Environment Rating Scales (ERS) Support Resources for Out-of-School Time Programs

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For more details about these resources, please consult the Environment Rating Scales tools, including the notes for clarification. ERS Website: <http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/node/79>

These resources are adapted from *Caring for Our Children:*
American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. 2011. Caring for our children: National health and safety performance standards; Guidelines for early care and education programs. 3rd edition. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; Washington, DC: American Public Health Association. Also available at <http://nrckids.org>.

*Note: these resources pertain to Environment Rating Scales requirements for QRIS Levels 2, 3, and 4. In some cases, EEC licensing regulations are more rigorous than the ERS requirements. In these cases (following EEC diapering procedures, for example), please follow EEC licensing requirements.*

# About the ERS

**What are the environment rating scales?**

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

* ([**ECERS-R**)](http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/node/82) *The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised*: A thorough revision of the ECERS, designed to assess group programs for preschool-kindergarten aged children, from 2 through 5 years of age. Total scale consists of 43 items. (Also available in Spanish).
* ([**ITERS-R**)](http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/node/84) *The Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised*: A thorough revision of the ITERS, designed to assess group programs for children from birth to 2 ½ years of age. Total scale consists of 39 items. (Also available in Spanish).
* ([**FCCERS-R**)](http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/node/111) *The Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised*: A thorough revision of the FDCRS, designed to assess family child care programs conducted in a provider’s home. Total scale consists of 38 items. (Also available in Spanish).
* ([**SACERS**)](http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/node/151) *The School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale*: Designed to assess before and after school group care programs for school-age children, 5 to 12 years of age. The total scale consists of 49 items, including 6 supplementary items for programs enrolling children with disabilities.

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.

The 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.

Helpful Website for information about the ERS:

* ERS Website: [http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/node/79](http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/node/79%20)
* Public Playground Safety Handbook Website: [www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/325.pdf](file:///%5C%5Ceec-fps-bos-002%5Cshareddocs%5CPrograms%5CQRIS%5CQRIS%20Tool%20Box%5Cwww.cpsc.gov%5Ccpscpub%5Cpubs%5C325.pdf)
* National Health and Safety Standards “Caring for Our Children”: [http://nrckids.org/CFOC/PDFVersion/National%20Health%20and%20Safety%20Performance%20Standards.pdf](http://nrckids.org/CFOC/PDFVersion/National%20Health%20and%20Safety%20Performance%20Standards.pdf%20)

**What Does the Environment Rating Scales Measure?**

* **Schedule:** Children have opportunities to explore and engage in many different ways which respect the differences (Cognitive, Emotional, Physical, Individual Interests). The schedule needs consistency for emotional safety and requires planning, yet remain flexible for changes as needed.

**Questions to ask:**

* + Do I consider all children’s differences when creating the schedule?
	+ Do I follow the same schedule of daily events (with some flexibility) so that children know what the routine is and what they can expect next?
* **Interactions:** Staff to child, child to child, parent to staff, and staff to staff (includes positive, negative, neutral, purposeful and social interactions). Interactions have their own subscale and are also interwoven throughout the items.

**Questions to ask:**

* How often do I talk individually with each child?
* How often do I greet parents, talk with them for periods of time and share information?
* What is my tone of voice when I interact with children/parents/colleagues?
* What does my body language look like?
* How frequent are my interactions?
* **Accessibility of Materials:** Materials need to be accessible where children can easily reach them for a designated period of time.

**Questions to ask:**

* Do children know what we have to play with? Can they see it?
* Can children reach the materials and get them out of the storage to play?
* Can the children easily clean up and know where to put the materials away?
* **Space management:** Provides the ability to move freely; analyzes the traffic patterns, place center conveniently so as not to interfere with each other; quiet and noisy centers separate; places for children to be alone; supervision is easy. Children need a quality learning environment having the freedom to move about without interrupting others play. The environment should have well-defined center placed out of traffic and equipped with the materials to support meaningful play. Noise should not detract from the children’s learning through play. At times children need a break just like adults. There should be space for children to work, play, or engage in quite time alone. All areas of the classroom occupied by children must be visible and easy to supervise at a glance.

**Questions to ask:**

* Is every child engaged in meaningful play?
* Are children able to move easily and safely around the room without interfering in
* another child’s play?
* Is there excessive running from place to place or areas that encourage rough play?
* Do children have materials, props, supplies, clean up items, etc., nearby to ensure successful play. (e.g., is there a dust broom and pan near the sand table; towels to wipe up spilled water near the water table; sink available near messy play; etc.)?
* Is the noise level in each area appropriate, are children who need it quiet able to find space that is quiet. Is background music used? If so, is the volume low and music does not have words so as not to interfere with language/communication?
* Can children find space to be alone and protected from others as needed? Is this space easy to supervise? Do you respect the right for children to create their own space to be alone provided it is safe and easy to supervise?
* **Health & Safety:** Cleanliness, hand washing, sanitizing, safe equipment, and a safe environment. Prevention is the key! Proper practices need to become habitual.

**Questions to ask:**

* Is my classroom/center clean? Would I be willing to sit on the floor? Is the floor vacuumed/washed daily? Is there visible debris.
* Do the children/staff know when to wash their hands?
* Do I know the proper process for hand washing, diapering, food and table preparation and clean up, food/bottle handing?
* When was the last playground safety analysis done?
* Is there any safety violations in my classroom/center?

