YoungStar Evaluation Criteria: Group Child Care 2021/2022

Congratulations!

You are taking an important step on the path of continuous quality improvement by participating in YoungStar. This document will give you the information you need to assess your program's current strengths, identify opportunities for improvement, and prepare for your YoungStar rating.

Let's get started!

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General Information

The care children receive both at home and away from home couldn't be more important. Studies show that children who experience engaging, one-on-one activities in safe, healthy, and nurturing learning environments have a better chance at lifelong success. They're more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to engage in criminal activity and often earn higher wages throughout their lifetime.

The Department of Children and Families is committed to improving the quality of care for all young children. YoungStar, Wisconsin's Child Care Quality Rating and Improvement System, is helping to make it happen by:

- Helping programs improve in quality
- Offering financial incentives that support both programs and families
- Giving families meaningful information at https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/parents/resources to make informed care decisions

This work is done in partnership with multiple stakeholders, or partners, who also support high-quality early care and education in Wisconsin:

Supporting Families Together Association (SFTA)
SFTA is a statewide association committed to making every early childhood a great one. SFTA employs Environment Rating Scale (ERS) Observers and Micro-Grant Specialists while directing other YoungStar services in partnership with Child Care Resource and Referral agencies.
- https://supportingfamiliestogether.org/

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Agencies
CCR&R agencies are located throughout the state, helping parents find child care, and offering training and support to both families and child care programs. CCR&Rs employ YoungStar Consultants and serve as the local YoungStar offices.
- https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/program/localoffice

Child Care Regulation
YoungStar builds on the basic health and safety requirements set by Wisconsin's Bureau of Early Care Regulation. To be eligible to receive YoungStar services, programs must be regulated and maintain regulatory compliance. Programs out of regulatory compliance are given a 1 Star rating and are not able to receive Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy authorizations. You can find three years of regulation history and YoungStar rating information on the Child Care Finder website.
- https://childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov/Search/Search.aspx

The Registry
The Registry provides a listing of training opportunities throughout the state and assigns career levels to the early education workforce according to each individual's education and training background. YoungStar accesses information from The Registry to verify the education and training of lead program staff.
- https://www.the-registry.org/

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA)
WECA is a statewide agency offering professional development, advocacy, and support to early childhood providers. WECA administers the T.E.A.C.H. and REWARD programs, making scholarships and salary stipends available to child care providers.
- https://wisconsinearlychildhood.org/programs/t-e-a-c-h

Participation

Participation in YoungStar is voluntary. However, programs that wish to accept Wisconsin Shares payments from families are required to participate.

There is no cost for programs to participate in YoungStar. In fact, YoungStar provides low-cost training, free consultation and coaching, and targeted micro-grants to support a program's quality improvement efforts.

Programs choose the type of rating they would like. To achieve a 3 Star rating or higher, a program must either receive an onsite rating or be accredited by a YoungStar approved accrediting body or Head Start grantee.

Contract and Renewal

Programs interested in participating in YoungStar for the first time must submit an initial contract to their Local YoungStar Office. An initial YoungStar contract can be found on the Department of Children and Families website.

- https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/providers/contract

To continue participating in YoungStar, you must renew your contract every two years. Renewal and off-year service contracts are mailed directly to programs and are also available in the Provider Portal.

- https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/provider-portal/info

Programs are eligible to receive technical assistance and a micro-grant every year, whether it is a required rating year or not.

Before submitting a contract, programs should review all YoungStar policies.

- https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/providers/policy

Technical Assistance

Once your contract is received with a request for free YoungStar support services, a YoungStar Consultant will contact your program to schedule an initial visit and discuss your program's YoungStar goals.

Your Consultant will be your navigator as you move through the YoungStar process.

- They will support you as you fill out a self-assessment and develop a quality improvement plan
- They will review the YoungStar Evaluation Criteria with you and provide resources and assistance to help you achieve your quality improvement goals
- They will assist you in micro-grant planning and purchasing
- They will help you identify professional development opportunities

Onsite Rating

Whether you receive a Technical Rating (earning up to a 3 Star rating) or a Formal Rating (earning up to a 5 Star rating), your Consultant will use the YoungStar Evaluation Criteria to assess your program.

Programs that are eligible for, and choose to have, a Formal Rating will also be assessed using one or more Environment Rating Scale (ERS) observations.

- An ERS Observer will work with you to set up and complete ERS observations for the required classrooms
- Following the completion of the ERS observation(s), the ERS Observer and your Consultant will meet with you to review the results of your rating and provide meaningful feedback to support your future quality improvement efforts

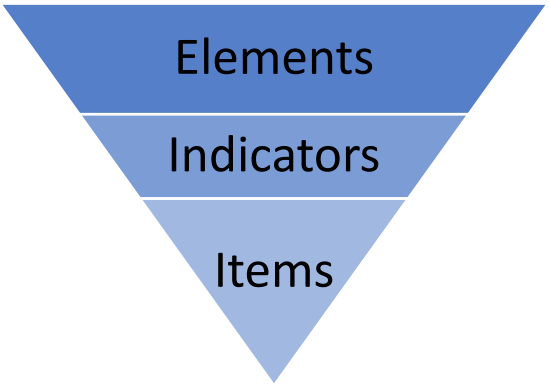
How to Use This Document

The *YoungStar Evaluation Criteria* document outlines what will be observed and/or verified for a YoungStar rating. This document should be used to prepare for a rating and to learn more about high-quality early education practices.

