



A Guide to the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Environment Rating Scale Assessment Process (ECERS-R)

Administrators and teachers often feel more at ease when observers are present in their classroom, if they know what to expect. Please review this information with program staff that may be involved in an upcoming Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) assessment. This information will give you and your staff a better understanding of the assessment process.

A reminder for the 2016-2017 school year: NC Pre-K ECERS-R assessments were incorporated into a facility's Star Rated License as of July 2012.

If you have NC Pre-K funding, what does this mean for your program?

- When your next Rated License assessment process occurs, NC Pre-K classrooms will continue to be included in random selection for the ECERS-R age group.
 - The ECERS-R score for any NC Pre-K room selected will be applied to the Program Standards component of your Rated License along with any other Environment Rating Scale scores based on the typical licensure process. This assessment will also be applied to NC Pre-K program requirements.
 - If at least one NC Pre-K room is not selected during the Rated License Assessment Process, **ONE** NC Pre-K assessment will be scheduled to occur as quickly as possible based on assessor availability. The NC Pre-K room to be assessed will be randomly selected from any existing NC Pre-K rooms.
- NC Pre-K program score requirements of 5.0 still apply for ECERS-R assessments.
- NC Pre-K classrooms in the first year of operation are included in the random selection process as would occur during a typical Rated License assessment visit for any classrooms that operate in licensed space.
- With the exception of low-score reassessments or NC Pre-K assessments for facilities where Rated License assessments occur during times when NC Pre-K is not in operation (i.e., summer), there is no longer a separate Environment Rating Scale assessment process for the NC Pre-K classrooms.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE VISIT

Review and Study the ECERS-R

Assessors will be using the ECERS-R to assess NC Pre-K classrooms. The rating scale considers many aspects of early childhood environments and pre-kindergarten environments, such as materials for children's use, activities, the daily schedule, health, safety, interactions, language, and communication. The ECERS-R is consistent with *North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development*. The seven-point rating scale is designed to look at a range of quality beginning with inadequate to minimal care, progressing to good (developmentally appropriate) care, and then to excellent environments for children. It is

extremely helpful to spend time reading and studying the rating scale carefully, including any definitions in the front of the ECERS-R books and the notes for clarification. More information on how to obtain and study the scale is available at www.ncrlap.org.

Review Supplementary Materials

Assessors also use the following materials, which are available at www.ncrlap.org. These materials will be helpful as you prepare for the visit.

- NC Additional Notes (clarify items and indicators on the rating scales)
- US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Meal Guidelines
- Requirements for Gross Motor Space and Equipment
- Additional resources regarding the NC assessment process and the rating scales, including handouts and videos, are available on the NCRLAP website

Conduct Self-Assessments

Participate in a “self-assessment” before the scheduled assessment, and use the results to prepare your classrooms to maximize the score. Any changes should reflect best practices for young children and should improve the quality of the program on an ongoing basis.

Request Technical Assistance

You may request information or assistance from the following sources:

- Division of Child Development and Early Education(DCDEE) Child Care Consultants (919.527.6335)
- Local Smart Start Partnership consultants (contact the Smart Start agency in your county or call the NC Partnership for Children - Smart Start (919.821.7999)
- Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) specialists (contact DCDEE 919.527.6335 for the CCR&R serving your area)
- NC Rated License Assessment Project offers various resources and webinars about the ECERS-R and the assessment process (contact NCRLAP 336.315.7723 or view the training calendar online at www.ncrlap.org).

Prepare Children for the Visit

Help children in your class understand that they will have a visitor in their classroom for the day. This will help them feel more comfortable when the assessor conducts the assessment.

WHAT TO EXPECT ON THE DAY OF THE ASSESSMENT

Arrival of the Assessors

The assessors will arrive in the morning at the time set during the scheduling phone call. Before the observation begins, the assessors will typically greet the Site Administrator, Principal, or designated individual and provide a brief overview of the day. Assessors will gather the “Classroom Information Form and Teacher Information Form” (enclosed in the packet). Assessors will also request a copy of the classroom daily schedule and clarify the operating hours of the facility. Upon entering the classroom to be observed, assessors will introduce themselves to the teachers and briefly explain what they will be doing during the observation.

Facility Operating Hours

The ECERS-R assessment is based on the length of the day that children are served and is not limited to only the 6-6½ hour NC Pre-Kindergarten program day. Therefore, a facility's operating hours are considered to be the earliest time that a child may arrive at the facility in the morning and the latest time that a child may leave the facility at the end of the day.