# MA-QRIS ERS Process

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| ERS Requirements Level 2 - After School/Out-of-School Time Programs |
| Self-Assessment: | **EEC Program Quality Specialist Verification:** |
| * All programs at Level 2 must complete an ERS self-assessment using the SACERS as part of their Level 2 application.
* ERS group observation can be completed by educators and/or program support staff.
* Scores must be entered into the on-line application.
* Printed copies should be kept on-site.
* ERS scores will no longer be valid if:
	+ Scores are older than 2 years
	+ A program has been assigned a different site coordinator
	+ A program has been physically moved to a new location (in the same building or in a new building)
* A Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP) must be completed and include a programs’ goals based on the results of the ERS scores.
 | * Scores entered in the on-line application system will be reviewed and verified by a PQS (not on-site).
* If ERS scores meet the requirements (along with *all* other documentation, professional development requirements, and measurement tools), the program will be granted a Level 2 Status. This status is valid for 2 years.
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| ERS Requirements Level 3 - After School/Out-of-School Time Programs |
| Self-Assessment: | **EEC Program Quality Specialist Verification:** |
| * All programs at Level 3 must complete an ERS self-assessment using the SACERS as part of their Level 3 application.
* ERS group observation can be completed by educators and/or program support staff.
* Scores must be entered into the on-line application.
* Printed copies should be kept on-site.
* ERS scores will no longer be valid if:
	+ Scores are older than 2 years
	+ A program has been assigned a different site coordinator
	+ A program has been physically moved to a new location (in the same building or in a new building)
* A Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP) must be completed and include a programs’ goals based on the results of the ERS sores.
 | * Once a program’s Level 3 application has been *final submitted* , a Program Quality Specialist will contact the program to schedule a Technical Assistance site visit.
* Self-Assessed ERS Scores will be reviewed on site.
* The PQS will observe a sample of groups.
* The PQS and Program Administrator will:
	+ discuss the ERS self-assessed scores and the PQS observations; and
	+ identify together the strengths and areas for potential growth.
* A revised Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQI) will be developed to address areas for potential growth.
* If ERS scores meet the requirements (along with *all* other documentation, professional development requirements, and measurement tools), the program will be granted a Level 3 Status. This status is valid for 2 years, with the option to extend an additional 1 year.
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| ERS Requirements Level 4 - After School/Out-of-School Time Programs |
| Self-Assessment: | **EEC Program Quality Specialist Verification:** |
| * All programs at Level 4 must complete an ERS self-assessment using the SACERS as part of their Level 4 application.
* ERS group observations can be completed by educators and/or program support staff.
* Scores must be entered into the on-line application.
* Printed copies should be kept on-site.
* ERS scores will no longer be valid if:
	+ Scores are older than 2 years
	+ A program has been assigned a different site coordinator
	+ A program has been physically moved to a new location (in the same building or in a new building)
* A Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQI) must be completed and include a programs’ goals based on the results of the ERS sores.
 | * Once a program’s Level 3 Status has been granted and a Level 4 application has been *final submitted* , a Program Quality Specialist will review the Self-Assessed ERS scores in the on-line application.
* If the ERS self-assessed and PQS scores meet the requirements for Level 4, the PQS will make a referral for an ERS Reliable Rater visit.
* An ERS Reliable Rater will contact the program to schedule group observations.
* A random sample of group observations will be completed, based on the following guidelines: In programs with 1-3 groups, all groups will be observed. In programs with more than 4 groups, 60% of the groups will be observed.
* After the Reliable Rater visit, the PQS and Program Administrator will:
	+ discuss the ERS self-assessed scores and the PQS observations; and
	+ identify together the strengths and areas for potential growth.
* A revised Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQI) will be developed to address areas for potential growth.
* If ERS scores meet the requirements (along with *all* other documentation, professional development requirements, and measurement tools), the program will be granted a Level 4 Status. This status is valid for 2 years, with the option to extend an additional 2 years.
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**What happens when a program does not meet the ERS score requirements?**

* + Level 2- If ERS scores do not meet the requirements for Level 2, the PQS will change the application status to “EEC Review Complete.” Programs that do not meet the score requirements must:
		- Make the necessary changes within 90 days
		- Notify their PQS when the changes have been submitted in the online application
	+ Level 3- If ERS scores do not meet the requirements for Level 3, the PQS will change the application status to “EEC Review Complete.” Programs that do not meet the score requirements must:
		- Collaborate with the PQS to develop a Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP).
		- Work on the areas of potential growth identified in the CQIP.
		- Notify the PQS when the improvements have been implemented.
		- The PQS may request a second site visit to verify that the program improvements have been implemented.
	+ Level 4- If ERS scores do not meet the requirements for Level 4, the PQS will change the application status to “EEC Review Complete.” Programs that do not meet the score requirements must:
		- Collaborate with the PQS to develop a Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP).
		- Work on the areas of potential growth identified in the CQIP.
		- Notify the PQS when the improvements have been implemented.
		- The PQS may require a second Reliable Rater site visit to verify that the program improvements have been implemented.

