The Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (FPG) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, in partnership with Child Trends, collaborated with North Carolina's Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) to conduct a validation study of North Carolina's Star Rated License system. The N.C. Star Rated License is a tiered quality rating and improvement system (TQRIS) for early care and education programs.

The validation study included two phases: (1) an exploration and model development phase, and (2) a model testing phase.

**PHASE 1**  
**JANUARY 2013 - MAY 2015**

- Developed alternative TQRIS models based on multiple sources of data:
  - Recommendations from the TQRIS Advisory Committee
  - DCDEE data
  - Stakeholder interviews
  - Provider Surveys
  - Review of TQRIS models in other states

- Obtained feedback on alternative models from multiple sources:
  - Focus Groups with providers (centers, FCCHs) and parents
  - Interviews with key stakeholders identified by DCDEE

- Mapped programs onto alternative models using:
  - Existing DCDEE data
  - Additional program information gathered through phone interviews
  - Based on all available data, DCDEE selected model with the “best fit” to be further assessed in Phase II.

**PHASE 2**  
**MAY 2015 - DECEMBER 2016**

- Gathered data from a randomly selected sample of programs (centers, FCCHs) through:
  - Classroom observations
  - Director interviews
  - On-site document reviews
  - Family questionnaires
  - Child pre-academic and social skills assessments

- Conducted data analyses to:
  - Assign hypothetical ratings to programs
  - Identify quality features that distinguish programs at the upper ranges of quality based on hypothetical ratings
  - Determine if differences in quality ratings were associated with differences in child outcomes
  - Document program features most closely associated with differences in child outcomes among children with high needs

The validation study will inform possible changes to strengthen N.C.’s Star Rated License, including possibly raising standards related to environments, staff qualifications and family engagement.
In Phase I, the research team solicited feedback from providers and key stakeholders, and gathered other data to inform possible revisions to the N.C. Star Rated License. DCDEE used the information to develop alternative TQRIS models. Existing programs were then mapped onto the alternative TQRIS models, using available data and a small-scale data collection effort.

The model with the best fit to the state’s goals (i.e., increasing the minimum and highest standards, and representing incremental improvement overall) was selected for further testing in Phase II.

Phase II involved implementing a validation study to test the selected model. Data collection included program-level quality data, classroom observations, director interviews, on-site document reviews, family surveys and direct child assessments. Participants in Phase II included 176 child care centers, 70 family child care homes, and 786 children and their families. Study activities concluded in December 2016 and the report is available at http://earlylearningchallenge.nc.gov.

The validation study was guided by the work of an advisory council that collaborated to develop recommended actions, including the Department of Public Instruction, Division of Public Health, Head Start State Collaboration Office, the Division of Child Development and Early Education, NC Child Care Commission, child care resource and referral, community colleges and universities, military child care, North Carolina Partnership for Children and local Smart Start agencies, and child care providers.