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Introduction

Environment Rating Scale (ERS) assessments are an important component of Pennsylvania’s quality early learning initiatives and results of assessments can be a great source of evidence for programs to use in their continuous quality improvement plans. This guide includes information to efficiently and accurately determine when ERS Assessments are to be conducted, how communication regarding the visit should occur and other details to assure assessment practices are initiated as expected. The use of the guide by Regional Key and PA Key staff supports the establishment and maintenance of ERS scores for programs participating in Keystone STARS, Pennsylvania’s Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) and other initiatives.

Purpose of ERS Visits

ERS Assessments conducted by a PA Key Program Quality Assessor serve a number of purposes. All ERS assessments serve as a resource for programs and a source of evidence to establish goals for classroom practice quality improvements over time. In addition, the assessments also support Pennsylvania’s early learning initiatives in assuring that a program has met or maintained a particular level of classroom quality as outlined in that initiative’s standards.

- **Keystone STARS Programs**

  Assessments are conducted at Keystone STARS participating programs when they are preparing to move to a STAR 3 or 4 Designation, to establish that the program has met the expectations for classroom quality as outlined in the STARS Standards. After ERS scores for a participating program have been established, checks of ongoing quality practice occur every two years. If STARS participating programs experience changes at their facility in between the routine assessment visits, additional visits may be scheduled and conducted outside of the regularly scheduled time frames. All ERS assessments are conducted by a Regional Program Quality Assessor.

- **PA Pre-K Counts Programs**

  Assessments are conducted in PA Pre-K Counts participating programs on a biennial basis to verify that the program is meeting the expectations for quality as outlined in PA Pre-K Counts. If changes occur for participating Pre-K Counts programs in between the routine assessment visits, additional visits may be scheduled and conducted outside of the regularly scheduled time frames. All ERS assessments are conducted by a Regional Program Quality Assessor.

Determining which Environment Rating Scale to Use

ERS Assessments occur in a variety of facility types. As a result it can be difficult for some programs to determine the appropriate rating scale(s) to meet their needs. The environment rating scales include the following:
Environment Rating Scale Assessment Protocol Guide

- Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ITERS-R)
- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R)
- School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS)
- Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale – Revised (FCCERS-R)

Child Care Centers and Head Start Programs

The chart below provides guidance for center based and Head Start programs to use in determining which ERS professional development to attend and which scale is appropriate for an individual classroom. The chart provides guidelines for typically developing children. In classrooms where at least half of the children are experiencing significant developmental delays, the developmental age of the majority of the children will determine the appropriate scale to use.

**Mixed Age Groups** - To determine which scale should be used in mixed-age groupings, the program should establish the age of the majority of the children in the group and use the ERS scale developed for that age group.

In situations where there is an equal age distribution of children for the ITERS-R and for the ECERS-R, or where there is an equal age distribution of children for the ECERS-R and the SACERS, use the scale designed for the older group of children. This takes into account the emerging developmental needs of the younger children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILD STATUS</th>
<th>DPW CERTIFICATION AGE LEVEL</th>
<th>ERS SCALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infant</td>
<td>Birth-12 months</td>
<td>ITERS-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Toddler</td>
<td>13-24 months</td>
<td>ITERS-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older Toddler</td>
<td>25-36 months</td>
<td>ITERS-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>37 months to date child enters 1st grade</td>
<td>ECERS-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger School-Age</td>
<td>1st-3rd grade</td>
<td>SACERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older School-Age</td>
<td>4th grade through age 15</td>
<td>SACERS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Family Day Care**

The FCCERS-R will be used to assess all family day care homes.

**Group Day Care**

The FCCERS-R will be used to assess all group day care homes that are located in a residence.

In group day care homes that are not in the provider’s residence, and the program is set up to serve one particular age group, the corresponding age appropriate scale should be used. For instance, if the group
day care is located in a church and provides care for school-age children only, the appropriate scale is the SACERS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>In a Residence</th>
<th>Out of Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age groups separated by room (as in Center-based Care)</td>
<td>FCCERS-R</td>
<td>ITERS-R or ECERS-R or SACERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of the majority of the children enrolled will determine which training the provider should take and which scale will be used for assessment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settings Serving Children Grades 1-6 Only</td>
<td>FCCERS-R</td>
<td>SACERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settings Serving Children Ages 3 years through Kindergarten Only</td>
<td>FCCERS-R</td>
<td>ECERS-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settings Serving Children Ages Birth to 36 months Only</td>
<td>FCCERS-R</td>
<td>ITERS-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Age Grouping</td>
<td>FCCERS-R</td>
<td>FCCERS-R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PA Pre-K Counts Programs**

