

Introduction

The Regional Municipality of Durham, Social Services Department, Child Care and Early Years Division is dedicated to embracing quality in child care and early learning. Durham Region's Operating Criteria (DROC) is designed to provide valuable insight regarding child care programs. Child Care and Early Years Division (CCEYD) staff work in collaboration with child care operators to ensure the information gathered is utilized to reflect on pedagogy and practice, set program goals and ensure continuous improvement.

Acknowledgements

Toronto Children's Services has provided permission for The Regional Municipality of Durham, Child Care and Early Years Division (CCEYD) to implement the Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 measure in Durham. The Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC) includes four sections: Infant Program, Toddler Program, Preschool Program, and Before and After Program, of Toronto Children's Services Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI). Copyright for the AQI is owned by the City of Toronto, is subject to Canadian copyright law and may not be reproduced without the permission of the City.

The Regional Municipality of Durham, Child Care and Early Years Division has been granted permission to utilize the AQI.

Defining quality

Research in the area of early learning indicates that there are six key elements essential for a high-quality child care program, including:

1. Sound management practices
2. Training, experience and stability of educators
3. Group size: ratio of children to educators
4. Family involvement in the program
5. Health and safety standards of the physical facility
6. Program content and development

These multi-dimensional requirements are key components in the Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement measure included in the Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC). High-quality programs must also have Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) who are responsive to the children's individual needs and who provide opportunities for growth in all areas of development, including personal and social development, language, mathematics, science and technology, health and physical activity and the arts.

RECEs recognize that play is a natural way for children to learn and they strive to provide a rich environment that is both interesting and safe for children to explore. Children are to be provided with equal opportunities to participate and benefit from their experiences in ways that promote individual development and learning.

Why measure quality?

The Regional Municipality of Durham Child Care and Early Years Division (CCEYD) is the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for The Regional Municipality of Durham and as such, has responsibility for planning and managing a broad range of child care and early learning services. The CCEYD is therefore responsible for ensuring quality child care and early years programming is available to children and families across the Region of Durham.

CCEYD values quality child care experiences for children, as well as financially stable and dependable child care operations. We know that children who have access to high-quality early learning programs enjoy positive developmental

outcomes, which in turn, supports the child in their life-long learning. To this end, the DROC is comprised of the Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI), as well as additional sections that include Attendance Audit and Leadership sections designed to review contract compliance requirements. Programs must comply with DROC to maintain a service agreement with The Regional Municipality of Durham.

DROC serves as a self-evaluation and planning tool for child care operators, supervisors and educators. DROC assessment reports are presented to the operator for each visit. DROC assessment reports may be shared with the Ministry of Education, families and members of the public as necessary.

Responsive to diverse needs

CCEYD supports diversity. Child care and early learning programs that allow children and families to see themselves reflected in the environment support a sense of belonging. The quality assurance requirements set out in the DROC and service agreement emphasize the importance of respect, sensitivity and inclusion for all members of our community.

CCEYD is committed to an inclusive child care system that promotes positive and healthy environments for children. Inclusive child care means that quality services are provided for all children regardless of culture, ethnicity, race, languages spoken, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability or family structure.

DROC is designed to provide information regarding areas of strength and growth in the child care and early learning setting. The measures and information gathered from each section of DROC are clearly explained in the sections that follow.

Minimum requirements

It is expected that all operators with a service agreement meet the minimum requirements of the DROC inclusive of the AQI measurement. Meeting the minimum requirements indicate that programs reflecting quality are being offered. This document is structured to promote self-assessment and learning that support the goal of enhancing pedagogy and practice. This will provide even higher levels of quality care to the children and families in Durham. Instructions on how to measure the DROC inclusive of the AQI are provided in the section titled “Measurement.”

Meeting Expectations

Child care programs will be required to design an action plan to address areas of growth. This is mandatory for DROC items flagged by the Quality and Contract Compliance Advisor (QA) for AQI items that receive a score of “1 or 2.” The action plan is established in consultation with the QA, who will work with the operator and the centre's educators to ensure expectations are met in a timely fashion.

Goal setting

Child care programs are encouraged to focus on continuous program improvement. All scores including "Exceeds Expectations" provide data that is helpful for goal setting, long-range planning and choosing program and educator professional learning activities.

Measurement

How does the five point measurement scale work?

Does Not Meet Expectations Quality Rating:

To receive a credit of “1”:

Fifty per cent or more of the sub-items in the “Does Not Meet Expectations” column must be answered “yes,” or for the “Interactions” section, if a **bolded** interaction is marked “yes,” it is automatically a credit of “one.”