**What issues should trigger the need for a program to complete a new Environment Rating Scales Self-Assessment?**

* + Change in Site Director
	+ Change in location
	+ Scores older than two years

# Calculating Substantial Portion of the Day

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| Calculating Substantial Portion of the Day[[1]](#footnote-1) |
| Number of Hours of Operation | Substantial portion (1/3 of these hours) |
| 4 | 1 hour. 20 minutes |
| 4.5 | 1 hour, 30 minutes |
| 5 | 1 hour, 40 minutes |
| 5.5 | 1 hour, 50 minutes |
| 6 | 2 hours |
| 6.5 | 2 hours, 10 minutes |
| 7 | 2 hours, 20 minutes |
| 7.5 | 2 hours, 30 minutes |
| 8 | 2 hours, 40 minutes |
| 8.5 | 2 hours, 50 minutes |
| 9 | 3 hours |
| 9.5 | 3 hours, 10 minutes |
| 10 | 3 hours, 20 minutes |
| 10.5 | 3 hours, 30 minutes |
| 11 | 3 hours, 40 minutes |
| 11.5 | 3 hours, 50 minutes |
| 12 | 4 hours |

# Meal Guidelines

MEAL PATTERN FOR CHILDREN Ages 1 through 12 Years

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| BreakfastSelect All Three Components for a Reimbursable MealChildren age 12 and older may be served larger portions based on their greater food needs. They may not be served less than the minimum quantities listed in this column. |
| Food Components | **Ages 1-2** | **Ages 3-5** | **Ages 6-12** |
| 1 milk[[2]](#footnote-2)fluid milk | 1/2 cup | 3/4 cup | 1 cup |
| 1 fruit/vegetable[[3]](#footnote-3) juice, fruit and/or vegetable | 1/4 cup | 1/2 cup | 1/2 cup |
| 1 grains/bread[[4]](#footnote-4) |  |
| * Bread
 | 1/2 slice | 1/2 slice | 1 slice |
| * Cornbread or biscuit or roll or muffin
 | 1/2 serving | 1/2 serving | 1 serving |
| * Cold dry cereal
 | 1/4 cup | 1/3 cup | 3/4 cup |
| * Hot cooked cereal
 | 1/4 cup | 1/4 cup | 1/2 cup |
| * Pasta or noodles or grains
 | 1/4 cup | 1/4 cup | 1/2 cup |

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| Lunch or SupperSelect All Four Components for a Reimbursable MealChildren age 12 and older may be served larger portions based on their greater food needs. They may not be served less than the minimum quantities listed in this column. |
| Food Components | **Ages 1-2** | **Ages 3-5** | **Ages 6-12** |
| 1 milkfluid milk | 1/2 cup | 3/4 cup | 1 cup |
| 2 fruits/vegetables juice, fruit and/or vegetable | ¼ cup | ½ cup | ¾ cup |
| 1 grains/bread |
| * Bread
 | ½ slice | ½ slice | 1 slice |
| * Cornbread or biscuit or roll or muffin
 | ½ serving | ½ serving | 1 serving |
| * Cold dry cereal
 | ¼ cup | 1/3 cup | ¾ cup |
| * Hot cooked cereal
 | ¼ cup | ¼ cup | ½ cup |
| * Pasta or noodles or grains
 | ¼ cup | ¼ cup | ½ cup |
| 1 meat/meat alternative |
| * Meat or poultry or fish[[5]](#footnote-5)
 | 1 oz | 1.5 oz | 2 oz |
| * Alternate protein product
 | 1 oz | 1.5 oz | 2 oz |
| * Cheese
 | 1 oz | 1.5 oz | 2 oz |
| * Egg
 | ½ | ¾ | 1 |
| * Cooked dry beans or peas
 | ¼ cup | 3/8 cup | ½ cup |
| * Peanut or other nut or seed butters
 | 2 TBSP | 3 TBSP | 4 TBSP |
| * Nuts and/or seeds [[6]](#footnote-6)
 | ½ oz | ¾ oz | 1 oz |
| * Yogurt[[7]](#footnote-7)
 | 4 oz | 6 oz | 8 oz |

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| SnackSelect two of the four components for a Reimbursable Snack |
| Food Components | **Ages 1-2** | **Ages 3-5** | **Ages 6-12** |
| 1 milkfluid milk | 1/2 cup | 1/2 cup | 1 cup |
| 2 fruits/vegetables juice, fruit and/or vegetable | 1/2 cup | 1/2 cup | ¾ cup |
| 1 grains/bread |
| * Bread
 | ½ slice | ½ slice | 1 slice |
| * Cornbread or biscuit or roll or muffin
 | ½ serving | ½ serving | 1 serving |
| * Cold dry cereal
 | ¼ cup | 1/3 cup | ¾ cup |
| * Hot cooked cereal
 | ¼ cup | ¼ cup | ½ cup |
| * Pasta or noodles or grains
 | ¼ cup | ¼ cup | ½ cup |
| 1 meat/meat alternative |
| * Meat or poultry or fish[[8]](#footnote-8)
 | 1/2 oz | 1/2 oz | 1 oz |
| * Alternate protein product
 | 1/2 oz | 1/2 oz | 1 oz |
| * Cheese
 | 1/2 oz | 1/2 oz | 1 oz |
| * Egg
 | ½ | 1/2 | 1/2 |
| * Cooked dry beans or peas
 | 1/8 cup | 1/8 cup | 1/4 cup |
| * Peanut or other nut or seed butters
 | 1 TBSP | 1 TBSP | 2 TBSP |
| * Nuts and/or seeds
 | ½ oz | 1/2 oz | 1 oz |
| * yogurt
 | 2 oz | 2 oz | 4 oz |

# MA-QRIS ERS Score Requirements

* **When scoring, things to consider:**
	+ Scores are based on the current situation that is observed or reported by staff, not on future plans.
	+ Requirements in the scale apply to all children in the group being observed, unless an exception is noted in an item.
	+ Score will always start from 1 (inadequate) and progress upward until the correct quality score is reached.
* **Ratings are assigned in the following manner:**
	+ A rating of 1 must be given if any indicator under 1 is scored “yes”.
	+ A rating of 2 is given when all indicators under 1 are scored “no” and at least half of the indicators under 3 are scored “yes”.
	+ A rating of 3 is given when all indicators under 1 are scored “no” and all indicators under 3 are scored “yes”.
	+ A rating of 4 is given when all indicators under 1 are scored “no” and all indicators under 3 are scored “yes” and at least half of the indicators under 5 are scored “yes”.
	+ A rating of 5 is given when all indicators under 1 are scored “no” and all indicators under 3 and 5 are scored “yes”
	+ A rating of 6 is given when all indicators under 1 are scored “no” and all indicators under 3 and 5 are scored “yes”, and at least half of the indicators under 7 are scored “yes”.
	+ A rating of 7 is given when all indicators under 1 are scored “no” and all indicators under 3, 5 and 7 are scored “yes”.