Most PA Pre-K Counts grantees locate their classrooms in STAR 3 or 4 child care centers, private preschools, school district and/or Head Start agencies. As a result in most cases the ECERS-R tool is used to conduct assessment visits for participation and continuous quality improvement purposes. If a PA Pre-K Counts grantee has utilized a classroom location which falls outside of these guidelines, the Preschool Program Specialist will work with the Regional Program Quality Assessment leadership to determine which scale will be used.

**Eligible Classrooms for Assessments**

Providers renewing a STAR level, moving to a higher STAR level, and/or participating in PA Pre-K Counts programs are expected to be operating at the level of quality described in the program standards relevant to that initiative at all times. Since Keystone STARS Designations are awarded to a facility, all classrooms operated by the provider, including those not certified under DPW or dually certified (such as, but not limited to, Department of Education, Federal Head Start and Nursery school classrooms), are considered viable options for an ERS assessment as part of the Keystone STARS designation.
Types of ERS Assessment Visits
There are a number of different categories of assessment visits, which reflect the reason for the visit. The categories of visits and their reasons are:

- **STARS Movement** – supports a STARS enrolled facility in establishing ERS scores to support movement to a STAR 3 or 4 Designation.
- **ERS Score Renewal** – supports a STARS enrolled facility in showing it has maintained the appropriate level of classroom practice quality for its current STAR Designation.
- **ERS Triggers** – is required when certain changes occur at a STARS enrolled facility that could affect the level of quality of classroom practices.
- **PKC Diagnostic Initial** – supports a facility that is participating in the Pre-K Counts initiative in establishing it is meeting the expectations for classroom practice quality for the first time since becoming a grante location.
- **PKC Diagnostic Renewal** – supports a facility that is participating in the Pre-K Counts initiative in showing it has maintained the appropriate level of classroom practice quality to meet the expectations of the initiative.

Timing of Assessment Visits
Each type of assessment visit has its own time frame during which the visit may be scheduled:

- **STARS Movement Visits** – are scheduled for the next available open four week window after the Regional Key communicates the assessment need to the Regional Program Quality Assessment Team via the Pennsylvania Program Assessment Communication Tool (PA PACT).
- **ERS Score Renewal Visits** – may be scheduled up to six months prior to the Effective End Date of the current ERS scores as recorded in PELICAN, after the facility has been approved for a visit in PA PACT.
- **ERS Triggers Visits** – are scheduled based upon the individual Trigger situation (Refer to the ERS Triggers section of this document for more details.)
- **PKC Diagnostic Initial Visits** – are scheduled within the Fiscal year after being approved for a visit in PA PACT. Preschool Program Specialists may place notes within the facility’s PA PACT record indicating special directions for when to schedule the visit (e.g. Please schedule this visit in the spring. Site has a new teacher this year.)
- **PKC Diagnostic Renewal Visits** - are scheduled within the Fiscal year after being approved for a visit in PA PACT. Preschool Program Specialists may place notes within the facility’s PA PACT record indicating special directions for when to schedule the visit (e.g. Please schedule this visit in the spring. Site has a new teacher this year.)

Changes that Trigger Out of Cycle Assessment Visits
Over time, Keystone STARS participating facilities may undergo programmatic changes which can affect daily classroom practices and the overall quality of care experienced by the children. As a result, when
these changes occur, it is sometimes necessary to conduct an ERS assessment visit before the regular biennial assessment. The purpose of this additional visit is to support the Regional Key in assuring that the changes have not had a negative effect on the facility’s ability to maintain STARS Performance Standards associated with classroom environmental quality. The Regional Key is responsible for communicating the need for a new ERS assessment visit to the Assessment Team. The Assessors are then responsible for scheduling and conducting the assessments and providing the ERS Summary Reports to the Regional Key.

