Technical Assistance for the QRIS Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP)

# Introduction

This document provides programs and providers guidance in creating a Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP). The CQIP is the Program Improvement Plan (PIP) referenced in the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care’s (EEC) Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Standards. The CQIP helps programs and providers identify their strengths and areas of potential growth, and turns these areas for growth into an action plan for program improvement. Over three hundred pilot programs, representing programs of many different types and sizes, participated in the development and testing of the CQIP in 2014. As a result of this collaboration with the field, the CQIP has undergone several revisions to become easier to use.

# CQIP Template

The CQIP Template is available for all QRIS program types: Center-Based/School-Based, Family Child Care, and Afterschool/Out of School Time. Translations of the CQIP template are also available in the following languages: Spanish, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Chinese, Arabic, and Russian. Select the template to that is aligned with your program type.

The CQIP is your tool to capture and summarize the information you already have learned about your program, and then make improvements that will benefit children, families, and staff. The CQIP process has three stages:

*Figure 1: EEC Technical Assistance Cycle*

* **Develop** your plan, including action steps;
* **Implement** action steps; and
* **Reflect** on the progress and success of the action steps as you work towards improving your program’s quality.

Strong continuous quality improvement is a cycle that never ends. The CQIP can be a dynamic, living document that is always evolving, not just a document that is referenced and updated just once a year. The CQIP reflects the work you do for children and families, and documents how you are increasing program quality as your program moves towards the next level of the QRIS.

# Step One: Develop Your Plan

Use the information and data collected from the required QRIS measurement tools and other sources to create your CQIP. Be sure to have a copy of the QRIS standards available, and refer to them as you prepare your CQIP. You will find that they align closely to the CQIP templates, and will guide you during this process.

Gather your QRIS documentation, measurement tool scores, and staff and parent surveys. It is important to become familiar with the measurement tools before you self-assess your program; consider participating in one of the measurement tool trainings offered by EEC. If your program has gone through accreditation, collect that information as well. Look at the EEC Professional Qualifications Registry (PQR) for each staff member to gather data about the training needs of your staff.

*Figure 2: Phase One of the Technical Assistance Cycle, "Develop"*

**What will all this information tell you about the program?** The CQIP will help you tell the story of your program, including identifying the strengths and areas for growth. Set aside time with your staff, parents, and other key individuals to develop your CQIP plan together. The more engaged staff and parents are, the more support and buy-in will result for your improvement process. You may want to consider making CQIP planning part of a training day or a component of your regular staff meeting.

As a first step in completing the plan, record your current program scores from the measurement tools directly into the first column of the template. If you have multiple classrooms, these scores will be an average of all your classrooms. Assessment scores that are objective and authentic will create the strongest foundation for your CQIP. The data from your self-assessments will support your team in identifying what your program is doing well; these are the areas of strength. It will also assist in highlighting the aspects of your program that could benefit from improvement; these are the areas needing growth.

Next, create clear action steps to address the areas you identified as needing improvement. Most programs do not have the time or resources to work on every action step at the same time, so programs should take the time to prioritize these action steps. Research suggests that three to five action steps at a time are a good place to start. Issues impacting the immediate health and safety of the children, or areas where a program identifies they may no longer be in full compliance with current licensing standards, should receive the highest priority. You should work with EEC licensors and EEC Program Quality Specialists on these high priority items.

Think about what will be needed to complete the action steps as they are developed. Consider factors such as and organizational goals/mission, staff time, funding, and the resources you have available to support these action steps. Some steps will require more time and resources than others. Stronger goals detail who is responsible for meeting goals, and when the goals will be met. To truly be considered an action step, the task needs to be clearly defined. Below are examples of weak and strong action steps.

**Weak Action Steps**

| ERS SUBSCALE | AREAS OF STRENGTH | AREAS FOR POTENTIAL GROWTH | ACTION STEP  (what, who and when) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1. Space and Furnishings**  ITERS-R Score: 4.2  ECERS-R Score: 4.7  *(Required)* | * Clean and organized environments. * Adequate natural lighting, temperature control, and ventilation | * Not all children can touch their feet to the floor when seated * Diaper changing table has only 4” lip * No separate cozy area with soft items and holes or worn spots in several rugs * Not enough diversity materials | * Purchase new tables and chairs for the classroom * Need to buy new changing table * Figure out what we need and buy soft items for cozy areas and new rugs if they have holes * Buy new diversity materials or make our own * Get families to fundraise for classroom materials |

***Strong Action Steps***

| **ERS SUBSCALE** | **AREAS OF STRENGTH** | **AREAS FOR POTENTIAL GROWTH** | **ACTION STEP**  **(what, who and when)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1. Space and Furnishings**  ITERS-R Score: 4.2  ECERS-R Score: 4.7  *(Required)* | * Clean and organized environments. * Adequate natural lighting, temperature control, and ventilation | * Not all children can touch their feet to the floor when seated * Diaper changing table has only 4” lip * No separate cozy area with soft items and holes or worn spots in several rugs * Not enough diversity materials | * Director will order two new toddler height tables with chairs and a preschool table with appropriate sized chairs within 8 weeks (by November 20th). * Director will order changing table with 6” lip and repair or remove unsafe rugs within 3 weeks (by October 15th). * Each classroom teaching team will meet by October 7thth to review measurement tool scores and identify a wish list of soft items for cozy area and diversity materials for their classrooms. The Director will combine these lists and prioritize purchases based on available funding. * Director will schedule a staff training in “Creating Diversity Materials for Your Classroom” for October. * Director will share wish list of items not yet purchased in the monthly newsletter and with the Parent Advisory Group by November 1st, and encourage the parent group to consider fundraising for these items during the school year. |

