Licensing Violations and Program Quality in Child Care and Early Education
Research Summary

The Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education (TRLECE) project conducted an exploratory study with three states to examine whether child care and early education (CCEE) licensing violations were related to program quality, as measured by state quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). This summary highlights key results and considerations from the detailed report, *Licensing Violations and Program Quality in Child Care and Early Education* (Lin et al., 2024). See the TRLECE project page for all TRLECE briefs and reports.

Overview

CCEE programs that are higher quality may meet more licensing regulations (i.e., have fewer licensing violations) compared to lower-quality programs. However, there is currently little research in this area. This is one of the first studies to look at CCEE licensing data from multiple states and one of few to consider links between licensing and program quality, as measured by QRIS. The results, however, should be interpreted with caution because the study included only three states and CCEE licensing varies from state to state.

We examined data from two types of CCEE settings:

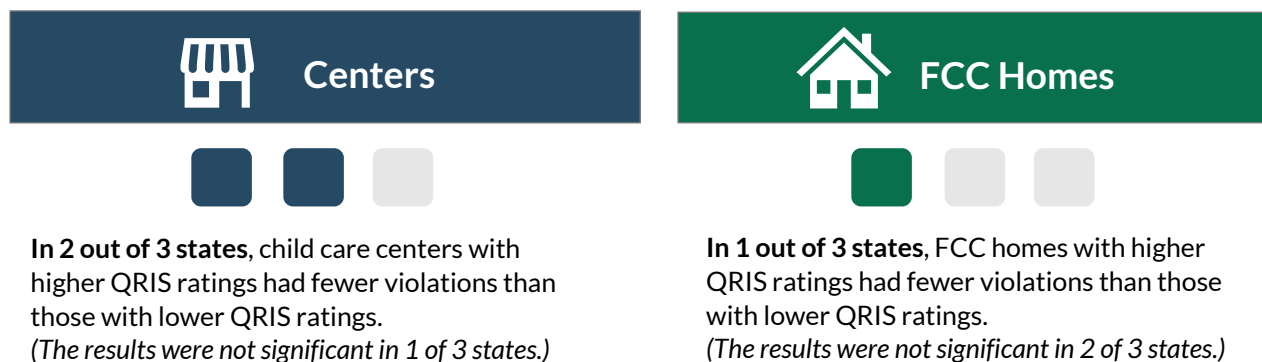|	
Licensed centers, indicated with the icon of a ***building***	**Licensed family child care (FCC) homes**, indicated with the icon of a ***home***

This study found that in some states (two of three) and CCEE setting types, programs with higher QRIS ratings had fewer licensing violations. However, we did not find this relationship in all states or across both setting types. Although the results were mixed and must be interpreted cautiously, **we hope the study sparks future research to explore these issues more deeply.** Future studies can help us better understand how licensing and QRIS can support one another and to unpack *when* and *how* quality and licensing intersect.

Research Findings

We analyzed licensing data in three states to answer our questions for each state separately. For each setting type, we present the number of states with statistically significant ($p < .05$) associations between quality rating and licensing violations found in routine inspection visits.[1] We note the number of states with non-significant associations in parentheses. Please read the full report (Lin et al., 2024) to understand the details of the analyses.

Do programs with higher QRIS ratings tend to have fewer licensing violations than those with lower ratings?

🏪 **Centers**	🏠 **FCC Homes**
■ ■ □	■ □ □
In 2 out of 3 states, child care centers with higher QRIS ratings had fewer violations than those with lower QRIS ratings. *(The results were not significant in 1 of 3 states.)*	**In 1 out of 3 states**, FCC homes with higher QRIS ratings had fewer violations than those with lower QRIS ratings. *(The results were not significant in 2 of 3 states.)*

We re-ran these same analyses looking only at high-risk violations—that is, violations that the state designated as placing children at a greater risk of harm[2]—and found a similar pattern.

Considerations

Although the results were not entirely consistent, they suggest that higher-quality programs may have fewer licensing violations. However, given the small number of states included in the analyses and the low number of violations in these states, future research should replicate our analyses in additional states. Further, more research is needed to better understand the results.

- *QRIS and violations.* This study found that CCEE licensing violations were generally lower in programs with higher QRIS ratings, but that was not always the case. To better understand possible relationships between QRIS and violations, it could be helpful to design future research studies to address questions like: Are QRIS ratings more likely to be related to certain types of violations (e.g., staff-child ratios, staff-child interactions, behavior management)? Among programs that receive child care subsidies, are QRIS ratings linked to licensing violations, after accounting for subsidy reimbursement rates? Are associations between QRIS and violations different for centers versus FCC homes? If so, why?

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[1] We conducted similar, separate analyses in each state and setting type. For models examining how QRIS ratings were related to the total number of violations, we used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, with planned comparisons in which we compared the highest QRIS level with each of the other QRIS levels in each state. For models examining the relationship between QRIS ratings and whether a program had one or more high-risk violations, we used logistic regression. In both the OLS and logistic regression models, we included control variables for program and community characteristics where possible.

[2] The terminology, definition, and designation of regulations as "high-risk" varies across states (e.g., some may use the term severe or serious). A "high-risk" violation might include, for example, lack of supervision or hazardous materials accessible to children.

- *QRIS and other aspects of licensing.* Future research could also explore how quality, as measured by QRIS ratings, might be related to other aspects of licensing, as noted by Maxwell and Starr (2019). For example: Are programs with higher QRIS ratings able to correct violations more quickly than programs with lower QRIS ratings? Are programs with lower QRIS ratings more likely than programs with higher ratings to experience repeat licensing violations over time?

- *Other ways of conceptualizing quality.* Future research could also explore relationships between licensing violations and other measures of quality outside of QRIS ratings, such as program leadership and business practices or national program accreditation.

This study was an important step in deepening the field's knowledge about CCEE licensing. While the study results are exploratory and have limitations, the study itself underscores the need to examine CCEE licensing data and provides ideas to guide future research. Better understanding how QRIS—and CCEE quality more broadly—are linked to violations may help state licensing agencies and QRIS better support licensed CCEE programs. We also hope it sparks increased collaboration between CCEE licensing and QRIS staff to use data to reflect together on how to strengthen licensing and QRIS.

For additional information about this study, please read the detailed report, *Licensing Violations and Program Quality in Child Care and Early Education* (Lin et al., 2024). See the TRLECE project page for all TRLECE briefs and reports.

References

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