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Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Guidance and Procedures

Welcome to the Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Guidance and Procedures. This document is a supplement to the [Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Standards](#). The purpose of this document is to guide programs through the STARS process as well as to offer additional information and procedures as programs work through STAR levels. Because STARS to Quality is about Continuous Quality Improvement, this document is subject to change. For more information, visit the [STARS to Quality](#) website.

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STARS TO QUALITY GUIDANCE

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

The Best Beginnings STARS to Quality program (STARS) is a Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) that aligns quality indicators with support and incentives for early childhood programs and early childhood professionals. STARS is a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) model in which the quality of the overall program is continually being evaluated for quality improvement.

STARS was developed to do the following:

- Raise the quality of child care in Montana;
- Increase the number of children in high-quality child care settings; and
- Enhance workforce development.

This program is meant to be a pathway to National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) accreditation.

Eligibility

- Programs must apply via the [STARS Application site](#) and be selected for participation in STARS;
 - Providers with licensing deficiencies on their last licensing inspection will be subject to further review by Department staff to determine the severity and resolution of the deficiencies in relation to participation in STARS
- Programs must be licensed through MT Child Care Licensing;
- Programs must have been licensed a minimum of 6 months in order to participate in STARS. The exception to this is Early Head Start and Head Start programs who can apply once licensed;
- Program directors and owners, if applicable, must sign a STARS agreement prior to enrollment in STARS;
- Programs must complete a W-9 and attach a voided check as part of the STARS agreement in order to set up direct deposit;
- Programs must complete the Program Info and Classrooms tab in the STARS Application site prior to enrollment in STARS;
- Programs must serve a minimum 10% high needs children in their programs at STAR 1, STAR 2, and STAR 3. STAR 4 and STAR 5 programs must serve a minimum 15% high needs children. This percentage will be figured from the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) or licensed capacity, whichever is less.

High Needs Definition

High Needs is defined as:

- Children receiving services from the following:
 - Part B
 - Part C
 - Home Visiting programs
 - Children's Mental Health Bureau
 - Children and Family Services Division
- Evidence that the child has special healthcare needs (such as food allergies, asthma, diabetes, special dietary restrictions, on extended prescribed medication, etc.)
- Infants age 0-19 months (program must be **servicing** this population, not just licensed for this population)
- Enrolled Tribal member
- Children of teenage parent(s)
- Children being served through Best Beginnings subsidy
- Children of migrant families
- Children who are homeless
- Other children as identified by the Early Childhood Services Bureau

Programs will be required to report the percentage of high needs children based off ADA or licensed capacity, whichever is less.

The ECSB has approved children in Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership programs that are paid for by Early Head Start funds as a high needs category.

When entering high needs data in the Program Info tab of the STARS Application site, a child may be counted more than one time (i.e. if a child is an infant 0-19 months, is served through Best Beginnings Subsidy, and has a special healthcare need they would be counted in all 3 of those categories). Please see [STARS Site Guidance and Procedures](#) for more information.

STAR Level

There are five levels in Montana's QRIS. Criteria at each STAR level builds upon the previous level(s). A program must demonstrate that they are meeting all criteria at any given STAR level to achieve and maintain that level. As a program moves up a STAR level, they must maintain all the criteria at previous level(s). Criteria within each STAR level fall within the following 4 categories: Education, Qualifications, & Training (EQT); Family/Community Partnerships (FCP); Leadership & Program Management (LPM); and High-Quality Supportive Environments (HQSE).

Support for STARS Programs

STARS is a voluntary program, and as such it is up to directors and their staff to determine the pace in which STAR levels may be achieved, as well as implementation of criteria.

Resources for New STARS Programs

Upon acceptance into STARS, programs receive the following resources, free of cost to the program:

- ✓ YIKES Emergency Response Guide and Flip Book
- ✓ Montana Early Learning Standards
- ✓ Early Care and Education Knowledge Base
- ✓ CACFP Meal Guide Poster and meal pattern reminders flyer
- ✓ The Dirty Dozen Playground Hazards brochure (on the [STARS website](#))
- ✓ PAS scale book (Center)
- ✓ BAS scale book (Family/Group)
- ✓ ERS scale book
- ✓ All About the ECERS-3
 - All About the ITERS-R will continue to be sent until All About the ITERS-3 is available

These resources will either be sent directly to the program by ECSB or be delivered to the program by their STARS Consultant.

STARS Consultants

STARS Consultants are employees of local Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies and are assigned to STARS programs upon acceptance. STARS Consultants are available to assist programs in moving through the STARS Standards and support the application process. Consultants are trained in all assessment tools, STARS Standards, Guidance & Procedures, and the STARS Application site. The role of the STARS Consultant is to: 1) Facilitate program goal setting to meet and maintain STARS Standards. 2) Guide program leadership to independently navigate the STARS Application site.

Pyramid Model Coaching

The goal of coaching is the implementation of effective practice, which lead to better outcomes for young children and families.

Instructional-based coaching is available free of charge, at all STARS levels. To request coaching contact your CCR&R agency. STARS Coaches are trained to use an evidence-based coaching model called Practice Base Coaching. Programs requesting coaching will work in partnership to establish the practices of focus and identify an appropriate format and method. Clear communication, facilitated by a coaching agreement, will ensure everyone knows what to expect from the coaching process. STARS coaches are expertly trained in Pyramid Model but can support a wide variety of content. To learn more about STARS Coaching, you can view [Practice Based Coaching in Montana - YouTube](#).

STARS Application Site

Montana's STARS application Site is housed through the [Early Childhood Project](#). All interested programs must apply for STARS through this website.

[STARS Application Site Guidance and Procedures](#) are available to provide guidance on the STARS application site.

Programs must create an Organization ID to log in and apply for STARS. All STARS to Quality programs must apply for desired application levels, as well as submit for STAR level ratings through this site.

Upon STAR level submission, programs must enter the date of their most recent update to the Program Profile information in the Evidence box at STAR 1 for Program Management and each STAR level for the High Needs criteria. This date must be within 3 months of STAR level submission. Refer to [STARS Application Site Guidance and Procedures](#).

Assessments

Montana has certified and reliable Early Childhood Assessors (assessors) for the following scales:

- Environment Rating Scales
 - Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – 3 (ECERS-3)
 - Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale-3 (ITERS-3)
 - Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-3 (FCCERS-3)
- Program Administration Scale (PAS) 2nd Edition for Centers
- Business Administration Scale (BAS) 2nd Edition for Family and Group programs

Scheduling an Assessment

Baseline Assessment

Once a program is accepted into STARS to Quality, they will receive a baseline ERS assessment. The assessment will be scheduled, and results will be given to the STARS Consultant who will go over the results with the program. The STARS Consultant will accompany the assessor whenever possible on the baseline assessment.

To schedule a baseline for a new program, assessors will:

- Contact the program and provide the exact date of the assessment
 - Confirm the date works for the program
- Contact the STARS Consultant and invite them to attend the assessment
 - Assessors do not need to reschedule a baseline to meet the needs of the STARS Consultant if the assessment date works for the program

- Offer some time to debrief after the assessment with the STARS Consultant, either in person or on the phone, depending on the assessor's travel schedule

Live Assessments

Programs must be in Applied status for the Application Period in order to Submit for Rating. To request an assessment at STAR 3 and above, programs must "Submit for Rating" by the required submission deadline of January 10th.

