt application for QIP funds to make necessary improvements. Only 3 of the 6 classrooms submitted applications and received QIP awards.

Classroom	Score 1	QIP	Score 2	Increase	Comment
a	1.9	Yes	3.39	1.47	
b	2.3	Yes	4.55	2.26	
c	2.3	No			Classroom moved to new location
d	2.7	No			Did not apply for QIP
e	2.7	Yes			Received QIP 5/18/09 – no follow up
f	2.9	No			Did not apply for QIP

Classrooms receiving higher scores were quicker in submitting a request for quality improvement funds than lower scoring programs. The lowest scoring classrooms were often late, did not submit an application (38) or failed to resubmit an application (7). The Project has sent as many as three letters, with copies to School Readiness Liaisons, to classrooms urging that they submit a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). There were 45 eligible classrooms that did not receive QIPs. This could be interpreted as meaning that a strong administration is nearly as important to classroom quality as a good teacher.

Connecticut State Department of Children and Families

On five occasions an ECERS Rater felt compelled to make a report to the Connecticut Department of Children and Families and/or the Connecticut Department of Public Health. All five incidents concerned supervision issues. The ECERS-R Project Collaborative Management Team, the local School Readiness Liaison, and the program director were notified immediately by the Project Coordinator.

Did classrooms deliberately try to score low to access QIP funds?

At the start of the Project both high scoring and low scoring classrooms could apply for an equal amount of funds (\$5000) for quality improvement or enhancement. As the Project progressed it became clear that funds needed to be dedicated to supporting only those classrooms that needed improvement – the classrooms scoring in the minimal or inadequate ranges and were in the group required to participate. Enhancement funds were reduced to \$500 and later discontinued. The question arose that this would inspire classrooms to attempt to deliberately score below 5 in order to be eligible for needed financial support. There is no solid evidence to support this theory.

The table below shows that the percentage of required classrooms scoring below 5 (inadequate or minimal quality) is approximately the same in both the 07/08 and 08/09. The percentage of classrooms receiving QIP funds is also very similar. The slight increase of low scores in the 08/09 required classroom list could be attributed to an increased awareness of the ECERS Project

and a greater understanding of the application procedures. It could also be attributed to the greater number of classrooms (58 of 140 classrooms) that were new (in the first year of the 3-year window) to School Readiness in the 08/09 fiscal year than in the previous year.

	Total Classrooms Assessed	# scoring below 5	% of classrooms scoring below 5	# Receiving QIPs	% Receiving QIPs
07/08 Required	171	96	56.10%	73	76.00%
08/09 Required	140	81	57.90%	65	80.20%
Volunteers	112	54	48.20%	40	74.10%
Total	423	231	54.61%	178	77.06%

ECERS Raters were alerted to the possibility that classrooms might attempt to deliberately score low. None observed anything that made them suspicious during an observation. One rater, in her role as consultant – not as a rater - was told that a specific classroom was attempting to score low – it scored a 5 (good quality). Another rater shared the following:

“It seems that if the environment was altered enough to change a score, a rater may pick up some cues from kids that things were amiss (such as we do when kids keep asking why they have to wash their hands while we are there!). A program would also have to be pretty well versed in how to affect scores, and I cannot say this is that common. I never had the feeling that anything was deliberate.”

Volunteer Classrooms

The percent of volunteer classrooms scoring less than 5 looks good at first glance. Half of the volunteer classrooms were NAEYC accredited, familiar with the ECERS tool, and connected to the Project through their local School Readiness Liaison. This could explain why the volunteer classrooms performed slightly better than the required classrooms. It is doubtful that the volunteers as a group would have continued to perform better. A waiting list of 92 volunteer classrooms shows only 33 are accredited under either the old or new NAEYC accreditation systems and 57 are of unknown accreditation status. Our experience with many on the wait list is that they had no previous experience with ECERS and were enrolling due to networking with the local School Readiness Liaison. This would certainly have made an impact on the volunteer percentages.

QIPs and QEAs

Classrooms scoring below 5 were the target of the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) funds of “up to but not to exceed \$5000.” The Project required each participating classroom that scored low to complete an action plan that addressed each one of the 43 items on the ECERS-R Scale that scored below 5. Applications were reviewed by the Project Coordinator and ECERS-R raters to determine if the proposed strategies would, indeed, help to raise the classroom scores.

Ineffective QIPs were returned to the classroom with advice and support for creating a stronger plan.

At the start of the Project classrooms scoring 5 or above could apply for Quality Enhancement Plan (QEA) funds equal to the QIPs. Six months into the Project the CMT re-evaluated this policy. Since approximately 58% of the 07/08 classrooms were eligible for QIPs there was concern that funds needed to be conserved for the 08/09 required classrooms. Thus the QEA amounts were reduced to \$500. In November 2008 the QEAs were discontinued. The numbers of each type of award are below.

# QIPs	194	\$846,986
# QEAs	87	254,073
Total Awards	281	\$1,101,059

The CMT discussed the question of who should write the QIP for each classroom – Project staff or the classroom director? Some of the early applications showed that few directors had experience in this type of planning. The CMT determined that each classroom must prepare the application on their own as each classroom would have individual and unique problems to solve with program resources that were unknown to Project staff. No classroom’s QIP would be denied but they might be asked to strengthen the proposed strategies and resubmit the application.

The variety of proposed improvement strategies was very broad. Some classrooms needed educational materials while others requested expensive items such as classroom sinks or new playground fencing. Some distributed funds equally between materials, training, and smaller improvements such as classroom observation mirrors. Some classrooms had additional sources for items such as training or consultants and thus did not need to request QIP funds for certain improvement strategies. These programs had access to school nurses, School Readiness facilitators, Accreditation Facilitation Project support, and the Training Wheels Project. QIP reviewers would approve an application so long as all deficiencies were adequately addressed.

Project staff grouped the funding requests for QIPs and QEAs into 4 categories as follows:

Category	%	Examples of requested items
Training, coaching, consultation, teacher resource materials	13%	Topics included: room arrangement, personal care routines, supervision, transition activities, and curriculum development.
Classroom Furniture	23%	sand/water tables, child size sofas, shelving, and observation mirrors
Capital Expenses	26%	Mostly outdoor improvements. Repairs (cushioning/mulch, fence repair, gate replacement, moving items to increase fall zones), and climbing equipment. Sheds, cabinets, classroom sinks and bathrooms, too.
Educational Materials	38%	Gross/fine motor activities and all center activity materials (math, art, science/nature, dramatic play, etc).

A closer look at follow-up assessment scores that decreased.

There were 12 classrooms that scored low, received a QIP award, and scored even lower on follow-up assessment. There were 3 areas that presented common difficulties.

Handwashing

All of these classrooms earned an average score of 2 in this area. Most reported that they would employ hand washing trainings, review health practices, and/or post hand washing steps to address this problem. However, follow-up visits demonstrated that those classrooms continued to be lacking in the use of proper hand washing procedures. Problems included lack of supervision, not rinsing thoroughly, recontamination after hand washing, or not washing after sand and water play. For example, in an initial visit, a classroom earned a 2 in health practices because, “Adequate hand washing did not take place on arrival, before and after sand play, coming in from outside, after nose blowing and sneezing.” Their QIP proposed trainings on correct procedures regarding hand washing and sanitizing. However, their follow-up score was a 1 because, “Children were observed to cough, sneeze, and wipe their mouths and noses on their clothes. Teachers were inconsistent in getting children to wash hand after these incidents. Children often touched the garbage pail and were not asked to wash their hands after doing so.”

Substantial portion of the day

In the Activity Subscale items decreased scores were often the result of failing to meet “substantial portion of the day.” The ECERS-R Scale requires that 11 items meet “substantial portion of the day.” This is calculated as 1/3 of the hours the classroom is in operation (example: 1/3 of a classroom scheduled to be open for 6 hours equals 2 hours). This affects mostly educational materials and center areas where equipment must be freely available and accessible to children for 1/3 of the day. The rater determines this through observation of the activities and analyzing the daily schedule. It is important to note that this requirement affects 11 items on the scale and can have a big impact on the overall classroom score. Five of the 12 classrooms were located in school-based settings and were more likely than the other center-based settings to struggle in this area because of additional requirements such as “specials” that must be included in their schedules.

Inadequate improvement strategies

Sometimes lower scores were the result of inadequately addressing a standard. For example, room arrangement did not always improve Item #4 Room arrangement for play, standard 3.2 “Visual supervision of play area is not difficult.” An initial report noted that the “L-shaped classroom makes it difficult to see a child in the block area and sink area from many points in the room.” Despite room arrangement with a consultant, standard 3.2 was not met during the follow-up visit; “Some areas were difficult to supervise because of tall book shelves, tall equipment (dry erase board), and things that were placed upon the shelves.”

