



RACE TO THE TOP – EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE:
ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM REGIONAL QRIS IMPLEMENTATION | BRIEF 5

ASSESSMENT IN QUALITY RATING & IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS



Bay Area Quality Early Learning Partnership

First 5 Alameda County | First 5 Contra Costa | First 5 San Francisco | First 5 San Mateo County
| First 5 Santa Clara County | First 5 Santa Cruz County

In 2011, California was awarded a 4-year, \$75 million, Federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant to improve early childhood education systems and better serve children and families by enhancing the quality of programs, developing quality standards, and aligning disconnected systems. Sixteen counties in California received funding to develop a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) to achieve this goal. In the Bay Area, six First 5 County Commissions created the Bay Area Quality Early Learning Partnership to pilot a regional QRIS approach. The following brief is a product of their experience implementing QRIS locally and as a regional partnership from 2012-2015.

Assessment is a significant requirement of California’s quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). The QRIS matrix includes assessments using two specific tools for programs to score above a 3 rating: the Environment Rating Scales (ERS), which measure teaching environments, and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), which measures teacher-child interactions.

In particular, use of the ERS assessment tool requires outside assessors who are anchored and reliable in the ERS scales to conduct the assessments. Training and maintaining assessors is costly and time-intensive, so counties across California have faced challenges finding enough assessors to meet their assessment needs, as well as resourcing the assessment requirements.

THE REGIONAL ASSESSMENT EFFORT

The Bay Area Quality Early Learning Partnership identified assessment as an area of focus from the beginning of its collaboration. An assessment task group was convened to identify existing county resources and determine specific ways the Partnership could collaborate effectively around assessment. Key achievements of their collaboration include:

- **Regional Assessment Protocol:** A common regional protocol for assessment was developed to ensure that ERS and CLASS scores that are used for QRIS ratings are valid and reliable across the region. Regionally consistent

assessment data also enables the Partnership to compare results and share a regional story about quality and the impact of their efforts.

- **Uber anchor:** The region invested in two ERS “uber anchors” (assessors trained in all ERS tools and who are able to train other assessors to be anchors, re-train existing assessors, and train new assessors), eliminating the need to send new assessors out of state for ERS training. By sharing this cost, the region built its capacity to more efficiently recruit, train, and anchor assessors.
- **Regional assessor pool:** To further reduce the cost and time required to recruit and train assessors, the region gathered a common pool of assessors from which to draw and shared the costs of training and anchoring them. Through this process, the Partnership ensured that each county in the region had sufficient assessment coverage and that selected assessors had the desired skill sets and approaches to assessment.

Counties in the Partnership report that the coordinated network of peer support across the Bay Area region has been especially helpful in the area of assessment. Regional collaboration has deepened their understanding of the assessment tools and their ability to conduct assessments.



REGIONAL ASSESSMENT PROTOCOL

The Regional Assessment Protocol governs the use of the ERS and CLASS assessments for the purposes of QRIS rating, where protocols are not established by statewide Consortia Implementation Guide. The Regional Assessment Protocol guides practice in the following areas:

- + Qualifications and Requirements of Assessors
- + Establishing and Maintaining Assessor Reliability
- + Scheduling Observations
- + Site Orientation and Preparation for the Site Visit
- + Classroom Observation Methodology
- + Calculating Substantial Portion of the Day for ERS
- + Scoring Modifications



SAN FRANCISCO'S ROLE IN ASSESSMENT

First 5 San Francisco has been utilizing the ERS assessment for 15 years, and their assessment capacity and understanding of the benefits and challenges of this tool were critical to the Partnership's work in this area. The ERS anchor contracted by First 5 San Francisco became the regional "uber anchor," a critical component of the Partnership's increased capacity. First 5 San Francisco also provided key input on desired assessor skills, including the need for bilingual assessors, and shared modifications they had made to the tool to make it more responsive to their needs.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO ASSESSMENT IN QRIS

Though the Partnership's efforts have had significant positive impact on the counties' assessment capacities, assessment-related challenges still exist. The high cost of the assessments is a concern, as is the sustainability of the current assessment requirements. As the number of counties developing QRISs in California increases, the demand for anchored and reliable assessors will also increase.

Furthermore, although the study is underway, there is not yet data on the California matrix to support the current assessment requirements as leading to differentiated child outcomes. It is critical that the information gained through these assessments is beneficial to educators' quality improvement efforts. (For more on the need to gather data on the California matrix, refer to the Partnership's brief, "Development of a Quality Early Learning System.")

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR QRIS ASSESSMENT SUSTAINABILITY

The Partnership has the following recommendation to support assessment sustainability as part of QRIS:

1. **The California Department of Education and First 5 California should allocate funding and staff time to**

conduct a collaborative statewide assessment review process with QRIS counties to:

- a. Gather data to fully understand how the current assessment requirements relate to outcomes.
- b. Review the current assessment tools and requirements and define the appropriate use of assessment in the matrix.
- c. Determine the best periodicity for administering assessments.
- d. Evaluate the sustainability and cost effectiveness of using proprietary tools with strict anchoring requirements.
- e. Evaluate whether assessments should be placed as rated elements in the matrix or placed into the non-rated quality improvement pathways guiding professional development.
- f. Update California Department of Education's use of assessment tools as part of their state preschool program visits to enable CDE field staff to accept assessments from QRIS consortia.