BEST BEGINNINGS QUALITY INITIATIVES

CHILD CARE 7 - 1

STARS to Quality Program

Supersedes: Child Care 7-1 (2/1/11)

References: 52-2-701 - 704 & 52-2-711 - 713 MCA
Sections 37.80.101-103, 37.80.201-202, 37.80.205-206, 37.80.301-302,
37.80.305 -306, 37.80.315-316, 37.80.501 37.95.620 ARM
45 CFR 98.20 – 47

Overview

The Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program is the quality rating improvement System [QRIS] for licensed and registered early childhood care and education settings in Montana.

Quality Rating Improvement Systems [QRIS] are essential for improving child care quality and later educational outcomes for all children. The Montana Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program uses the quality rating systems to create quality improvement plans, provide coaching support, and offers financial incentives to reward programs for continual quality improvement and to support quality improvement initiatives within the individual programs.

Montana's Best Beginnings STARS to Quality program is a voluntary 5-star quality rating improvement system, which uses research based standards to drive quality improvement in the early childhood care and education settings in Montana. The Standards are composed of five research based categories which have been shown to improve and maintain quality in early childhood care and education settings. These five categories are; Education Qualifications and Training, Staff/Caregiver to Child Ratio and Group Size, Family/Community Partnerships, Leadership and Program Management, and Environments for Care and Learning. The Standards may be viewed at www.stars.mt.gov.

QRIS Composition

The quality system for Montana has several focuses:

1)   Workforce Development - Workforce support will be managed through the Montana Early Childhood Project, encouraging professional development along a continuum of training.

2)   Quality Rating Improvement System - The QRIS is based on two foundations, improvement and assessment. Assessments will be conducted by use of Environment Rating Scales, Program and Business Administration Scales, Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool, and the Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale. Improvement will be supported by the MT Pyramid Model training and tools including The Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) and The Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS) in addition to supporting individual program needs and identified quality improvement steps in accord with the criteria outlined in the STARS Standards.

3)   Infrastructure to administer the program – The infrastructure is designed to provide training, coaching and technical assistance, and to validate the STARS system.

Resources and support will be provided to programs in order to assist them as they move through the levels. Infrastructure will be provided by Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, the Early Childhood Project, and other state determined resources.

Incentives for QRIS

STARS incentives are to be used for continuous quality improvement, staff support and salaries, professional development, equipment, etc. Anything that would assist a program in moving to the next level and maintaining the STAR level achieved. STARS incentives must be used in accord with a quality improvement plan.

- STARS programs are eligible to receive Accreditation Scholarships though the Early Childhood Project. Accreditation costs are also allowable in the STARS budget.
- Programs are subject to random audits of STARS incentive funds. Early Childhood Services Bureau reserves the right to request documentation of STARS incentive funds spent, according the program budget and quality improvement plan, at the time.
- The Best Beginnings Program Specialist will audit one-third of the STAR 2 and above centers quarterly to verify average daily attendance, which relates to the incentive amount.

Workforce incentives are available in a variety of forms and are not tied directly to the Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program, and have separate eligibility criteria.

All incentives are based on available funding and are subject to change.