ERS Minimum Subscale Requirements for School-Age Care Environment (SACERS)**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

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| ERS Subscales | Level 1 Requirement | Level 2 Requirement(overall = 3) | Level 3 Requirement(overall= 4.5) | Level 4Requirement(overall=5.5) |
| 1. Space and Furnishings | No ERS requirement | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. Health and Safety | No ERS requirement | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. Activities | No ERS requirement | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Interactions | No ERS requirement | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Program Structure | No ERS requirement | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Staff Development | No ERS requirement | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. Special Needs Supplementary Items | No ERS requirement | 3 | 4 | 5 |

# MA QRIS ERS Policy Statements

The following ERS policies conflict with EEC Licensing requirements. EEC Licensing Requirements will always supersede ERS requirements in these cases.

**Policy Statement: Addressing Weather Permitting when using the ERS**

The term, “Weather Permitting” is used frequently throughout the ERS, which is used to support QRIS applications at level 2 or higher. This policy addresses the appropriate interpretation of the term, “Weather Permitting” to remain aligned with EEC licensing regulations.

The definition of Weather Permitting as noted by, Harms, Clifford and Cryer in the Environment Rating Scales reads as follows, “’Weather permitting’ means *almost every day*, unless there is active precipitation, extremely hot or cold conditions, or public announcements that advise people to remain indoors due to weather conditions such as high levels of pollution and extreme cold or heat that might cause health problems” (7).

EEC licensing regulations follow the recommendations on the chart noted below when determining whether or not it is appropriate for children to participate in outdoor activities:

<http://www.mycccc.org/Weather%20Watch.pdf>

When administering the Environment Rating Scales in any program type; programs, educators and reliable raters will adhere to the EEC licensing regulations concerning appropriate outdoor climate found here:

<http://www.mycccc.org/Weather%20Watch.pdf>

A program/educator will not be kept from receiving a score of, “yes” on an indicator noting, “Weather permitting” if they do not participate in outdoor activities as a result of following EEC licensing regulations.

**POLICY STATEMENT: REQUIREMENT FOR TB TESTING IN THE SCHOOL AGE ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE (SACERS)**

This policy addresses the SACERS item: 12, indicator 3.4 – Staff have had physical exam and TB test within last 2 years.

TB testing every 2 years is no longer considered best practices according to DPH, both program staff and reliable raters administering the SACERS for participation in QRIS at levels 2 or higher will score this indicator yes as long as the staff member's physical exams are up to date.

For programs using the revised SACERS (2014), this criterion is no longer applicable.

**Policy Statement: Addressing the term, Adequate Supervision, in connection with the use of the ERS**

The term, Adequate Supervision, is used frequently throughout the ERS, which is used to support QRIS applications at level 2 or higher. This policy addresses the appropriate interpretation of the term, “Adequate supervision” to remain aligned with EEC licensing regulations.

In connection with the ERS, the term, “Adequate supervision” does not address teacher/child ratios.

EEC regulations regarding teacher/child ratios can be found in section, 7.10, of licensing regulations. Programs and educators must meet these licensing requirements at all times for supervision of children to be considered adequate.

When administering the ERS in any program type, programs, educators and reliable raters will adhere to the EEC licensing regulations concerning teacher/child ratios when determining whether or not supervision is adequate.

If it is observed by the reliable rater that a classroom is out of ratio in accordance with EEC licensing regulations, the classroom would not be able to receive a score of, “yes” on any indicator requiring, “Adequate supervision.”

**POLICY STATEMENT: ADMINISTERING THE ERS IN HALF DAY PROGRAMS SERVING 2 MEALS**

When applying for Level 3 or higher for the MA QRIS, preschool programs must meet the requirements for specific materials being accessible “substantial portion of the day”, as defined by the ECCERS.

 EEC acknowledges the challenges this might present for half day programs that provide both breakfast and lunch, due to the allocation of time that meals can require. EEC also recognizes the importance of providing children with both a healthy breakfast and lunch. To accommodate half day program serving both breakfast and lunch, “hours of operation (program time)” as measured for an ECCERS observation will be counted as beginning at the **end** of the first meal, as opposed to children’s arrival into the classroom. This action will shorten the “program” day and reduce the time expectation for substantial portion of the day. Therefore, half day programs serving 2 meals will be given credit for substantial portion of the day on the ECERS, if children have free access to specified classroom materials 1/3 of the program time, as measured from the **conclusion** of breakfast until departure.

**POLICY STATEMENT: ADDRESSING SUBSTANTIALLY SEPARATE CLASSROOMS WHEN APPLYING FOR QRIS LEVEL 2 OR HIGHER**

When applying for QRIS level 2 or higher, programs are expected to self-administer the appropriate ERS on each classroom in operation. When applying for level 3 or higher a reliable rater will also administer the Environment Rating Scale on all/a sample of the classrooms in operation depending on program size. The Environment Rating Scales are not intended to be used in substantially separate classrooms serving children with severe disabilities. This policy will address the alternative method to assessing these classrooms if a program is applying for QRIS level 2 or higher.