The following chart outlines the changes which may occur at Keystone STARS enrolled facilities that may affect classroom practices, and the conditions under which those changes then trigger the need for an additional ERS visit. It should be noted that for some triggers, the presence of the change for the facility always results in an ERS assessment visit, while other triggers have additional factors which must be considered to determine if an ERS assessment is necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment Rating Scale Assessment Trigger</th>
<th>Facility Changes</th>
<th>Is an ERS Visit Needed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provisional Certificate of Compliance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If, while the site is on a Provisional Certificate:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• STAR Designation expires, ERS scores do not:</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• STAR Designation expires, ERS scores expire:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• STAR Designation does not expire, ERS scores expire:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Director Turnover</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If, at the time the Regional Key becomes aware of the New Director:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The ERS scores will expire in 12 months or less:</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The ERS scores will expire in 13 – 24 months:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff Turn Over</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If, 50% + of all full-time staff are new:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If, more than 1/3 of classrooms have lost a lead teacher and:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ERS scores will expire in 12 months or less:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ERS scores will expire in 13 – 24 months:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Age Group Added</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ERS visit needed within 6 months of when the Regional Key becomes aware that a new age group of services has been added.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Location</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If, LE/Tax ID are new to PELICAN:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If, LE/Tax ID are already known in PELICAN:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change in Ownership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ERS scores will expire in 12 months or less:</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ERS scores will expire in 13 – 24 months:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change of Physical Location</strong> (Same owner)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change of Facility Type</strong> (Same Legal Entity)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facility type change results in change in applicable ERS scale:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facility type change has no impact on applicable ERS scale:</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When the Regional Key determines that a facility has experienced a change which triggers an additional ERS visit, the site is entered into PA PACT to alert the Assessors to the need. When entering the site into PA PACT, the Regional Key staff should select “ERS Triggers Visit” from the Assessment Type drop down listing, and the appropriate sub-type from the secondary drop down list. Some communication of the need for these visits should occur immediately, while other situations may require some monitoring of facility readiness for a visit prior to adding the site to PA PACT.

- **Provisional Certificate:** If an enrolled facility receives a DPW Provisional Certificate of Compliance, the Regional Key staff must determine, at the time they are notified of the change in certification status, whether the facility’s current STARS Designation Certificate and/or ERS scores will expire during the period of the Provisional Certificate. Based upon the chart guidance, if an additional ERS visit is needed, the Regional Key should monitor both the expiration date of the Provisional Certificate as well as the facility’s progress toward re-establishing their full compliance with DPW Regulations. At the point at which the Regional Key determines that the site will achieve a full DPW Certificate, they may enter the site onto PA PACT to support the Assessor in initiating scheduling as soon as the full DPW Certificate is received by the site.

- **Director Turnover:** When a facility alerts the Regional Key to a new director being in place, staff must determine where the facility is in the two year cycle for regular ERS visits. If current scores will expire within the next 12 months, an additional visit is not needed, as an automatic entry to PA PACT will occur within the next 6 months, and an ERS Score Renewal visit will occur prior to the end of the 12 month period. If current ERS scores are good for an additional 13-24 months from the point that the Regional Key is made aware of the change in director, a new ERS visit must be scheduled. The Regional Key should enter the site onto PA PACT and work with the Assessor to establish a window for the site that enables the new director to acclimate him/herself to the facility prior to the visit. (Special Note: If the facility has had an ERS Visit within the last 90 days, the new window for this ERS Trigger visit cannot occur prior to the 91st day after the date of the letter accompanying the initial set of Summary Reports.)

- **Staff Turnover:** There are two types of staff turnover change that are applicable to the need for an additional ERS visit. The first type of turnover is related to full time staff. If a facility experiences a turnover of more than half of its full-time staff, a new ERS visit is needed and the Regional Key should enter the facility onto PA PACT as soon as they are made aware of this change to enable the Assessor to establish the first available window for the facility. The second type of staff turnover is specific to lead teachers. If one-third or more of the facility’s classrooms lose a lead teacher, a new ERS visit is needed and the Regional Key should enter the facility onto PA PACT as soon as they are made aware of this change to enable the Assessor to establish the first available window for the facility. (Special Note: If the facility has had an ERS Visit within the last 90 days, the new window for this ERS Trigger visit cannot occur prior to the 91st day after the date of the letter accompanying the initial set of Summary Reports.)
• **New Age Group Added:** When the Regional Key is made aware of a facility adding a new age range of care (e.g. a facility that offered care to infants, toddlers and preschoolers, begins offering services for school age children) the site should be added to PA PACT to alert the Assessor to the need for an additional ERS visit. The Regional Key and Assessment Team should work together to determine the appropriate visit window for the site within the six months following the entry to PA PACT, providing flexibility in placing the visit within the Assessor’s schedule, as well as assuring that children are enrolled in the new group at the time of the new visit.

