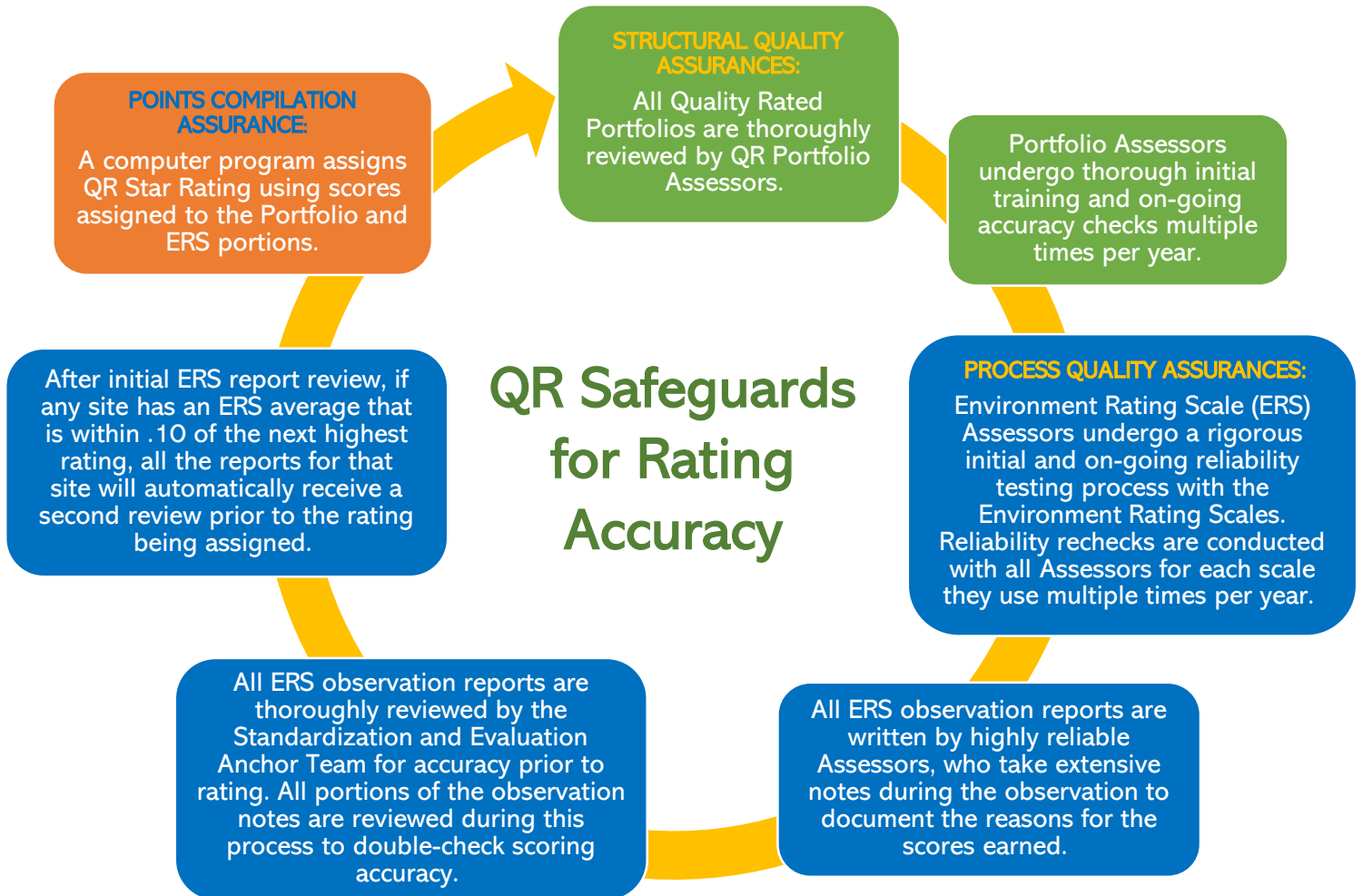


Star Ratings: Accurate and Quality Assured

For Georgia’s quality rating and improvement system (Quality Rated) to be effective and meaningful, Georgia’s child care providers and families must have confidence that the process for determining ratings is accurate, fair, and consistent. The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) works diligently to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and transparency of the Quality Rated system. Seven extensive quality assurance measures allow Quality Rated to assign ratings with the greatest confidence in their accuracy.



Structural Quality Assurances:

1. All Quality Rated Portfolios are thoroughly reviewed by QR Portfolio Assessors.

After each portfolio is submitted to Quality Rated, Portfolio Assessors carefully and independently review each piece of the documentation. The Portfolio Assessor reviews the portfolio and assigns scores for each of the standards, using the Rating Rubric found on the Quality Rated website and in the Quality Rated Program Manual. Once the scores and corresponding comments have been entered on the scoring screens, portfolios are randomly selected from each Assessor for a second review, which examines all documentation, scoring, and comments a second time to check for

accuracy. The first Portfolio Assessor finalizes the score after the second check has been conducted.