Programs operating substantially separate classrooms along with inclusion/typically developing classrooms will not be expected to administer the Environment Rating Scale in their substantially separate classrooms when applying for Level 2 or higher in QRIS. The reliable rater will not administer the Environment Rating Scale in substantially separate classrooms.

The reliable raters will complete the special needs item on ERS to assess center practices as related to special needs. In addition, programs will need to submit documentation of their IEP process and policies, regarding children with special needs and children placed in substantially separate classrooms. Programs will also need to provide documentation of the qualifications of educators working with substantially separate children, including classroom teachers and therapists employed by the program. This will be reviewed by the QRIS Specialist.

**POLICY STATEMENT: USE OF HAND SANITIZER**

This policy addresses the use of hand sanitizer in childcare settings.

According to the ERS used by programs applying for QRIS levels 2 or higher, programs may use hand sanitizer in place of running water and soap to wash hands for children over the age of 2 and all adults as long as the hands are not visibly soiled.

According to EEC licensing regulations, hand sanitizer may not be used in place of running water and soap to clean hands as long as running water and soap are accessible. Programs applying for levels 2 or higher in QRIS and administering the ERS should adhere to EEC's licensing regulations and only make use of hand sanitizer in the event that soap and running water are inaccessible.

**POLICY STATEMENT: WALKING SAFELY TO AND MAKING USE OF OFFSITE PLAYGROUNDS**

For programs utilizing offsite playgrounds for gross motor time, the following procedures must be followed:

* More than one adult should be present, if group size is larger than 4 children. When possible, more than one adult should be present.
* Travel should be limited to sidewalks only.
* A buddy system (children holding hands in line) must be employed.
* Children should always be positioned between adults (adult at front and end of the line).
* If a street has cross walks, crossing should only take place at the cross walk (this may require walking additional blocks).
* If traffic and walk signals are present, they should always be followed, regardless of the volume of traffic.
* When preparing to cross the street, adults must look left, right and left again to check for oncoming traffic.
* The street should be crossed as one cohesive group, with no substantial gaps between children.
* Children should NOT be permitted to touch dangerous debris and/or objects on sidewalk (e.g., glass, petting animals).
* Teachers should check public playground space for unsafe objects and materials before children are permitted to access the space.
* Public playgrounds must meet the safety standards as outlined by the ERS. This includes:
	+ Well-maintained and safe equipment.
	+ An absence of dangerous objects and debris (broken glass, bottles, etc.).
	+ Children limited only to the use of age-appropriate equipment (toddlers use toddler equipment, preschool children access preschool sized equipment).
	+ Complete fence.
	+ Adequate cushioning and fall zones.

If a playground does meet the above safety standards, it will be rated as unsafe.

# Playground Information

***Based on information from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC),* Public Playground Safety Handbook, Pub. No. 325 *and information from the American Society for Testing and Materials Standards (ASTM),* Standard Consumer Safety Performance Specification for Public Use Playground Equipment for Children 6 Months through 23 Months, F 2373-05*. These guidelines are a basic overview of areas to review when scoring playground and safety items in the ECERS-R, ITERS-R, FCCERS-R, or SACERS. This list is not to be used as a comprehensive guide for playground assessment.***

**Fall Zones** *–* A fall zone is the area around and under gross motor climbing, sliding, or swinging equipment where protective surfacing is required to prevent injury from falls. The fall zone should be cleared of items that children may fall onto or run into.

**Protective Surfacing** – Protective surfacing is intended to cushion falls and prevent serious injuries from any equipment used indoors and outdoors. The amount of a consistent type of surfacing required is based on the fall height of the equipment, which is the height of the highest designated play surface on the equipment. Equipment having a fall height of 18" or less is not required to have protective surfacing; however, no equipment should be placed over concrete, asphalt, stone, ceramic tile, or similar hard surfaces. The surfaces under and around play equipment should be soft enough to cushion falls, which are the most frequent causes of injuries on playgrounds. Common indoor surfaces (such as rugs, tumbling mates, or carpet) and common outdoor surfaces (such as grass or dirt) are not adequate cushioning for gross motor equipment with a fall height greater than 18" even when the equipment is not anchored. For specifics on surfacing depth for different loose-fill materials, see the chart below. When the surfacing in much-used areas becomes displaced (e.g., under swings, at slide exits), it should be raked back or replaced to maintain correct depth. For poured or installed foam or rubber surfaces, the materials must meet the ASTM F1292 requirements, which can be verified through a written statement from the manufacturer.

## Minimum compressed loose-fill surfacing depths:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Inches** | **Of** | **Loose-Fill Material** | **Protects To** | **Fall Height (feet)** |
| 9 |  | Shredded/recycled rubber |  | 10 |
| 9 |  | Sand |  | 4 |
| 9 |  | Pea gravel |  | 5 |
| 9 |  | Wood mulch |  | 7 |
| 9 |  | Wood chips |  | 10 |

**Equipment Spacing** – Fall zones for climbing equipment should extend at least 6 ft on all sides for preschoolers and school-agers and at least 3 ft on all sides for infants and toddlers. Spacing between pieces of equipment must allow children to circulate around or fall from play structures without striking another structure, and permit adults to have easy access to the children who are using the equipment. For preschoolers (2 – 5 years) and school-agers (5 – 12 years), adjacent play structures, with a play surface over 30" high, should be spaced at least 9 ft. apart. If the play surfaces of both structures are 30" high or less, the equipment may be located a minimum of 6 ft. apart. For infants and toddlers (6 – 23 months), play structures with surfaces between 18" and 32" high must be spaced at least 3 ft. apart. Moving pieces of equipment (e.g., swings, merry-go-rounds) should be located in an area away from other play structures so children have adequate room to pass from one play area to another without being struck by moving equipment, and their fall zones should not overlap the fall zone of other equipment.

