



Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Center Standards of Quality

Welcome to the Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Center Standards. This document will guide licensed centers, serving children from birth-12 years of age, through STARS to Quality. Additional information can be found on the [STARS to Quality website](#). For more detailed information, please refer to the [STARS Guidance & Procedures](#).


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Instructions & Key

- ★ Criterion which require STARS-approved documents only will be marked with an asterisk (*)
- ★ Required forms are in the STARS Kit and can be found on the [STARS Kits web page](#)
- ★ All teaching staff in the standards means the Director, Lead Teacher, and Assistant Teacher
- ★ Acronym Key:
 - CCR&R – Child Care Resource and Referral Agency
 - DIR – Director
 - ECAT – Assistant Teacher (formerly AID – Aide)
 - ECERS – Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale
 - ECLT – Lead Teacher (formerly PCG – Primary Caregiver)
 - ERS – Environment Rating Scale
 - ITERS – Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale
 - PAS – Program Administration Scale
 - QIP – Quality Improvement Plan
 - SUB – Substitute Teacher
 - TPITOS – The Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale
 - TPOT – Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool

Submitting for STARS to Quality

- ★ Required documents must be uploaded at time of submission into the STARS Site.
- ★ Programs are encouraged to use the New Staff Training Template located in the [STAR Kits](#). It is highly recommended that all new staff have a Training Plan on file within 30 days of hire.
- ★ Criteria may require evidence to be uploaded in the STARS Site, however, not all evidence requires a document to be uploaded; many just require answers to be entered into the evidence box.
- ★ To see what is required for evidence, use your mouse to hover over the green question mark in each evidence box. The green question mark looks like this: 

STAR 1

- If a staff person works less than 500 hours annually, they are exempt from Practitioner Registry requirements.

Education, Qualifications & Training (EQT)

Practitioner Registry

EQT 1: Director (DIR) and all teaching staff (ECLT, ECAT) current on the [Practitioner Registry](#) at any level.

STAR 1 Professional Development

STARS to Quality Essentials (2 hours)

EQT 2: The Director (DIR) and all teaching staff (ECLT, ECAT) must complete this course. It is available through [ChildCareTraining.org](#).

Program Administration Scale (PAS) Training (2 hours)

EQT 3: The Director (DIR) must complete this course. It is available through the [CCR&R](#).

Environment Rating Scale (ERS) Training (2 hours)

EQT 4: The Director (DIR) must complete this course. It is available through the [CCR&R](#).

Food Safety Course (minimum 3 hours)

EQT 5: Direct food service staff attend(s) an approved Food Safety Training (offered through the County Health Dept., Sanitarian, Extension Agency if it is not a ServSafe approved course), or online at [ChildCareTraining.org](#). Training must be in addition to the training required by CACFP.

Family/Community Partnerships (FCP)

High Needs

FCP 1: Programs must serve a minimum 10% of high needs children, as defined in [STARS Guidance & Procedures](#). This information must be updated in the Classrooms tab within 3 months of STAR level submission.

High Quality Supportive Environments (HQSE)

Daily Health Checks

HQSE 1: The program must have documentation that Daily Health Checks are taking place.

Self-Assessment

HQSE 2: The Director will complete a self-assessment using the appropriate Environment Rating Scale(s) (ECERS-R; ITERS-R).

- A Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) * is written to address the findings of the self-assessments, specifically addressing any subscale scores below a 3.0.

Montana Early Learning Standards

HQSE 3: All staff have access to the MT Early Learning Standards (MELS) *.

Leadership & Program Management (LPM)

Program Management

LPM 1: Programs must complete and update the Program Profile (Program Info and Classrooms Tabs) in the STARS Site. High Needs information must be accurate and current. This must be updated within 3 months of STAR level submission.

Self-Assessment

LPM 2: The Director will complete a self-assessment using the Program Administration Scale (PAS).

- A Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) * is written to address the findings of the self-assessments, specifically addressing any subscale scores below a 3.0.

Licensing Regulations

LPM 3: All program staff shall have available a copy of the State of MT Department of Public Health and Human Services Licensing Requirements for Child Day Care Centers—including Infant Regulations. These regulations are available in the [Licensing Requirements for Child Care Centers](#).

LPM 3: All program staff will sign off * that they have read and have access to the Licensing Requirements and these forms will be kept in each staff persons' personnel file.