Interacting with Children and Staff

To ensure a valid assessment, the assessors will not interact with the children or staff during the assessment and will stay in the "background" as much as possible while conducting the observation. If a child wishes to speak or play with the assessor, he or she will politely redirect the child back to the activity or teacher.

The Observation

The observation will take approximately three to five hours. In order to complete the observation, we need to make sure the observation is representative of what typically happens in the classroom. Therefore, at a minimum, it is required that more than half of the children enrolled in each classroom be present. We also need to see the teacher (s) who is typically responsible for the children. Additional staff members should not be present unless these individuals are a part of the daily routine for that classroom (e.g., floater that assists daily with lunch). We thank you for your cooperation.

During the visit, assessors will observe a wide variety of interactions, activities, and materials as required by the rating scale. Assessors will observe all spaces used by children in the group including indoor and outdoor gross motor areas, multipurpose rooms, early morning/afternoon care areas, and special activity areas (library, art room, music room, etc.).

Assessors will record information throughout the observation. The amount of note taking is in no way an indication as to the quality of the program. Detailed notes ensure that sufficient information is available to accurately score each item for every classroom that is assessed. The information gathered through direct observation and teacher interview(s) is then used to rate each item on the ECERS-R.

Interview with Staff

The ECERS-R requires a 30-45 minute interview with a classroom teacher after the observation to ensure accurate scoring. The interview may take place during nap or rest time, and is usually conducted in a room other than the classroom, if the staff-to-child ratio is maintained. The interview allows assessors the opportunity to clarify the daily schedule with the teacher and find out additional information about his/her classroom since not every activity or material that is included in the rating scale will be observed. If additional staff provides care for children during certain portions of the day, such as the early morning or late afternoon when the regular classroom staff are not present, the assessor will also briefly speak with these staff to learn about children's activities. At this time teachers do have the opportunity to share any additional information they would like assessors to know about their classroom.

After the Assessment

When the assessment is completed, assessors will leave the classroom and attempt to notify the Site Administrator of their departure. Assessors will be unable to give any feedback to Site Administrators and/or classroom staff on the day of the assessment. After observing, taking notes, and interviewing the classroom staff, assessors must look at all the information collectively before giving any feedback. They will, however, write a detailed summary of their findings. This feedback is presented in a document called an Assessment Report (AR). The AR is designed to provide specific feedback so that early childhood educators and Site Administrators may enhance their program's quality through goal setting and other quality enhancement efforts.

How to Use the Assessment Report

The AR will be sent from NCRLAP to the program's DCDEE Child Care Consultant, typically within 10 working days following the last assessment at a facility. The Child Care Consultant will contact the facility Director/Administrator and the NC Pre-K Site Administrator (if different from the facility Director/Administrator) to schedule a visit to deliver and review all the assessment reports, including the NC Pre-K ECERS-R assessment report.

NC Pre-K Site Administrators and Teachers may use the results to determine if, and to what extent, program improvements are needed to maintain environment quality or improve certain program components. Programs may also conduct self-assessments using the ECERS-R to monitor and track progress over time.

If the NC Pre-K classroom scores less than a 5.0 on the ECERS-R assessment an Improvement Plan is required. The Improvement Plan will describe specific changes that will be made to the classroom to improve the score on the next assessment by identifying goals and specific improvement strategies (e.g., scheduling technical assistance, visiting other quality programs, participating in professional development), and determining a timeline for achieving results. The classroom will have one year to make revisions. The DCDEE Child Care Consultant will contact the NC Pre-K local Contract Administrator to set up a meeting to discuss the AR and to develop the Improvement Plan to enhance program quality. The Improvement Plan will be developed jointly with the DCDEE Child Care Consultant and Supervisor (if necessary), the NC Pre-K local Contract Administrator, the NC Pre-K Site Administrator, Lead Teacher and Teacher Assistant, the Early Educator Support, Licensure and Professional Development (EESLPD) mentor/evaluator teams, and (as needed) the local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency or Smart Start Partnership.

The Improvement Plan will identify who is responsible for monitoring the completion of the Improvement Plan and ensuring that stated objectives for improvement to maintain environment quality or improve certain program components are met within the established timeframe. Subsequent assessments will be scheduled during the next school year to ensure that classrooms achieve the minimum 5.0 ECERS-R program standard score or higher. A NC Pre-K site must achieve at least a 5.0 in order to continue to be approved as a NC Pre-K site, as required by Child Care Rule 10A NCAC 09 .3002(b).