

HS/ECEAP Challenges with Early Achievers:

Early Achievers works well in most cases, and many programs have good relationships with their Child Care Aware coaches and the way the system operates. However, certain challenges keep coming up for our programs, and we're interested in seeing how DEL/DCYF may address this going forward as we attempt to improve quality and expand ECEAP and Head Start and access.

Major:

Inconsistency. I hear from multiple programs that classrooms they have in different buildings, with virtually identical "Files of Supporting Materials", practices, and backup paperwork and files, end up with very different scores. If I only heard this once I wouldn't be concerned, but it seems to happen fairly frequently.

Response: As we talked about during our meeting on these topics I would like to have you and a few participants that have had this experience to come together and review the rating data side by side. I hope that through this review we can identify a solution.

As a reminder, the file of supporting materials is not required. Participants must complete the Interactive Rating Readiness Tool and indicate where data collectors will find evidence of their practices for the standards selected for their onsite evaluation. We also created a Guide to the Interactive Rating Readiness Tool (IRRT). The goal of this document was to clarify the expectations and criteria for the Quality Standards. This goal was met with varying levels of success. We are currently working on revising the IRRT Guide and welcome the opportunity to meet and review this document with WSA staff and Early Achievers participants to ensure that both the language and the intent are clear. We will continue to work with partners to clarify how participants should prepare for the onsite evaluation.

Lack of detail and delayed results. It would be great if programs could use their EA results to improve their practice and procedures, but in practice it takes so long to get the results and the detail is so minimal that the school year is practically over by the time they get any info. The lack of detail is also VERY frustrating to programs who do not understand why they got a low score in a given area. It is difficult to appeal or improve when you don't know what you're getting marked down for.

Response: We are working to provide greater access to rating data, including justification for scores. We recently implemented this with the ERS tools and will have more data available once WA Compass, our new data system, launches in the coming year. We would be happy to share samples of these reports when they become available. Your feedback can help us improve the reports for future iterations. I will send you a collection of our current reports that have been redacted to protect the provider specific information. Our cohort model is very similar to other states' models. I understand the frustration for sites that operate on a school year.

Focus on issues not as closely tied to child outcomes. There is concern that a move away from CLASS will mean that this will be even greater – counting toys, playground issues, endless washing of hands, etc, rather than teacher/child interactions. School districts are often unevenly affected here – they are moved around from classroom to classroom and building to building so building a new playground may not be feasible, and their physical space is constrained by SD requirements.

Response: Positive outcomes for children are our top priority. The decision to move away from CLASS does not lessen our commitment to strong teacher-child interactions. The ERS-3rd edition tools incorporates interactions throughout and has been linked to positive child outcomes as well as improved executive functions. The ERS-3 tools allow us to measure both the learning environment, teacher support of child engagement, and positive teacher-child interactions with a single tool. This is another place where we can pull data on participants that are located in school district buildings to see how they have performed on the ERS. I will work to pull aggregate data that we can review together.

Special Education. Several programs have mentioned that the ERS sometimes conflicts with accommodations for children with special needs, but reviewers do not account for this. Some of the comments related to family child care are pertinent in this area as well – it's not best practice to put out every toy, for example, but when the ERS people are coming, we throw the whole lot out there.

Response: All of our data collectors have early learning classroom experience, as well as training on collecting data in inclusive classroom. In fact, some of our highest scores have been earned in inclusive environments. We also understand the concerns providers have regarding how serving children with special needs or challenging behaviors may affect the on-site evaluation. Data collectors are trained to focus on how adults are addressing the needs of children rather than behavior of children during an observation. This includes accommodations for children with special needs. They are also sensitive to the challenges of having an outside observer in the classroom and recognize that their presence can affect child behavior, particularly those with special needs. Child behavior does not have a negative impact on observation scores.