The document is organized into four elements of program quality. These elements are further broken down into indicators and items that provide additional details.

The four **Elements** that will be evaluated are:

- **A.** Lead Staff Education
- **B.** Learning Environment and Curriculum
- **C.** Business and Professional Practices
- **D.** Health and Well-Being



High-Quality Practices

Following the 3 Star requirements are additional High-Quality Practices that programs must demonstrate to achieve a 4 or 5 Star rating.

To earn a 4 Star rating, programs must demonstrate at least 4 of the 7 High-Quality Practices.

To earn a 5 Star rating, programs must demonstrate at least 5 of the 7 High-Quality Practices.

1. Curriculum Aligned with *Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards/School-Age Curricular Framework*
2. Individual Child Portfolios
3. Intentional Planning to Improve Individual Child Outcomes
4. Developmental Screening
5. Tracking Child Outcomes
6. Social Emotional/Inclusion Training
7. *Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education with Mandated Reporter* Training

Verification

Throughout the document you will find verification sections explaining how the YoungStar Consultant will verify whether a program meets the requirements or not.

YoungStar Changes 2021/2022

The YoungStar rating system has moved from a point system to a block structure

Programs no longer earn points for indicators, instead they will be rated on the required items for each star level, with the addition of seven High-Quality Practices for programs hoping to earn 4 or 5 Stars. These High-Quality Practices, previously optional points, were chosen because of their strong connection to improved child outcomes.

Programs will be rated as follows:

- 3 Star rating – Programs must meet the required criteria only
- 4 Star rating – Programs must meet the required criteria + 4 of 7 High-Quality Practices + average ERS program score of 3.50
- 5 Star rating – Programs must meet the required criteria + 5 of 7 High-Quality Practices + average ERS program score of 4.50

Group Child Care Rating Overview – Block System

	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
High-Quality Practices 1. Curriculum Aligned with WMELS/SACF 2. Individual Child Portfolios 3. Intentional Planning to Improve Child Outcomes 4. Developmental Screening 5. Tracking Child Outcomes 6. Social Emotional/Inclusion of Children with Special Needs Training 7. *Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education* Training				Program demonstrates 5 of 7 additional areas of high-quality practices
			Program demonstrates 4 of 7 additional areas of high-quality practices	
Health and Well-Being		Program progresses on healthy nutrition and/or physical activity policy and practice goals	Program progresses on healthy nutrition and/or physical activity policy and practice goals	Program progresses on healthy nutrition and/or physical activity policy and practice goals
Business and Professional Practices		Ongoing yearly budget, budget review, payment agreement, and record-keeping Some family engagement items	Ongoing yearly budget, budget review, payment agreement, and record-keeping Many family engagement items High-quality employment policies	Ongoing yearly budget, budget review, payment agreement, and record-keeping Many family engagement items High-quality employment policies Strategic planning around staff retention strategies
Environment and Curriculum		Developmentally appropriate interactions, materials, and environment, incorporating WI Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) or School-Age Curricular Framework (SACF)	Developmentally appropriate interactions, materials, and environment, incorporating WMELS/SACF ERS Average Score of 3.50	Developmentally appropriate interactions, materials, and environment, incorporating WMELS/SACF ERS Average Score of 4.50
Education and Training		Lead Teachers with Registry Level 7 or higher for 25% of all classrooms AND Level 6 or higher for 25% of additional classrooms Director with Registry Level 10 or higher	Lead Teachers with Registry Level 9 or higher for 50% of all classrooms AND Level 7 or higher for all additional classrooms Director with Registry Level 12 or higher	Lead Teachers with Registry Level 12 or higher for all classrooms Director with Registry Level 13 or higher
Regulatory Compliance	In Regulatory Compliance	In Regulatory Compliance	In Regulatory Compliance	In Regulatory Compliance

Updated Environment Rating Scales (ERS)

Starting in 2021, YoungStar will begin using three newly updated ERS tools. Three of the four Environment Rating Scales have been updated from the Revised editions to the new 3rd editions:

- Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R) to Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-3 (ITERS-3)
- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) to Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-3 (ECERS-3)
- Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised (FCCERS-R) to Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-3 (FCCERS-3)

Note: The School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale-Updated (SACERS-U) has not been revised and therefore school-age classrooms/groups will continue to be assessed with the current SACERS-U.

Updated Developmentally Appropriate Environments (DAE) Requirements

- Nature/Science materials are required for classrooms where all children are 24 months or older
- Art materials are required for classrooms where all children are 24 months or older
- The number and type of required organized areas for play has been modified based on age and program type:
    - Infant/Toddler – Classrooms with all children under 24 months must have accessible materials provided within at least one *play area*. A ***play area*** is a space that is large enough for children to play with accessible, organized materials. Like materials are organized and stored together.
        - An interest center can be used for this age group and is considered a type of play area
    - Older Toddler/Two – Classrooms with any child between 24 months and 36 months must have at least three *interest centers* with accessible materials organized by type. An ***interest center*** is a clearly defined play area created for a particular kind of play with accessible, organized materials.
        - Although not required for children 18 months - 24 months of age, programs are encouraged to provide interest centers for this age group
    - Preschool and School-Age – Classrooms/groups with all children over age 3 must have accessible materials organized by type into at least five *interest centers.*