STAR 2

- If a staff person works less than 500 hours annually, they are exempt from Practitioner Registry requirements.
- **Must meet all criteria for STAR 1 along with the following:**

Education, Qualifications & Training (EQT)

Practitioner Registry

EQT 1: Director (DIR) current on the [Practitioner Registry](#) at Level 2 or higher.

Individualized Professional Development Plan

EQT 2: Director (DIR) and all teaching staff (ECLT, ECAT) have an individualized written Professional Development Plan linked to the current Knowledge Base. Individualized Professional Development Plans must be updated annually.

STAR 2 Professional Development

Pyramid Model (8 hours)

EQT 3: Introduction to the Pyramid Model (2 hours): Director (DIR) and all teaching staff (ECLT, ECAT) must complete this course

EQT 3.1: Montana Blended Pyramid Module 1 (6 hours): Director (DIR) and all teaching staff (ECLT, ECAT) must complete this course

- These courses are available through the [CCR&R](#). Introduction is also available online at [ChildCareTraining.org](#).

Oral Health Training (2 hours)

EQT 4: Lead Teachers (ECLT) must complete this course. It is available online at [ChildCareTraining.org](#).

MT Medication Administration II (3 hours)

EQT 5: This course must be completed by the Director (DIR), Lead Teachers (ECLT), and any other staff person that administers medication. The Director and/or Lead Teachers are responsible for documentation of the licensing-required form, medication being stored properly, and implementation of all other course requirements and regulations. If an employee of the program is the parent of an enrolled child and has not taken the course, they are allowed to administer medication to their own child only, following all licensing rules and regulations. This course is available online at [ChildCareTraining.org](#).

- Medication I must be completed for licensing requirements prior to enrolling in and completing Medication Administration II.

MT Medication Administration Refresher (4 hours)

EQT 6: Director (DIR), Lead Teachers (ECLT) must complete Medication Administration Refresher **every 3 years** after completing Medication Administration I and Medication Administration II. Medication I and Medication II **MUST** be completed prior to enrolling in and completing Medication Administration Refresher. This course is available at [ChildCareTraining.org](#).

Introduction to the Montana Early Learning Standards (3 hours)

EQT 7: Director (DIR), Lead Teachers (ECLT) must complete the Introduction to the MT Early Learning Standards Course. This course is available online at [ChildCareTraining.org](#).

Family/Community Partnerships (FCP)

High Needs

FCP 1: Programs must serve a minimum 10% of high needs children, as defined in [STARS Guidance & Procedures](#). This information must be updated in the Classrooms tab within 3 months of STAR level submission.

Enrollment Process

FCP 2: A written enrollment process is in place that facilitates an exchange of information between the program and families, which works to assure strong partnerships. This process should include the following: description of the program and policies; family culture; and wishes around topics such as eating, sleeping, toileting, and discipline.

High Quality Supportive Environments (HQSE)

Food Service/Meal Coordination

HQSE 1: All programs must be currently participating or apply to participate in the Montana Child and Adult Care Food Program.

HQSE 1: Program must re-apply for CACFP at time of annual renewal, or submission to move up from STAR 2, *if the program was previously ineligible due to income eligibility requirements*.

HQSE 1: For all programs, at least 1 person is in charge of food service/meal coordination. Other staff can assist in this role.

* **HQSE 1:** *If a program is not eligible for MT CACFP, the following indicators must be met:*

- MENUS POSTED

- Written menus must be posted for the current and future week at the entrance to the facility and visible to the public.
- ‘DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITY’ in FEEDING
 - Ellyn Satter Institute ‘Division of Responsibility’ is followed in meal services to children.
- Special Dietary Needs Statement for Children and Protected Health Information form is completed for all children who require this.

Support for Nursing Mothers

HQSE 2: Breastfeeding is encouraged and the environment and program policies are designed to support this. Programs must have policies in place whether they serve infants or not in order to support families.

Internal Transition Plan

HQSE 3: The program has an appropriate plan for moving children within the program, when applicable. This plan must be documented, and will include the process to assist children, families, and caregivers in moving from one room to another.

Pyramid Model: Promoting Social Emotional Competence and School Readiness in Young Children

HQSE 4: All or selected classroom teaching staff (ECLT, ECAT) will work to implement Module 1 topics. CCR&R Pyramid Model Coach and program leadership will determine the readiness and steps needed in order to begin implementation of the Pyramid Model.