File of Supporting Materials. This is a MAJOR paperwork burden for programs, and the assessment of it is extremely nitpicky and uneven. Most programs report that doing this file takes a minimum of 1 week of staff time (and I am being very conservative here), which is time not well spent in most people's estimation. Due to the ECEAP/HS Track (which has its own issues of inequity given that CC providers all have to do the FSM) not requiring this, programs are incentivized away from mixed income or inclusion classrooms, since going under 70% ECEAP or HS would trigger a major paperwork hassle. We do not want to disincentivize these things. If I am hearing on the ground correctly, this FSM burden has also led to many CC centers not doing it at all and just doing the CLASS/ERS review, and has led to coaches having to focus on the nitpicky details of how the UW will interpret your FSM, rather than on the things that we know are more important to child outcomes – teacher interactions, curriculum fidelity, supportive learning environment.

Response: As stated above, an FSM is not required. Participants are required to document the standards they want to include in their on-site evaluation by completing the Interactive Rating Readiness Tool (IRRT) and opting in or opting out of standards. Providers must enter information into the IRRT that describes where the evidence of their practice is located for each standard they have selected for their evaluation. We do not want providers creating separate systems to demonstrate their evidence. It is our hope that a meeting with WSA to gather feedback on the upcoming revised IRRT guide will address many of the concerns regarding unclear or confusing expectations.

I appreciate your concern about the streamlined rating option. We created this opportunity as an on-ramp to quality practices. There are many providers who are not yet implementing screening, assessment or even a curriculum. We have heard that providers who try to take on too many new practices prior to their initial quality rating struggle to sustain the practices, other providers burnout because of the volume of change. The

streamlined rating option allows them to attain a quality rating and then work with their coach to develop sustainable practices over time.

We are absolutely committed to a mixed delivery system for ECEAP and understand the challenges presented by the reciprocity pathway. Once the full progression of standards are in place it makes sense to move to one pathway so we have begun discussions about sun setting reciprocity. Discussions have just started and dates have not been finalized.

Minor:

~~The auto reminders for the renewal process (3-year anniversaries) come out one year in advance. The wording makes it sound as though something needs to be done immediately, when the reality is that the site has up until the anniversary date to request the renewal data collection.~~

Response: Thank you for this feedback. The email language has been updated to read:

~~Thank you for your participation in Early Achievers, Washington's Quality Rating and Improvement System. It has been two years since your last rating! According to the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines, facility ratings are valid for three years from your rating release date.~~

~~Your current rating is set to expire on [date]. In order to maintain a valid Early Achievers rating, your facility must request an on-site evaluation on or before this date.~~

~~Additionally, once Early Achievers goes live within WA Compass, providers will be able to see all of their milestones related to the Early Start Act expectations. They will also have a display that includes contact information for their assigned coach, regional coordinator, grantee/contractor, licensor, etc.~~

-New classrooms. I've heard this from multiple programs who went through expansion – getting a new site up and running and then getting EA rated within a few months of starting is extremely challenging. I think this is in statute, but is there any flexibility? Would be great for existing programs with a good track record to be able to really focus internally on creating a good classroom until the following winter rather than jump through the EA hoops at the same time.

Response: You are correct. This requirement is in legislation and we are aware of the challenges it presents. Once all sites are licensed the timeline will extend a bit, but ECEAP and Early Head Start facilities will continue to have an accelerated participation timeline.

Family Childcare Model comments:

Are all 3 CLASS tools (Infant, Toddler and Pre-K) used, or have they created a “hybrid?” And if the latter is true, can that contribute to the concern about one of our veteran Providers rating at a Level 3 while others rate at Level 4?

Response: Data collectors use both Toddler and Pre-K CLASS for mixed age groups in family child care settings along with a scoring protocol that aligns the indicators within the tools. We only use Infant CLASS in programs that exclusively serve infants and toddlers.

*The overall requirements that must be met for Family Child Care providers with ages birth through 5 is a task that most if not all child care providers struggle with being able to achieve. For example, each age group needs to have three different varieties of blocks, which means 9 sets of blocks when you have three different age groups. (Lack of space)

Response: At the highest indicators, the ERS looks for two different types of blocks accessible for both toddlers and preschoolers (the age groups considered for this item). One set of blocks equals six blocks for toddlers and 15 blocks for preschoolers. The ERS also looks for 'many' blocks for each age group, meaning enough for each age group without undue competition. So, if you have a space for block play that accommodates three children, then you should have enough blocks for those three children to play without arguing over who has the blocks. My offer stands to coordinate ERS training for WSA. We can do deep dive sessions on any of the ERS tools and are happy to arrange reliability training if you or representatives from WSA are interested.