All criteria for the level being requested must be met when submitting for STAR 3 and above for an assessment to be scheduled. Criteria will be re-verified during the final submission so if trainings must occur between the time of the assessment request and the final submission this will be verified, and if trainings are not completed the program will not achieve the STAR level they have submitted for, regardless of whether the assessment has been completed or not.

To schedule a live assessment for programs submitting for a STAR 3, 4, or 5, assessors will:

Contact the program and provide a 2-week window of the assessment(s).

- The program is able to select 3 black out days within that window that they would not like as an assessment day
 - **Black out days should be used to denote any day that is not a typical day.** Examples of these include weekdays when the program is closed, special events like field trips, class parties, or picture days and vacation days of lead staff members. **The following holidays do not need to be included in black out days:** Martin Luther King Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving Day, and Friday following Thanksgiving Day. Programs will not be given any more than 3 blackout dates. Final assessment scores and reports

are in the STARS Application Site in the Assessments tab.

Vendor Discounts

Contact consultants for further information on the following vendors:

- 360 Office Solutions (MT based out of Billings)
- Constructive Play Things
- Discount School Supply
- Kaplan Early Learning Company
- Lakeshore

Not all vendors have discount codes, so you will need to contact the individual vendor and identify yourself as a MT STARS program.

The State of MT Department of Public Health and Human Services, Early Childhood Services Bureau, does not endorse particular vendors. These vendors have provided this opportunity to Best Beginnings STARS to Quality participants independently as a means of supporting high quality early care and education for young children.

Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Incentives

- Incentives are available to programs in two forms:
 - Quality improvement incentive awards, paid quarterly
 - STARS to Quality quarterly incentives will be paid no later than the 15th of the first month of each quarter (January, April, July, October)
 - Tiered reimbursement percent above standard state reimbursement rates for facilities serving Best Beginnings Scholarship families
 - STARS subsidy bonus percent increase payments are included with monthly Best Beginnings Scholarship Program reimbursement payments
- STARS programs are eligible to receive Accreditation Scholarships through The Early Childhood Project, as long as funding is available. Accreditation costs are also allowable in the STARS budget.
- Programs are subject to random audits of STARS incentive funds. The ECSB reserves the right to request documentation of STARS incentive funds spent, according to the program budget and quality improvement plan, at any time.
- The Best Beginnings Program Specialist will audit 1/3 of the STAR 2 and above Centers quarterly to verify average daily attendance, which relates to the incentive amount.
 - If the average daily attendance is consistently different, the Center size will be adjusted to reflect this. The program would then need to revise and submit their STARS to Quality Budget and QIP.
 - The programs are responsible for letting the ECSB Program Specialist know of consistent changes with their enrollment.

Quarterly Incentives Chart

STAR 1

Resources delivered by STARS Consultant (value about \$450)

STAR 2

Program Type	Family	Group	Small Center	Medium Center	Large Center
Incentive	\$625	\$875	\$1,250	\$1,625	\$2,063
Reduction After 3 rd Renewal	\$469	\$656	\$938	\$1,219	\$1,547

20% of total budget must go towards Personnel/Staff Costs *5% increased reimbursement for Best Beginnings Scholarships*

STAR 3

Program Type	Family	Group	Small Center	Medium Center	Large Center
Incentive	\$938	\$1,375	\$1,875	\$2,500	\$3,125

30% of total budget must go towards Personnel/Staff Costs *10% increased reimbursement for Best Beginnings Scholarships*

STAR 4

Program Type	Family	Group	Small Center	Medium Center	Large Center
Incentive	\$1,250	\$1,875	\$2,500	\$3,375	\$4,063

40% of total budget must go towards Personnel/Staff Costs *15% increased reimbursement for Best Beginnings Scholarships*

STAR 5

Program Type	Family	Group	Small Center	Medium Center	Large Center
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Incentive	\$1,563	\$2,250	\$3,125	\$4,250	\$5,000
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50% of total budget must go towards Personnel/Staff Costs 20% increased reimbursement for Best Beginnings Scholarships

Small Center: 13-29 Licensed Capacity or previous 3 months Average Daily Attendance, whichever is less

Medium Center: 30-59 Licensed Capacity or previous 3 months Average Daily Attendance, whichever is less

Large Center: 60+ Licensed Capacity or previous 3 months Average Daily Attendance, whichever is less

Remaining at a STAR Level

- **STAR 2** – Incentives will be reduced by 25% after 3 renewals at this level. Scholarship bonus remains the same.
- **STAR 3** – No reduction of incentive amount for sustaining STAR 3
- **STAR 4** – No reduction of incentive amount for sustaining STAR 4
- **STAR 5** – No reduction of incentive amount for sustaining STAR 5

STARS to Quality Budget and Quality Improvement Action Plan (QIAP) Document

- The STARS to Quality Budget is the formal agreement for the STARS Incentive award.
- The budget narrative must align with the budget and can also reflect any resources noted within the program's Quality Improvement Action Plan.
- The ECSB will be monitoring to ensure the budget is expended as proposed. Should there be difficulty in expending the funds as requested; examination will be made of the funds provided.
 - If a program must change their STARS to Quality Budget across line-item amounts, they must contact the ECSB Program Specialist for permission to do so then send revised documentation in to reflect any approved changes.
 - Budgets may not be amended during a quarter in which payment has already been made; budgets may only be amended for future quarters.
- The ECSB reserves the right to ask for clarification or more information on budgets, as well as to deny budgets and make recommendations for a new budget according to assessment scores.
- ***If a budget is incorrect or un-signed at time of submission, the application will be marked Incomplete, and the program must resubmit. Programs are allowed only three submissions to correct any errors on their application, which includes errors to the Budget.***

Budget

- Budgets must be for the exact amount of the Incentive for the year.
- Budgets will be returned to the program for revisions for the following:
 - The amount does not match the total incentive award.
 - Budget is not signed.

- Personnel minimum is not met
- Budgets must be electronically filled out on the form supplied by the ECSB. A signature is required on this form; an electronic signature will be accepted.
 - This is a legally binding agreement, and by signing, programs agree to spend the funds accordingly. Failure to do so could result in loss of STAR level and the requirement to return any incentives awarded.
- Budgets will be effective July 1 – June 30 annually
 - Budget total incentive amounts will remain at the level awarded effective July 1.
- Budgets will not be approved with any requests for the following:
 - Construction
 - Food
 - Gift cards
 - Workman's Comp Insurance
 - Payroll Taxes
 - Business Liability Insurance
- For further guidance on what can be spent towards personnel, refer to the BAS or PAS scale booklet or the STAR 1 Working to STAR 2 kit in the ["Budget Ideas for Personnel Costs"](#) document.

Quality Improvement Action Plan

- The intention of the Quality Improvement Action Plan is to support programs in planning to advance to the next STAR level, or to maintain a STAR level.
 - The Quality Improvement Action Plan is informed by the various tools such as ERS, PAS/BAS, The Knowledge Base, individual professional development plans, and/or STARS criteria.
 - The intention of this plan is to set goals for the program that demonstrates a desire to improve, rather than attempting to justify scores received from the assessment tools.
 - This plan may also inform the budget, so although there may be items listed in the action plan that do not cost money, anything that is being budgeted

for use with STARS incentive money should align within the budget.

