

Glossary of Terms for The Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education (TRLECE) Project

Introduction

The purpose of this glossary is to define child care and early education (CCEE) licensing-related terms used across The Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education (TRLECE) reports. The definitions apply to the work of the TRLECE research project and are meant to help readers understand our products. This was not developed to be a comprehensive glossary that applies more generally to the field of CCEE licensing; others in licensing may use different terms or definitions.

We used various sources to develop definitions, including the Child Care Licensing Study (CCLS), the Research Connections CCEE Glossary, National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance resources, and resources from the National Association for Regulatory Administration. When the TRLECE team was unable to locate a specific definition, we created one informed by resources on and our knowledge of CCEE licensing.

This glossary is part of the project [The Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education \(TRLECE\)](#). TRLECE is funded from 2019-2024 by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families. The project team includes staff from Child Trends and ICF. The team has conducted a variety of activities to strengthen the field's understanding of child care and early education licensing.

Glossary

Abbreviated compliance review: A type of differential monitoring strategy where only a select subset of rules within a licensing system are reviewed during the inspection (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2014a; National Association for Regulatory Administration, 2020).

Administrative data: “Information programs collect about individual children, families, and staff to deliver program services and meet program, funding, or legal requirements. Generally, programs collect administrative data to determine child/family eligibility for services, monitor staff workload, document services provided, or examine progress children are making” (King et al., 2016, p.2).

Announced inspection: An inspection that occurs after a CCEE provider is notified by the licensing agency that it will be inspected on a certain day and time (adapted from National Association for Regulatory Administration & National Child Care Information Center, 2006).

Appeal: The process by which a CCEE provider requests the review and reversal of a licensing enforcement action.

Before- and after-school programs: “Programs serving school age children and older when they are not in school” (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d. -a). (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections uses this definition for after-school programs.)

Caseload: The number of CCEE providers assigned to an individual front-line CCEE licensing staff member.

Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG): The source of discretionary funding for the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). The CCDBG was originally enacted under the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990. In 2014, Congress reauthorized the CCDBG for the first time since 1996 and included new laws and requirements related to the quality and availability of CCDF-funded child care programs and related activities (Administration for Children and Families, 2022).

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF): “A federal and state partnership program ... authorized under the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG) and administered by states, territories, and tribes with funding and support from the Administration for Children and Families’ Office of Child Care. States use CCDF to provide financial assistance to low-income families to access child care so they can work or attend a job training or educational program ... In addition, states use the CCDF to invest in quality to benefit millions more children by building the skills and qualifications of the teacher workforce, supporting child care programs to achieve higher standards, and providing consumer education to help parents select child care that meets their families’ needs” (Administration for Children and Families, 2016).

Child Care and Development Fund Final Rule (2016): The 2016 final rule was published September 30, 2016 with an effective date of November 29, 2016 (Administration for Children and Families, 2023). It “updates CCDF regulations for the first time since 1998. The rule applies to states, territories and tribes administering CCDF and incorporates and clarifies changes made through the [Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014]” (Administration for Children and Families, n.d., p.1).

Child Care and Development Fund Final Rule (2024): The 2024 final rule was published March 1, 2024 with an effective date of April 30, 2024 (CCDF Program, 2024). It “updates regulations to help working families afford child care and broadly support child care quality and accessibility in communities” (Administration for Children and Families, 2024).

Child Care and Development Fund Regulations: The CCDF regulations contain provisions that were published in five final rules: 2014 Final Rule, 2016 Final Rule, 1998 Final Rule, CCDF State Match Provisions Final Rule, and CCDF Error Rate Reporting Final Rule. The CCDF regulations are available on the [Government Printing Office Electronic Code of Federal Regulations](#) website (adapted from Administration for Children and Families, 2023).

Child care and early education: Caregiving and educational services for children from birth to age 13. CCEE includes center- and home-based settings for infants, toddlers, preschool- and school-aged children. CCEE refers to services for a larger age group than early care and education (ECE), which consists of services provided only for young children (birth to age 5 who are not yet in kindergarten). ECE programs are included within the definition of CCEE.

Child care and early education center: “Child care services for fewer than 24 hours per day per child in a nonresidential setting, unless care in excess of 24 hours is due to the nature of the parent(s)’ work” (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, 2015a, p. 3).

Child care and early education licensing: Establishes regulations that must be met to legally operate a child care program. Child care licensing also monitors and enforces those regulations.