In addition, some classrooms improved on low scoring items while negatively impacting other items. One classroom needed to improve item #4 Room arrangement for play, standard 5.2 “Quiet and active centers placed to not interfere with one another. The program purchased

furniture and shelving in order to divide the classroom into centers. While the original problem was resolved, they earned a lower follow-up score because they now failed to meet the criteria for standard 1.2, “Supervision of play area is difficult.”

Same or different teacher question

It does not appear that staff changes or credentials contributed to decreases in follow-up scores. Most of these classrooms had the same teacher prior to and following the implementation of QIP strategies and the majority of the teachers in these 12 classrooms have at least an associate degree in early childhood education.

Recommendations:

Much has been learned over the course of the ECERS-R Project. There are 5 key recommendations to use in any future quality enhancement programs.

1. Require accountability. A QIP award is a “carrot” or incentive to improve. A follow up assessment is the “stick” that encourages meaningful change.
2. Technical assistance is vital. Workshops, telephone responses, and on-site consulting are needed to help program staff understand the use of the tool and to brainstorm improvement strategies.
3. Maintain excellent communication strategies with all parties. This includes telephone availability, director’s survey, and regular updates via email.
4. High scoring classrooms should be eligible for some financial reward to prevent classrooms from deliberately trying to score low in order to access funds.
5. Hire raters whose job description is only to assess classrooms and review improvement plans. This would support high inter-rater reliability and prevent conflict of interest issues.
6. Extend the time required to implement classroom change. Not all change can be implemented quickly.
7. All follow up assessments should be full and not partial.

Accountability

Many of the classrooms required to participate in the ECERS-R Project had limited experience with ECERS-R assessments and with using the tool for planning improvement strategies. Using the QIP award as the “carrot” and the final report and follow up assessment as the “stick,” classrooms were held accountable to implementing real change. The data shows this strategy was effective. It is possible that the “carrot” could be reduced but an on site classroom check is very necessary to inspire real change.

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance was not a formal component of the ECERS-R Project but the need was great. The CMT was clear that “raters should rate” and programs should hire “consultants for consulting” but raters often reported being pressed for recommendations. The Director’s Survey includes comments expressing frustration over how the tool is scored and what the scores mean.

Many early QIP submissions showed that directors needed advice in interpreting the ECERS summary report in order to make meaningful improvements. School Readiness liaisons protested about the time spent assisting directors in completing QIP applications. One liaison reported spending 3 hours per QIP application with each of her directors. The Project coordinator spent a good portion of time responding telephone and email inquiries and later in the development of the QIP tech tips and workshop.

Technical support was helpful in alleviating some of the “high stakes” anxiety that having an ECERS-R assessment could generate in teachers. One teacher and her education consultant called with questions and refused to give their names for fear of being identified. While this was unusual it does represent the intensity which many view the ECERS-R assessment. Two teachers who shared that they had each had ECERS every year for the past six were stunned to learn that anyone could purchase a copy of the tool – that it wasn’t a secret. Other teachers contacted Project staff regularly with a variety of questions once they discovered they had a source for answers. Email inquiries listing 6 or 8 questions were not uncommon.

As new classrooms engage in School Readiness requirements the need for technical assistance will certainly continue.

A Core Group of Raters

All the raters used in the Project were independent contractors who juggled other professional responsibilities that limited their availability to accept ECERS assignments. Some were very available and others hardly at all. It often created scheduling challenges when trying to juggle the requirements of the Project and needs of raters. A core group of raters employed instead of contracted to perform the work would ease this challenge.

In addition, we received feedback from School Readiness Liaisons that a few raters were leaving business cards for their consulting services at sites when concluding the ECERS-R assessment. The practice was discouraged by the CMT. Once a rater performed consulting services at a site she was no longer able to perform assessments on other classrooms at that site. Project staff remained diligent in confirming any conflicts of interest but this was a practice we could not entirely prevent. A group of raters with no other professional obligations would control this behavior.

Inter rater reliability scores improved with a small core group of raters. School Readiness Liaisons had concerns in regard to differences between the first and second rater comments. Maintaining extremely high inter rater reliability helped alleviate this concern. At the start of the Project there were 22 raters who had met the 85% inter rater reliability threshold at some point with the previous year. The group of 12 raters who finished up the Project had 3 inter rater checks within the year and averaged 93% reliability scores. The raters, as a group, went from a “B” average to an “A” average. This achievement was simpler with a smaller group of raters. The reports received in the second half of the Project were highly objective, precisely written, and gave a good clear snapshot of each classroom. These clear reports also greatly reduced the number of calls challenging specific classroom scores. There were 3 arbitration calls in the first six months compared to only 1 in the last 11 months.

The Process

The time between receiving an ECERS-R summary assessment, writing and submitting a QIP, implementing strategies, returning a Final Report, and getting a follow up assessment required much more than was originally assumed by the CMT.

QIP/QEA Submission:

1. At the start classrooms were sent an eligibility notice stating that the classroom had 15 working days to submit either a QIP or QEA application. This was extended to 30 working days but the average time to submit a QIP was 8 weeks (less for QEAs which were simpler to complete). Some classrooms were sent as many as three “reminder” letters as the CMT was anxious to see that low scoring classrooms received the needed support.
2. Classrooms whose QIP was denied were given 30 days to re-submit a new application. This extended submission time even longer.
3. The Project asked that QIPs be reviewed and signed by the local School Readiness liaison to assist in verifying that strategies would be implemented as described. Some liaisons refused to sign fearing liability issues if the program failed in their obligations. Liaisons from larger communities needed extra time to review the large quantity of QIPs from classrooms under their responsibility. While the CMT felt it was extremely important to keep liaisons “in the loop” regarding any action within a classroom under their responsibility the guidelines for liaison roles should be carefully reviewed.

QIP/QEA Review:

1. All QIP/QEA applications were reviewed by the Project Coordinator and 1 or 2 ECERS-R raters. All documents were made anonymous to maintain objectivity. The first applications were reviewed by the CMT to confirm that the process was working as anticipated. Then applications were reviewed through bi-monthly meetings of raters. This was changed to emailing the documents to raters to speed the process of review. Even with these changes it took an average of 3 weeks to review an application.
2. Once the QIP or QEA was approved a check was cut through the State of CT Core System. This added an additional week to the process.

Implementation and Reporting of Improvement Strategies:

1. At the start classrooms could request implementation time lines ranging from 2 – 8 months. In September 2008 classrooms were directed to complete all improvements within 2 months so that the Project could schedule follow-up assessments before the end of June 2009. Some strategies were easy to accomplish within this time. Others such as teacher training and scheduling consultants were more difficult to squeeze within this time period.
2. Each QIP or QEA award required a Final Report describing how the funds were used with documentation to support the expenses. Most classrooms took an average of 6 weeks past their “report due date” to submit this report and required “Report Due” notices.

Follow up Assessments:

1. Follow up assessments were scheduled upon receipt of the Final Report. Since many classrooms submitted reports late it created challenges. No visits were scheduled before the end of the designated completion date but many had to be done before receipt of the Final Report in order to comply with the requirements of the SDE ECERS Required List for 08/09.
2. Setting up any ECERS assignment takes approximately 2 weeks to complete. This time should be included when planning new initiatives.

Suggestions for Improving the Process Include:

1. Have technical assistance available to the classroom teacher and director immediately upon completion of the ECERS-R assessment to explain the report, plan improvement strategies, and submit the application in a timely manner.
2. Permit classrooms to have a minimum of 4 months to complete all strategies. This increases the flexibility each classroom would have to order supplies, train staff, and schedule both training and facility improvements.
3. The task of QIP review should be part of the job description for the core group of raters. If raters were in the field 3 days a week they could be in the office 2 days a week to review QIPs and thus speed the turn around time for approval.
4. The Final Report form should be simplified.
5. Consequences for failure to complete the Final Report should be clearly established and made known to classrooms prior to submission of the QIP by the technical advisors.

All Ratings Should be Full Assessments:

The Project used follow up ECERS assessments to rate only those items that scored below 5 on the initial assessment and that were addressed by QIP improvement strategies. The CMT assumed these would take approximately much less time. Raters reported that most follow ups required the same 3 hours as a full assessment. In addition, raters reported frustration over not being able to comment on items they were asked not to score. Some scores had deteriorated since the initial rating and the raters could not apply the information to the follow up report since the item had scored 5 or above on the initial assessment.

1. The number of items that required re-scoring ranged from 14-42. Any follow up assessment that required more than 29 items to score was assigned as a full assessment.
2. Some specific items require 3 hours to adequately and accurately capture the score. Language and reasoning is just one example.
3. Incorporating the re-scored items into the profile to determine a new over all classroom score can affect data analysis (see Dr. Gilliam's report).
4. Lisa Waller of the Environment Rating Scale Institute of North Carolina who provided training to the Project rater trainers agrees that all assessments should be full in order to be fair to the classroom and faithful to the tool.