Cost of Care Calculator

- The Cost of Care Calculator computes the cost of care per child at the program level. This tool is designed to help programs understand the cost of operating centers or family/group child care programs.
- Programs at all STAR levels must report monthly and annual cost of care at Submission time.
- The intent of the Cost of Care Calculator is an annual revenue and expense budget for a program, either a center or a family/group child care program, at a given level of quality, enrollment size, children's ages, and family income mix. Programs can use the tool to compare and contrast programs of different sizes, with different ages of children, and different mixes of family income and revenue sources.
 - The Cost of Care Calculator is an estimate. If a program enters reasonably accurate data, it will produce a reasonably accurate estimate of the annual revenue and expense (R&E) statement of a program.
- *The Cost of Care calculator tab within the Budget document must be completed, or the numbers gained from completing this tab may be entered in the checklist evidence box and the information entered into the tab deleted.*

Star Kits

[STAR Kits](#) are available for every STAR level by facility type. These kits include resources as well as required forms that are to be used. Required forms will be marked as such with an *.

Montana Early Learning Standards (MELS)

This publication describes the standards that guide the work of early childhood professionals to ensure that children from birth to age five have the skills and knowledge they need to achieve success in learning to reach their full potential in life. The Montana Early Learning Standards (MELS) feature a continuum of developmental progression without listing specific ages. Printed copies of Montana Early Learning Standards can be ordered by filling out an [ECSB Resource Order Form](#), and electronic version is available on the [MT ECP website](#).

Developmental Screening

As of July 1, 2020 STAR 4 and 5 programs are required to implement screening, utilizing a valid and reliable screening tool. For additional information regarding developmental screening within STARS to Quality, go to the [Developmental Screening tab](#) located on the STARS to Quality website.

Using a valid and reliable developmental screening tool to monitor children's skill development helps ensure the child's development is on schedule, identifies a child's strengths and areas where the child may need support (ASQ Guide). Within the STARS Standards, this criterion has been placed within Family & Community Partnerships, as engaging families in the developmental screening process validates the family's concerns, conveys the value and importance for the family's expertise, educates families about development, and bridges communication between families and childcare providers and teachers.

Distribution of Kits:

- Kits will only be distributed to STAR 4 and 5 level programs, or programs at lower STAR levels preparing to apply for STAR 4 or 5, by their STARS Consultant or the Family Engagement Coordinator.
- **Programs must request kits.** They are not automatically distributed to the programs described above.
- Discussion will occur to discern what resources are given to programs.

Implementation Support:

- CCR&R Family Engagement Coordinators (FECs) can provide limited TA support, primarily virtual, to programs related to the implementation of screening. They have

been trained on the ASQ-SE-2 and will receive training on the ASQ-3.

- Consultants and coaches are not responsible for screening support.
- Program leaders should follow the publisher's guidance for their selected tool.
- At STAR 3, program directors and lead teachers are required to complete the following training:
Developmental Screening: Develop a process to identify and support individual child development, promote family engagement, and enhance program quality. This training is available at Child Care Training, CCT. The screening process training was developed to help providers create a screening implementation plan.

Training

Free Professional Development

- STARS-required trainings offered through Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (CCR&R) and [Child Care Training](#) will be offered with no registration fee, as long as funding allows. If an individual is a “no show” for a course and they must register to take the course again, the individual may be required by the CCR&R or [Child Care Training](#) to pay to take the course.

Role Types for Training

- Required trainings for specific staff are referred to by the Child Care Licensing (CCL) Staff Role type definition for purposes of STARS. The role types are listed below. For further information regarding role types visit the [Child Care Licensing website](#).
- For STAR 1 and STAR 2:
 - If an individual works less than 500 hours annually, they are exempt from the Practitioner Registry requirements.
- For STAR 3, STAR 4, and STAR 5:
 - Individuals working less than 1040 hours annually or less than a minimum of 20 hours/week are exempt from trainings.

Center role types

Director (DIR), Early Childhood Lead Teacher (ECLT), Early Childhood Teacher (ECT), Substitute (SUB), Support Staff (SPSTF)

Child Care Centers	
Direct Care Staff	Non-Direct Care Staff
Center Director (DIR)	Support Staff (SPSTF)
Early Childhood Lead Teacher (ECLT)	Owner/Admin
Early Childhood Assistant Teacher (ECAT)	
Substitute ECT (SUB)	

Trainee – temporary role type	
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Family/Group Home role types

Director (DIR), Early Childhood Teacher (ECT), Substitute (SUB), Support Staff (SPSTF)

Family & Group Child Care Homes	
Direct Care Staff	Non-Direct Care Staff
Family/Group Director (DIR)	Spouse (SPO)
Early Childhood Teacher (ECT)	Other Adult (OAD)
Substitute ECT (SUB)	Support Staff (SPSTF)
	Adult Child (ADC)
Trainee – temporary role type	Owner/Admin

Practitioner Registry

Directors and teaching staff must be always current on the Practitioner Registry per Child Care Licensing rule.

Certain requirements of staff at higher levels on the Registry will remain at STAR 2 and above.

Because all staff must be current on the Practitioner Registry within 90 days of hire, there are no training plan timeframes for the Practitioner Registry for Directors or teaching staff at the higher levels. Criteria must be met at the time of submission. STARS monitors will determine percentages based on any staff that is current at the Practitioner Registry at the required levels. Directors will also be counted into the percentage.

Teaching staff are not required to meet Practitioner Registry requirements if they work less than 500 hours per year.

The Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Development

To support fidelity to the Pyramid Model, STARS provides comprehensive training opportunities. The Pyramid Model Training Modules are based on promotion, prevention, and intervention and using evidence-based strategies and teaching practices to prevent and address children’s challenging behaviors. Each level of the Pyramid provides the foundation for the next level, so training modules must be taken in order as a series:

ALL lessons within each module must be completed to receive training credit. STARS providers must take the courses in the following sequence:

- STAR 1: Introduction to Pyramid Model
– www.childcaretraining.org
- STAR 2: E-Pyramid Birth-5 Module 1 (9 lessons) - [ECP Statewide Training Calendar](#)
- STAR 3: E-Pyramid Birth-5 Module 2 (5 lessons) - [ECP Statewide Training Calendar](#)
- E-Pyramid Birth-5 Module 3 (6 lessons) - [ECP Statewide Training Calendar](#)

STARS TO QUALITY PROCEDURES

Maintaining a STAR Level

If a program chooses to remain at a specific level, they must renew their STAR level annually prior to their STAR expiration date. Deadlines are as follows:

- STAR 1: April 15
- STAR 2: March 15
- STAR 3, STAR 4, STAR 5: January 10
 - Required assessments will need to be requested by the above deadlines for the application period. All other criteria must be met at time of submission for requesting assessments.

Programs must Submit for Rating within the [STARS application site](#). Programs must be in the appropriate Application Period in order to Submit for Rating. The deadline to apply for the annual application period is June 30th.

Please refer to the STARS Application deadlines chart in this document

. Please note: the earlier a program submits for a level within an application period, the more time allowed to correct any incomplete criteria.

If the program is submitting for STAR 3 or above at the time of renewal and does not meet the assessment score criteria for their desired level, the program does not need to do another self-assessment to meet STAR 1 criteria. They will use the scores from their assessment(s) to inform their STARS to Quality Budget and QIP.

The last three months of average daily attendance, which the program report to CACFP (if applicable), will be used to determine the programs new incentive level. If the program has continued to serve the number of children required to receive the same level of incentives, program incentives will not be reduced. If a program's

attendance is less than the number verified when they first applied, ECSB will look at the facility's attendance reported during the past year. If it is determined that the facility is serving fewer children on average, the program's incentive amount will be reduced.

Participants must maintain requirements at all times of that specific STAR level, and lower STAR levels when applicable.