**Age-appropriate equipment** provides children with opportunities to safely practice gross motor skills without putting them at risk for unnecessary injury. Appropriate equipment for each age group is listed below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Infant/Toddler: 6 – 23 months** | **Preschool: Ages 2 – 5** | **School-age: Ages 5 – 12** |
| Climbing equipment up to 32" high | Climbing equipment up to 60" high | Climbing equipment up to 84" high |
| Ramps | Horizontal ladders and overhead rings 60" high or less for 4-5 year-olds | Arch climbers |
| Free standing flexible climbers |
| Single file step ladders | Merry-go-rounds | Stairways |
| Slides | Ramps | Chain or cable walks |
| Spiral slides less than 360° | Rung ladders | Fulcrum seesaws |
| Spring rockers | Single file step ladders | Ladders- horizontal (84" high), rung, and step |
| Stairways | Slides | Overhead rings up to 84" high |
| Swings with full bucket seats | Spiral slides up to 360° | Merry-go-rounds |
| Ramps | Spring rockers | Ring treks |
| Single file step ladders | Stairways | Slides |
|  | Swings- belt, full bucket (2-4 yrs.), and rotating tire | Spiral slides more than one 360° turn |
| Vertical sliding poles |
|  | Balance beams up to 12" high | Swings- belt and rotating tire |
|  |  | Track rides |
|  |  | Balance beams up to 16" high |

The following equipment is *not appropriate* for any age group: trampolines, swinging gates, giant strides, climbing ropes not secured at both ends, animal figure swings, multiple occupancy swings, rope swings, and swinging dual exercise rings and trapeze bars.

In addition to equipment listed above, the following equipment is *not appropriate* for preschool children (ages 2-5): freestanding arch climbers, dome climbers, freestanding flexible climbers, fulcrum seesaws, log rolls, track rides, spiral slides more than one 360° turn, parallel bars, and vertical sliding poles. Horizontal ladders and overhead rings are not appropriate for children 3 years and younger.

In addition to the equipment listed above, the following equipment is *not appropriate* for infants and toddlers (6 – 23 months): rung ladders, merry-go-rounds, rotating tire swings, spiral slides with a full 360° turn, balance beams.

## Requirements for slides:

For preschool and school-age: The exit region of slides should be at least 11" long. The exit height of slides up to 4 ft. high should be 11" or less, and the exit height of slides over 4 ft. high should be at least 7" but not more than 15". The fall zone around slides should be at least 6 ft on all sides, except at the slide’s exit. For slides up to 6 ft. high, the fall zone at the exit should be at least 6 ft. For slides greater than 6 ft., the fall zone at the exit should be at least as long as the slide is high up to 8 ft. max. The fall zone at a slide’s exit should not overlap the fall zone of any other equipment.

For infants and toddlers: The exit region of slides should be 7" – 10" long, and the exit height should be 6" or less. The fall zone around slides should be at least 3 ft., except at the slide’s exit, which should be at least 6 ft. The fall zone at a slide’s exit should not overlap the fall zone of any other equipment.

## Requirements for swings:

For preschool and school-age: **Single-axis swings** should have a pivot point of 8 ft. or less. There should be no more than 2 swings located within a single swing bay. The distance between swings at rest within a single bay should be at least 24", and the distance between a swing at rest and its support structure should be at least 30" (measured 5 ft. from the ground). The seat of swings for preschool-age children should rest at least 12" inches from the ground, and the seat of swings for school-age children should rest at least 16" from the ground. The fall zone for single-axis swings is 2 times the distance from the pivot point to the ground, both in front and back of swings, and cannot overlap the fall zone of any other equipment. A 6 ft. fall zone is required from the perimeter of the supporting structure. **Tire swings** should not be attached to composite structures and should not be suspended from a structure with other swings in the same bay. The bottom of the seat of the tire swing should rest at least 12" from the ground. The clearance between the seat and the sides of the support structure should be 30" when the tire is held in its closest position to the support structure. The fall zone for tire swings is the distance from the pivot point to the top of the tire plus 6 ft. in all directions, and should not overlap the fall zone of any other equipment. A 6 ft. fall zone is required from the perimeter of the tire swing’s supporting structure.

For infants and toddlers: **Single-axis swings** should have a pivot point of 47” or less, and the seat should rest at least 6" from the ground. The fall zone for single-axis swings is 2 times the distance from the pivot point to the ground, both in front and back of swings and cannot overlap with the fall zone of any other equipment. A 3 ft. fall zone is required from the perimeter of the supporting structure. **Bucket swings** should have a pivot point between 47" and 95", and the seat should rest at least 24" from the ground. The fall zone for bucket swings is 2 times the distance from the pivot point to the bottom of the swing seat, both in front and back of swings and cannot overlap the fall zone of any other equipment. For both types of swings, there should be no more than 2 swings located within a single swing bay, and the distance between swings at rest within a single bay or between a swing at rest and its support structure should be at least 20" (measured 5 ft. from the ground).