2. Portfolio Assessors undergo thorough initial training and on-going accuracy checks multiple times per year.

Each Portfolio Assessor goes through an intense 2-month initial training process before they can begin to score portfolios. New Portfolio Assessors start by learning portfolio policy and familiarizing themselves with portfolio requirements. They spend a month studying the 5 portfolio standards and practice scoring each standard, followed by specific training on how to score portfolios for family child care providers and for stand-alone school-age programs. During this time, they engage in scheduled discussions with their mentor and the Portfolio Manager to check for understanding and study completion. Following the study and training period, Portfolio Assessors complete three days of side-by-side scoring, during which the Portfolio Assessor and their mentor score 4-5 portfolios together.

Once a Portfolio Assessor has successfully completed side-by-side scoring, they will complete the reliability process with the Portfolio Review Team. During this process, the Portfolio Assessor and a member of the Portfolio Review Team independently score two portfolios, then compare scores and discuss. The Portfolio Assessor is designated as reliable in scoring when their portfolio scoring average is within 4 points of the Portfolio Review Team member. After reliability is achieved, the Portfolio Assessor will begin to score portfolios independently, while their mentor and the Portfolio Review Team continue to spot check their work to ensure accuracy and provide feedback during the first month of their independent scoring.

Accuracy checks are conducted on an ongoing basis, both through random spot checks by the Portfolio Review Team and through the 2nd review process outlined in Safeguard #1. These initial and ongoing quality assurance measures verify Portfolio Assessors are scoring accurately and routinely employing safeguards to double-check portfolio rating accuracy.

Process Quality Assurances:

3. Environment Rating Scale (ERS) Assessors undergo a rigorous initial and on-going reliability testing process with the Environment Rating Scales, and reliability rechecks are conducted with all ERS Assessors for each scale they use multiple times per year.

From hire through initial scale reliability, new Assessors undergo a rigorous screening, onboarding, and reliability process.

To ensure highly experienced classroom Assessors, Quality Rated requires that ERS Assessors have a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood or a related field and/or prior career experience in the field, with Environment Rating Scale experience preferred; in addition, many have a Master's Degree in ECE or related fields.

Once hired, ERS Assessors undergo a rigorous onboarding and training process that is customized to their level of experience with the Environment Rating Scales, which can take up to 3 months. This onboarding process typically includes completing ERS Online Training available through the Environment Rating Scales Institute (ERSI), engaging in comprehensive discussion and studying of each item and indicator in the first scale they will use, creation of an Individual Indicator Intent Document to deepen their understanding of every indicator in the scale based on

their study, on-demand application activities for specific scale concepts, and conducting practice observations and report writing to hone skills for specific subscales and items. ERS Assessors then begin completing weekly shadow visits with their mentor, veteran Assessors, and/or Standardization and Evaluation Anchors to complete full 3-hour classroom observations. Each observation is scored and thoroughly discussed with the Assessor in training following the observation. Throughout this onboarding and training process, weekly check ins also occur for the Assessor with their mentor and a Standardization and Evaluation Anchor to ensure ongoing understanding and determine any additional supports that may be needed to fully develop scale understanding and consistency.

Following onboarding and initial training, the new Assessor will complete their first initial scale reliability over a 3-4-day period in different classrooms of varied ages covered by the scale. This reliability process is conducted with the Assessor by a member of the Standardization and Evaluation Anchor Team. This team is led by Georgia's State Anchor who serves as the state Gold Standard and has been trained by the Environment Rating Scale Institute. The Anchor team is comprised of highly reliable veteran Anchors who have many years of experience conducting ERS assessments and routinely maintain reliability scores on all four Environment Rating Scales above 90%. The Anchors write the GA Additional Notes for each scale, conduct report reviews and scale training, and provide assessment guidance and resources to ensure ERS Assessors have the knowledge and tools necessary to accurately assess programs using the Environment Rating Scales.

To determine an Assessor's reliability, the Anchor and the Assessor together conduct up to 4 days of classroom observations. For each observation, they score the ERS independently and without prior discussion independently enter their scores for every item into the ERS Data System to determine the Assessor's level of reliability. This process is repeated daily for up to 4 days. The Assessor must earn a 3-day consecutive observation average of 85% or higher to be considered reliable on the scale. This is a benchmark score provided by the Environment Rating Scale Institute as the valid measure of an Assessor's reliability in accordance with scale guidelines, and as such is considered the industry standard throughout the United States. If the Assessor does not meet this benchmark in 4 days, the Assessor enters an additional training period to address any lingering scoring questions prior to repeating the initial reliability process.

As a last step of initial reliability, the new Assessor must write a full report using one of the observations from reliability, whereby they prove they can accurately observe, score, and write precise reports. Once they have submitted their observation report, it is immediately reviewed by an Anchor and scored using a Report Review Rubric. An Assessor is considered officially reliable on a scale once they pass both the observation and report writing portions of reliability.