Remaining at a STAR level

Pre-STAR Level

- Programs must move from Pre-STAR to a STAR level within one year of being accepted into STARS (or during the closest submission deadline to one year).
 - The closest submission deadline means the deadline after passing the 1-year mark of acceptance into STARS (i.e. if a program is accepted into STARS in 2021, they would have until the deadline of the 2022 application period to submit for STAR 1).
 - Programs that do not move to a STAR level from Pre-STAR within one year will be removed from STARS to Quality. Programs may re-apply to participate; however, programs must wait 6 months from date of removal to re-apply.
 - If a program does not renew a current STAR level, the program will be put into Pre-STAR status and must move to a minimum of STAR 1 within one year of the status change.
 - If a program submits for a higher level and does not meet all criteria, they will be awarded the level in which all criteria are being met. If no criteria is being met, the program will be put into Pre-STAR status and must move to a minimum of STAR 1 within one year of the status change.
- See the Quarterly Incentives Chart section of this document for budget impacts for remaining at STAR 2 for specified time frames.

Termination/Reduction/Hold Status of a STAR Level

A program may be terminated, reduced, or placed on hold for the following reasons:

- The facility is not operational;
- The provider or program is on the National Disqualified List for the Child and Adult Care Food Program;
- The program receives a Serious Deficiency from the Child and Adult Care Food Program;
- The program has a negative licensing action;
- The program receives an Intentional Program Violation through the Best Beginnings Childcare Subsidy program; or
- If a provider is under investigation for a crime that puts vulnerable populations such as children or the elderly at risk.
- If the program has received a STARS audit and is not maintaining criteria or spending funds as approved by ECSB.

Change in Status and Substitutions

Voluntary Change in Licensing Status

If a program changes their licensing status, they do not forfeit their status in STARS, as long as the program wants to remain in the program and participate, meeting expectations for the appropriate category of licensure.

- STARS programs who change their licensing designation (i.e. moving from Family to Group Child Care, adding an age group under the same PV#, etc.) must meet all STARS and licensing criteria for that new designation. Programs may be placed on hold with a change in licensing status, due to the fact that they will have a provisional license.
- Programs who make voluntary changes to licensing designation during an award year (July 1-June 30) will still remain at the incentive level awarded July 1.
- Programs must also submit any and all other documentation required to reflect compliance with STARS criteria for this new designation at their current STAR level. For example; A Family Care at STAR 2 which has changed their license to Group Child Care would have to ensure all criteria for a Group Care at STAR 2 have been met. This could include training plans for additional staff that must be hired to serve more children.
- If programs change their licensing designation and cannot demonstrate compliance with licensing or STARS criteria, they will be placed on Hold Status until a determination is made by the ECSB.

Change in Program Ownership

- A written request must be sent to the STARS Program Specialists, who will make a determination of whether the program will be allowed to remain in STARS.
 - This request must provide assurances that all STARS criteria will be met and/or maintained. Assurances must also be provided that the program is in good standing with CACFP and the Best Beginnings Scholarship program.

- The STARS Program Specialists will respond in writing within 30 business days of the written request from the provider giving a determination on whether participation in STARS will continue.
- Once participation is approved, STARS Program Specialists must be notified as soon as CCL issues a new PV#. STARS Application Site programmers will be notified in order to merge the old PV# with the new PV# in the STARS Application Site. This will ensure that all STARS submission history for the program will be retained.
 - A new Organization ID must be created in ECP with the new PV# prior to the merge occurring.
- Child Care Licensing must be contacted, as ownership changes require a change in the PV#.
 - A provisional license will be issued, which will not affect quarterly incentives, but could potentially have an impact on scholarship bonuses as these cannot be paid out to a program holding a provisional license. Scholarship bonuses are also affected by the timing within the quarter when licenses are updated and payment schedules in CCUBS. Scholarship bonuses are not retroactive. If a program has changed ownership & is holding a provisional license the STAR bonus restoration does not occur until the first of the next quarter. At that time payment of the related bonus on services provided is discontinued until the first of the next quarter. Using January as an example as the beginning of a quarter, January bonus increments would not be paid until the following month, in this case February.
 - New ownership also will mean a change in the EIN for tax purposes, so an accountant should be consulted. Neither ECSB nor CCL will answer tax related questions.
 - A change in ownership may result in ECSB scheduling assessments to ensure program quality is being maintained. A change may also result in

ECSB requesting further documentation of compliance with STARS criteria.

Change in Programs' Physical Space

If a STARS program moves locations, ECSB Program Specialists, STARS Consultants, and Child Care Licensing must be notified.

- Change in location does not mean that a program can no longer participate in STARS; however, a program may be moved to a lower STAR level based on their current level and may have to re-submit.
- The program must have a new baseline assessment.
- If a program moves from one location to another, it is possible that they may receive a provisional license from Child Care Licensing, which may affect percent bonus payments if a program is at STAR 2 or above.
- If a program has not yet achieved a STAR level, they must still notify the ECSB Program Specialists and coaches of their program move.

Available Criteria Exceptions

Transition Time for New Staff

- Training plan templates are located in the [STAR Kits](#).
- Programs currently at a STAR 1 or working towards a STAR 1 have a 6-month transition period from date of hire for new staff to fulfill STAR 1 criteria in order to be able to submit for a STAR 1 rating or keep their current STAR level.
- Programs currently at a STAR 2 have the 6 months from date of hire for new staff to fulfill STAR 1 criteria and 9 months from date of hire to fulfill STAR 2 criteria (an additional 3 months beyond the 6-month requirement-not 9 additional months).
- Programs currently at a STAR 3 and above have: 6 months from date of hire to fulfill STAR 1 criteria, 9 months from date of hire to fulfill STAR 2 criteria, and 12 months from date of hire to fulfill STAR 3 criteria (an additional 3 months beyond the 9-month requirement). Additionally, for STAR 3, new staff must have completed **or be enrolled in** the required Infant/Toddler or Preschool Teacher Certification Course within 12 months of hire.
- Programs currently at STAR 4 have: 6 months from date of hire to fulfill STAR 1 criteria, 9 months from date of hire to fulfill STAR 2 criteria, 12 months from date of hire to fulfill STAR 3 criteria, and 18 months from date of hire to fulfill STAR 4 criteria.
- Programs currently at STAR 5 have: 6 months from date of hire to fulfill STAR 1 criteria, 9 months from date of hire to fulfill STAR 2 criteria, 12 months from date of hire to fulfill STAR 3 criteria, and 18 months from date of hire to fulfill STAR 4 and STAR 5 criteria.
 - Programs must include training plan information as evidence during the submission process for staff on a current training plan. There is a training plan template available to use and upload, or training plan information can be entered into each training and Practitioner Registry criteria evidence box. Programs are subject to losing or not meeting their

STAR level if training plans are not current for individuals and trainings have not been completed.

- ECSB recognizes that staff may be assigned a new age group to work with, especially in Center care.
 - If a staff person begins working with a new age group, that change is treated as a new employee and will potentially require a training plan for that individual. For example: If a facility is at STAR 3 and one of their Preschool teachers moves out of Preschool to work with Infants/Toddlers, the following would need to happen as far as trainings for the facility to maintain their STAR level (trainings specific to I/T – it is assumed all other trainings are complete): within 1 year the individual needs to be either enrolled in or have completed the Infant Toddler Caregiver Education course (for lead teachers) for STAR 3. Not following through on this training plan could result in the facility being placed on hold or potentially losing their STAR rating until the plan is fulfilled.
 - The same process shall occur with role type changes as well.