Next Steps

The ECERS Project was created to establish a base-line data set on the levels of quality in preschool classrooms in CT. The Project has shown clearly that when the ECERS-R Scale is used for classroom improvement it can be effective. It was hoped that this would lead the way

into the establishment of a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The current financial situation in the country has caused this plan to be put on hold and now the ECERS-R Project at Charter Oak State College has completed its memorandum of agreement. There are still School Readiness classrooms that will need to be assessed using the ECERS-R Scale. There is still a need for ECERS-R Assessments, ECERS-R raters and technical assistance.

Since an ECERS-R assessment is part of the CT SDE School Readiness participation requirements classrooms must still obtain a yearly assessment by a rater meeting the 85% inter rater reliability standard until NAEYC accreditation is achieved. The 12 raters (3 of whom are rater trainers) have recently met inter rater reliability standards and have been encouraged to maintain quarterly inter rater reliability checks on their own initiative. The SDE School Readiness team will have a plan in place in September to coordinate rater training and reliability checks. Individual programs will return to locating, hiring, and paying for ECERS raters on their own or through the local School Readiness liaisons.

It is strongly recommended that technical assistance remain available to teachers and directors. During the course of this pilot raters were instructed to refer all questions to the Project coordinator. The coordinator explained the requirements of the tool, how the items were scored, and reminded callers to look at the number of “yes” items beyond the final score to determine next steps. This preserved the objectivity and integrity of the summary report, calmed anxiety, and was an opportunity for sharing information about classroom quality. This reduced the number of arbitration calls and greatly eased the high stakes attitude some had toward their score. The Colorado QRIS system uses the local child care resource and referral agencies to provide technical assistance. This might be an option to consider.

Finally it should be noted that using the ECERS-R Scale in the manner piloted by this Project sharply focused the preschool’s staff in their approach to planning and implementing improvement strategies. Being required to analyze the specific indicators that scored low caused directors to reflect on each standard and the impact it had on the entire classroom. Using the QIP award as a “carrot” to encourage program staff to look closely at scores was very effective. One director reported that “just working on the QIP with my teachers has already generated many changes.” Using the follow up assessment as the accountability “stick” provided high motivation for program staff to implement truly effective improvement strategies. Any future plans for quality enhancement initiatives should focus on targeted interventions with accountability built into the system.

“A dream is just a dream. A goal is a dream with a plan and a deadline.” Harvey Mackay

We all dream of the day when all children in Connecticut have the opportunity to work and play in a high quality preschool program. The ECERS-R Project required that each classroom make a plan (QIP) and meet a deadline (Final Report and follow up assessment) for improvement. The data shows it worked. The challenge now is to keep the dream alive.



Respectfully submitted:

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Appendix

Findings from the Charter Oak State College ECERS-R Project – Dr. Walter Gilliam

Low/high scores on specific ECERS-R items

ECERS Project Survey

Distribution of QIPs/QEAs by City

Introduction to the Harms, Clifford and Cryer Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales

Findings from the Charter Oaks ECERS-R Project

This report summarizes findings from the ECERS-R Project conducted by Charter Oak State College. All analyses were conducted using data obtained from Charter Oak State College and reported to be complete and accurate as of June 30, 2009. For a description of the project and methods employed to train raters and assess reliability, please see the March 9, 2009 Charter Oak Update Report and other written materials by Charter Oaks.

Classrooms in three groups of sites were assessed – 2007/2008 required sites ($n = 152$), 2008/2009 required sites ($n = 146$), and 2008 voluntary sites ($n = 112$). According to *School Readiness ALERT Number SR-08-03*, dated January 15, 2008, Connecticut School Readiness sites were required to participate in the ECERS-R project if they (a) “accepted 6 or more additional children and are accredited under the old NAEYC criteria or are in a Head Start, NEASC, or AMS approved program” or (b) “accepted 1 or more children and are new to the school readiness system and in process of initial NAEYC accreditation.” (Programs accredited by NAEYC prior to September 16, 2006 are accredited “under the old NAEYC criteria.”) Voluntary sites were classrooms during the Spring and Summer of 2008 that requested to participate in the ECERS-R Project even though they were not required to do so.

Interpreting ECERS-R Scores

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R) is likely the most widely used measure of the quality of child care, having been utilized extensively for both program evaluation and improvement. The ECERS-R has sound psychometric properties of reliability and validity as a measure of classroom quality with implications for child outcomes. Complete administration of the ECERS-R requires a well-trained rater and about 4 hours of classroom observation, followed by about 45 minutes of teacher interview.

The ECERS-R consists of 470 individual indicators of quality that contribute to 43 specific items located in 7 quality domains. These domains and items include:

- 1. Space and Furnishings** (indoor space; furniture for routine care, play, and learning; furniture for relaxation; room arrangement for play; space for privacy; child-related display; space for gross motor; gross motor equipment)
- 2. Personal Care Routines** (greeting/departing; meals/snacks; nap/rest; toileting/diapering; health practices; safety practices)
- 3. Language-Reasoning** (books and pictures; encouraging children to communicate; using language to develop reasoning skills; informal use of language)
- 4. Activities** (fine motor; art; music/movement; blocks; sand/water; dramatic play; nature/science; math/numbers; use of TV, video, and/or computers; promoting acceptance of diversity)
- 5. Interaction** (supervision of gross motor activities; general supervision of children; discipline; staff-child interactions; interactions among children)
- 6. Program Structure** (schedule; free play; group time; provisions for children with disabilities)
- 7. Parents and Staff** (provisions for parents; provisions for personal needs of staff; provision for professional needs of staff; staff interaction and cooperation; supervision and evaluation of staff; opportunities for professional growth)

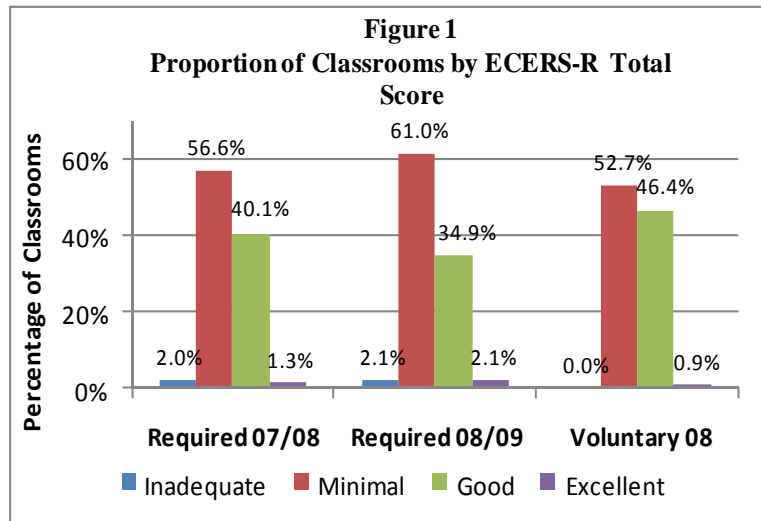
Each item is scored on a seven-point anchored Likert scale (1 = Inadequate; 3 = Minimal; 5 = Good; 7 = Excellent). Items within domains are averaged to yield the seven domain scores, and all items are averaged to yield a total score. ECERS-R total and domain scores may be interpreted using the suggestions provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Interpreting ECERS-R Total and Domain Scores

Score	Descriptor	Suggested Interpretation
1.00 to 2.99	Inadequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Unacceptable as safe child care ➤ Potentially harmful to children’s health and/or development
3.00 to 4.99	Minimal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Marginally acceptable as child care ➤ Likely to cause neither harm nor educational good
5.00 to 6.49	Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Good quality child care ➤ May be associated with some school readiness benefits
6.50 to 7.00	Excellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Excellent early education ➤ Likely to cause significant school readiness benefits

ECERS-R Scores at Baseline by Group Type

As shown in Figure 1, ECERS-R total scores at baseline (before any quality enhancement plans or applications) across all three groups were mostly in the minimal range (ranging from 52.7% for the Voluntary 08 classes to 61.0% for the Required 08/09 classes). Only 37.0% (Required 08/09) to 47.3% (Voluntary 08) classes scored in the good to excellent range. Relatively few classrooms scored at the extreme ends of either inadequate or excellent quality. No statistically significant differences between the three groups were found ($X^2_{(6)} = 5.75$, Sommer’s $d = -.03$), suggesting at baseline that classrooms in each of these three groups were in roughly equivalent need of quality enhancement efforts.