**Entanglement Hazards** – There should be no dangerous pieces of hardware, such as protruding bolts or open S-hooks on swings that could entangle children’s clothing, particularly drawstrings on the hoods of jackets or sweatshirts, and cause strangulation. An S-hook is considered closed if there is no gap or space greater than .04" (about the thickness of a dime).

**Entrapment Hazards** – Children can get trapped and strangle in openings in which they can fit their bodies but not their heads through the space. Therefore, openings in guardrails and spaces between platforms, ladder rungs, uprights in protective barriers and fence slats, should measure 3.5" or less or 9" or greater. Any completely bounded opening that is not bounded by the ground may pose an entrapment hazard. Even openings that are low enough for children’s feet to touch the ground still present a strangulation risk because young children may not have the cognitive ability or motor skills to free themselves. Children can also become entrapped by angles (less than 55°) formed between 2 sides of playground parts, for instance at the top of a wooden picket fence or fort.

**Pinch, Crush, and Shearing Hazards** – Moving pieces of equipment, such as suspension bridges, track rides, merry-go-rounds, or seesaws, should not have accessible moving parts that might pinch or crush a child's finger or other body part.

**Sharp Points, Corners, and Edges** – There should be no sharp points, corners, or edges (either wooden or metal) on play equipment or other objects in the space (e.g., fences, gates) that could cut or puncture a child’s skin.

**Guardrails** – A guardrail is an enclosing device around an elevated platform that is intended to prevent inadvertent falls from the platform. A child might be able to climb over, under, or through the guardrail. For preschoolers, guardrails are required for platforms higher than 20", and up to 30" above the ground. For preschoolers, the top edge of the guardrails should be at least 29" from the platform, and the lower edge should be between 9" and 23" from the platform. For equipment used *only* by school-aged children, any platform more than 30" above the ground (but not over 48" above the ground) will need guardrails at least 38" above the platform, with the lower edge between 9" and 28" from the platform.

**Protective Barriers** – A protective barrier is an enclosing device around an elevated platform that is intended to prevent both inadvertent falls from the platform and deliberate attempts to pass through the barrier. No child should be able to climb over, under, or through the barrier. For infants and toddlers, protective barriers are required for all equipment with play surfaces over 18", and the top surface of the barrier should be at least 24". For preschoolers, protective barriers are required for platforms that are over 30" above the ground, and the top surface of the barrier should be at least 29" above the platform. For equipment used *only* by school-aged children, any platform more than 48" above the ground requires protective barriers, and the top surface of the protective barrier must be at least 38" high. Guardrail and barrier recommendations do not apply if they would interfere with the intended use of the equipment, such as stepping up to the next level. For example, platforms that are layered on equipment, (e.g., one platform leading up to another in a step-like manner), do not need guardrails or barriers if the fall height between levels is 7" or less for toddlers, 20" or less for preschoolers, and 30" or less for school- agers.

# Table Washing Procedure[[9]](#footnote-9)

* To remove gross soil, spray the table (or highchair tray) with a soap-water solution and wipe dry with a disposable paper towel.
* To sanitize the eating surface, spray the table/tray with bleach-water solution and wait at least 2 minutes before wiping with a disposable towel or allow to air dry, in order to allow the solution to kill germs. The surface cannot be sprayed and immediately wiped.
	+ The recommended SANITIZING dilution for 8.25% bleach is:
		- 2 teaspoons bleach to 1 Gallon cool water
		- 1 teaspoon bleach to 1/2 Gallon cool water
		- 1/2 teaspoon bleach to 1 Quart cool water
		- 1/4 teaspoon bleach to 1 Pint cool water
	+ **Note:** All bleach and water dilutions must be freshly mixed every 24 hours.

Additional precautions

* Sponges should not be used for sanitizing tables because they soak bacteria away from the surface of the sponge, which then cannot be easily reached in the interior of the sponge by the sanitizing agent.
* If wet cloths are used, a separate cloth is required for each table/tray, and cloths cannot be returned to soak in a bleach-water solution.
* Food should not be put directly on the table or highchair tray because eating surfaces are more likely to be contaminated than disposable plates or washed and sanitized dishes
* If highchair trays are used as eating surfaces, the trays should be washed and sanitized in the same way as plates and other food service utensils.
* In case different children rotate through snack, each place must be cleaned and sanitized between use by different children. Sanitizing solution should not be sprayed while children are seated at the table.

# ERS Frequently asked questions

1. **Is anti-bacterial gel an acceptable substitute for hand washing? NO**

Antiseptic waterless washes or wipes are not acceptable substitutes for thorough hand washing with liquid soap and warm running water except under very special circumstances when a disposable wipe may be used in order to avoid injury (e.g., a newborn baby with very little head control; a very heavy baby with little body control) or when necessary because running water is not readily available, such a wiping noses on the playground. Otherwise hands must be washed under normal indoor conditions. If a sink is not accessible, this will affect scores.

1. **Why is food not considered an acceptable are material for children?**

Edible materials, such as chocolate pudding, dried pasta, pop corn, etc., cannot be counted as art materials because they give a misleading message about the proper use of food. The possible health (sanitary issues), safety (e.g., choking hazards), and supervision consequences of using food in art is considered under the corresponding items in the ITERS-R (#10, Health practices,#11 Safety practices, and #25 supervision of play and learning), the ECERS-R (#13, Health practices, #14, Safety practices, and #30, General supervision of children), the FCCERS (#11, Health practices, #12, Safety practices, and #27, Supervision of play and learning). In addition, many children are being raised in homes where food cannot be wasted, and using food in art causes a conflict in the messages given at home and in school.