Reflect on who needs to be involved as you develop your steps; will it be educators, administrators, parents, or other professional staff? Will this action step require the support of someone outside the program, such as a health care consultant? Does EEC and/or other community organizations offer supports (such free or low-cost trainings or access to resources) that could be incorporated into your action steps? Have you considered applying for grants or other available funding to assist with the cost of quality improvements?

Set realistic deadlines and hold the people assigned to these tasks accountable, while providing the support they need to meet their goals. Try to avoid making your action steps too long-term. Instead, break down your long-range goals into smaller, incremental action steps. This helps maintain progress as you work toward reaching longer-range goals. It also provides everyone involved with a sense of achievement as you accomplish your action steps. At the end of the CQIP planning process, your program will have developed a plan with clear action steps to guide quality improvements.

# Step Two: Implement Your Plan

*Figure 3: Phase Two of the Technical Assistance Cycle, "Implement"*

Using the CQIP created in Step One, begin to address the action steps in your plan. Remember that your action steps will often require both time and some type of support to make progress. Action steps will typically require staff and/or administration time to learn, train, develop, or research. Action steps may also require funds to buy something, hire someone, or complete an improvement to a classroom or playground environment.

Successful implementation involves classroom or program observations to evaluate whether your action steps are achieving their intended results. Encourage your staff members to participate in observations and provide feedback about how your action steps are progressing. A classroom educator may have a different view of the success of an action steps than a supervisor or program administrator. Collaboration and concrete feedback are important to support your continued growth. Be sure to keep parents informed of the steps you are taking to improve program quality; their observations and feedback will also provide valuable information about the success of your action steps.

# Step Three: Reflect On Your Progress

The reflection stage is critical to making your CQIP a dynamic, living document. Assemble a group of staff members and stakeholders to reflect on the progress your program has made towards the action steps in the CQIP. Remember, the more engaged staff and parents are in the entire process, the more support and buy-in your plan will receive. Expect that some action steps may have delivered the measurable progress you anticipated, while others will be more challenging, and will take more time to provide clear and measurable success. At a minimum, QRIS requires you review your CQIP at least once a year. Carefully evaluate the progress have you made towards each action step and note this in the final column of the template.

*Figure 4: Phase Three of the Technical Assistance Cycle, "Reflect"*

**Review Current Action Steps:** When reviewing your action steps and the information you collected in your observations, consider these questions:

* Did you complete any of the action steps? If so, did they achieve the desired results?
* If an action step did not deliver what you planned, how can it be modified to achieve the desire result? Does it need more time? Does it need more resources? Does it need to be redefined or broken out into smaller steps?
* Has something changed in your program that requires reconsidering an action step? Do you have new staff members, a change in the number or ages of children enrolled, or any other change that impacts the program?
* Are you updated on the most current licensing regulations and quality standards? Do these require the program to add or change an action step?

**Develop New Action Steps:** Keep in mind that as you complete action steps and the program evolves over time, your plan will also need to change. Reflection is a time to take a fresh, comprehensive look at your program, and to ask the same questions you asked when you developed your first CQIP. What did we do well? What can we do better? It is also the time to consider a new question. How have the needs of our program evolved as we made these quality improvements?

Gather any recently updated information in your QRIS documentation, measurement tool scores, parent surveys, and accreditation documentation (if applicable). Once again, look at the EEC Professional Qualifications Registry for each staff member to gather updates about the training needs of your staff members. Using all of this information, carefully reflect on the action steps you outlined in your CQIP. Use this feedback to answer the questions in the "reflection" section of the CQIP. When this is done, you have the information you need to develop a revised CQIP with new action steps.

*Figure 5: The Technical Assistance Cycle*

# Conclusion

Share the updated CQIP with staff members, families, and other stakeholders and begin the work to implement your new or revised action steps. Don’t forget to pause and celebrate your achievements! Use that momentum to reenergize your staff and school community as you engage in the ongoing process of Continuous Quality Improvement.

# Resources

* Visit the **QRIS Resources for Programs** page on the EEC website at <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/qris/qris-resources-for-programs.html> to access the CQIP templates and additional QRIS resources.
* Remember that your regional **EEC QRIS Program Quality Specialist** can provide important insights into quality improvements for your program. They are familiar with QRIS quality standards, required measurement tools, and EEC licensing regulations. Access contact information for these regional support staff at <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/provider-and-program-administration/quality-rating-and-improvement-system-qris.html>.
* Your local **Educator Provider Support (EPS)** grantee can also connect programs to regional quality supports, such as trainings and coaching, at <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/workforce-and-professional-development/educator-and-provider-support-eps-grant.html>.
* **Webinar**: Recording of QRIS Monthly Technical Assistance Webinar: "Continuous Quality Improvement Planning": <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/2917528082211530241>