Hardship Exception for Training Existing Staff

In extreme cases of verifiable medical or personal hardship, a decision to extend training time for individual staff members can be made. A written request must be submitted to the ECSB Program Specialists 30 days prior to the date of the required training along with any pertinent verification, or a minimum 30 days prior to STAR level submission. Approval decisions will be based on impact to the provider and their future ability to attend the training.

Requests for Training Waivers

Any request for a training waiver must be submitted to the ECSB Program Specialists. Requests should include the following: justification for why the waiver is being requested, documentation of completion of a similar course, certificate, etc. Once the request is received by the ECSB Program Specialists, they will

review the request and either ask for more information or make a decision regarding the request and respond in writing to the individual seeking the waiver within thirty (30) days.

STARS Request for Review

No review may be requested from any decision related to acceptance into STARS to Quality. Criteria at each STAR level cannot be challenged.

Actions and decisions related to a provider's license are governed by the program policies of the Quality Assurance Division, Child Care Licensing Program.

Assessment Review

Child care providers may contest assessment scores resulting from an Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-3, ITERS-3 FCCERS-3) assessment and/or a Program Administration (PAS) or a Business Administration Scale (BAS) assessment by submitting a written request setting forth specific reasons for contesting the scores to the ECSB Program Specialist. This written request must be received by the ECSB Program Specialist *within 30 days* of the provider receiving their final assessment report(s). The ECSB may place the program on Hold Status while the request is being reviewed. While on Hold Status, programs cannot submit for STAR levels or receive incentives. The ECSB will review the assessment scores, including assessment reports, assessor notes, assessment tools and supporting guidance.

If the ECSB determines the documentation supports the assessment scores, the assessment scores will be upheld. If the ECSB determines the documentation does not support the assessment scores, the facility will be re-assessed by either the Assessor or other qualified ESCB staff within 2 weeks of the determination or the score will be changed in the ERS Data System. The assessment score determination by the ECSB Staff is the final determination of contested assessment scores, due to the reliability requirements of the rating scales as defined by the scale authors.

All Other STARS Requests for Review

Requests for review must be made through the Early Childhood Services Bureau. This written request must be received by the ECSB Program Specialist *within 30 days* of the provider receiving their denial letter. The ECSB Program Specialist may place the program on Hold Status while the request is reviewed. While on Hold Status, programs cannot submit for STAR levels or receive incentives. The ECSB Program Specialist will review the request and any supporting documentation and information. Individuals may be interviewed to gather all necessary information. The ECSB will make a determination of the request and send a decision letter in writing within 30 days of receiving the request for review. The determination of the request for review by the ECSB Program Specialist is final.

Training Procedures

Out of State Trainings

Training certificates for STARS/QRIS specific courses taken in other states will not count for MT STARS to Quality. College courses from out of state being requested as an equivalent for a STARS training will need to be submitted to the ECSB, with a syllabus, course description, and name of text used, for review. Individuals must allow up to 30 days for any decision.

Training Equivalents

If an equivalent is accepted, this will be noted in the STARS to Quality Standards with additional guidance or will be posted on the training section of the website. If a staff person is requesting approval for an equivalent course, the following information must be sent to the Early Childhood Services Bureau in order to review and approve or deny:

- Title of textbook and author
- Syllabus
- Course Description
- Transcript

Individuals must allow up to 30 days for any decision.

STARS Participant Priority for Trainings

The first time a course is offered that is a STARS required course, STARS participants will receive priority.

Additionally, a course cannot be filled completely with staff from only one facility. CCR&R's are encouraged to limit enrollment from one facility to 1/3 of the enrollment.

If a course is not full, any individual can attend.

Subsequent times the courses are offered, prioritization is as follows: 30% of slots in any given STARS required course to STARS participants, CCL referrals, and programs serving children with special needs.

Related to priority for the Certified Preschool Course, if an individual is a Level 4 or higher on The Practitioner Registry or enrolled in early childhood higher education coursework that prepares them for a CDA credential, apprenticeship certificate, 30 credit college certificate in early childhood, or associate's degree in early childhood (which would make them eligible for a Level 4 or higher upon completion), they should not be included in prioritization of offering the preschool courses.

STARS Training Availability

As with all training, STARS required or not, enrollment caps may exist to support quality learning environments and agencies must balance all training offered to meet the various needs of providers in their area. Additionally, if a course is not routinely full, agencies may adjust their training schedule to decrease the frequency of course offerings.

Director Requirements

In some programs there is not a clear "director" role and in some cases the "director" is the owner and is not responsible for the daily operations of the early childhood program.

If there is an Assistant Director or Education Manager, that individual may take trainings that are required for the Director (i.e. it may make sense for the person responsible for the education staff to take courses related to the care of children, and the person responsible for administration of the program to take the Program/Business Administration Scale training). This exception is for training purposes only, and not Practitioner Registry requirements. Any exception must be noted at the time of submission for a STAR level.

For the purposes of STARS, Center Directors may not train their staff on the required STARS trainings, unless:

- They have attended a train the trainer event preparing them for serving as a trainer in a specific curriculum such as the Certified Infant Toddler Course, Certified Preschool Teacher Course, CPR/First Aid, or ServSafe; and they are in

contract at the State's discretion to provide this training in a community; Or

- they have been contracted with by the state and participated in necessary reliability or certification training to provide statewide training; Or
- they are employed on a part time basis through the Child Care Resource & Referral Agency for purposes of offering training on their behalf.

In all situations, ECSB must determine appropriateness of Director involvement in training implementation, and Directors cannot train only their staff in a separate training for the purposes of STARS required courses; however, if staff members from a Director's facility participate in a community/state training in which their Director is the trainer as described above, this is acceptable.

Pyramid Model

Fidelity to the Pyramid Modules is important. The Pyramid Model Training Modules are based on the teaching pyramid model of promotion, prevention, and intervention and using evidence-based strategies and teaching practices to prevent and address children's challenging behavior. Each level of the Pyramid provides the foundation for the next level. *Training Modules must be taken in order as a series beginning with [Introduction to the Pyramid Module](#), followed by [E-Pyramid Birth-5 Module 1](#), and [E-Pyramid Birth-5 Module 2](#).*

All Pyramid Model trainings are available online. [Introduction to the Pyramid Model](#) can be found at [Child Care Training.org](http://ChildCareTraining.org). The [E-Pyramid Modules](#) can be found on the [ECP Statewide Training Calendar](#).

Only individuals who are approved through the Early Childhood Services Bureau and the MT Early Childhood Project may offer training on the Pyramid Model for purposes of STARS.

Preschool Teacher Certification Course

At STAR 3, lead teachers that are caring for preschoolers, must be enrolled in or have completed the MT Preschool Caregiver Education course. Equivalent courses will be determined on a

case by case basis. A waiver request and rationale must be submitted to the ECSB for determination.

“Enrolled in” is defined as: having applied for or being on a list for an upcoming course which must be started within the quarter following the submission for STAR Level 3 or higher. The ECSB will monitor the “enrolled in” staff, and if the participant(s) do not complete the course within 6 months of STAR 3 or higher being awarded, the facility will lose their STAR Level 3 or higher until this requirement is met and would then have to re-submit for STAR 3 or higher at their yearly renewal time frame.

The ECSB would encourage programs that may have long term staff which are not lead teachers to build these courses into those individual’s Professional Development Plan to complete this course within 2 years.