Child care and early education licensing staff: Any staff who work in CCEE licensing (e.g., front-line staff, managers, administrative or clerical staff).

Child care and early education provider: An organization or individual that provides CCEE services (adapted from Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d. -a).

Citation: The documentation of a CCEE provider’s violation of licensing regulations.

Codebook: “Information on the structure, content, and layout of a data set. The codebook typically provides background on the project, describes the study design, and gives detailed information on variable names and variable value codes. User’s manuals and user’s guides are examples of codebooks” (Child Care & Early

Education Research Connections, n.d. - b). Some may consider a codebook to be the same as a data dictionary.

Complaint: A concern or grievance about a CCEE provider that families or the public make to the licensing agency.

Compliance: Adherence to licensing regulations.

Data dictionary: A document containing descriptions of the data elements or variables in a data set (adapted from Gould et al., 2014).

Dataset: A collection of separate pieces of information or data (e.g., pieces of information about each licensed CCEE provider).

Differential monitoring: This is an “umbrella term used to describe alternative approaches to monitoring every program using all licensing regulations at the same frequency. Instead of monitoring every program at the same frequency for all licensing regulations, differential monitoring strategies specify variations in the frequency or depth of monitoring inspections. For example, programs with a history of strong compliance may receive fewer inspections or may be monitored using an abbreviated list of regulations” (Miranda, et al., 2022, p.3).

Enforcement: The actions that licensing agencies use to address licensing violations. These may include fines, probation, and revocation of licensure.

Equity: “The state that would be achieved if individuals fared the same way in society regardless of race, gender, class, language, disability, or any other social or cultural characteristic” (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2019, p.17).

Facility: “The buildings, the grounds, the equipment, and the people involved in providing child care of any type” (National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education, 2023).

Family child care: “Child care provided for one or more unrelated children in a provider's home setting.” (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d. -a). “Family child care” can be used to describe a provider (i.e., person) or a setting (i.e., home).

Front-line licensing staff: Individuals who routinely conduct licensing inspections of licensed CCEE programs. They may have other responsibilities as well, as long as one of their jobs is to routinely conduct licensing inspections.

Full compliance review: An inspection where facilities are monitored for compliance with all licensing regulations (adapted from National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2014a).

Group child care: This term is used in the Child Care Licensing Study (CCLS); TRLECE uses this term only when referring to this setting type specified by CCLS data. Defined as “two or more individuals who provide child care services for fewer than 24 hours per day per child, in a private residence other than the child's residence, unless care in excess of 24 hours is due to the nature of the parent(s)' work” (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, 2015b, p.3).

High-risk violations: Some licensing agencies designate a subset of their regulations as high-risk. These regulations are considered critical to children's health and safety, and, if violated, pose a greater risk of harm to children. Repeated violations may also be considered high-risk by some licensing agencies.

Implicit bias: “A negative attitude, of which one is not consciously aware, against a specific social group” (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Incidents: An event that places a child or children at risk that the CCEE provider is required to report by law or regulation (e.g., child injuries, accidents involving children).

Inspection: A visit to assess if a CCEE provider is meeting licensing regulations.

Inspector: This is an alternate term, used by some licensing agencies, for “front-line licensing staff.” (See definition for “front-line licensing staff.”)

Interpretive guidelines, guides, or guidance: Guides that help CCEE licensing staff understand the purpose of licensing requirements and how they should assess providers’ compliance with the requirements; guides can also be used by CCEE providers to help better understand the licensing requirements and how they will be assessed (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2014b).

Key indicators approach: An approach to determine the subset of regulations to be included in an abbreviated compliance monitoring review. In this approach, regulations that predict overall compliance are identified through statistical methods to determine the subset of regulations (referred to as key indicators) that best predict compliance with the full set of regulations (Fiene & Kroh, 2016; National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2014a).

License-exempt: A determination by states/territories of providers who can operate legally without a license. License-exempt providers might include providers caring only for related children (e.g., person caring for grandchildren only), providers caring for a small number of children (e.g., one or two children), and facilities operating for only a few hours per day (e.g., serving children from 9-11am on Tuesdays and Thursdays only) or caring for children while adults are present (e.g., exercise facility caring for children while parent is exercising on site).

Licensed capacity: “The maximum number of children allowed to be in a licensed or regulated child care program or setting at any one time. Capacity is based upon the number of children for which adequate facilities and teachers/caregivers are provided, in accordance with supervision and space requirements” (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d. -a).