Following completion of initial reliability, the Assessor also completes mentor accompanied observations for their first 1-2 official Quality Rated observations. This is designed to ensure the Assessor is ready to independently be on site in programs, providing excellent customer service to utilize their in-depth scale knowledge while applying all Quality Rated policies and procedures to the full process from observation to report writing. The mentor Assessor accompanies the Assessor on these first 1-2 observations to observe the same classrooms so he/she can step in to finish the process without disruption for the program should any questions arise.

One day reliability rechecks are compulsory on an ongoing basis for all Quality Rated ERS Assessors for all scales. During the first year of reliability on a new scale, an Assessor receives a

minimum of 3 rechecks following initial reliability and as needed should any questions arise. Veteran Assessors who have successfully used a scale for longer than one year receive 1-2 reliability checks per year and as needed should any concerns arise.

These initial reliability and ongoing reliability recheck processes are repeated for each scale the Assessor needs to become reliable in. Quality Rated Assessors must maintain reliability in two scales, and some have 3 scales. Most Quality Rated Assessors maintain this rigorous reliability in all their scales well above the 85% national benchmark, with many routinely scoring above 90%.

4. All ERS observation reports are written by highly reliable Assessors, who take extensive notes during the observation to document the reasons for the scores earned.

During each classroom observation, all data for the observation is captured in individual records within the Branagh ERS Data System to ensure only relevant information for that classroom is included. Assessors take on average 30-40 pages of extensive notes on everything they observe, including evidence for 30-35 individual scale items, classroom schedule, interactions, and materials. They record a detailed schedule throughout the observation of all that occurs including play times, routines times, and group times, recording exact times for activities and transitions as they occur. Assessors record the materials in the classroom, teaching practices observed, the interactions between teachers and children, peer interactions, and any measurements relevant to safety and accessibility of the classroom and playground. They use this information to determine whether the scale indicators were met or not and to write the observation report using the Branagh ERS Data System software. The reports are tailored to each observation and give a description of what each item score means, evidence for why specific indicators were not met, as well as reflective questions designed to assist with program improvement. If Assessors have any questions about how a unique situation should be scored, they contact the Anchor Team prior to uploading the report and at any time as needed during the review process.

5. All ERS observation reports are thoroughly reviewed by the Standardization and Evaluation Anchor Team for accuracy prior to rating. All portions of the observation notes are reviewed during this process to double-check scoring accuracy.

After each observation report is completed and uploaded, a representative of the Quality Rated Standardization and Evaluation Anchor Team will review it to ensure accuracy prior to it being released to the program. The Anchor reads all observation notes, reviews the schedule, verifies all scoring, and reviews reasons listed for indicators that were not met. The Anchor and the Assessor work together to perfect and finalize the report. When questions arise, both the Anchor and Assessor often consult the scale book, GA Additional Notes, and ERSI Additional Notes for Clarification to verify scale requirements as they apply to the specific situations observed. During this process, if any question or uncommon situation was observed that needs further input from the scale authors, the Anchor will contact the Environment Rating Scales Institute and converse with one of the scale authors by email or phone to discuss the scoring question prior to finalizing the report. This extensive review process allows Quality Rated to give programs customized, useful, and accurate classroom information to assist in their continued quality improvement.

- 6. After initial ERS report review, if any site has an ERS average that is within .10 of the next highest rating, all the reports for that site will automatically receive a second review prior to the rating being assigned.**

A second Anchor review is completed for any site who earns an ERS Average within one tenth of the score needed to earn the next highest rating. Once all reports for a program have been finalized, they are averaged together, and the average of those scores is used in the rating process to determine how many process quality points are earned. If the average score is within .10 of an ERS average needed to earn the next highest rating, a second Anchor will re-review all the reports for that site to triple-check for accuracy. Quality Rated management understands that these are high stakes assessments and does everything to ensure that programs earn the correct star rating. Given that, this second Anchor review is conducted as a courtesy for programs who are very close to the next rating so that they can be certain of the rating outcome.

Points Compilation Assurance:

- 7. A computer program assigns QR Star Rating using scores assigned to the Portfolio and ERS portions.**

After completion of the portfolio and ERS scoring and review processes, the rating is issued through a specially designed computer program within the Quality Rated system, to ensure no mathematical or human error occurs. The system receives the scores directly from the ERS observation report database and the portfolio scoring screens to calculate the Structural and Process Quality points. Any points earned for a National Accreditation are included and the system computes all the points to issue the star rating. An Anchor oversees this computerized process to ensure that all components are included in the rating as necessary for each program.

For more information, check out the Quality Rated website at www.qualityrated.org or contact the Quality Rated Help Desk at 1.855.800.7747 or by email at qualityrated@dec.al.ga.gov.