• **New Location:** Processing of this trigger situation is slightly different than the others, as the trigger and its specific situations result in the Regional Keys processing the change as the facility moving into a new STAR level. In the event of a new legal entity, that does not currently exist in PELICAN, opening a new location, the site would be new to the Keystone STARS program, and would be moving into STARS and seeking to be designated a particular STAR level. If this new location wishes to be designated at a STAR 3 or STAR 4, the Regional Key would enter the site into PA PACT selecting the “Movement” assessment type from the drop down list, and the Assessor would then schedule the first available ERS Visit Window with the site.

In the event of an existing legal entity that already has facilities in PELICAN, opening a new location, the site would be new to the Keystone STARS Program and would be moving into STARS and seeking to be designated a particular STAR level. If this new location wishes to be designated at a STAR 3 or STAR 4, the Regional Key would enter the site into PA PACT selecting the “Movement” assessment type from the drop down list, and the Assessor would then schedule the first available ERS Visit Window with the site.

• **Change in Ownership:** If a facility’s ownership changes, the Regional Key must determine when the facility’s current ERS Scores will expire. If the current scores expire within the first 12 months after the completion of the change in ownership, an additional visit is not needed, as an automatic entry to PA PACT will occur within the next 6 months, and an ERS Score Renewal visit will occur prior to the end of the 12 month period. If current ERS scores are good for an additional 13-24 months from the point that the change in ownership is complete, a new ERS visit must be scheduled. The Regional Key should enter the site onto PA PACT and work with the Assessor to determine an appropriate visit window for the facility.

• **Change of Physical Location:** When a facility moves from one physical location to another it is necessary for the Regional Key to establish that the facility still meets all of its STARS Standards at the new location, including those associated with the classroom environment. Once the facility is open in the new location, the Regional Key enters it onto PA PACT and the Assessor schedules the first available window for the site.

• **Change of Facility Type:** If an enrolled facility changes its provider type (Family Child Care Home, Group Child Care Home, Center) with DPW Certification, the type of ERS assessment that would need to be used to verify the Keystone STARS Standards related to the quality of the
learning environment may change. If the change in provider type results in a change in type of ERS assessment used, then a new ERS visit is needed. Once the Regional Key is notified that a change in provider type has occurred at a facility, staff enter the facility onto PA PACT, and the Assessor schedules a visit during the first available window.

**Number of Assessment Visits Allowed**

STARS enrolled facilities may receive up to two ERS Assessment visit windows within a given 12 month period with two exceptions:

1. **ERS Trigger Visits** – as this type of assessment visit must occur to address changes at the facility resulting in a need to reaffirm the level of quality existing within facility classroom practices, this type of assessment can be requested in addition to any other type of assessment during a given 12 month period.

2. If a facility attempts to:
   a. Renew its ERS scores for its current STAR 3 Designation, and is unsuccessful, it may request a second visit within a 12 month period. If, upon that second visit the facility is successful in achieving its goal, and then wishes to attempt to move up to a STAR 4 within that 12 month period a third visit may be requested.
   b. Attempts to establish ERS scores to move up to a STAR 3 and is unsuccessful, it may request a second visit within a 12 month period. If, upon that second visit the facility is successful in achieving its goal, and then wishes to attempt to move up to a STAR 4 within that 12 month period a third visit may be requested.

The additional ERS Visits within a 12 month period cannot be scheduled prior to the 91st day after the date on the cover letter sent out with the ERS Summary Reports for the previous visit.

**Communicating Assessment Need through the Pennsylvania Program Assessment Communication Tool (PA PACT)**

The Pennsylvania Program Assessment Communication Tool, located on the PA Keys website, provides a statewide communication and monitoring tool for use by all relevant partners. Access to PA PACT is limited to designated Regional Key, PA Key, and OCDEL staff members who use it for assessment notification and approval, and for window scheduling purposes. Use of PA PACT provides a consistent system for gathering information for all OCDEL ECE quality initiatives including PA Pre-K Counts assessment, STARS renewal, and/or STARS movement to a higher STAR level. STARS facilities that need to have their ERS scores renewed are automatically populated in PA PACT on the first day of every month. All other types of assessments are identified by the Regional Key or, for Pre-K Counts sites, by the Preschool Program Specialists and are manually entered. Regional Program Quality Assessors claim the sites, schedule the assessment window, and complete the assessment process. In addition, each Regional Key assigns a staff person as the primary contact for the Assessment Team regarding program
assessments. Once selected, the Regional Keys will notify the Regional Program Quality Assessment Supervisors regarding the contact person. Detailed guidance on PA PACT use can be found in the Pennsylvania Program Assessment Communication Tool User’s Manual and Core Elements Guide, which will be located on the Help tab within the Tool upon its release.