- If an individual is at Level 4 or higher on the Practitioner Registry, they are exempt from the Preschool Certification Course.
- If an individual is enrolled in a CDA program, in which the coursework is college based and will result in Level 4 on the Practitioner Registry, it can be used as an equivalent to the Preschool Caregiver Course requirement. This also applies to individuals enrolled in the Child Care Development Specialist Apprenticeship Program. Documentation of enrollment would be required at time of submission.
- If an individual has successfully completed Introduction to Early Childhood at a Montana Higher Education institution with the grade of a 'C' or better, this course can be waived. A transcript would be required for documentation at time of submission.

	Certified Infant Toddler Caregiver Course (CITC)	Certified Preschool Teacher Course (CPTC)
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Center-based	<i>Who:</i> Lead Teachers currently working with children ages 0-3.	<i>Who:</i> Lead Teachers currently working with children ages 4-5.
Family/Group	<i>Who:</i> Teachers currently working with or may work with children ages 0-3.	<i>Who:</i> Teachers currently working with children ages 4-5 and not likely to work with younger children.

The ECSB encourages all teaching staff to consider enrolling in an appropriate 60-hour course.

For Family & Group programs licensed for 0-5, the Certified Infant Toddler Caregiver Course should be completed if the program serves or might serve even one child ages 0-3. Only one 60-hour course is required. Therefore, careful consideration must be given to determine which course best meets learning goals and program needs. Your consultant can help to uncover the best option.

***Family and Group Homes are no longer required to take both the Certified Infant Toddler Caregiver (CITC) and Certified Preschool Teacher Course (CPTC).

Infant Toddler Certification Course

At STAR 3, lead teachers that are caring for infants and/or toddlers, must be enrolled in or have completed the MT Infant Toddler Caregiver Education course. Equivalent courses will be determined on a case by case basis. A waiver request and rationale must be submitted to the ECSB for determination.

“Enrolled in” is defined as: having applied for or being on a list for an upcoming course which must be started within the quarter following the submission for STAR Level 3 or higher. The ECSB will monitor the “enrolled in” staff, and if the participant(s) do not complete the course within 6 months of STAR 3 or higher being awarded, the facility will lose their STAR Level 3 or higher until this

requirement is met and would then have to re-submit for STAR 3 or higher at their yearly renewal time frame.

The ECSB would encourage programs that may have long term staff which are not lead teachers to build these courses into those individual's Professional Development plan to complete this course within 2 years.

*Programs need to consider the developmental levels of the children in their care. Developmental needs are individualized, and not all 2-year olds are alike. As a result, a program may want to consider sending some staff to the Infant Toddler course, and some staff to the Preschool course. The program would be expected to work with their consultant to identify the best option for their program and then document the decision and justify why the decision was made.

****For Family & Group Home programs**, At STAR 3, individuals must be enrolled in or have completed an appropriate 60-hour course. "Enrolled in" means applied for or accepted in a current or next semester course. Enrolled in courses must be completed within 6 months or a facility will lose their STAR 3 level.

The ECSB encourages all teaching staff to consider enrolling in an appropriate 60-hour course.

For Family & Group programs licensed for 0-5, the Certified Infant Toddler Caregiver Course should be completed if the program serves or might serve even one child ages 0-3. Only one 60-hour course is required. Therefore, careful consideration must be given to determine which course best meets learning goals and program needs. Your consultant can help to uncover the best option.

***Family and Group Homes are no longer required to take both the Certified Infant Toddler Caregiver (CITC) and Certified Preschool Teacher Course (CPTC).

Medication Administration

Note: Medication Administration I OR New Staff Health & Safety Orientation is a pre-requisite for Medication Administration II.

Centers

The director and all lead teachers must take Medication Administration 2 if medication is administered in the program.

Assistant teachers may administer only non-ingestible OTC medications (such as sun screen and diaper rash cream) if they do not take the courses.

Directors and/or Lead teachers will be responsible for making sure that the required consent (Non-Ingestible Over-the-Counter Medication Authorization Form) is on file for each child and that these medications are stored properly and are available (as provided by the parent and stored by the program) for use by a non-primary caregiver.

Family/Group

The Director and Early Childhood teacher must take the Medication Administration training, regardless of who administers medication.

All Programs

If a program does not administer medications at all, the Director must still complete the required Medication Administration trainings and a policy stating that medications are not administered at the facility must be uploaded at each of those criteria in the STAR level submission.

If an employee is a parent of a child enrolled in a program, and has not taken the Medication Administration, they are allowed to administer medication only to their own child. Appropriate licensing regulations such as: have a signed authorization on file, medication in a container with the prescription label or directions for use (for OTC's), record giving the medication on the Medication Administration Log (signed by the administering parent), and a Special Needs Health Care Plan on file for the child, when appropriate, should be followed.

Courses are available at [Child Care Training.org](http://ChildCareTraining.org).

Inclusion I & II

Lead teachers and all Family/Group Early Childhood teachers must be enrolled in or have completed these courses for STAR 4 and STAR 5. The only exclusions for the required Inclusion I & II courses would be an individual at Level 6 or above on the Practitioner Registry, or proof of a college course specific to inclusive care being successfully completed. College courses that embed inclusive practices do not qualify for this requirement. If an individual is requesting a waiver from these courses due to taking a college course, information from this course (syllabus, text used, etc.) must be submitted to the ECSB for review.

For any college course accepted as a replacement for Inclusion I & Inclusion II; a transcript with proof of course completion and passing grade must be uploaded as evidence in the checklist OR if the transcript is sent to ECP to be added to the individual's Professional Development Record (PDR), the PDR can be uploaded as evidence showing the course was completed. These courses are available at [Child Care Training.org](https://www.childcaretraining.org).

At this time, credits for these courses are awarded through the University of Montana but are coded as elective credits and **will not be applied to Early Childhood** or any other degree. If there are questions about college credit, please contact the CCT course instructor.

Requesting and Receiving Assessments

Baseline ERS Assessments will be conducted once a program is accepted into STARS. Baseline assessments will also occur if the program moves locations. Programs may request a baseline assessment as well, if there is a significant and permanent change to the physical space.

The assessment will be scheduled by the assessor, and results will be given to the STARS Consultant who will go over the results with the program. The STARS Consultant will accompany the assessor whenever possible on the baseline assessment, and/or debrief together after the assessment is conducted.

Environment Rating Scales (ERS) – all ERS assessments (ECERS-3; ITERS-3; FCCERS-3) must occur each time at STAR level 3 and 4, regardless of previous scores met (i.e. if the score for STAR 3 meets the criteria for STAR 4, the assessment must still occur at STAR 4). Once a program achieves STAR 5, assessments can occur every other year unless the following occurs: change in director, significant staff turnover, and/or at the request of the director.

Business Administration Scale (BAS) for Family/Group and Program Administration Scale (PAS) for Centers – will occur every 3 years after the initial assessment at which a STAR 3 or higher is achieved. If a program submits to move up a level and has met the score for the higher level within the past 3 years, an assessment is not required.

It is important to plan ahead – the time from when the assessment is scheduled to the time the summary report is complete can be a lengthy process.

- An assessment may be requested only once ALL criteria for the particular level being submitted for have been met and verified by an ECSB Program Specialist.
- Programs must verify that all criteria have been met including; Program Profile is complete, all STARS checklists completed, that all required staff are current on the Practitioner Registry and there are no

missing trainings for staff *unless a training plan is in place and **being followed***, staff list is correct with correct role types on the ECP/CCUBS Employee tab and this matches the most current master staff list, and all required documentation uploaded, and verification that all documentation for PAS/BAS assessments is together.