Updated Budget/Record Keeping Criteria

- Parent payment agreements must be on file between the program and families that have a Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy authorization
- For YoungStar purposes, Consultants will no longer review tax records
- For YoungStar purposes, Consultants will no longer review menus and meal counts

Updated Healthy Nutrition and Physical Activity Criteria

- After a program initially earns the Healthy Nutrition and Physical Activity indicator, they must demonstrate progress on at least one healthy nutrition and/or physical activity policy and/or practice goal from their previous QIP in order to continue to earn this indicator
- For YoungStar purposes, Consultants will no longer verify the program's allergy policy

Updated Layout

- Both rating requirements and support information are included in this document
- The rating verification sections after each indicator have been moved to a separate document

Requirements for Onsite Rating

To be eligible for an onsite rating, programs must complete a Self-Assessment and develop a Quality Improvement Plan.

Indicator: Program Self-Assessment

Self-assessments help programs become aware of their strengths and areas for improvement. Before a program can receive a rating or earn a micro-grant, they must complete a YoungStar-approved, program-wide, self-assessment tool. Seventy-five percent (75%) of Lead Teachers and the Director must have reviewed/contributed to the self-assessment. This can be demonstrated with a document signed by each staff member. The self-assessment must have been completed within the past 12 months, and not used for a previous rating. Self-assessments should match the age of the majority of children in care.

Programs must choose from the following self-assessments:

- YoungStar Self-Assessment for Group Child Care
  - English - https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/ys-self-assessment/2018-ys-gcc-selfassess.docx
  - Spanish - https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/ys-self-assessment/2018-ys-gcc-selfassess-s.docx
- HighScope Program Quality Assessment - https://highscope.org/our-practice/child-assessment/pqa/

Note: ERS tools cannot be used as a self-assessment.

For accredited programs or those in the process of accreditation, the YoungStar approved accrediting body's self-study/self-assessment/self-observation tool may be used to meet the self-assessment requirement. The full tool must be completed in its entirety each year, with at least 75% of Lead Teachers and the Director reviewing/contributing to the self-assessment. The self-assessment must have been completed within the past 12 months and not used to earn a previous microgrant. YoungStar-approved accreditation self-studies:

- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- Association for Early Learning Leaders | National Accreditation Commission (NAC)
- American Montessori Society (AMS)
- City of Madison
- Council on Accreditation (COA)
- National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA)
- Cognia – NCA/SACS/NWAC (formerly AdvancEd)

Indicator: Quality Improvement Plan

Programs must create a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) based on the most recent program-wide self-assessment that identifies areas of strength and at least three areas for improvement. The QIP must also include an action plan for each area of improvement.

VERIFICATION

Self-Assessment:
The Consultant will verify that a program-wide self-assessment has been completed within the past 12 months, document the type of self-assessment tool used, and the date the self-assessment was completed. The self-assessment should be contributed to and reviewed by at least 75% of Lead Teachers, as well as the Director. Programs can create and attach a document signed by teachers and the Director stating that they have reviewed and contributed to the self-assessment.

Quality Improvement Plan:
The Consultant will verify that a QIP has been completed. The QIP should identify areas of strength and three areas of improvement, with a completed action plan for each area of improvement.

Requirements for 3 Star Rating or Higher

To be eligible for a 3 Star rating or higher, programs must create and maintain an accurate Registry Program Profile.

The Registry Program Profile

The Registry Program Profile is used to verify the training and education of teachers and directors. The following steps MUST be completed by the program:

1. Create a Registry Program Profile.
   Visit: https://www.the-registry.org/ResourceCenter.aspx to learn more about creating a Program Profile.
2. Complete the "Classroom Tab" within the Program Profile. In this section enter each classroom within the program, the number of children the classroom can have, and the Lead Teacher assigned to work the most peak hours in the classroom. Any changes in staffing must be updated in the Program Profile as they occur. The information entered in the Program Profile is automatically used to verify the YoungStar education and training requirements that help determine the program's YoungStar rating. The rating is then used to determine the YoungStar Adjustment (if applicable) your program receives through the Wisconsin Shares Subsidy Program.

When creating your Registry Program Profile remember:

- Each employee must have an individual Registry membership - designating your program as their employer - and Career Level (determined by The Registry) before being assigned to a position on the Program Profile
- A person can only be associated with one program's Registry Program Profile at a time. This means a person working at more than one program must choose one Program Profile to be listed on.
- Every classroom that is open at least 25% of the time that the program cares for children, between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. (up to 40 hours), must be listed on the Program Profile
    - If the program is open 40 hours or more per week, then any classroom that is open 10 or more hours per week needs to be on the Program Profile

Note: Programs can refer to the Maintaining Your Registry Program Profile policy (https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/2016-ys-maintain-profile.pdf) for more information and/or contact the Child Care Information Center (CCIC) at 1-800-362-7353 for assistance.

Element A: Lead Staff Education

Research indicates that providers with higher levels of education are linked to improved outcomes for children. YoungStar verifies Lead Teacher and Director educational qualifications through The Registry. This requires staff to be entered into a Registry Program Profile (https://www.the-registry.org/ResourceCenter.aspx).

