

Small Changes Can Have Big Policy Implications for Quality Rating and Improvement Systems¹

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) changed its approach to calculating quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) ratings to make it easier for programs to achieve higher ratings of quality. To inform both researchers and state-level QRIS administrators about how changes in QRIS calculation approaches influence program ratings, REL Midwest examined how ratings changed between MDE's original calculation approach and two simulated approaches—MDE's revised approach and a third exploratory approach, known as the total score approach.

Each program received a QRIS rating ranging from **Level 1** (lowest quality) to **Level 5** (highest quality).



QRIS ratings (1–5) were determined by the number of **minimum required domain scores** and **total points** a program earned.

Minimum required domain scores for each rating level*

Domain	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Administration and management	2	4	4	4
Curriculum	4	6	8	8
Environment	2	4	6	6
Family and community partnerships	4	4	6	6
Staff qualifications and professional development	3	6	8	8
Additional points in any domain	1	2	6	10
Total points	16	26	38	42

To earn a QRIS rating Level 2, programs would need to meet the following domain score requirements.

* All programs must be licensed. Licensed programs that do not meet Level 2 requirements are given a Level 1 rating.

Each calculation approach had the same **total point** requirements but varied in the number of **minimum required domain scores** needed for a given rating level.

After moving from the original to the revised approach, **FEWER** programs were rated at Level 1, and **MORE** programs were rated at Levels 2, 3, and 4.²

Original approach

Meet minimum required scores in **all 5 domains** for a given level.



Revised approach

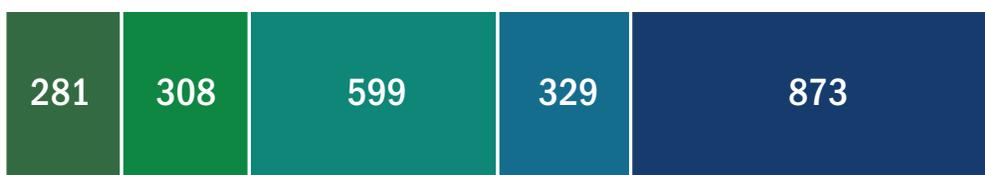
Meet minimum required scores in a **subset of domains**: 2 domains for a Level 2 rating, 3 domains for a Level 3 rating, and so on.



Total score approach

simulated for research purposes

No minimum required scores needed for any domain. See total points needed for each rating level in the table above.



State-level QRIS administrators and researchers should be aware that minor changes in the calculation approaches can lead to big changes in QRIS ratings. When making changes to a system, QRIS administrators should consider the trade-offs between having a simple, transparent QRIS and the benefits of including minimum required scores for different aspects of quality in early childhood education programs.

Data Source

Faria, A.-M., Hawkinson, L., Greenberg, A., Howard, E., & Brown, L. (2015). *Examining changes to Michigan's early childhood quality rating and improvement system* (REL 2015-029). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest.

Endnotes

¹ Mitchell, A. W. (2005). *Stair steps to quality: A guide for states and communities developing quality rating systems for early care and education*. Alexandria, VA: United Way success by 6. Retrieved from <http://qrisnetwork.org/sites/all/files/resources/gscobb/2011-09-14%2011:35/Report.pdf>.

² The distributions of ratings under the total score approach simulation and the revised approach simulation were almost identical.

Additional information

For more information about this infographic, contact REL Midwest by e-mail (relmidwest@air.org) or by phone (866-730-6735).

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