As shown in Table 2, average ECERS-R Total Scores for classrooms before quality enhancement plans or applications were in the Minimal range (Required 07/08 Sites = 4.81; Required 08/09 Sites = 4.74; Voluntary 08 Sites = 4.90). Results of ANOVA indicated no significant differences ($F_{(2,407)} = 1.07$) between the three groups on Total ECERS-R scores. Significant between group differences, however, were found for three of the seven ECERS-R domains. Specifically, Voluntary 08 classes outscored Required 08/09 classes in personal care routines, and Voluntary 08 outscored both Required 07/08 and Required 08/09 classes in parents and staff. Required 07/08 classes outscored Required 08/09 in program structure.

Table 2
ECERS-R Total and Domain Scores for Required 07/08, Required 08/09 and Voluntary Sites

Required 07/08 (n = 152)		Required 08/09 (n = 146)		Voluntary 08 (n = 112)		ANOVA $F_{(2,407)}$
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	

Space & Furnishings	4.32	1.02	4.23	0.97	4.36	0.95	0.59
Personal Care Routines	3.39	1.24	3.16 ^a	1.31	3.57 ^b	1.30	3.33*
Language & Reasoning Activities	5.42	1.18	5.40	1.01	5.23	0.91	1.18
Interactions	4.57	1.03	4.68	0.97	4.75	0.81	1.22
Program Structure	5.53	1.49	5.44	1.32	5.49	1.26	0.19
Parents & Staff	5.50 ^a	1.23	5.13 ^b	1.38	5.48	1.12	3.86*
Parents & Staff	5.78 ^a	0.89	5.79 ^a	0.78	6.09 ^b	0.61	6.23**
TOTAL ECERS-R	4.81	0.87	4.74	0.82	4.90	0.66	1.07

Notes. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Groups with differing subscript letters differed on post hoc Scheffe tests ($p < .05$).

ECERS-R Scores and Teacher Educational Level

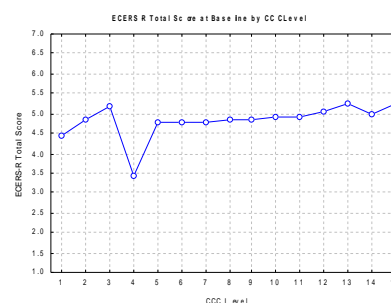
The lead teacher in each classroom reported her educational level in terms of Connecticut Charts a Course (CCC) Career Ladder level. A total of 371 teachers reported their CCC level.

Table 7

Proportion of Teachers at Various CCC Levels (n = 371)

CCC Level	Description	Proportion of Teachers
1	CCAC Membership	11.1%
2	Module I (30 hours)	0.3%
3	Modules I-II (75 hours) or 3 ECE Credits	1.1%
4	Modules I-III (120 hours)	0.3%
5	Modules I-IV (150 hours) or 6 ECE Credits	2.4%
6	CDA or 12 ECE Credits	7.3%
7	CDA including 12 ECE Credits	13.2%
8	30 ECE Credits or 1-Year ECE Certificate	7.0%
9	Associates Degree, including 12 ECE Credits	3.2%
10	Associates Degree in ECE or School-Age	15.6%
11	Bachelor's Degree including 12 ECE Credits	7.5%
12	Bachelor's Degree in ECE or School-Age	18.3%
13	Master's Degree including 12 ECE Credits	1.6%
14	Master's Degree in ECE or School-Age	10.5%
15	Advanced Degree including 12 ECE Credits	0.5%

A small but statistically significant correction was found between CCC level and baseline ECERS-R Total Score ($r = .22$, $p < .001$). As shown on the graph, however, no easily discernable pattern was observed to suggest a minimum CCC level threshold for achieving a particular ECERS-R Total Score. Except for the lower CCC levels (2-4), where relatively few teachers were observed, the relationship between educational level and ECERS-R score is gradual throughout the range of CCC levels.



Relative Strengths and Weaknesses at Baseline

Ipsative analyses were used to determine whether a specific pattern of relative strengths and weaknesses could be detected between domains of the ECERS-R for these three groups of classes. The purpose of such an analysis is to identify potential areas of weakness where quality enhancement efforts might be focused to achieve greatest gains. Average domain scores were computed for each of the three groups, and dependent-sample t -tests were used to compare each domain score to the average. Across all three groups, the same pattern of relative strengths and weaknesses was found. Therefore, analysis was conducted with all three groups combined.

Table 3

Ipsative Analysis of Baseline ECERS-R Domains

	Domain Score		Relative to Average Domain Score		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Diff Score	<i>t</i> ₍₄₀₉₎	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Space & Furnishings	4.30	0.98	-0.61	-19.73***	-0.75
Personal Care Routines	3.36	1.29	-1.55	-35.57***	-1.91
Language & Reasoning	5.36	1.05	0.45	11.64***	0.56
Activities	4.66	0.95	-0.26	-8.24***	-0.32
Interactions	5.49	1.37	0.57	12.92***	0.70
Program Structure	5.36	1.27	0.45	11.31***	0.56
Parents & Staff	5.87	0.79	0.96	26.42***	1.19
Average Domain Score	4.91	0.81	--	--	--

*** $p < .001$.

As shown in Table 3, three domains emerged as relative weaknesses (Space & Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, and Activities), and four domains emerged as relative strengths (Language & Reasoning, Interactions, Programs Structure, and Parents & Staff). As a quality enhancement project, areas of relative weakness are of greatest interest. The area of singular greatest weakness was Personal Care Routines. Continued ipsative analyses at the item level within the Personal Care Routines domain, suggested significant concerns in all item-level areas, with the exception of Greetings/Departings. (See Table 4.) In other words, Personal Care Routines was the domain of greatest concern, and this was due to relatively weak scores on all items within this domain with the exception of Greetings/Departings.

Table 4

Ipsative Analysis of Items within the Personal Care Routines Domain at Baseline

	Domain Score		Relative to Domain Score		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Diff Score	<i>t</i> _(1,409)	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Greetings/Departings	6.23	1.26	2.80	40.48***	2.17
Meals/Snacks	2.43	2.04	-0.92	-13.98***	-0.71
Nap/Rest	3.12	1.97	-0.19	-2.39*	-0.15
Toileting/Diapering	3.04	2.18	-0.32	-3.72***	-0.25
Health Practices	3.02	2.01	-0.33	-4.59***	-0.26
Safety Practices	2.52	2.11	-0.83	-10.74***	-0.64
Domain Score	3.36	1.29	--	--	--

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

Similar ipsative analyses in the domains of Space & Furnishings indicated significant relative weaknesses in the areas of space for gross motor ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.68$, $t_{(395)} = -22.63$, $p < .001$, $d = -1.68$), room arrangement for play ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 2.08$, $t_{(409)} = -10.62$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.91$), gross motor equipment ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 2.12$, $t_{(388)} = -3.30$, $p < .01$, $d = -0.31$), and space for privacy ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 2.12$, $t_{(409)} = -2.15$, $p < .05$, $d = -0.17$). These items represent areas of greatest needs within this domain. Likewise, within the domain of Activities, the areas of greatest relative need were in music/movement ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.62$, $t_{(409)} = -6.37$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.42$); dramatic play ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.12$, $t_{(409)} = -8.17$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.40$); use of TV, video, and/or computers ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.83$, $t_{(224)} = -3.17$, $p < .01$, $d = -0.37$), nature/science ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 1.76$, $t_{(409)} = -4.95$, $p < .01$, $d = -0.32$), and math/numbers ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.44$, $t_{(409)} = -2.00$, $p < .01$, $d = -0.09$). Follow-up analyses at the indicator-level could be useful to determine more fully the specific areas in most need of addressing.

Follow-up ECERS-R Evaluations

As previously stated, some classes were assessed because they were required to participate in the ECERS-R assessments or they volunteered to participate in the project. Financial incentives were offered, which may have influenced participation rates. Also, different

procedures were used to collect follow-up ECERS-R evaluations after the implementation of Quality Improvement Plans (QIP) or Quality Enhancement Applications (QEA), resulting in three different types of follow-up evaluations – (a) sites scoring an ECERS-R total score under 5.00 and receiving a partial follow-up evaluation only on the items that were scored under 5, (b) sites scoring an ECERS-R total score under 5 and receiving a complete follow-up evaluation, and (c) sites scoring an ECERS-R total score of 5 or higher and receiving a full follow-up evaluation because the site was listed as a required site in the following year.