Indicator: Lead Teacher Qualifications
Lead Teachers with Registry **Level 7** or higher for 25% of all classrooms and Lead Teachers with Registry **Level 6** or higher for an additional 25% of all classrooms – ***Required for 3 Stars***
Lead Teachers with Registry **Level 9** or higher for 50% of classrooms; all other classrooms have a Lead Teacher with Registry **Level 7** or higher – ***Required for 4 Stars***
Lead Teachers with Registry **Level 12*** or higher for 100% of classrooms – ***Required for 5 Stars***

* For YoungStar purposes, 60 credits beyond high school with at least 30 of those credits related to early childhood or school-age care is accepted as equivalent to Registry Level 12.

Each YoungStar Lead Teacher Assigned to The Registry Program Profile will:

- Have their educational qualifications counted toward the program's YoungStar rating
- Plan, implement, and supervise the daily activities for a group of children
- Communicate with families
- Perform duties under the supervision of a Director
- Spend the greatest number of hours between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. in a given classroom each week

Examples:

- If a program is open from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Calvin works 25 hours per week and Lincoln works 35 hours per week in a given classroom/group, Lincoln should be listed as the Lead Teacher for the classroom.
- If Jackie and Drew both work 8 hours per day, from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., either one could be listed as the Lead Teacher in the Program Profile for that classroom.
- A program is open 24 hours per day. In the Bumblebee classroom, Juliet works from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and Jeff works from 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. Juliet must be listed as the Lead Teacher in the Program Profile because, even though both she and Jeff work 8 hours per day, only 3 of Jeff's hours are before 6:00 p.m. Therefore, Juliet has more hours between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Note: Only the education of the person assigned as "Lead Teacher" in the Program Profile will be considered for this indicator.

Indicator: Director Qualifications
Registry **Level 10** or higher – ***Required for 3 Stars***
Registry **Level 12*** or higher – ***Required for 4 Stars***
Registry **Level 13** or higher – ***Required for 5 Stars***

* For YoungStar purposes, 60 credits beyond high school with at least 30 of those credits related to early childhood or school-age care is accepted as equivalent to Registry Level 12.

Note: Registry levels **do not** reflect licensing requirements. The individual serving in a position must minimally meet licensing requirements for that position. All questions regarding whether a staff person meets the minimum requirements for their position should be directed to a licensing or certification specialist.

The YoungStar Director (Director of Record or Licensee) assigned to The Registry Program Profile will:

- Have their educational qualifications counted toward the program's YoungStar rating
- Be on site weekly for at least 25% of the total number of hours they work for the program per week (up to 40 hours)
- Be responsible for:
    - Supervising the planning and implementation of curriculum
    - Supervising program staff
    - Staff meetings and orientation
    - Continuing education for the staff

Example:

- A Director who works 40 hours per week (between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.) would need to be on site for at least 25% of the time, or 10 hours per week, carrying out Director responsibilities in a single, full-day center location. If the Director works less than 40 hours per week, they would need to be on site for 25% of the time they work for the program. The person serving as the Director may step in to help with Lead Teacher responsibilities if a staff member is ill, during staff break/mealtimes, when special programming or activities require more adults to be in the room, or for emergencies.

Alternate Options for Director Qualifications

Centralized Administration (for programs with multiple sites)

If the individual in the role of Director is off site, the program may ask for a variation from the typical YoungStar Director requirements. Responsibilities 1 and 2 (listed above under YoungStar Director) must be performed by a person who is on site at the center for at least 25% of the total number of hours they work for the program. Responsibilities 3 and 4 may be performed by a person(s) located off site.

In these cases, the program has two options:

- **Option 1**: List the person who is off site performing responsibilities 3 (Staff meetings and orientation) and 4 (Continuing education for the staff) as the Director.

- **Option 2**: List the person who is on site performing responsibilities 1 (Supervising the planning and implementation of curriculum) and 2 (Supervising program staff) as the Director. If the program wants to choose this option and the person listed as the Director is also a Lead Teacher, the rules for Dual-Role (see below) must be followed.

Dual-Role

In the following cases, programs licensed for 30 or fewer children may have a Director who is also listed as a Lead Teacher in the Registry Program Profile:

- **To earn 3 Stars:** The person in the dual-role must have Director responsibilities for at least 25% of the time the program is open* (up to 40 hours) and meet the educational qualifications for a 3 Star rating
    - For example, if a program is open 40 hours per week, the person in the dual-role would need to be in the Director role for 10 hours per week (between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.) and be at a Registry Level 10 or higher (as verified through The Registry Program Profile)

- **To earn 4 Stars:** The person in the dual-role must have Director responsibilities at least 37.5% of the time the program is open* (up to 40 hours) and meet the educational qualifications for a 4 Star rating
    - For example, if a program is open 40 hours per week, the person in the dual-role would need to be in the Director role for 15 hours per week and be at a Registry Level 12 or higher (as verified through The Registry Program Profile)

  * For dual-role eligibility, "the time the program is open" refers to the number of hours the program can accept children for care. If a program has additional hours where staff are present, but no children can be in care (e.g., staff meetings), these hours do not count toward the time the program is open.

Note: Dual-role is not an option for 5 Star ratings.

VERIFICATION

Lead Teacher Verification:
All educational requirements will be verified using The Registry Program Profile. The Consultant will visit each classroom to verify that the Lead Teacher present in the classroom is the Lead Teacher assigned to that classroom on the Registry Program Profile. If the Consultant cannot verify this, the rating will not be completed. For further verification, time sheets or pay stubs may be required.