Staff/Caregiver-to-Child Ratio & Group Size (RGS)

Staffing Plan

RGS 1: A written staffing plan* is in place assuring continuity of care (including a plan for substitute staff situations), appropriate adult to child ratios, appropriate group size, and that children are benefitting from having Primary Caregivers.

STAR 3

- Professional Development and Practitioner Registry status requirements at this level are required for employees working more than 1040 hours annually or working a minimum of 20 hours per week.
- An Assessor will be visiting the facility at this level.
- **Must meet all criteria for STAR 1 and STAR 2, along with the following:**

Education, Qualifications & Training (EQT)

Practitioner Registry

EQT 1: Director (DIR) current on the [Practitioner Registry](#) at Level 3 or higher.

EQT 1: 50% of teaching staff (ECLT, ECAT) are current at Level 2 or higher on the [Practitioner Registry](#)

STAR 3 Professional Development

Certified Infant Toddler Caregiver Course (CITC) (60 hours)

EQT 2: Lead Teachers (ECLT) caring for infants and/or toddlers must be enrolled in (which is defined as currently taking the course or beginning the course in the quarter following application for STAR 3) or have completed the 60-hour course or its equivalent. This course is available through the [CCR&R](#), UM-Western, Dawson Community College, Salish Kootenai College, or Flathead Valley Community College.

Certified Preschool Teacher Course (CPTC) (60 hours)

EQT 3: Lead Teachers (ECLT) caring for ages 2 and up must be enrolled in (which is defined as currently taking the course or beginning the course in the quarter following application for STAR 3) or have completed the 60-hour course or its equivalent. This course is available through the [CCR&R](#).

- This course can be waived if an individual is a Level 4 or higher on the Practitioner Registry. If an individual is enrolled in college courses or the MT Apprenticeship program that will result in becoming a Level 4 on the Practitioner Registry within 2 years of application for STAR 3, this course can be waived.
- This course can be waived if the Introduction to Early Childhood college-level course has been successfully completed with the grade of a C or higher.
- If a program only serves ages 2 and up, they need to consider the developmental levels of the children in their care. As a result, a program may want to consider sending some staff to the Infant Toddler course, and some staff to the Preschool course. Documentation that includes rationale for this decision must be submitted for approval prior to application for STAR 3.

Pyramid Model Trainings (6 hours)

EQT 4: Montana Blended Pyramid Module 2 (Prerequisite: Introduction and Montana Blended Module 1): Director (DIR) and all teaching staff (ECLT, ECAT) must complete this course. It is available through the [CCR&R](#).

Family/Community Partnerships (FCP)

High Needs

FCP 1: Programs must serve a minimum 10% of high needs children, as defined in [STARS Guidance & Procedures](#). This information must be updated in the Classrooms tab within 3 months of STAR level submission.

Community Resources

FCP 2: The program provides families with information regarding community resources. Examples of community resources may include: Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, public library, city recreation department, housing authority, parent resource center, public health clinic, hospital, public schools, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Office of Public Assistance, county health department, family support agency, early intervention organizations such as: Hi-Line Home Programs, Inc., Developmental Educational Assistance Program (DEAP), Quality Life Concepts (QLC), Support & Techniques for Empowering People (STEP), Early Childhood Intervention (ECI), Family Outreach, Child Development Center (CDC).

Transitions

FCP 3: The program supports children and families while transitioning children into child care and out of child care into another educational setting.

Family Engagement

FCP 4: The program provides families with multiple opportunities for involvement such as: open house, opportunities to volunteer, social events, potluck meals, parent/family surveys, parent resource center.

High Quality Supportive Environments (HQSE)

Family Style Meal Service

HQSE 1: Adults, including program staff and visitors, participate in family style meal service with the children that is developmentally appropriate for the children in care. Staff always join the children for meals and encourage health and nutrition as well as positive and engaging interactions.

Environment Rating Scale (ERS) Assessment

HQSE 2: The program will receive a formal assessment with the appropriate ERS (ECERS-R and/or ITERS-R).

- The average facility score must be at least 3.0 overall, along with the following Subscale/Item scores:
 - Personal Care Routines: 2.0 or higher
 - Activities: 3.0 or higher
 - Listening & Talking: 3.0 or higher
 - Interactions: 3.0 or higher
 - Program Structure:
 - Free Play 3.0 or higher
- The finalized report(s) will inform the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) *. Any subscale scores below a 3.0 must be addressed in the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) *.