Analysis of covariance was used to determine whether pretest to posttest differences were significantly related either to (a) partial rather than full administration of the posttest ECERS-R or (b) voluntary versus required status. Eight models were estimated, one for the Total ECERS-R score and one for each of the seven ECERS-R domain scores. Posttest score was the dependent variable, with pretest score entered as a continuous predictor and completeness of posttest (0 = full posttest, $n = 90$; 1 = partial posttest, $n = 82$) and voluntary status (0 = required, $n = 129$; 1 = voluntary, $n = 43$) entered as categorical predictors. Across all eight models, neither voluntary status nor the interaction between voluntary status and completeness emerged as significant predictors of change. However, completeness was a significant predictor in the models for Total ECERS-R Score ($F = 6.22, p < .05$), Space and Furnishings ($F = 6.33, p < .05$), Personal Care Routines ($F = 6.31, p < .05$), and Activities ($F = 3.52, p < .01$). Because completeness of posttest was a significant predictor of change, subsequent analyses were conducted separately for cases where the posttest was complete versus incomplete.

For the 82 classes receiving partial follow-up evaluations, results indicated a significant increase in total and domain ECERS-R scores. However, the use of partial administrations, where items with pretest scores of 5 and above are credited with the same score at posttest, may lead to greatly over-inflated posttest scores and the shockingly high Cohen's d effect sizes below in Table 5. For this reason, the results below are likely a significant over-representation of the differences between baseline and follow-up assessment.

Table 5
ECERS-R Scores for Classes Receiving QIPs and Partial Follow-up Evaluations ($n = 82$)

	Pretest		Follow-up		$t_{(81)}$	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD		
Space & Furnishings	4.03	0.74	5.00	0.82	10.26***	1.31
Personal Care Routines	2.93	0.79	4.13	1.27	9.17***	1.52
Language & Reasoning	5.10	0.92	5.65	0.82	6.54***	0.60
Activities	4.38	0.69	5.32	0.65	12.72***	1.36
Interactions	4.97	1.41	5.84	0.92	6.54***	0.62
Program Structure	4.91	1.03	5.94	0.78	8.58***	1.00
Parents & Staff	5.84	0.65	6.16	0.61	5.57***	0.49
TOTAL ECERS-R	4.51	0.39	5.34	0.53	14.72***	2.13

*** $p < .001$.

Results from the potentially lesser biased analysis of full ECERS-R follow-ups, also suggested statistically significant gains from pretest to posttest on the total score and all domains, but the effect sizes were in a more modest range. (See Table 6.) At baseline, 2.2% of classrooms scored inadequate, 76.7% minimal, 20.0% good, and 1.1% excellent. At follow-up the proportions were 1.1% inadequate, 44.4% minimal, 50.0% good, and 3.3% excellent.

Table 6
ECERS-R Scores for Classes Receiving QIPs and Full Follow-up Evaluations ($n = 90$)

	Pretest		Follow-up		$t_{(89)}$	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD		
Space & Furnishings	3.83	0.99	4.53	0.92	5.44***	0.71

Personal Care Routines	2.84	1.07	3.58	1.26	4.70***	0.69
Language & Reasoning Activities	5.10	1.22	5.45	1.03	2.46*	0.29
Interactions	4.14	0.95	4.84	0.82	6.90***	0.74
Program Structure	5.19	1.55	5.64	1.32	2.78**	0.29
Parents & Staff	4.94	1.42	5.66	1.18	4.30***	0.51
Parents & Staff	5.50	0.91	5.95	0.91	4.29***	0.49
TOTAL ECERS-R	4.42	0.86	5.00	0.70	6.00***	0.67

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Caveats and Implications

There are several features of the methodology that limit the usefulness of these findings. First, because of the nature of the selection of programs, it is impossible to determine whether these data generalize to a larger body of early childhood education or child care programs. The programs in this project were not selected in a manner to make them representative of the range of programs in Connecticut. Indeed the combination of required programs and volunteer programs makes it very difficult to characterize exactly which programs are included. Therefore, these findings should not be generalized to any larger population of programs (e.g., the Connecticut School Readiness Program, child care in Connecticut, etc.).

Most classes (58.0%) did not complete a follow-up evaluation, and those classes that did complete a follow-up scored significantly lower on the ECERS-R total score ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.68$) relative to those that did not complete a follow-up assessment ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 0.79$; $t(408) = -8.13$, $p < .05$). Because there is no control or comparison group it is not possible to know for certain that this increase in scores from baseline to follow-up assessment would not have happened spontaneously or as a result of simple statistical regression. Although in 171 out of 172 cases the follow-up assessor was a different person than the initial assessor, all raters presumably knew which rating was baseline and which was follow-up, and this may have biased ratings. Finally, there was a financial incentive for programs to score low enough on the baseline assessment to qualify for quality enhancement efforts and follow-up assessment, and it is not possible to rule out any potential effect this may have had on deflating baseline scores and thereby enhancing any baseline to follow-up differences.

Because of these limitations, the results stated here should not be generalized to any larger population of programs. Likewise, it is not possible from these data to definitively conclude that the quality enhancement efforts included in this project actually caused the observed differences from baseline to follow-up assessment. It is possible that the intervention did improve classroom quality, but the evaluative methods employed in this project do not allow one to imply causation with any degree of certainty. The findings are promising, but they were not collected in a manner that would allow for conclusive interpretations.

Nonetheless, several findings from these data are worth note.

First, findings suggest that both required and voluntary classrooms appear to be in similar need of assessments and targeted quality enhancements. There appears to be no clear reason to limit the program to only the required classrooms or to even distinguish at all between required and voluntary classes.

Second, three domains emerged as relative weaknesses (Space & Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, and Activities), where additional quality enhancement efforts may be best focused. The area of singular greatest weakness was Personal Care Routines, where significant concerns were noted in the areas of meals/snacks, safety practices, nap/rest, health practices, and toileting/diapering. In the domain of Space & Furnishings, the greatest areas of need were space for gross motor activities, room arrangement for play, gross motor equipment, and space for

privacy. Within the domain of Activities, the areas of greatest relative need were in music/movement; dramatic play; use of TV, video, and/or computers; nature/science; and math/numbers. Systemic efforts at providing support to programs may benefit from enhanced focus on these areas of quality.

Submitted by,
Dr. Walter Gilliam, PhD
Yale University Child Study Center
September 30, 2009

Low/high scores on specific ECERS-R items

It was clear early in the data collection that there were certain items on the ECERS-R Scale that were problematic for most classrooms. Some areas were challenging even for those classrooms whose overall score was above 5. All these areas improved on the follow up assessments but still remain challenging. The table below shows the average item score across all participating classrooms in both initial and follow up assessments for these most difficult areas.

Subscale	Item #	Description	1 st score average	2 nd score average	Increase
Space/furnishing	4	Room arrangement for play	3.4	3.8	0.4
	7	Space for gross motor	2.6	3.0	0.4
Personal Care Routines	10	Meals/Snacks	2.4	3.2	0.8
	11	Nap/rest	3.1	3.5	0.3
	12	Toileting/diapering	3.0	3.7	0.7
	13	Health practices	3.0	3.3	0.3
	14	Safety practices	2.5	3.3	0.8

Item #4 Room arrangement for play

This item addresses the arrangement of the classroom learning centers. The indicator that is most challenging is “3.2 – visual supervision of play area is not difficult.” QIP improvement strategies often included requests for consultants with expertise in room arrangement and/or the purchase of observation mirrors to improve the ability of teachers to monitor children more easily.

Item #7 Space for gross motor

This item addressed the availability, accessibility, and appropriateness of outdoor play areas. The most common stumbling block was indicator “3.2 – Gross motor space is generally safe. (Ex. Sufficient cushioning under climbing equipment; fenced in outdoor area).” Lack of cushioning (mulch), incomplete fencing, or fencing in poor repair were frequent issues. QIP improvement strategies frequently requested funds for mulch and fencing repair or replacement – all expensive items.

Item #10 Meals/snacks

This item addresses all aspects of meal times. Requirements that classroom struggled with included making sure that children washed correctly and sat down to eat without re-contaminating their hands; tables are sanitized with a bleach/water solution or with an EPA-approved sanitizing solution; teachers sat with children at the table, and; any substitutions in case of allergies or family dietary restrictions had to meet nutrition guidelines. Classrooms were encouraged to use the QIP for the services of a health care consultant with expertise in this area. Classrooms with sinks inside the room had an easier time in this area although they need to sanitize the sink between general washing up and washing for meal times.

Item #11 Nap/rest

This item addresses the provisions for napping in full day classrooms. The most common challenge is “3.2 Sanitary provision for nap/rest.” Cots were crowded together (less than 18 inches apart), bedding was stored in a manner that would allow germs to transfer to other bedding, and children were permitted to walk across cots wearing shoes. QIPs included requests for room arrangement consultants for cot layout designs and storage items (bins or drawstring bags) to contain the bedding materials.

Item #12 Toileting/diapering

This item addresses the sanitary conditions of toileting facilities and hand-washing by both children and teachers. Some classrooms did not have facilities that met sanitary guidelines or did not have enough basic provisions such as towels and soap. Some classrooms did not supervise children to ensure proper handwashing procedures. The most common challenge was washing frequently and thoroughly. As in item #10 classrooms were encouraged to use the services of a health care consultant.