- If all of the above criteria are not met at the time the assessment is being requested, the ECSB will not schedule an assessment.

Once all criteria have been met and verified, the ECSB Program Specialist will verify on the STARS Site that all criteria have been met before assigning the program to an assessor for assessment scheduling. This submission will count as one of only three submissions the program will get for a STAR level. Once the assessment is complete, the application can be resubmitted as long as all incomplete items are met and the STARS to Quality Budget and QIP is uploaded. The STARS to Quality Budget and QIP should reflect the assessment result(s).

Programs wanting to submit for STAR 3 and above must submit their application no later than January 10. Programs can submit for STAR 3-5 beginning October 15. This can help to ensure that assessments can occur in a timely manner. The ECSB Program Specialist will notify the program if they are to receive an extended deadline to resubmit.

If a program cancels their assessment for any reason, there may not be a guarantee that the assessment can take place in time to submit for that application period.

The ECSB reserves the right to schedule assessments at any time for any program type, particularly for programs that have had significant programmatic or staff changes, change of Director/leadership, change in location, not meeting criteria, or any other significant changes according to the ECSB.

Assessments in STARS to Quality

Environment Rating Scales

The Early Childhood Services Bureau uses the Environment Ratings Scales (ECERS-3, ITERS-3 FCCERS-3) as the quality rating scales to be used to assess quality care in Centers, Head Start, Early Head Start, Group Homes, and Family Child Care Homes in Montana. Each scale is grounded in research, rigorously field tested, proven valid and reliable and continually updated for clarity and to reflect best practice and current research in the early childhood field. The ERS are the most commonly used instruments used in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) like STARS to Quality. The ERS evaluates programs on process quality (what children experience in their environment including various interactions and other features that support those interactions) which is indicative of positive child outcomes. Various studies have shown that children in classrooms with a high overall average ERS score have higher developmental outcomes than those children in classrooms with low scores and those differences in outcomes are lasting. The ERS is an appropriate tool used to assess and improve the environment, interactions, and experiences for the children and teachers in the classroom.

ERS All About Books

The “All About” books are great guides to help improve understanding of the ECERS-3 and the ITERS-3. The “All About” books are references and the scale is considered the “rule” when deciding on the score for the indicator. The “All About” books do not contain every scenario or account for every individual situation and therefore should be used strictly as a guide. While the scales are continually updated, the “All About” books are not, so at times they may no longer reflect the current interpretation of an indicator. It is helpful to use them as a complement to the scales when programs have difficulty understanding a specific indicator. Upon acceptance into STARS to Quality, centers will receive a copy of the All About Book(s) based upon the ERS tool(s) that will be used in their program. The All About ITERS-3 is not yet

released; however, programs may still utilize the All About ITERS-R for reference.

Definitions and Additional Notes

For definitions and clarifying information regarding the scales, reference should be made to each individual scale book, the notes for clarification; which are updated routinely by the authors, and the Montana Notes which address Montana-specific needs. [Montana Additional Notes](#) supersede the [Author's Additional Notes](#).

ERS Random Classroom Selection

Random selection is done by the assessor and the director when the assessor arrives at the facility. Before the assessment begins the assessor asks the director if it is expected to be a typical day. The director must have the class rosters printed with the children's names and birthdates as well as the teacher's names and their work hours. A classroom will be chosen through a random selection process facilitated by the assessor. Only one assessment can take place per day unless there is more than one assessor present. For each age group that a program serves, at least one-third of the classrooms in that age group will be selected for assessment. Once the classroom/s is chosen the assessment/s begins. If more than one assessment is required at the early childhood program and only one assessor is there, a random selection is done only for the classroom scale that is being done that day. The random selection for the other classroom(s) will occur the day those assessments are going to be done.

The following criteria will be used to determine the type and number of assessments required at each facility:

- Some centers may have more than one assessment completed at their facilities due to the facility serving multiple age groups with separate staff for each age group. 1/3 of each age group will require an assessment (Ex. A center has 3 preschool age classrooms where the majority of the children in each are 36 months and older and 2 infant/toddler classrooms where the majority of the

children are under 36 months. This program will receive one ECERS-3 and one ITERS-3).

- ITERS-3 will be used in rooms where the majority of children are birth to age 3.
- If the facility is an Infant/Toddler only program, then the "1/3 of all classrooms must be assessed" rule applies for determining the number of assessments.
- For centers with multiple classrooms where the majority of all the children in each group are ages 3-5 then the "1/3 of all classrooms must be assessed" rule applies. The ECERS-3 assessment tool will be used on 1/3 of the classrooms.
- For Family and Group Care the FCCERS –3 will be used. If the children are divided into two distinctly different groups except for routines and outdoor playtime only one assessment needs to be completed but the assessor will need to do a random selection to choose the room to be assessed.

See the chart below for specific information regarding the "one-third" rule:

Number of Classrooms per Age Group	Number of Assessments per Scale
1-4	1
5-7	2
8-10	3
11-13	4

Assessments Completed Based on License Issued by CCL

Due to the many and varied ways that Early Childhood programs can be configured in Montana, it is important to note that each Early Childhood Program will be assessed based on the license issued by CCL. For instance, if the program is licensed as a group home the FCCERS-3 will be used even if the program is run more like a center. If a facility is licensed as a center or only serving infants, then the ages of the children will determine which scale/s will be used for assessment and is based on the majority of the children. Some centers may have an ITERS-3 and an ECERS-3

assessment. To determine which scale to use in a mixed age group classroom, choose the majority, i.e. how old are most of the children in the room.

Requirements for an Assessment to Occur

The director must have a copy of the rosters for each classroom with the children's names and birthdates; as well as the teacher's names and work hours before the random selection process can begin. The director must supply the assessor with a copy of the daily schedule for each group before the assessment begins.

- To make the assessment fair and valid, observations need to be on a typical day. For the purpose of the assessment "typical" means a day when the usual routine and the usual teachers are present. Assessors will start the 3-hour observation once the regular teacher and regular group are in attendance with at least half of the children present. (Ex. If 10 children are enrolled, 6 or more must be present). The assessment cannot be conducted on a day with special activities, special guests, or different teachers.
- For a FCCERS-3 assessment it is important that all of the age groups of enrolled children are represented. If all age groups are not represented within the first hour of the assessment the assessment is called and rescheduled for a later date. For example, if an infant is enrolled the infant must be present during the assessment. Infants are children birth to 11 months old. The assessor will not stay to conduct the assessment if it is not a typical day. The assessor will have to call the assessment and reschedule for a later date.

During the ERS Assessment

Only the interactions observed from the staff assigned to the particular group of children being assessed can be counted in the assessment (Ex. If the director is not normally present or assigned to work with the children his/her interactions will not be counted). However, any interactions that occur which are very negative will be counted in the assessment regardless of whether the individual is assigned to the group or not. The assessor should let the

providers know this during random selection, so the provider is aware of this before the assessment begins.

In addition, the children listed on the classroom roster can't be moved to another classroom during the assessment. If children are transferred during the assessment it must be called and rescheduled because the removal of children can affect the validity of the assessment.

During the assessment it is important that the assessor has access to all spaces used for care including outdoor areas and indoor areas, cabinets, drawers, and closets. It is also important the assessor asks which areas are used for child care and which are private spaces in the home or facility. Assessors are to be respectful of the space and must ask if they are not sure which areas the children have access to. The assessor must stay with the children during the assessment and go everywhere they go. The assessors need to look at the total environment and this includes every area and all materials the children have access to.