1. **Can the scales be used with Montessori programs? YES**

Often there are questions about the suitability of using the Environment Rating Scales in Montessori programs. This is an issue pertinent to ALL programs with a strongly focused philosophy. The scales are based on a comprehensive, broad-based definition of quality in early childhood programs. This definition has three major components: protection health and safety), building relationships (social-emotional development, independence, discipline, interaction, etc.), and stimulation through hands-on activities (nature/science, language, math, art, wand/water, gross and fine motor activities, etc.).

These scales have been used in a wide variety of programs, including many Montessori programs, Reggio (including those in an Italian study of quality), as well as those following NAEYC guidelines. Research shows that quality rests on how well the program meets the three major components of high quality early childhood programs, rather than n the program’s philosophy. However, it is true that a program’s philosophy usually focuses more on one aspect of quality than another.

When an accurate, knowledgeable assessment is made with the scales, program strengths and weaknesses usually become apparent. Thus, a program that values creativity above all else may find that it needs to concentrate more on cleanliness in order to strike a good balance. A program that stresses social development may find that it needs to pay more attention to cognitive skills.

Montessori program differ widely in their inclusion of art, dramatic play, and blocks along with their traditional materials. Montessori staff have varying educational backgrounds. The Early Head Start study included a number of Montessori programs, and the directors of that project discussed how to use the scales to score the Montessori programs, accurately. Giving credit for some traditional Montessori activities in categories such as water play, dramatic play, and block play, because of the materials involved, may be open to question. For example, the Montessori daily living activities (such as table washing) are performed as isolated activities following a set pattern, and not in the context of dramatic play initiated by the child. The validity of calling such an activity “dramatic play” is questionable, since it has a very different purpose and may result in quite different learning. Thus, giving credit for such activities would probably be disallowed when scoring.

Programs that consistently apply the Montessori method often do very well on many of the items on the scales, especially in the activities section of the ECERS-R and in some of the language items (See ECERS items #14, “Using language to develop reasoning skills”, which is typically a low-scoring item in the preschools, and #25, “Nature/science” and #26, “Math/number”).

It is not believed that the scales penalize Montessori programs. All programs, no matter what their philosophies emphasize, show meet children’s needs in a variety of ways.

1. **Why doesn’t the ERS Reliable Rater interact with the adults and children during an observation?**

The Rater is there to objectively observe atypical day. In order to get the most accurate picture of what the children experience on a day to day basis, it is important that the Rater interact with the teachers/providers and the children as little as possible. If the Rater becomes involved in talking with you and the children, it detracts from the observation and changes the environment of the classroom.

1. **How long is the observation?**

The Rater typically spends 3 to 4 hours observing one classroom, group or family child care home. The day usually begins between 8:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. Observations may vary in length depending on the operating hours of the program and flow of daily activities.

1. **Why does the ERS Reliable Rater need to talk to the classroom teacher or the family provider at the end of the assessment?**

The Rater will only get a “snapshot” of the classroom on the day of the observation. Follow- up questions may be asked after the observation to get information on activities and materials that were not observed and about the program policies and procedures. This Question and Answer session usually takes about 15-20 minutes.

1. **Why does the ERS Reliable Rater look in the closets and cabinets (FCCERS- unlocked rooms of the home)?**

Many of the items require that you have certain materials accessible to the children and other materials available to provide variety. The Rater will also need to check closets, cabinets, drawers, etc. for anything that might be harmful to children.

1. **Why does the ERS Reliable Rater watch routines such as hand washing, diapering, and toileting?**

The scales assess whether certain routines, such as toileting and diapering, are conducted in a sanitary manner. The Rater watches these routines carefully to see what procedures are in place.

1. **Why can’t the ERS Reliable Rater give any information or feedback immediately after or during an observation?**

In most situations, the Rater uses the observation time to gather the information needed to score. The final score is not determined until the assessor has the opportunity to review the notes and the answers to the questions. In some situations, the Rater may also consult with others before determining a score on a particular item. If there is a particular immediate safety item that was observed the Rater will address it with the director of the program.

# MA-QRIS Frequently Asked Questions

**Is QRIS mandatory or voluntary?**

QRIS is voluntary. It may in the future become mandatory to receive certain grants or funding streams from EEC, but there are no specific plans at this time. However, QRIS will be an excellent way to demonstrate your quality to families and to access supports to improve your quality when it is implemented.

**Do I have to meet each of the levels before applying for the next?**

Yes. Programs need to be granted one level before they can apply for the next level. For example, a program must be granted a level 2 rating prior to applying for a level 3 rating.

**When will the MA-QRIS begin using the newly revised ECERS-3?**

EEC is currently formulating a plan to transition to the ECERS-3 and we will provide the field with ample notice prior to any transitions in this or other tools.

1. ©2001 Harms, Clifford, Cryer [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Milk served must be low-fat (1%) or non-fat (skim) for children ages 2 years and older and adults. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Fruit or vegetable juice must be full-strength. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Breads and grains must be made from whole-grain or enriched meal or flour. Cereal must be whole-grain or enriched or fortified. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A serving consists of the edible portion of cooked lean meat or poultry or fish. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Nuts and seeds may meet only one-half of the total meat/meat alternate serving and must be combined with another meat/meat alternate to fulfill the lunch or supper requirement. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Yogurt may be plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. A serving consists of the edible portion of cooked lean meat or poultry or fish. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. From All About the ITERS-R (2004), Cryer, Harms, and Riley, Pact House Publishing (a Kaplan Learning Co.) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)