Director Options:
Director educational requirements will be verified using The Registry Program Profile. To verify alternative options for Director qualifications, schedules, pay stubs, timesheets, job descriptions, employee handbooks, and/or employment policy and procedure documentation may be required.

Element B: Learning Environment and Curriculum

Providing a safe, nurturing, and responsive environment is the foundation for supporting the learning and development of young children.

Indicator: Developmentally Appropriate Environments (DAE)

Teachers create developmentally appropriate environments by intentionally creating a physical and social environment - including the materials, room arrangement, interactions, schedules, and routines that make up each day - that supports the development of the whole child, focusing on the individual needs and interests of each child, and guided by the *Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards* (WMELS) or *School-Age Curricular Framework* (SACF).

Programs must demonstrate the following:

Item 1: Staff members provide developmentally appropriate interactions and promote positive relationships

All the following must be observed:

- All staff/staff and staff/child interactions must be positive or at least neutral
- Staff and children demonstrate enjoyment in being with each other
- Staff respond to children's needs promptly and appropriately
- Staff have developmentally appropriate expectations for children's behavior

At least two of these additional practices must be observed:

- Staff are near children when promoting positive interactions and learning opportunities
- Staff initiate language and literacy activities to support language development (e.g., storytelling, reading books, nursery rhymes, sign language, allowing children time to respond, expanding on children's vocabulary)
- Staff have turn-taking conversations with most children and ask follow-up questions with a pleasant tone of voice
- Staff intentionally create opportunities for all children to engage in peer interaction in ways that are appropriate for each child
- Staff provide children with descriptive feedback for their efforts or accomplishments (e.g., instead of simply saying "Good job," staff are more descriptive by saying, "You picked up those blocks; that helps to keep our classroom safe")

Item 2: The environment is organized into interest centers or play areas to support children's meaningful play. Materials in all required interest centers and/or play areas must be accessible for children to use for the entire uninterrupted free choice time period.

- Infant/Toddler – Classrooms with all children under 24 months must have accessible materials provided within at least one *play area*. A ***play area*** is a space that is large enough for children to play with accessible, organized materials. Like materials are organized and stored together.
    - An interest center can be used for this age group and is considered a type of play area

- Older Toddler/Two – Classrooms with any child between 24 months and 36 months must have at least three *interest centers* with accessible materials organized by type. An ***interest center*** is a clearly defined play area created for a particular kind of play with accessible, organized materials.
    - Although not required for children 18 months - 24 months of age, programs are encouraged to provide interest centers for this age group
- Preschool and School-Age – Classrooms/groups with all children over age 3 must have accessible materials organized by type into at least five *interest centers.*

Note: The ERS tools include requirements for interest centers at the good or excellent levels. Interest centers needed for preschool classrooms (ages 3-5 years) include areas for: reading, blocks, dramatic play, and nature/science. Interest centers needed for older toddlers/twos classrooms (ages 18 months -3 years) include: fine motor, blocks, dramatic play, and nature/science. The ERS tools also require a cozy area (which could be combined with a quiet interest center) for preschool and older toddlers/twos classrooms/groups. The SACERS-U requires space for privacy where children are allowed to be alone, which can be created by the children.

Item 3: The following types of materials must be developmentally appropriate and accessible to children in each classroom/group. At minimum there must be:

- One book for each child present at any given time
- Six different examples of fine motor materials
- Six different examples of art materials (for classrooms with all children 24 months or older)
- Two sets of 10 to 20 blocks (for classrooms with all children 12 months or older)
- Five different examples of dramatic play materials
- Five different examples of nature/science materials (for classrooms with all children 24 months or older)
- Six different examples of math materials

Item 4: Accessible materials are reflective of the WMELS five domains and/or the SACF nine content areas, different learning styles, and varied levels of difficulty.

- The WMELS five domains and/or the SACF nine content areas must be reflected in the materials offered. School-Age classrooms may be using WMELS and/or SACF.
    - The "Approaches to Learning" domain recognizes that children approach learning in different ways. It addresses the importance of how children learn, as well as what children learn. This is demonstrated by offering materials and/or experiences that address children's different learning styles (e.g., visual, kinesthetic/active, auditory).
- At least three types of materials and/or experiences offer children varied levels of difficulty. Materials should be from different learning activities, for example, one from books, one from fine motor, and one from dramatic play.
- Materials in the interest centers/play areas must be considered easily accessible, allowing children to independently reach furnishings, equipment, and materials

Item 5: The daily schedule must include a minimum of 50 consecutive minutes of uninterrupted free choice. Materials in all required interest centers and/or play areas must be accessible for children to use for the entire uninterrupted free choice time period.

Clarifications:

- For programs open more than eight hours, the 50 consecutive minutes cannot be during the first or last two hours of program operation
- For programs open more than four hours per day, 50 consecutive minutes is required
- For programs open less than 4 hours per day, 30 consecutive minutes is required
- For programs with split schedules, the 50 consecutive minutes can be split into two segments of consecutive, uninterrupted time
    - For example, if a program is open for two hours before school and three hours in the afternoon, the program can split the minutes by having 25 minutes in the morning and 25 minutes in the afternoon

Note: When 50 minutes of free choice occurs outdoors, DAE can be earned if items 2 through 4 are met in the outdoor space where children are playing.

