

An Opinion on Balancing Program Compliance (Licensing) with Program Quality Systems (Pre-K and QRIS) in Early Care and Education

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In conducting several very recent studies where comparisons were made between program compliance as measured by state child care licensing systems and program quality as measured through Pre-K and QRIS (Quality Rating and Improvement Systems) some very interesting statistically significant trends in the data were observed.

I have published results in the past describing a curvilinear relationship between licensing compliance with program quality measures (Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) or the CLASS). With the advent of Pre-K and QRIS programs being introduced within states, we now have sufficient data to begin to analyze the impact that these quality improvement programs have on state early care and education programs building upon state licensing systems.

The results are very promising from the few states that I have worked with. From the data analyzed to date, both Pre-K and QRIS programs are having a very positive impact on the overall quality of ECE programs where the programs that either are in Pre-K or at the highest Quality level within the QRIS are also the programs scoring the highest on the respective quality assessments, the ERS or CLASS tools. Now this may not seem all that earthshattering but I have consistently found that this was not the case when I compared licensing compliance data with the ERS and CLASS data. The programs that were in full compliance with all the licensing rules were not necessarily the programs that scored the highest on the ERS or CLASS tools. In other words, there was a curvilinear relationship between the licensing data and the quality data.

From a public policy standpoint, this is a very important distinction because the licensing rules do help to protect children from harm in the health & safety arenas but do not necessarily mean the program is of the highest quality. It would appear from the most recent data that the way to get to this public policy result is through the introduction of either a Pre-K program or a QRIS program.

There is still work to be done to determine the exact indicators of Pre-K and QRIS programs that statistically predict child development outcomes but this requires additional research.

For those interested in continuing this discussion, please contact me at the following website: <http://DrFiene.wordpress.com/home> or go to <http://RIKInstitute.wikispaces.com/home> for additional information about quality ECE key indicator research. I can also be reached at DrFiene@gmail.com