Licensed child care and early education: CCEE programs operated in homes or facilities that fall within the regulatory system of a state or community and comply with those regulations. Many states have different licensing and regulatory requirements (adapted from Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d. -a).

Licensing administrator: The person who oversees the operation of the CCEE licensing agency.

Licensing agency: The agency responsible for regulating and licensing CCEE facilities. The term “licensing unit” may also be used.

Licensing authority: The legal basis for an entity to administer the licensing program. A licensing statute typically grants authority to a specific government agency.

Licensing data system: A repository for collecting and managing information related to licensed CCEE providers. This can include one or multiple datasets.

Licensing guidance documents: Any public document that provides guidance, context, clarification, or information beyond the licensing regulations for more than one regulation, or any document that provides information about licensing processes or procedures.

Licensing procedures: Information about carrying out the functions of the licensing unit.

Licensing regulations: “Requirements that providers must meet to legally operate child care services in a state or locality, including registration requirements established under state, local, or Tribal law” (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d. -a). (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections uses this definition for “licensing or regulatory requirements.”)

Linked data: “Data are considered linked when information from two or more separate data systems or databases are shared, connected, combined, or merged” (King et al., 2016, p.2).

Monitoring: “The process used to enforce child care providers’ compliance with licensing rules and regulations” (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d. -a).

Out of School Time: “Time periods outside of regular school hours, such as before/after school, weekends, holidays, and summer breaks, in which school age children generally need child care and other types of programming and services” (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d. -a).

Preservice training: Training for licensed CCEE providers that must be completed before they begin their job duties.

Pre-licensing visit: A visit that occurs before the CCEE provider is licensed, during which front-line staff assess the CCEE provider’s compliance with licensing regulations.

Quality rating and improvement system (QRIS): “A system typically administered by a state or local jurisdiction used to assess, improve, and communicate the quality of CCEE settings. Most incorporate some variation of the following elements: quality standards; a system for rating/measuring and monitoring program quality; resources to improve quality, such as grants for classroom materials and staff scholarships; and outreach services to educate and communicate ... about choosing high quality [CCEE]. QRIS may also create a range of financial incentives to motivate programs to achieve higher levels of quality” (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d. -a).

Risk assessment: An approach to determine and then monitor the subset of rules to be included in an abbreviated compliance review. In this approach, licensing agency staff and other rules experts identify rules that place children at greater risk of harm if the rules are not followed (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2014a).

Routine compliance inspection: An inspection of a CCEE provider for compliance with the regulations that occurs periodically throughout the year and is not part of the initial licensure or renewal (adapted from National Association for Regulatory Administration & National Child Care Information Center, 2006). The term “routine inspection” may also be used.

Routine licensing visit: This an alternate term, used by some licensing agencies, for “routine compliance inspection.” (See definition for “routine compliance inspection.”)

Severity level: A level assigned to licensing regulations to indicate the risk to children if violated. A higher severity level for a regulation suggests that a violation would pose a greater risk to children.

Subsidy: “Private or public assistance that reduces the cost of child care for families” (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d. -a).

Technical assistance (TA): “The provision of targeted and customized supports by a professional(s) with subject matter and adult learning knowledge and skills to develop or strengthen processes, knowledge application, or implementation of services by recipients” (National Association for the Education of Young Children & National Association for Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2011, p. 18).

Unannounced inspection: An inspection that occurs without first notifying the CCEE provider that they will be inspected on a certain day and time (adapted from National Association for Regulatory Administration & National Child Care Information Center, 2006).

Violation: Failure to comply with a licensing regulation.

Waiver: Written permission provided by the licensing agency to allow a CCEE provider to be out of compliance with a specific licensing regulation, often for a limited period, and under the condition that children’s health and safety is not compromised. The term “variance” may also be used.