**Scheduling and Conducting ERS Assessment Visits**

*Scheduling an ERS Visit*

Upon notification of a facility’s need for ERS assessment via PA PACT, the PA Key Regional Program Quality Assessor will claim the site and determine a tentative assessment window to offer.

- **STARS Movement assessment requests** - The Assessor will contact the site and establish the first available visit window.

- **ERS Score Renewal visits** - The intent for ERS Score Renewal visit scheduling is for visit windows to occur before the current ERS Scores expire in PELICAN, assuring that valid scores are in place at all times. The Assessor has flexibility in when to contact the site to offer and confirm the visit window, enabling the assessment team to respond as rapidly as possible to the need for STARS Movement visits on an ongoing basis, shifting the tentatively planned ERS Score Renewal visit window back when appropriate to accommodate more urgent requests.

Once contact is established with a facility, the Assessor will notify the contact at the facility via phone or email of the four-business week window for the assessment and gather any additional details needed to ensure proper scheduling (e.g. total number of classrooms/groups of children, etc.). Providers are expected to cooperate with the Assessor to establish a window for assessments that is in keeping with the ERS Score effective end date, request for movement to higher STAR level and/or PA Pre-K Counts, or Head Start expectations. No specific dates for the assessments within this window will be given.

The next steps in the scheduling process include:

1. Once the four-week window is established, the provider must inform the Assessor of any days within that period that the entire facility would not be available for an assessment such as field trips, planned closures, special days, etc. The provider may have four of these “block out” days within the four week window.

2. The Assessor will inform the provider which ERS scales will be conducted, number of classrooms that will be assessed, and number of days the Assessor will be at the facility within that four-week window, and will provide contact information (including Regional Program Quality Assessment Supervisor information) in case of emergency within the established four-week window.

3. If an emergency occurs and a facility is closed on any day falling within the above timeframe, they will call the Assessor to inform them of the closure. If the facility is unable to reach the
Assessor, they will call the Regional Program Quality Assessment Supervisor who will then forward the message to the Assessor.

**Conducting the ERS Assessments in Keystone STARS facilities** (Includes PA Pre-K Counts classrooms within STARS facilities):

1. In full day programs, the Assessor(s) will typically arrive at the site between 8:00-9:00 a.m. In half or part day programs (such as after-school classrooms), assessment times will be established based on the operating hours. The Assessor(s) will provide photo ID for admittance to the facility. The facility contact or other designated individual will show the Assessor(s) all areas that parents, children and teachers have access to during facility operating hours.

2. **Classroom selection** - Using the classroom information gathered during the intake phone call/e-mail, the Assessor will create a numbered listing of all potential classrooms that could be assessed for the scale selected for observation that day. The facility contact will randomly select a number and initial beside that entry to indicate agreement to the group randomly drawn. The classroom listed for the number selected will be the classroom assessed that day. A minimum of one third of all STARS rooms and at least one classroom from each scale will be assessed. The facility contact will take the Assessor(s) to the selected classroom(s) for that day and introduce her to the staff. In STARS sites with PA Pre –K Counts classrooms at least one half of all PA Pre-K Counts rooms will be assessed.

3. The Assessor(s) will spend approximately 3-4 hours of continuous observation.

4. At the end of the observation, the Assessor(s) will need to speak with the classroom teacher for a short period – approximately half an hour – to ask some questions. The preference is that this dialogue takes place in a private area outside the classroom, but it may occur in the classroom if staffing is a problem.

5. The Assessor(s) will notify the facility contact and/or classroom staff once the observation is complete.

6. Additional days of assessment will be conducted within the four-week window but may not necessarily be continuous days.