To receive a credit of “2”:

Less than 50 per cent of the “Does Not Meet Expectations” column is answered as “yes,” or all indicators in the “Does Not Meet Expectations” column are marked as “no,” but a sub-item in the “Meets Expectations” column is marked as “no.”

Meets Expectations Quality Rating:

To receive a credit of “3”:

All sub-items in the “Does Not Meet Expectations” column must be marked as “no” and all sub-items in the “Meets Expectations” column must be marked as “yes”; or, all the sub-items in the “Does Not Meet Expectations” column are marked “no” and all sub-items in the “Meets Expectations” column are marked as “yes,” and at least one sub-item in the “Exceeds Expectations” column is marked as “no.”

Exceeds Expectations Quality Rating:

To receive a credit of “4”:

All sub-items in the “Does Not Meet Expectations” column are marked as “no,” all sub-items in the “Meets Expectations” column are marked as “yes,” and 50 per cent or more of the sub-items in the “Exceeds Expectations” column are marked as “yes.”

To receive a credit of “5”:

All sub-items in the “Does Not Meet Expectations” column are marked as “no,” all sub-items in the “Meets Expectations” column are marked as “yes,” and all sub-items in the “Exceeds Expectations” column are marked as “yes.”

What is the role of the Early Learning Team?

The Early Learning Team (ELT) is designed to support child care operators and community partners to maintain quality programs in Durham region. The goal is to establish continuous learning and improvement plans that ensure our system continuously adapts to the individual needs of the children and families served.

The ELT is dedicated to building professional relationships based on mutual trust with child care operators and community partners. The focus is to establish and maintain quality programs in Durham. The team provides oversight to ensure all necessary documentation required for contract and system management are collected and reviewed. Funding for the child care and early learning system is allocated according to provincial funding guidelines. The DROC inclusive of the Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement (ELCAQI) provides additional data that the ELT will use to further support operators in Durham to provide quality programs.

What is the role of the Quality and Contract Compliance Advisor?

The Quality and Contract Compliance Advisor (QA) conducts unannounced quality assessment visits on all licensed child care centres with a service agreement.

The QA or designated CCEYD staff administers the Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC) on all program rooms. Each room assessment takes approximately 60 to 90 minutes to complete. The QA will ask questions of the program educators when appropriate with the intent being to get clarification in instances where sub-items cannot be confirmed through observations.

Upon completion of the assessment measure, the QA will discuss areas of strength and identify any areas that do not meet expectations and explain the action required. A report is then completed. When there are items that do not meet expectations, the report outlines strengths and any items that do not meet expectation, along with a due date for the operator to submit an action plan to their QA.

The QA and members of the ELT are committed to working in collaboration with child care operators to ensure ongoing conversations include, but are not limited to, the DROC, How Does Learning Happen, Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years, integration, gaps in service and the centre's short- and long-term goals. The ultimate goal of the ELT is to ensure that child care operators are supported to maintain a stable licensed child care sector. This, in turn, helps to ensure that high-quality early learning environments are accessible to families across the region.

The QA regularly monitors progress of the specified targets and will address questions and inquires. This information is used to determine if there are any knowledge gaps in the child care community, which would form the basis for further developing training and/or supports needed.

What is inter-rater reliability?

Inter-rater reliability is a process that ensures an assessment measure is administered in the same way by all assessors using the ELCAQI sections of the document. This process upholds the integrity of the measure and ensures that we are confident in the quality ratings that are collected through the inspection process. Each rater must participate in mandatory

inter-rater reliability testing. This involves a designated gold-rated QA going out with each individual rater on one of their assigned assessment visits and administering the measure on an Infant, Toddler, Preschool, and Before and After program. This practice is to determine whether both assessors arrive at least 80 per cent of the same scores to ensure consistent use of the assessment tool. The reliability testing process is conducted at least twice per year.

Service Agreements

Currently, programs with a Purchase of Service Agreement for Fee Subsidy must meet the requirements of their Service Agreement, all applicable policies, including the Fee Subsidy Policies and Procedures, and the DROC to meet their contractual obligations. The Child Care and Early Years Division will monitor and work in partnership with child care operators to maintain quality and contractual obligations. If standards and contractual obligations are not met, The Regional Municipality of Durham, Child Care and Early Years Division may apply sanctions until compliance is achieved. Sanctions are intended to ensure the service provider returns to optimal operational status. Each situation will be considered individually and in the context of service to families.