Pyramid Model: Promoting Social Emotional Competence and School Readiness in Young Children

HQSE 3: Pyramid Model Coach and Leadership Team set goals for implementing the Pyramid Model program-wide, including the number of classrooms working to implement Pyramid Model Module 1 and Module 2 topics.

- Suggested Pyramid Model tools for implementation: Benchmarks of Quality and Inventory of Practices-sections related to Modules 1 and 2 and the first two levels of the Pyramid.

HQSE 4: Work with external CCR&R Pyramid Model coach to use *Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool* (TPOT for Preschool age) * or *Teaching Pyramid Infant/Toddler Observation Scale* (TPITOS) * as a guide for coaching and implementation. Program is encouraged to request CCR&R coach to administer TPOT and/or TPITOS.

HQSE 5: Director will communicate with families about the Pyramid Model using the brochure *Positive Solutions for Families* *.

Curriculum

HQSE 6: The program has a written curriculum plan that is aligned with the MT Early Learning Standards and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (2009, 3rd Ed. by Carol Copple & Sue Bredekamp, eds).

Observations

HQSE 7: The program demonstrates that observations of the children are used to inform curriculum and environment to support the individual needs of children.

Leadership & Program Management (LPM)

Program Administration Scale (PAS) Assessment

LPM 1: Programs will receive a formal assessment and must receive at least a 3.0 overall.

- Any subscales below a 3.0 must be addressed on the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) *.

STAR 4

- Professional Development and Practitioner Registry status requirements at this level are required for employees working more than 1040 hours annually or working a minimum of 20 hours per week.
- An Assessor will be visiting the facility at this level.
- **Must meet all criteria for STAR 1, STAR 2, and STAR 3, along with the following:**

Education, Qualifications & Training (EQT)

Practitioner Registry

EQT 1: Director (DIR) current on the [Practitioner Registry](#) at Level 4 or higher.

EQT 1: 50% of teaching staff (ECLT, ECAT) are current at Level 2 or higher AND 25% of teaching staff (ECLT, ECAT) are current at Level 3 or higher on the [Practitioner Registry](#).

STAR 4 Professional Development

Inclusion Course (15 hours)

EQT 2: Lead Teachers (ECLT) must be enrolled in or have completed Inclusion 1: Foundations for Inclusion (15 hours) or its equivalent. This course is available at [ChildCareTraining.org](#).

- This course can be waived for individuals at Level 6 or higher on the Practitioner Registry
- EDEC 340: Practicing Inclusion in Preschool Programs is a 3 credit course (45 hours) and is an acceptable equivalent for Inclusion I and Inclusion II. This course is available through UM-Western. Transcripts must be provided for this course.

Pyramid Model (hours will vary)

EQT 4: Module 3 Overview (**2 hours**): Director and any teaching staff staff (DIR, ECLT, ECAT) **not** taking MT Blended Pyramid

Model Module 3 **must** attend Module 3 Overview (Prerequisite: Introduction and Montana Blended Modules 1 and 2). It is available through the [CCR&R](#).

EQT 4: MT Blended Pyramid Model Module 3 (**8 hours**): The Behavior Support Team, as identified using the Pyramid Model guidance and the help of the CCR&R Pyramid Model Coach, will attend MT Blended Pyramid Model Module 3. It is available through the [CCR&R](#).

Family/Community Partnerships (FCP)

High Needs

FCP 1: Programs must serve a minimum 10% of high needs children, as defined in [STARS Guidance & Procedures](#); after 3 renewals at STAR 4 the program must be serving 15%. This information must be updated in the Classrooms tab within 3 months of STAR level submission.

Conferences

FCP 2: The program offers, in addition to ongoing conversations, a meeting/conference with each child's family at least once per year. Together, the child's progress and needs are reviewed, and goals for the child are set.

Home/School Communication

FCP 3: Opportunities are available to facilitate exchange of information between the program and families, such as home/school journals or notebooks, bulletin boards, newsletters, parent/family advisory councils, parent/family volunteers, parent/family participation.

High Quality Supportive Environments (HQSE)

Environment Rating Scale (ERS) Assessment

HQSE 1: The program will receive a formal assessment with the appropriate ERS (ECERS-R and/or ITERS-R).

- The average facility score must be at least 4.0 overall, along with the following Subscale/Item scores:
 - Personal Care Routines: 3.0 or higher
 - Activities: 4.0 or higher
 - Listening & Talking: 4.0 or higher
 - Interactions: 4.0 or higher
 - Program Structure:
 - Free Play 4.0 or higher
- The finalized report(s) will inform the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Any subscale scores below a 4.0 must be addressed in the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) *.