VERIFICATION

All classrooms within a program must meet the requirements listed above. The Consultant will verify all items within this indicator in at least one randomly selected classroom for each age group served (birth to 35 months, 36 to 60 months and/or school-age). If all age groups are not represented, the Consultant will verify three randomly selected classrooms.

If there are three or less classrooms in the program, the Consultant must verify the requirements in every classroom.

The Consultant must verify the elements of a developmentally appropriate environment through observation. If more information is needed, lesson plans, schedules, and/or interviews may be used.

Element C: Business and Professional Practices

Early education programs that use effective business and professional practices are more likely to provide a high-quality learning environment, stay in business, and interact more sensitively with children and families.

Indicator: Budgeting/Record-Keeping/Payment Agreement

Good planning for any organization, including child care, includes budgeting and record-keeping. Budgeting provides a road map for implementing program goals and objectives. Thoughtful planning, accurate record-keeping, and continuous review is essential to effectively manage an early education program.

Programs must demonstrate the following:

Item 1: The program develops an annual line-item budget including the following:

- Projected and actual income and expenses for the current fiscal year, divided into line-items
  - A program budget must be in place for the current 12-month period, using whatever fiscal year the program has chosen (e.g., if the program is using a fiscal year from July to June, and it is October 2021, the Consultant will verify the budget from July 2021 to June 2022).
  - The budget can be shown in one page covering a 12-month period or can be separated into months or quarters.
- At least one item from the program's QIP must be identified in the budget (e.g., training is identified in the program's QIP and is also an expense in the line-item "continuing education" on the program budget).

Note: For an organization with several child care sites, each site will need to provide documentation of Item 1.

Item 2: The program reviews the budget annually and adjusts future annual budgets as necessary. A report of actual income and expenses divided into line-items for the previous fiscal year is available and was used to inform the current year's annual budget.

Item 3: The program demonstrates record-keeping practices that track income and expenses.

- The program tracks actual income and expenses on a monthly basis.

Item 4: A parent payment agreement must be signed and on file for all families that have a Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy authorization with the program. The agreement must be present at the location where the child is receiving care. All parent payment agreements must be kept on file for three years after the child's last day of attendance.

Programs can use DCF form 5224-E or create one of their own.
- https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/forms/doc/5224.docx

Forms must include:

- The price the program charges for monthly or weekly care
- The days and hours the program operates
- Any discounts or scholarships that are available to parents

- Any discounts or scholarships that the parent is receiving
- The parent's payment schedule
- The program's anticipated closure dates
- Payment expectations for the child's anticipated and unanticipated absences
- Payment expectations for the program's closure dates
- Parent procedures for termination of a child's enrollment
- Program procedures for termination of a child's enrollment

VERIFICATION

The Consultant will verify the following:

- The current 12-month line-item budget
- The QIP, to ensure that at least one item is also noted in the budget
- The previous 12-month budget with actual income/expenses noted
- Notation of when the budget was annually reviewed to inform the current budget
- Evidence of one month of tracking income and expenses

The program must provide physical copies of the necessary documents or have access to an electronic copy of the budget for rating. Documents provided must be updated and completed for each rating year.

If the program has a child enrolled whose family is receiving a subsidy through the Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy program, the Consultant will verify all required elements from one parent payment agreement. If there are no families in the program receiving subsidy, the Consultant does not have to verify a parent payment agreement.

Indicator: Family Engagement

Family engagement is an ongoing process that occurs through respectful and responsive relationship building between early childhood staff and families. Quality family engagement occurs when programs offer opportunities for all families to be partners in their child's education. Family engagement is different from, but builds on, family involvement. Family involvement occurs when families participate in activities and take advantage of opportunities at their child's early learning setting. This usually means that families attend meetings or special events a program offers. On the other hand, family engagement focuses on listening, welcoming ideas, and encouraging shared decision making. The goal of family engagement is to create partnerships, leading to stronger outcomes for children.

- 3 Star requirement: Programs must demonstrate how they meet **at least one practice** from each of the four items.
- 4 and 5 Star requirement: Programs must demonstrate how they meet **at least two practices** from each of the four items.

Item 1: Communication

Quality family engagement includes a variety of practices that encourage communication between early childhood staff and families. Quality practices take into consideration each family's communication needs and preferences, building mutual respect and understanding.

Practice 1: Respectful two-way exchange of information

Examples:

a. Efforts are made to communicate with children and families in their preferred language. Program can access linguistic supports as necessary

b. A written philosophy supports communication as a way to develop program and family relationships

c. Family handbooks are provided to families

d. Families are invited to share what they know about their children

Practice 2: Multiple ways to communicate are offered

Examples:

a. Regular written communication using multiple formats is available to families (e.g., social media, email, newsletters, calendar)

b. Families' preferred methods of communication are used (e.g., face-to-face, email, phone, letter)

c. Bulletin boards are maintained and updated with program information and events

Practice 3: Time is made to engage families in meaningful conversation

Examples:

a. Staff schedules allow time for meaningful communication with families

b. Initial intake or orientation meetings introduce families to the program

c. Families are notified in advance when changes or transitions will occur (e.g., classroom changes, substitute teachers, other events)

Item 2: Family Needs and Feedback

It is important that programs understand the needs and goals of the children and families they serve. Asking for, and using, family feedback allows the program to gather family perspectives and continuously improve. Feedback can be collected in a variety of ways (surveys, intake forms, comments, complaint submission processes, exit interviews, child and family strengths, and needs assessments) and must be used to inform program decisions, making the program more reflective of the children and families it serves.