The assessors will be using electronic notebooks to conduct their assessments.

Assessors are to be kind and courteous but must not engage with the children or the caregivers during the assessment unless the children's direct safety is compromised.

Scoring is based off what is observed during the 3-hour observation. There are times the Assessors are permitted or required to stay longer, such as if a specific routine did not occur (i.e. meal time). In this instance programs will still be scored on this item but will receive a score of no higher than a 3. Programs could possibly get credit in the 1's, but would not receive credit, at all, for 3.1 regarding schedule. Interactions that occur within the extra time will not be counted and scoring will be based on the item not occurring in the 3-hour observation. The assessor will not be able to share any information about the assessment, scores, potential licensing violations, or provide feedback at any time during or after the assessment.

Assessment Score Review

Requirements for minimum assessment scores are found in the STARS Standards.

When determining if a program has met assessment criteria for their desired STAR level and more than 1 ERS assessment has been conducted, the average scores of each of the assessment criteria will be reviewed to determine if the assessment criteria has been met. This process happens for more than one ECERS, and for a program that receives at least 1 ECERS and 1 ITERS. STARS to Quality is about the program's quality as a whole, so looking at the average scores supports that model.

Program Administration Scale

The PAS assessment is conducted for Centers by a certified assessor. It is designed to measure the overall quality of administrative practices of early care and education programs and serves as a useful guide to improve programs. The PAS is done completely on-site. A former PAS score can be used to submit for a new STAR level if the former PAS assessment occurred within the calendar year and only if there have not been any significant program or staff changes. The interview portion of the PAS Assessment takes approximately 3 hours. The time required for documentation review and tour can vary depending on the facility. Approximately half way through the documentation review process the assessor may give the director a list of missing documentation to allow them time to find the information before the assessor leaves but is not required to do so. Documentation needs to be available before the documentation review begins. The assessor will not need to leave the center with any of the documentation from the document review. The document review and interview should occur in a quiet location in the center. If the documentation is not provided before the assessor leaves then it does not count towards the assessment.

Business Administration Scale

The BAS is completed with Family and Group Homes by a certified assessor. It is designed to measure and improve the overall quality

of business practice in Family and Group Care settings. A former BAS score can be used to submit for a new STAR level if the former BAS assessment occurred within the calendar year and only if there have not been any significant program or staff changes. Often in the State of Montana, the interview portion of the assessment will be done over the phone before the on-site document review and tour of the facility take place. The interview portion can't be done while children are in care due to the dynamics involved with family care, so the interview will often need to occur either during the evening or on a weekend, and/or via phone. The interview should last approximately one hour. Next, a formal documentation review and tour of the facility will be scheduled with the program director. The time required for the documentation review and tour can vary depending on the facility. Approximately half way through the documentation review process the assessor may give the director a list of missing documentation to allow them time to find the information before the assessor leaves but is not required to do so. If the documentation is not provided before the assessor leaves than it does not count towards the assessment.

Finalized Reports

ERS Baseline assessment reports will be sent directly to the STARS Consultant. STAR 3-5 formal assessment reports will be available in the STARS Site in the Assessment Tab once finalized. Once the summary report(s) are available, the ECSB Program Specialist will notify the director and consultant via email that the report is accessible on the site. Confidentiality of these assessment reports is crucial. Programs must verify that the score required for a specific level has been met before a program can submit for a STAR level.

Acronyms Used in STARS

AAP– American Academy of Pediatrics

ACES – Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

ASQ – Ages & Stages Questionnaire

ASQ-SE – Ages & Stages Questionnaire, Social Emotional

BAS– Business Administration Scale 2nd edition (Family/Group)

CACFP– Child and Adult Care Food Program

CCL- Child Care Licensing MT

CCR&R– Child Care Resource & Referral Agency

CDA– Child Development Associate

CITC– Certified Infant Toddler Caregiver Course (MT)

CPTC– Certified Preschool Teacher Course (MT)

CSEFEL– Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

DAP– Developmentally Appropriate Practice

DPHHS– Department of Public Health & Human Services (MT)

ECAT – Early Childhood Assistant Teacher/Assistant Teacher for Centers

ECERS-3– Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale– 3rd edition

ECLT – Early Childhood Lead Teacher/Lead Teacher for Centers

ECP– Early Childhood Project (MT)

ECSB– Early Childhood Services Bureau (MT)

ECT – Early Childhood Teacher for Family/Group Programs

EHS– Early Head Start

EQT – Education, Qualifications, & Training

ERS– Environment Rating Scales

FCCERS– 3– Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale– 3rd edition

FCP – Family & Community Partnerships

HQSE – High Quality Supportive Environments

HS– Head Start

IMIL – I Am Moving, I Am Learning

ITERS-3– Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale-3rd edition

LPM – Leadership & Program Management

MELS – Montana Early Learning Standards

MOU– Memorandum of Understanding

NAEYC– National Association for the Education of Young Children

NAFCC– National Association of Family Child Care

PAS– Program Administration Scale 2nd edition (Center)

RGS – Staff/Caregiver-to-Child Ratio & Group Size

Definitions Used in STARS

Business Administration Scale 2nd Edition (BAS)

Designed to serve as a reliable and easy to administer tool for measuring and improving overall quality of business practices in family child care settings. High quality programs are run by providers who are intentional in their work, committed to ongoing professional development, engaged in ethical practice, and savvy about assessing community resources to enhance their program's effectiveness.

Program Administration Scale 2nd Edition (PAS)

Designed to reliably measure the leadership and management practices of center-based early childhood organizations. It uses a 7-point rating scale (inadequate to excellent) measuring leadership functions relating to helping an organization clarify and affirm values, articulate a vision, set goals, and chart a course of action to meet those goals over time. It also measures management functions pertaining to the actual orchestration of tasks and the development of systems to carry out the organizational mission.

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-3 (ECERS-3)

Designed for preschool, kindergarten, and child care classrooms serving children 3 to 5 years of age. This widely used program quality assessment instrument can be used by program directors for supervision and program improvement, by teaching staff for self-assessment, by agency staff for monitoring, and in teacher training programs. The assessment tool is organized in six subscales (Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language and Literacy, Learning Activities, Interaction, Program Structure). Each of the 35 items is expressed as a 7-point scale with indicators.

Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-3 (FCCERS-3)

A widely used program quality assessment instrument designed for use in family child care programs and is suitable for programs serving children from infancy through school-age. FCCERS-3 is

organized in six subscales (Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language and Books, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure). This quality assessment instrument accommodates the wider range found in family child care programs and has a deep focus on sensitivity to cultural and socioeconomic diversity.

Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale-3 (ITERS-3)

Designed for use in center-based child care programs serving birth to 3 years of age. The ITERS-3 can be used by program directors for supervision and program improvement, by teaching staff for self-assessment, by agency staff for monitoring, and in teacher training programs. ITERS-3 is organized in six subscales (Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language and Books, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure). Each of the 33 items is expressed as a 7-point scale with indicators.

Montana Notes

There are specific [Montana Notes](#) for each of the assessment scales used. These notes are used to better define terms, to support our unique programs in MT, and give additional information and feedback regarding the criteria and the additional author's notes within the scales. These notes are crucial to read through when administering a self-assessment and are used in the formal assessment process as well. MT Notes are reviewed for updates as necessary. These notes will be posted to the Assessments tab on the [STARS](#) website.