*With all the materials that need to be out at all times, in many cases is causing sensory overload for the children, as well as the staff. And is certainly a different philosophy than what they have been trained on in the past. More is not necessarily better or appropriate. Hence, the rotation of supplies and activities. Rotating materials keeps the children interested and wondering what's coming next, when they have everything out at all times it no longer is something to be curious about.

Response: The ERS tool measures the variety of materials that are accessible during the observation. These materials can be made available within a variety of learning centers and many materials count in multiple categories. For example, a dramatic play center may include items that are measured in math, promoting acceptance of diversity and fine motor by providing measuring cups, ethnically diverse dolls, and a clipboard and pencil in your dramatic play area. In addition, a single item may meet indicators within multiple items, such as scissors counting toward both fine motor and art tools. Several items also have indicators tied to how much time in the day materials are accessible. I am happy to arrange a deep dive session on the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale. These are also often available at the [Early Achievers Institutes](#).

*The expense of all the added materials that are encouraged to be purchased and changes to the child care spaces becomes very burdensome.

Response: It would be helpful to have additional information about who is encouraging the purchase of additional materials and what recommendations they are making. Access to resources such as Needs-Based Grants may be beneficial in some circumstances.

*The need for having all materials open for all age groups during the day. For instance, preschoolers should have access to all art materials throughout the day, all while keeping the materials out of the reach of the toddlers. If certain types of containers are used to address this, it is not counted as being available during most of the day. Special projects that have been typically brought out during rest time for infants/toddlers, to prevent choking hazards while providing the activities.

Response: Family child care providers have traditionally performed well on the ERS. This may be another area where professional development around the ERS tools may be helpful for facility coaches and staff members.

*The inconsistency of the data collectors and raters. They have not had any experience with Family Child Care and really are not aware of the model and the day to day duties of the child care providers.

Response: All data collectors have experience working in early learning classrooms, including some with family child care experience.

*The inconsistency of ratings from one provider to the next, meaning sites that have received a higher level 3 versus sites that received a level two. In some cases, it's a true disparage and with providers all knowing each other it has caused a bit of distention among the child care community. Which is the last thing we need as we are trying to build a strong sense of community.

Response: Unfortunately, it is difficult to address this concern effectively without more information. If there are specific sites you would like to us to review, we could look at the details of their data for discrepancies. Additionally, sites that have concerns about their ratings should contact us at gris@dcyf.wa.gov to have us look into their rating.

*The inconsistency of coaches and the information they bring forward. Also, the coaches changes fairly often.

Response: We are working with our partners toward having one system of high quality coaching. This includes improving consistency for participants, with the goal of only making changes to coaches upon request by the participant or when the coach moves on to another role. Additionally, we are working on differentiating services. We are working to offer differentiated coaching supports based on the needs of each participant. We are also in the process of developing a differentiated PD model for coaches so they can continue to develop and hone their skills.

Child Care Providers have reported they feel like they are being asked to put on a "show " for the raters rather than doing what is best and appropriate for the children in their care at the time. The flexibility to meet the individual children's needs at the time of rating is being put on the back burner because if they don't exhibit in that moment what the raters are checking off, somehow that means that requirement is not being met. The providers feel frustrated because the raters have no idea what transpired before they stepped into the room or after they have left.

Response: We never want early learning professionals to focus on providing "quality for a day." Data collectors are skilled observers who are able to gather a great deal of information from a single interaction. Data collectors work in all areas of the tools throughout their observation – they document what they see when they see it. It truly is a strength-based approach to data collection and quality improvement. While a data collection visit is a snapshot in time, studies have shown that test-retest reliability for the ERS tools is stable. This means that, when the ERS tool is conducted on different days and by different data collectors, ERS scores for a given classroom have remained consistent.