**PA Pre-K Counts sites not in STARS facilities** (informational for Regional Keys):

1. In full day programs, the Assessor(s) will typically arrive at the site between 8:00-9:00 a.m. In half or part day programs (such as afternoon only classrooms) assessment times will be established based on the operating hours. The Assessor(s) will provide photo ID for admittance to the facility. The facility contact will show the assessor(s) all areas that parents, children and teachers have access to during facility operating hours.
2. **Classroom selection** - Using the classroom information gathered during the intake phone call/e-mail, the Assessor will create a numbered listing of all potential classrooms that could be assessed that day. The facility contact will randomly select a number and initial beside that entry to indicate agreement to the group randomly drawn. The classroom listed for the number selected will be the classroom assessed that day. A minimum of one half of all PA Pre-K Counts classrooms will be assessed. The facility contact will take the Assessor(s) to the selected classroom(s) for that day and introduce her to the staff.

3. The Assessor(s) will spend approximately 3-4 hours of continuous observation. The ECERS Assessment will be conducted using 5 Subscales (Personal Care Routines and Parents & Staff subscale items will not be scored.)

4. At the end of the observation, the Assessor(s) will need to speak with the classroom teacher for a short period – approximately half an hour – to ask some questions. The preference is that this dialogue takes place in a private area outside the classroom, but it may occur in the classroom if staffing is a problem.

5. The Assessor(s) will notify the facility contact and/or classroom staff once the observation is complete.

6. Additional days of assessment, if needed, will be conducted within the four-week window but may not necessarily be continuous days.

**Finalized Assessment Report Distribution**

Regional Key and/or Preschool Program Specialists are responsible for determining if providers have met all Keystone STARS Performance Standards or Pre-K Counts expectations, including the ERS score. Regional Program Quality Assessment Supervisors are responsible for providing assessment report outcomes to the Regional Key and/or Preschool Program Specialist for the program. There is minimal contact between the Assessment Team and the provider following assessments; therefore, the reports are shared with the facility through the Regional Key or Pre-K Counts Preschool Program Specialist.

**Facility Achieves ERS Score**

If a STARS enrolled facility meets the ERS score for the corresponding STAR level goal indicated by the site, the Regional Key will mail, email, or hand deliver copies of the final reports within five (5) business days. When the ERS scores meet or exceed the requirements for a higher STAR level than that for which the facility was being assessed, the site may use these scores for up to six months following the ERS Effective Begin Date as noted in PELICAN to meet the ERS standard of the higher STAR. However, if the facility requests to move to a higher STAR level after this initial six month period, another ERS visit will need to occur.

**Facility Does Not Achieve ERS Score**

If a facility does not achieve the required ERS score during an ERS Score renewal visit, the scores will then be used by the Regional Key to immediately designate the facility at a lower STAR Level for which
they meet all of the STAR Standards expectations including ERS. The Regional Key must contact the site within five (5) business days to notify site leadership that the standard was not met. Contact may be by phone, email, or on-site visit. Regional Key staff will offer an on-site visit (preferred) or make other arrangements for a detailed review of the reports with Regional Key personnel. Once the review appointment has been scheduled, the Regional Key will send the reports to the provider or hand deliver them prior to the review meeting. The site will be informed that once the reports are received, site leadership is expected to review them in conjunction with the ERS scales and resources such as the PA Position Statements, All About ITERS-R and All About the ECERS-R, Caring for Our Children, etc.

Prior to the review meeting, Regional Key staff will have a detailed conversation with the Regional Program Quality Assessor and/or Supervisor. The purpose of this conversation is to gain specific information about the reports including strengths observed, recurring issues between classrooms, areas where significant improvement is warranted, etc. The goal is to act as a leadership team and to work together to proactively support the provider and direct the site to professional development and/or technical assistance as a follow up. The Regional Keys will document the contact with the Program Quality Assessment staff in the PELICAN – Keys to Quality data system.

At the review meeting with the facility, Regional Key staff will provide guidance in understanding the reports, pointing out strengths as well as areas which might be addressed in an improvement plan. Regional Key staff will serve as a conduit to the Assessment Team in obtaining answers to provider questions about ERS tool expectations and will offer assistance in drafting an action plan for improvement; however, the primary responsibility for the action plan rests with the provider. The site will be given two to three weeks to develop the action plan and submit it to the Regional Key.

**Addressing Facility Concerns about ERS Scores**

On occasion, providers have requested additional help in understanding the outcomes of an assessment visit, or dispute the scores they were given in one or more of the classrooms visited. In this instance, the Regional Keys serve as a “sounding board,” and gather the facility’s questions to take to the Assessment Team for a response.

