

# STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS) Choosing An Assessment Tool

In Vermont, Registered and Licensed Family Child Care Homes and Center Based Child Care and Preschool Programs (includes public preschool programs) may choose between two assessment tools: the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) or the Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS).



- Programs are not required to be assessed using one tool before having an assessment using the other.
- Programs must be participating in STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS) at star levels two through five or have submitted a STARS application to receive a CLASS or ERS observation by a STARS assessor.

## What are the Environment Rating Scales (ERS)?

The [Environment Rating Scales \(ERS\)](#) are designed to assess overall program quality in an early childhood setting. The scales view child development from a comprehensive or global point of view, examining a wide variety of areas that all contribute to positive child development. Observers assess the arrangement of space both indoors and outdoors, the materials and activities offered to the children, the supervision and interactions (including language) that occur in the classroom, and the schedule of the day, including routines and activities.

The ERS tools utilized by STARS:

- Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale, 3rd Edition (ITERS-3) | Ages birth – 36 months
- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, 3rd Edition (ECERS-3) | Ages 3 – 5 years
- Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition (FCCERS-R) | Ages birth – 12 years

## What is the Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS)?

The [Classroom Assessment Scoring System® \(CLASS\)](#) is a research-based tool that assesses the effectiveness of classroom interactions among teachers and children. These daily interactions promote children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development.

The CLASS tools utilized by STARS include:

- Infant CLASS | Ages birth – 18 months
- Toddler CLASS | Ages 15 – 36 months
- Pre-K CLASS | Ages 3 – 5 years

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## How do I choose which tool to use?

Start by thinking about the type of feedback that would benefit your program the most. Beyond that, your choice may depend on a few additional factors. Consider the questions below.

### What type of feedback do you want?

#### GLOBAL

Feedback on space and furnishings, personal care routines, gross motor spaces and equipment, schedules and transitions, materials and activities, and interactions.

**ERS provides this type of feedback.**

#### INTERACTION SPECIFIC

Feedback on improving the quality of educator/child and peer interactions to support social emotional, cognitive, and language development.

**CLASS provides this type of feedback.**

### Do you have a strongly focused philosophy, such as Waldorf or Montessori?

#### YES

Both ERS and CLASS address program quality across curriculum approaches. As a global assessment, ERS provides feedback on more program elements, increasing opportunity for conflict with a strongly focused philosophy.

**You may want to choose CLASS with its interaction-specific focus.**

#### NO

**Either tool provides valuable information about program quality. Choose the tool that matches the type of feedback you want for your program.**

### Do the majority of program activities take place outside?

#### YES

Programs that spend the majority of the day outside find the ERS requirements for indoor spaces and use of specific types of furniture are challenging to meet.

**You may want to choose CLASS.**

#### NO

**Either tool provides valuable information about program quality. Choose the tool that matches the type of feedback you want for your program.**

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## Assessment Myths and Truths

MYTH	TRUTH
It is easier to score well with one tool than the other.	Both CLASS and ERS are rigorous assessment tools with high standards for quality.
The ERS does not emphasize interactions.	Without effective interactions, it is difficult to move beyond the minimal level (3) in ERS scores.
To meet ERS requirements, classrooms must have so many materials that they become cluttered.	Wise decisions about materials prevent cluttering. For example, a puzzle with a realistic portrayal of animals will count for both Fine Motor and for Nature/Science.
The ERS versions are very similar (e.g., If my program scored well on the ECERS-R, it will score well on the ECERS-3.)	The 3rd editions of the ERS tools are major revisions that introduce innovations in both the content and the administration of the scales. Without specific preparation, scores are often lower on assessments with the 3rd editions than they are with the Revised Editions.
If you choose CLASS, interactions are the only things that matter.	High quality environments set the stage for more effective interactions. Objects from a variety of cultures and traditions, materials that encourage open-ended exploration, a designated space for privacy, and other elements not directly assessed by the CLASS tools support quality interactions.

## Additional Information and References

- Environment Rating Scales (ERS): [www.ersi.info](http://www.ersi.info)
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS): [www.teachstone.com](http://www.teachstone.com)

## Questions?

We encourage you to contact the STARS Office with further questions at (802) 398-2037 or [stars@mjjccvt.org](mailto:stars@mjjccvt.org).