Practice 1: Family input guides program planning and policies

Examples:

a. Program has a written family feedback procedure explaining how feedback will be collected and used

b. Program has a family advisory group with active family participation and/or families participate in program decision making

c. Program completes the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Checklist and findings are incorporated into program planning

d. Families are invited to share concerns and collaborate with staff to find solutions

e. Families are encouraged to participate in program evaluations/surveys AND programs demonstrate how the results impact their program decision making

Practice 2: Program is adapted to meet the needs of children and families

Examples:

a. Family strengths and needs assessments are completed, and a plan for utilizing information gathered is established

b. Program conducts child assessments and shares results with families in a manner that invites and considers the parent's perspective

c. Meetings and events are determined by family schedules and needs

d. Program collaborates with parents to create and incorporate individual written educational and developmental goals for the child and family

e. Family choice and decision making are promoted

Practice 3: Hiring practices of staff and volunteers reflect families' diverse backgrounds

Examples:

a. Program can demonstrate that there are racial, ethnic, and cultural similarities between program staff/volunteers and the children/families enrolled
b. Program uses positive images of diversity on its social media/website and diversity-related cues (e.g., equal opportunity employer statement, link to program's diversity policy) in job postings

Item 3: Collaborative Activities with Families

Families feel engaged when they are provided with multiple opportunities to meaningfully participate in their child's care and education. Programs can offer activities that help to create partnerships with parents to promote healthy child development and family connections.

Practice 1: Families are encouraged to participate in activities

Examples:

a. Participation of fathers or male role models for a child is encouraged and the program acknowledges that fathers/males can be equally knowledgeable caretakers

b. Extended family members are invited to participate in program activities acknowledging the various family members that support and care for children

Practice 2: Opportunities exist for staff and families to learn from one another

Examples:

a. Program offers opportunities for families to share knowledge about their child (e.g., interests, approaches to learning, the child's developmental needs, and the family's concerns and goals for their children)

b. Regular parent/teacher conferences encourage sharing between the teacher and the family

c. Activities encourage the development of parent confidence and competence

d. Family traditions are shared in classrooms and family photos are displayed

e. Diversity is reflected in images and languages included on posters, signs, and other program materials

f. Frequent family participation in the program is encouraged. To ensure that all enrolled families are able to participate in some opportunities, they are flexibly scheduled in consideration of families' employment/education schedules, language preferences, cultural practices, and holiday and religious commitments.

g. Program facilitates social networking and collaborative opportunities between families

Practice 3: Volunteer opportunities match families' strengths, interests, and skills

Examples:

a. Program encourages parent volunteer opportunities reflective of the strengths, interests, and skills of each family (with attention given to family capacity and time)

b. Program facilitates family activities that demonstrate consideration for their needs and interests

Item 4: Community Resources and Family Support

Early education staff can be a critical link between families and community resources. Program staff can fully support families by providing information around community resources that meet their unique needs.

Practice 1: Families are connected to community resources

Examples:

a. Community resource list is developed and shared

b. Program identifies and engages community partners

c. Relationships with public and community-based services are developed (e.g., health, school districts, social service agencies)

d. Program has a family resource center area and/or staff provides consultations that include parenting and community service information

e. Program navigates resources for families, links them to family supports, and provides direct advocacy (e.g., helps make initial phone calls for families, attends IEP's)

Practice 2: Support and planning around transitions is provided

Examples:

a. Program plans field trips to future 4K classrooms

b. Lead teacher has a parent meeting to discuss the transition plan for the child to move to a new classroom or program

c. Families are offered direct support resources such as transportation

Practice 3: Educational and developmental resources are available to families

Examples:

a. Educational workshops and trainings are offered to families (e.g., information workshops, career workshops, education meetings, parent training)

b. Training, education, and/or support is provided to families to prepare them to advocate and exercise their rights and responsibilities concerning the education of their children

c. Program shares child development information across all Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) domains

d. Program provides resources for extending learning experiences into the home

e. Program includes home visitation services that include family caregivers and the child

VERIFICATION

Consultants may observe the practices being implemented or the program may show evidence of how they are meeting (or met within the past 12 months) the intent of a practice under an item. Examples of evidence could include:

- Program policies or philosophy
- Meeting agendas
- Staff/family handbook
- Job descriptions
- Documentation of referrals
- Partnership agreements
- Event flyers
- Schedules, emails, newsletters, text messages
- Introduction and exit surveys
- Communication logs
- Translation services
- Materials for diverse family structures
- Written communications

Element D: Health and Well-Being

Children need access to daily physical activity and nutritious meals and snacks to help them develop lifelong healthy habits. Early education settings are a key place to start building these habits.

Indicator: Healthy Nutrition and Physical Activity

Early education programs can learn more about how to improve their nutrition and physical activity practices by using a self-assessment tool and developing a quality improvement plan specific to nutrition and physical activity.