The Regional Key can contact the Regional Program Quality Assessment Supervisor and Assessor via phone or email to discuss the facility’s questions and receive additional information to then share with the site. In most cases, facility questions and concerns can be resolved through this level of communication. Sometimes the Regional Key staff may decide that it would be beneficial to make this initial communication more formal, asking the facility to provide their questions/concerns in writing for the Regional Program Quality Assessment Supervisor to respond to with additional written explanation/information. The Supervisor will confer with the Assessor(s) who conducted the assessment visits and prepare the written response which is then sent to the Regional Key to share with the facility.

If resolution is not achieved the Regional Key may arrange to have a conference call or meeting with the Regional Program Quality Assessment Supervisor and/or Assessor, relevant Regional Key staff and the
provider at a date and time that are mutually agreed upon by all parties to have a final discussion and share any additional information that will support the facility.

**Canceling or Refusing ERS Assessment Windows and Refusing a Scheduled Assessment**

Facilities renewing a STARS Designation, moving to a higher STAR level and/or providing PA Pre-K Counts services are to be operating at the level of quality described in the STARS standards and/or PA Pre-K Counts regulations and guidelines including the ERS standard at all times. It is expected that when it is time to schedule an ERS Assessment they will cooperate with PA Key Regional Program Quality Assessors to establish assessment windows that are in compliance with program guidance and follow through with having the assessments conducted at the agreed upon time.

**Consequences for Facility Changes to ERS Assessment Window and Cancellations:**

Postponing assessments, requesting changes to the assessment window and canceling assessments have negative impacts on the overall implementation of the Commonwealth’s early childhood programs and are costly to implement.

A facility that cancels or refuses an assessment, reschedules an assessment window, or denies access at the time of a previously scheduled ERS assessment without just cause might still participate in the ERS assessment process. However, prior to the visit and/or window being rescheduled and completed, the facility will be charged and must pay $700 per day for each day that was cancelled, rescheduled or denied unless just cause is established. The fees are based on actual costs and may be periodically adjusted. Some examples of unforeseeable circumstances that could justify postponement of a scheduled ERS assessment include, but are not limited to, a medical emergency removing the teacher from the class or a closure of the facility due to unavoidable circumstances (e.g. frozen pipes resulting in no water, no heat at the facility, local flooding making safe passage to the site impossible, etc.).

The following procedure will be used if a site cancels an assessment, requests a change to the assessment window, or postpones an assessment. The Assessor must be contacted by site leadership via telephone or email immediately or by writing if sufficient time is available for notice about the change in plans. The facility must provide the reason and number of days of the cancellation, change or postponement.

The following will then occur:

1. Regional Program Quality Assessor will notify by email Program Quality Assessment Team leadership, Regional Key leadership, and/or Preschool Program Specialist, if applicable, of the contact date and type of change (i.e. cancel assessment windows, deny access on previously agreed upon assessment date or request substantive delays in the assessment window) and number of classrooms, the site name, facility contact person, MPI number, scheduled number of assessment days cancelled and program’s justification for delay or cancellation.
2. PQA Team leadership, Regional Key leadership and if applicable Preschool Program Specialist will make a recommendation to OCDEL about whether just cause has been provided. Program Quality Assessment Team leadership will forward documentation to OCDEL.

3. OCDEL will arrange for review of the recommendation and render a final decision to determine if just cause for the delay or cancellation is warranted. The review will occur expeditiously, generally within 5 business days of the receipt of the notice from the ERS leadership.

4. Once determined, notification of OCDEL’s decision and any resulting penalty information will be sent to the facility and/or grantee in writing by the PA Key. Should it be determined that just cause was not provided, the PA Key will send an invoice for the financial penalty based on the number of days the program scheduled assessments were not able to be completed. Until this penalty is paid, no subsequent ERS assessment will be rescheduled. Checks are the only acceptable method of payment and should be made payable to the PA Key and mailed to:

   PA Key
   Attn: ERS Project
   200 N. 3rd Street, 3rd Floor
   Harrisburg, PA 17101

5. Sites requesting delays in windows without just cause or refusing a scheduled visit will not be considered a priority assessment and will fall to the bottom of the assessment wait list. Consequences might include a drop in STAR level or PA Pre-K Counts non-compliance, which could result in funding reductions.