Item #13 Health practices

This item addresses procedures used to minimize the spread of contagious disease and handwashing that takes place after wiping noses, after handling animals, upon entering the classroom, and after returning from the playground. Raters must observe to see if proper procedures are followed at least 75% of the time. While many teachers tried to maintain high standards it was challenging to reach the 75% threshold. Classrooms were encouraged to use the services of a health care consultant to address deficiencies in this area.

Item #14 Safety practices

This item addresses safety hazards in both the indoor and outdoor environments and whether or not staff takes steps to prevent safety problems. Common challenges were play areas (poor cushioning, entrapment issues, tripping hazards, and climbing equipment too high for the age group) followed by cleaning supplies located within reach of children. There were a few issues of poor supervision on playscapes. QIP requests often included the purchase of mulch and fencing repair or replacement.

There were also extremes in high scores across all programs.

Subscale	Item #	Description	1 st score average	2 nd score average	Increase
Personal Care Routines	9	Greeting/departing	6.2	6.3	0.1
Language-Reasoning	16	Encouraging children to communicate	5.9	6.0	0.1
Interactions	32	Staff-child interactions	6.2	6.4	0.2
	33	Interactions among children	5.9	6.0	0.1
Program Structure	36	Group time	5.8	6.1	0.3
	37	Provisions for children with disabilities	6.4	6.5	0.1
Parents and Staff	38	Provisions for parents	6.4	6.5	0.1
	41	Staff interaction and cooperation	6.3	6.4	0.1
	42	Supervision and evaluation of staff	6.2	6.3	0.1

Items 9, 16, 16, 32, 33, 36 and 38 all indicate warm relationships between children, staff, and parents. It is particularly encouraging to note the high average score in item #37 Provisions for children with disabilities. Items 41 and 42 indicate positive directions in support of staff.

ECERS Project Survey – September 2008 to July 2009

Program Name? (Names deleted to maintain privacy)

answered question 73

skipped question 0

Classroom Number?

answered question 71

skipped question 2

Director Name?

answered question 71

skipped question 2

Name of ECERS-R Rater?

answered question 67

skipped question 4

Did the ECERS-R rater conduct the visit in a professional manner?

Yes	66
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No	3
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answered question	69
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skipped question	2
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Yes she did but the survey will not allow me to check yes.

Was asked to come on another day since the head teacher had a planned personal day. She came on that day anyway.

She was both professional and friendly.

Rater telegraphed a very negative facial aspect during the observation. The children expressed fear to their parents about the stranger in their classroom that day, although they accepted her because the teacher explained that she was her friend.

She was not consistent with things she said to the teacher in the classroom with what she wrote on the report. When she was told mirrors were on order, she stated "you could just be telling me that and I can't write that down on the report but did anyways. She told the teacher that her daily schedule should not be hung up because it did not have lunch written on it. Lunch was written on the schedule and she had to be shown that by the teacher.

I was away at a training and do not know

She emailed me another programs rating and I feel she confused/cross referenced the two. I deleted the other programs rating as a professional courtesy and respect to the other director.

Did the ECERS-R rater contact you ahead of time to introduce him/herself, to share the one-week window of when to expect a visit, and to answer any of your questions?

Yes	67
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No	6
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answered question	73
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skipped question	0
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Was the ECERS-R rater present at the site for at least three hours?	
Yes	66
No	5
answered question	71
skipped question	2

Did the ECERS-R rater interview the classroom head teacher at the conclusion of the observation?	
Yes	64
No	6
answered question	70
skipped question	3

Is there anything else you would like Charter Oak State College to know about the ECERS-R experience for this classroom? (responses are <u>unedited</u>)	
answered question	46
skipped question	27

I have a concern that this classroom was marked down because the centers were open for 3 hours and 14 minutes when it should have been 3 hours and 20 minutes to receive the full credit. However, the teachers sat down with the rater and showed her that the daily schedule does provide sufficient time for all areas to be open. The rater did not observe the afternoon so she was not able to see the other 6 required minutes of the areas being accessible to the children. I am curious if the score is able to be looked at again because the entire day was not taken into consideration.

It was a very pleasant experience and I felt the rater was fair, professional and honest.

The ECERS rater was very professional and did all of these things - the survey will not allow me to check yes or no to any of the items listed.

No

I do have several comments on the ratings that I will send along to you in an email. Several things were sited that were either misssd or misunderstood by the rater.

Please encourage all potential enrollees to purchace ther ECERS Book and read through it. Prior to a visit.

S__ was informative, fair and very professional.

She was very pfessional and fair in her ratings

It would be a good practice to have the same evaluator on the follow-up visit to the classroom. This will give the teacher an opportunity to improve the prior low scores. Further more, we did not feel that the evaluator accurately scored some areas of the report such as: gross motor, we were asked and responded 4 days per week and the report has 2 days per week. Another was in the writing area ,that our schedule did not include 1 hour of indoor play, when the schedule shows the required time for the students to have indoor play daily.This is the third time that we have been rated by ECERS-R rater. I feel we made the changes necessary that were recommended from each rater to improve the scores.

We thank you for the oppportunity to have an unbiased observer help us to supervise and reflect on our practice.

I wonder if we are the only profession that is given a window of time verses an actual date. In my opinion that policy is disrespectful to the teaching staff. I take it serious have passed 3x and enjoy the feedback. I feel that the new style or a window of time seems that the State does NOT want to treat teachers as professionals

The ECERS rater gave scores based on interview questions and answers that did not accurately reflect some facts about the program. In the ELLCO, the interview is only used for professional development. The basis for scoring is on actual, observed criteria only. I find this to be a weakness of the ECERS instrument. Additionally, shared spaces, of necessity, should not be rated by ECERS when not in use by the program.

Our rater rescheduled 3 different times--sometimes not showing up at all during the week window and then would call later for the rescheduling. This made it challenging for the teachers who were already anxious about being rated!

I was told that results from the review would be emailed to me within 48 hours of the visit. As of today (2 ½ weeks later) I still have not received our results.

Very Professional.

We did not have a week window. The rater was here the week before and I indicated to her that I would be going on vacation the following week and she called when I was away and spoke to my admin. assistant who knew nothing of the visit. The rater said she would be here either Thur. or Fri of the week she called. The day the rater came, we had a Storyteller in for the children and it was not a normal day. I was told by the rater that she would be coming in April, I assumed by our conversation that she would not be here on the 2nd knowing I was not going to be there.

feedback will be very helpful in improving our program

It was a very welcome and friendly experience. I was informed every step of the way as to what is to be expected from the visit as well as what would follow.

I was confused. My understanding was that for the follow-up visit the rater would be looking only at the items that were scored below a 5 the first time the ECERs visit occurred. Ms. L did another complete ECERs and was incorrect with some of her findings. She asked questions regarding items that were not part of the initial visit, and items that we did not get marked below 5 on. The action plan that I sent in reflected the items that the original rater scored us below 5 on and those items were brought up above 5 with the funds we received. Personally I feel that there needs to be better consistency from rater to rater and before leaving the rater should go over the scores with the director so if there are inconsistencies in what the rater did not see, we would have the opportunity to show the rater that we are meeting an item.

The school day started at 8:15 the rater showed up at 9:10. Also this rater visited another school that started at 8:02 and showed up at 9:30.

When the teacher asked when we should be expecting the results of the rating she said she would have it tomorrow for us. She told the teacher that we were "lucky" to be getting it so soon because she was going on vacation next week otherwise we would have to wait for it. Her overall "manner" was not very pleasant.

Reports do not say K's name on cover page. I strongly disagree with the ratings/comments regarding meals/snacks. We serve snacks here, requiring two components. K has commented that 3 components must be met. This is not the case according to USDA guidelines or the All About the ITERS book. K inaccurately counted activities with shapes in PS 7. K has expressed her disapproval of the 1to10 ratio / classroom structure in each ECERS report.

We've now had several ECERS-R ratings done, A was by far the best rater we had. Totally professional and thorough but with a personal nature. It was an extremely pleasurable experience when it could normally be a bit stressful!

This rater was excellent.

None

Our visit had to be rescheduled several times (weather and death in family) and A was very understanding and flexible.

The lead teacher was at a training with me for Training Wheels. I did ask which day we would be assessed as was told they could only say which week. I was unaware I could specify "not this date."