References

- Administration for Children and Families. (n.d.). *Overview of 2016 child care and development fund final rule*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/occ/ccdf_final_rule_fact_sheet.pdf
- Administration for Children and Families. (2016). *What is the Child Care and Development Fund?* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/archive/occ/faq/what-child-care-and-development-fund-ccdf>
- Administration for Children and Families. (2022). *OCC fact sheet*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/fact-sheet>
- Administration for Children and Families. (2023). *CCDF Final Regulations*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/law-regulation/ccdf-final-regulations>
- Administration for Children and Families. (2024). *2024 Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Final Rule*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://acfmmain-stage.acf.hhs.gov/occ/outreach-material/2024-ccdf-final-rule>
- American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *Implicit bias*. <https://www.apa.org/topics/implicit-bias>
- Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Program, 89 Fed. Reg. (March 30, 2024) (to be codified at 45 C.F.R. § 98). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/03/01/2024-04139/improving-child-care-access-affordability-and-stability-in-the-child-care-and-development-fund-ccdf>
- Child Care & Early Education Research Connections. (n.d. -a). *Child care and early education glossary*. Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services. <https://researchconnections.org/research-tools/childcare-glossary>
- Child Care & Early Education Research Connections. (n.d. - b). *Research glossary*. Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services. <https://researchconnections.org/research-tools/research-glossary>
- Fiene, R., & Kroh, K. E. (2016). *Human services licensing measurement, regulatory compliance, and program monitoring systems*. Research Institute for Key Indicators. <https://rikinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/ppt139-nara-riki.pdf>
- Gould, T., Nicholas, A., Blandford, W., Ruggiero, T., Peters, M., & Thayer, S. (2014). *The ABCs of data dictionaries*. The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, The Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems. <https://fpg.unc.edu/publications/abcs-data-dictionaries>
- King, C., Richards, D. E., Maxwell, K., Lin, V.-K., Abrams, J., Hutchison, L., & Burgess, K. (2016). *Strength in numbers: Supporting quality improvement in early care and education programs through linking administrative data* (Report # 2016-36). Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/strength-numbers-supporting-quality-improvement-early-care-education-programs-through-linking>
- Miranda, B., Ekyalongo, Y., Franchett, A., & Maxwell, K. (2022). *Monitoring practices used in child care and early education licensing*. OPRE Report #2022-137. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/trlece-brief-series-state-approaches-child-care-early-education-ccee-licensing>

- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2019). *Advancing equity in early childhood education*. [Position Statement]. <https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/advancingequitypositionstatement.pdf>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children & National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. (2011). *Early childhood professional development: Training and technical assistance glossary*. https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/glossarytraining_ta.pdf
- National Association for Regulatory Administration. (2020). *Child Care Licensing Study 2017*. <https://www.naralicensing.org/2017-cc-licensing-study>
- National Association for Regulatory Administration & National Child Care Information Center. (2006). *The 2005 Child Care Licensing Study: Final report*. National Association for Regulatory Administration, National Child Care Information Center. http://www.naralicensing.org/assets/docs/2005ChildCareLicensingStudy/2005_licensing_study_final_report_web.pdf
- National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement. (2014a). *Contemporary issues in licensing: Monitoring strategies for determining compliance: Differential monitoring, risk assessment, and key indicators*. Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/1408_differential_monitoring_final_1.pdf
- National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement. (2014b). *Interpretive guides for child care licensing regulations*. Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/interpretive_guidelines_for_child_care_licensing_regulations.pdf
- National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance. (2015a). *Trends in child care center licensing regulations and policies for 2014*. (Research Brief #1). Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/research-brief-1-trends-child-care-center-licensing-regulations-and-policies-2014>
- National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance. (2015b). *Trends in group child care home licensing regulations and policies for 2014*. (Research Brief #3). Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/research-brief-3-trends-group-child-care-home-licensing-regulations-and-policies-2014>
- National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. (2023.) *Glossary*. <https://nrckids.org/CFOC/Glossary>

Glossary of Terms for The Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education (TRLECE) Project

OPRE Report #2024-116

August 2024

Nina Johnson and Kelly Maxwell

Submitted to:

Ivelisse Martinez-Beck, Ph.D., Contracting Officer's Representative
Tracy Carter Clopet, Ph.D., Project Officer
Laura Cutler, Ph.D., and Shannon Warren, Ph.D., Project Monitors
Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Contract number: HHSP233201500034I-75P00119F37007

Project Directors:

Kelly Maxwell and Brenda Miranda
Child Trends
12300 Twinbrook Parkway, Suite 235, Rockville, MD 20852

This brief is in the public domain. Permission to reproduce is not necessary.

Suggested citation: Johnson, N. & Maxwell, K. (2024). *Glossary of terms for The Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education (TRLECE) project*. OPRE Report #2024-116. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This brief and other products sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation are available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre>.

Acknowledgements: *TRLECE Glossary of Terms* was produced through the Understanding the Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education (TRLECE) project funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The authors wish to thank Tracy Carter Clopet, Laura Cutler, Ivelisse Martinez-Beck, and Shannon Warren for their helpful feedback.

Subscribe to [OPRE News](#) and [Follow OPRE on Social Media](#)