Pyramid Model: Promoting Social Emotional Competence and School Readiness in Young Children

HQSE 2: Minimum 50% of classrooms will fully implement the Montana Pyramid Model to fidelity. Classrooms implementing to fidelity must achieve 80% or higher on TPOT/TPITOS scores.

HQSE 2: Program will identify a Behavior Support Team. This team will take the lead in developing individualized support plans as needed.

HQSE 2: A 30-minute Introduction to the Pyramid Model: Promoting Social Emotional Competence and School Readiness in Young Children will be offered to families by the program.

Leadership & Program Management (LPM)

Program Administration Scale (PAS) Assessment

LPM 1: The program will have a formal assessment. The average score must be at least 4.0

- Any subscale scores below a 4.0 must be addressed in the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) *.

Staff/Caregiver-to-Child Ratio & Group Size (RGS)

RGS 1: Programs must meet NAEYC Accreditation Standards for correlation ratios, group size, ages for Centers. Refer to the [STARS Guidance & Procedures](#) for the chart.

STAR 5

- Professional Development and Practitioner Registry status requirements at this level are required for employees working more than 1040 hours annually or working a minimum of 20 hours per week.
- An Assessor will be visiting the facility at this level.
- **Must meet all criteria for STAR 1, STAR 2, and STAR 3, and STAR 4 along with the following:**

NAEYC Accreditation

Centers must be NAEYC Accredited and maintaining accreditation standards for the five criteria areas (Education, Qualifications, & Training (EQT); Staff/Caregiver-to-Child Ratio & Group Size (RGS); Family/Community Partnerships (FCP); Leadership & Program Management (LPM); and High Quality Supportive Environments (HQSE)).

Education, Qualifications & Training (EQT)

Practitioner Registry

EQT 1: Director (DIR) current on the [Practitioner Registry](#) at Level 5 or higher.

EQT 1: 50% of teaching staff (ECLT, ECAT) are current at Level 2 or higher and 25% of teaching staff (ECLT, ECAT) are current at Level 3 or higher on the [Practitioner Registry](#).

STAR 5 Professional Development

Inclusion Course (30 hours)

EQT 2: Lead Teachers (ECLT) must be enrolled in or have completed Inclusion II: Strategies for Inclusion (30 hours) or an equivalent. This course is available through [ChildCareTraining.org](#).

- This course can be waived for individuals at Level 6 or higher on the Practitioner Registry
- EDEC 340: Practicing Inclusion in Preschool Programs is a 3 credit course (45 hours) and is an acceptable equivalent for Inclusion I and Inclusion II. This course is available through UM-Western. Transcripts must be provided for this course.

Building Skills and Safe Places for Childcare Providers (6 hours)

EQT 3: Director (DIR) and Lead Teachers (ECLT) must complete this course. This course is available online at [ChildCareTraining.org](#).

Family/Community Partnerships (FCP)

High Needs

FCP 1: Programs must serve a minimum 15% high needs children, as defined in [STARS Guidance & Procedures](#). This information must be updated in the Classrooms tab within 3 months of STAR level submission.

High Quality Supportive Environments (HQSE)

Health and Wellness

HQSE 1: The program has established policies addressing the health and wellness of children, staff, and families.

Environment Rating Scale (ERS) Assessment

HQSE 2: The program will receive a formal assessment with the appropriate ERS (ECERS-R and/or ITERS-R)

- The average facility score must be at least 5.0 overall, along with the following Subscale/Item scores:
 - Personal Care Routines: 4.0 or higher
 - Activities: 5.0 or higher
 - Listening & Talking: 5.0 or higher

- Interactions: 5.0 or higher
- Program Structure:
 - Free Play 5.0 or higher
- The finalized report will inform Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Any subscale scores below a 5.0 must be addressed in the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) *.

Pyramid Model: Promoting Social Emotional Competence and School Readiness in Young Children

HQSE 3: The Pyramid Model will be fully implemented program-wide and maintained. At least 80% of all classrooms must achieve an 80% or higher on TPOT/TPITOS scores.

Leadership & Program Management (LPM)

Program Administration Scale (PAS) Assessment

LPM 1: The program will have a formal assessment. The average score must be at least 5.0.

- Any subscale scores below a 5.0 must be addressed in the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) *.