I found this experience between the 2 ECERs done in this project to be very inconsistent in its ratings. We recieved a lower rating during the second ECER's and truely believe that this can not be a true picture of were we are at this time in that classroom. Over 1 year ago we had a rating and we scored a 4.9 in this classroom and with your assistance of \$5,000 we made the additioanl improvements identified on the assessment. A year later you provided a follow-up rater to assess the progress of the classroom and the classroom recieved a 3.9 rating. As youm can see a lot of work and dedication went into this project so your monies would be well spent to improve this classroom and I believe it did. So getting a rating 1 point less then last year seems impossible unless the raters and this tool is not a valid and reliable tool for this application. Respectfully, C

It was an interesting experience for this program since the original ECERS was done sometime in the fall and at that time the program was a contracted --- program and the director was a contracted employee of the community college. This was not the case for the follow up visit. The program opened as S S center (private vendor) on January 5th and this was my first week at the director of the cite. I was able to share this information with the rater, who was very professional. But it made for an interesting experience!! Thank you, V

For this revisit the concern I had was that the ECERS rater was not aware that it was a revisit and not a first time visit.

WE had a previous date scheduled, the communication about the cancellation of that visit could have been handled in a more timely manner. That having been said the actual visit on 1/-/09 was preceded by excellent communications and the the visit itself went very weel - thank you

It was a learning experience. Thank you very much for allowing our center to participate and award us Quality Improvement funding.

The teacher disagreed with couple of things in the report stating that she did not tell the rater the information that was provided in the report. The rater cancelled on the day of the visit and came two days later.

I sent comments to M, who let me know that I needed to contact Kathy Wilby with the concerns. I did email Kathy as to whether or not she recieved my comments from M, but never heard back. I will print them here again. #12 Our bathroom dispenser did run out of soap and we called the custodian as soon as we realized this. He came as quickly as possible to refill. The children were directed to wash hands in our other sink. #14 The curtain is open when children are permitted to use the coatroom under our supervision, and closed when they are either in the classroom or coat room with the teachers. #17 Each day during story time, we discuss the front cover and try to make personal connections to the story. Rater came in midway through the story, so this may not have been seen. #21 We do have 4 individual tape players that students are free to use during center time. We do have a box of instruments and more on back order. #26 For measurement, I am not sure if rulers are necessary, we do have links and cubes for measurement. #31 OUr very basic language is particular for students who have very limited English. We were advised to use very short, basic phrases, commands, etc. #32 These actions are in place for a particular student with plans in place by a team. #33 We do use conflict resolution but given each situation and surroundings, it is not always possible. #12 Our batroom toilet is automatic flush. Our bathroom sink has automatic faucets so children do not touch them. #10 We are given an approved cleaner in our building for washing furniture in the room. #7 Playscape is in woodchips. We also use a blacktop area as well as grass. #24 In our home living center we have a toolbox, firefighter uniform, police officer uniform. I don't know if they are considered gender specific. I am not familiar with ECERS so I'm not sure if this feedback is what you are looking for, but I felt it necessary to mention these comments.

There was confusion/computer error between my program and another program. Item 1, Indoor Space - the light bulbs ha just been replacd, therefore impossible to be dim and flickering. Item 3. Furniture for relaxation and comfort. The rocking cchair is brand new and the cushion had been removed due to a child having an accident. The spings of the seat are covered with leather and the other pillow put in its place in order for the cushion to be dry cleaned. Item 10. Meals - She arrvied at approximately 9:20. I escorted into the classroom and introduce her to the teaching staff. The children had findih breakfast and were sitting on the rug for group time. Therefore, its impossible for a child to cough on anything or of her being in the classroom to observe handwashing, when the process had already been completed with the children sitting on the capret for group time. Item 11. Nap/rest The childrens individual cubbies are located in the hallways, outside of the classroom. A container for clothes and blankets are in a bucket on the top shelve and the lower space has a hook for hanging up jackets and a place for boots. Item 13 Health practices. She stated the children coughed openly all over the breakfast table when breakfast was over. none of the teachers had a cold or cough on this day and the teacherss and children have been taught to cough into their elbows, as per safety and health classes/workshops. Whenever the children use the bathroom a teachers is standing at the door way and children nvever leave the bathroom without washing their hands. You can ask them yourself and they will answer "flush and clean hands before you leave". There are three teachers in the classroom and children are taught to use tissue for their noses as needs. (based self help skills). Item 14. The paper towel holders in this classroom and the entire building are placed on the wall from the screws inside the casings, which is covered by the papertowel rolls and a locked cover. Their is no wood to screw anything into. The wall are sheetrock and painted.she again must have confused by building with another one. No child was standding/climbing on furniture, it is our policy to have achild sent home if this was ever to occur as it is a safety issue to the child involved and safety to the other children in the classroom. It simply did not occur, I would have been notified by the tacher. The program uses individual water buckets. When the sentory table is opened for sand, a teacher is always with the group for instruction and assistance. Sentory table is a great area for assessing what the children are feeling during this activity. The rater stated the rug was to close to the eating area and was direty. The rug is brand new and is located in the individual quiet area, no where near the eating area. I strongly feel the rating needs to be redone without the use of a lap top computer to avoid computer qlick.

I'm not sure if they interview teachers in all classrooms observed

No

Yes I would like to know how they come to the rating that they did because my preschool is out of my home and the ratings to me are based on a center which I feel effects my scoring

Besides critical feedback, it would be nice to give suggestions given the limitations of the classroom size as to how to meet the expectations. The rater did call the school to give a window but as the classroom teacher, I was never given an opportunity to speak with the rater myself to present my questions.

The team felt that this rater made them feel comfortable so that the could function normal. Her expressions were warm, professional and positive.

No

the Rater indicated on her report that "many and varied art materials were not ACCESSIBLE to the children..." eventhough the art shelf has varied art material, every material labelled (shelf and containers) at child's level open at all times. With intentional teaching in mind and a focu on the topic the teacher had orange paint, bruches and paper on the table. However, that didn't mean that children could not use any other art material. I was informed on Friday (10-24-08) by the Borar President that she will be coming the week of 10-27-08. More advance notice would have been appreciated. I had to cancel day-off for one of the staff who had requested a day off.

Please note that the rater was present for all but the last 15 minutes of the session, 2 1/2 hrs. It was a little frustrating to receive the report in a format that I was unable to open (WinZip). This was resolved a couple of days later when it was sent as excel/word documents.

We questioned some of our ratings regarding the amount of time designated in centers - we had to adjust our times to comply with NAEYC, now we are told we need to have 3+ hours to comply with ECERS. Also, because we do not supply food for the children's lunch and snacks, there is only so much control we have over what is in lunchboxes. We have recommended lunch items, workshops, extra food available for a child who does not have enough food, however, parents are trying the best they can (many are in low income situations) - this did not seem like a fair rating for us/them. Thanks!

We felt that some of the observations were inaccurate, and we also felt that some of the observations were philosophically counter to NAEYC standards, however most observations provided valuable feedback on which we can reflect and make decisions about improvements to the program. Many items are easy to correct, others will require substantial renovations which may not be immediately possible, others, with the support of the grant can be pursued within the year. We intend to provide Charter Oak with a detailed letter outlining our response to the observation. Many thanks for providing us with this opportunity.

NO thanks

I think her observations are accurate and her visit and report are done in a professional manner.

Distribution of QIPs/QEAs by City

Town	QIP amount by City	QEA amount by City	Total
Andover	0	5,000	5,000
Bloomfield	0	10,000	10,000
Branford	0	3,950	3,950
Bridgeport	53,571	16,846	70,417
Bristol	38,600	0	38,600
Canterbury	0	5,000	5,000
Colchester	5,000	4,992	9,992
Danbury	74,597	33,475	108,072
Danielson/Brooklyn	10,000	0	10,000
East Hartford	10,000	0	10,000
Eastford	7,000	0	7,000
Greenwich	20,000	4,889	24,889
Griswold	0	3,060	3,060
Hamden	2,345	0	2,345
Hampton	0	4,500	4,500
Hartford	199,811	10,998	210,809
Lebanon	5,000	0	5,000
Lisbon	5,000	5,000	10,000
Meriden	24,890	14,570	39,460
Middletown	74,227	10,889	85,116
Milford	3,510	500	4,010
New Britain	10,000	28,479	38,479
New Haven	113,336	2,000	115,336
New Haven			0
North Canaan	0	4,816	4,816
North Grosvenordale	0	5,000	5,000
Norwalk	45,687	10,500	56,187
Norwich	24,934	10,000	34,934
Plymouth	0	5,000	5,000
Putnam	15,000	5,000	20,000
Stamford	10,000	0	10,000
Stratford			0
Thomaston	15,000	5,000	20,000
Waterbury	23,421	22,232	45,653
West Hartford	3,360	2,132	5,492
West Haven	32,697	24,745	57,442
Wethersfield	5,000	500	5,500
Winsted	5,000	0	5,000
Woodstock	5,000	0	5,000
Total	841,986	259,073	1,101,059

Introduction to the Harms, Clifford and Cryer Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales

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<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ECERS/>

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There are four environment rating scales, each designed for a different segment of the early childhood field.

- Each one of the scales has items to evaluate: *Physical Environment; Basic Care; Curriculum; Interaction; Schedule and Program Structure; and Parent and Staff Education.*
- The scales are suitable for use in evaluating inclusive and culturally diverse programs.
- The scales have proven reliability and validity.

Our scales are designed to assess process quality in an early childhood or school age care group. Process quality consists of the various interactions that go on in a classroom between staff and children, staff, parents, and other adults, among the children themselves, and the interactions children have with the many materials and activities in the environment, as well as those features, such as space, schedule and materials that support these interactions. Process quality is assessed primarily through observation and has been found to be more predictive of child outcomes than structural indicators such as staff to child ratio, group size, cost of care, and even type of care, for example child care center or family child care home (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1995).

In order to provide care and education that will permit children to experience a high quality of life while helping them develop their abilities, a quality program must provide for the three basic needs all children have:

- Protection of their health and safety
- Building positive relationships
- Opportunities for stimulation and learning from experience

No one component is more or less important than the others, nor can one substitute for another. It takes all three to create quality care. Each of the three basic components of quality care manifests itself in tangible forms in the program's environment, curriculum, schedule, supervision and interaction, and can be observed. These are the key aspects of process quality that are included in our environmental rating scales.

Our scales define environment in a broad sense and guide the observer to assess the arrangement of space both indoors and outdoors, the materials and activities offered to the children, the supervision and interactions (including language) that occur in the classroom, and the schedule of the day, including routines and activities. The support offered to parents and staff is also included.

All of our scales have been developed in close collaboration with realistic field-based sites. They have good interrater reliability and validity, thus making them suitable for research and program evaluation, as well as program improvement efforts. Each scale has a complete training program. The ECERS-R, ITERS and FDCRS training programs include an interactive videotape.

Research Use

The ECERS-R (1998) is the revised edition of the original ECERS (1980). It is currently being used in several major studies, including the Early Head Start Study (Mathematica Corporation), and Welfare, Children and Families: A Three City Study (Columbia University, University of Chicago, and Harvard University). The original ECERS was used in the Head Start FACES study, in which over 400 classrooms are included nationwide. The preliminary results in all these studies show that the ECERS and the ECERS-R are performing very well.

In addition, it should be noted that the ECERS and ITERS were used as the comprehensive quality measures in the National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989) and the Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study (1995), the major studies of their time. The FDCRS was used in The Study of Children in Family Child Care and Relative Care (Galinsky, Howes, Kontos, & Shinn, 1994). In all of these studies, a relationship was found between higher scores on the ECERS and more positive child development outcomes in areas that are considered important for later school success. The effects of higher quality early childhood experiences have now been shown to last at least through the second grade of elementary school (Peisner-Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Culkin, Howes, Kagan, Yazejian, Byler, Rustici, & Zelazo, 1999). Research is continuing to evaluate longer-lasting effects.

It is also interesting to note that our scales have been used in research studies and program improvement efforts in many other countries including Canada, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Russia, Iceland, Portugal, England, Spain, Austria, Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, Hungary and Greece. They have been proven reliable and valid in each country with relatively minor adaptations. No doubt there are cultural differences among these various countries, yet each of these countries adheres to a core set of child development goals and early childhood practices common to most modern industrialized countries (Tietze, et al, 1996). It has been shown that in England, Greece, Germany, Portugal, Spain, and Austria, higher scores on the scales are related to more positive child development outcomes (Petrogannis & Melhuish, 1996, European Child Care and Education Study Group, 1997). This provides evidence that children from many backgrounds require similar inputs for success in developmental areas valued in western industrialized countries.

The Environmental Rating Scales in Program Improvement

Since the use of the environmental rating scales in research has been well documented in the literature, it is important to describe here some of the current uses of our scales in program improvement efforts in the US and in other countries. The scales are used in a variety of ways including for self-assessment by center staff, preparation for accreditation, and voluntary improvement efforts by licensing or other agencies. For example, in the United States:

- The state of Arkansas has trained personnel, who do assessments and provide training and technical assistance so that child care centers and homes can increase their quality of care. The Federal money allotments for improving child care are linked to measurable program improvement on the scales. Another innovative feature of the Arkansas program is that parents who select child care facilities with an average of 4.5 or higher

on our scales are eligible for two times the state child care tax exemption. Thus both parents and providers are being rewarded for quality improvements that benefit the children.

- The state of Connecticut uses our scales in selecting child care facilities for the inclusion of children with handicapping conditions. The scales are subsequently used for program improvement after these children have been placed. This has enabled the early intervention program to close most of their self-contained classrooms and move the children into inclusive programs. North Carolina has a similar program called "Partnerships for Inclusion", which has been effective in on-site consultation with child care staff to include children with disabilities in programs for typically developing children. The scales are used as a basis for their consultants.
- The state of Colorado uses the scales in a variety of program improvement and evaluation projects. For example, Denver has a quality improvement program that uses on site consultation and training based on scale scores. Many of the centers participating in this program serve poor and minority children and their families. The state of Colorado is currently considering a tiered reimbursement system using the scales.
- Many counties involved in the state of North Carolina's quality improvement program, Smart Start, require training on and the use of the scales in self assessment before a center or family child care home may apply for an individual grant. This ensures that the staff will order equipment, materials and/or request training based on needs that have been objectively substantiated.
- North Carolina also currently uses scale scores as part of their 5 star rated license system. Centers and family child care homes are awarded either one or two stars based on compliance with licensing standards. Programs may voluntarily apply for an additional three stars based on a set of quality measures including the licensing compliance record, teacher and director education, and the levels of process quality as measured by the appropriate environmental scale. Only the lowest level of licensing is mandatory. However, an additional fee is paid to the provider of subsidized care for each additional star earned voluntarily.
- The Oklahoma 3 star tiered license incorporates an evaluation with the scales in the second tier as a basis for quality improvement, and provides technical assistance based on scores for meeting accreditation standards. Tiered reimbursement is a part of this system.
- Tennessee is now initiating a rated license system, based on North Carolina's experience. In their system, however, program evaluation is not voluntary, but is required yearly to create a "Report Card" that must be posted with the license so child care consumers have access to reliable information on the quality of child care they are using for their children. Tiered reimbursement will also be tied to scores on the scale.
- Other states, including California, Massachusetts, Montana, Mississippi, Kansas, Oregon, Kentucky, New Mexico, Georgia, Florida, Wisconsin, and Nebraska have also initiated quality evaluation and improvement programs using our scales. Each state is tailoring its use of the scales to its individual needs and resources.
- All the US military services have been using the scales routinely in their center and family child care homes for program improvement and monitoring. The military child development system was recognized by Executive Order in 1998 for its high quality.

- The District of Columbia uses the scales as a basis for technical assistance in child care centers and family child care homes in their Quality Care for Children Initiative, which provides on-site multi-visit consultation services.
- Our environmental rating scales are widely used by programs as they prepare for accreditation. This is due to the fact that our scales use a format with detailed levels of quality that provides a blueprint for gradual change. The content of our scales is completely supportive of the various credentialing and accreditation programs.

Use of our scales in foreign countries, either in translation or in the original version, has been increasing rapidly. Examples of use are:

- In Canada, the scales are available in both English and French. In many of the provinces, they are used as a voluntary part of the licensing visit. The license is given for compliance with a licensing checklist, mainly composed of health and safety items. During the visit, the licensing consultant also completes one of our rating scales and, with the voluntary cooperation of the caregiver, sets improvement goals for the program. The scales are used over a longer period in intensive consultation with programs that show problems during the licensing visit.
- In Sweden, several projects are using preschool teachers as leaders in program improvement efforts with the Swedish ECERS. In Stockholm, the staff working together in a classroom independently completes one subscale of the scale each month, then discusses their scores under the leadership of their head teacher, who is a fully trained preschool teacher. The staff makes and carries out its own improvement plans. A study of this low cost program showed substantial gains in quality (20 - 46%) (Andersson, 1998). Another program in the Gothenburg area uses preschool teachers as mentors for other programs.
- In Germany, the scales are presently being used by individual cities to evaluate the quality of child care and kindergarten programs. Reports are provided to administrative agencies and to center staff, as a basis for program improvement planning. In addition, the scales are being considered as part of a program accreditation system.

Related Work

The development of instruments to measure the quality of early childhood programs has been a major part of the work of the authors of these scales. In addition to our own scales, we have developed, in close collaboration with the sponsoring agencies, the following instruments for the field: the NAEYC Center accreditation classroom observation and the accreditation questionnaires; the CDA Classroom Observation; the Wellesley College ASQ school age care scale and director's questionnaire, which is now being used in the National School Age Care Alliance accreditation program; the Quality Criteria for Family Child Care; and the Military Family Child Care accreditation procedures and instruments.