Programs must demonstrate all the following:

Item 1: Complete a YoungStar-approved nutrition and/or physical activity self-assessment tool(s). Seventy-five percent (75%) of Lead Teachers and the Director must have reviewed/contributed to the self-assessment. This can be demonstrated with a document signed by each staff member. The self-assessment must have been completed within the past 12 months, and not used for a previous rating. Self-assessments should match the age of the majority of children in care. Multiple self-assessments can be used if desired. Self-assessments help programs become aware of their strengths and areas for improvement.

Self-Assessment Options:

- Birth - 60 Months
  - Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessments for Child Care (Go NAPSACC[1]) - https://gonapsacc.org/self-assessment-materials
    - Child Nutrition
    - Breastfeeding & Infant Feeding
    - Infant & Child Physical Activity **and** Outdoor Play & Learning
    - Farm to ECE

- School-Age
  - Out of School Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative (OSNAP) – School-Age Programs - http://osnap.org/tools/practice-assessment/introduction/
  - Wisconsin Youth Garden Self-Assessment - https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/providers/resources

Item 2: Develop a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) based on the results of the completed nutrition and/or physical activity self-assessment. The nutrition and/or physical activity QIP can be added to the program's overall QIP, rather than creating an additional form. The QIP must have been developed within the past 12 months and include:

[1]Ward D, Morris E, McWilliams C, Vaughn A, Erinosho T, Mazzuca S, Hanson P, Ammerman A, Neelon S, Sommers J, Ball S. (2014). Go NAPSACC: Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care, 2nd Edition. Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention and Department of Nutrition, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

- At least three specific goals that strengthen the program's nutrition and/or physical activity policies and/or practices
- Action steps to meet the identified goals
- Timeline for completion of the goals
- Persons responsible for accomplishing the goals

Item 3: If the program allows meals, snacks or beverages to be brought from home, the program has a policy which states the program will supplement the meals, snacks and beverages if they do not meet the guidelines established by the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

Item 4: Programs having met this requirement in the past must also demonstrate progress on at least one nutrition and/or physical activity goal from the previous quality improvement plan.

VERIFICATION

The Consultant will verify that an approved nutrition and/or physical activity self-assessment has been completed within the past 12 months with reviews/contributions from the Director and at least 75% of Lead Teachers, demonstrated by a document signed by all staff who have reviewed or contributed.

The Consultant will verify that the program has a nutrition and/or physical activity focused QIP, including areas of strength, three areas of improvement, and action plans for each area of improvement. (This does not have to be an additional QIP and can be added to the program's overall QIP.) The Consultant will verify that the QIP was developed within the past 12 months based on the results of the self-assessment. For programs that have met this requirement in previous years, the Consultant will verify the program has made progress on at least one nutrition and/or physical activity goal from the previous quality improvement plan.

Congratulations!

Now that you've taken steps to improve your program's quality, let's think about what comes next.

1. Celebrate the accomplishments you've made so far!

2. Consider additional high-quality practices you could implement along your path of continuous quality improvement.

3. Introduce your staff to the Environment Rating Scale tool(s) that fits your program.

4. Your Consultant is a valuable early childhood resource – Stay in Touch!

5. Visit https://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/providers

Additional Requirements for 4 and 5 Star Ratings

Indicator: Environment Rating Scales (ERS)

- 4 Star requirement: ERS program average score of 3.50
- 5 Star requirement: ERS program average score of 4.50

VERIFICATION

An ERS observer will observe the required classroom(s) during an identified 4-week period. At least one classroom from each age group (ages birth up to age 3, ages 3 up to age 5, and ages 5 and older) will be observed. Classrooms will be randomly selected on the day of the observation.

Indicator: Employment Policies and Procedures - Required for 4 and 5 Stars

Employment policies and procedures are an important part of any early education program. They provide direction for overall program management, support the well-being and professionalism of staff, and lead to high levels of quality care.

Programs must demonstrate the following:

Staff must be aware of the existence of, and have access to, a written copy of **each** policy and/or procedure listed below within one business day of request.

Programs must have ALL the following:

1. Hiring Policy
   A hiring policy exists that explains how the program consistently recruits, interviews, and selects employees. It outlines the process, as well as the person(s) responsible for each task. Programs use one or more resources that provide guidance for best practices in hiring, e.g., asking appropriate interview questions, checking past employment references.

2. Job Descriptions and Policy
   The job description policy states that staff will receive a job description upon hire. In addition, the program has written job descriptions with clear expectations and responsibilities for each position within the program.

3. Salary/Wage Scale
   A salary/wage scale - which is used to determine the starting wage or salary of an employee, and the factors that make up an employee's ability to earn an increase - is made available to all staff. The salary/wage scale must include at least three factors used to determine an employee's **starting wage** (e.g., education, Registry Level, years of experience, job title, and/or specialized training (e.g., Preschool Credential)). Actual wages do not have to be listed.

   The salary/wage scale must also include at least one additional factor used to determine when an **increase to an employee's salary/wage** will be made (e.g., a cost of living adjustment, years of service, high performance on annual review, and/or additional training).

Note: The individual program determines starting wages for each level of the salary/wage scale, as well as the factors that allow for increases to be earned.

4. Performance Evaluation Policy
   A program's performance evaluation policy explains that the annual evaluation process includes a self-evaluation, as well as an evaluation from the direct supervisor. Criteria for evaluating staff performance are different for each position and align with the responsibilities in each job description. Lead Teachers and Directors who have been employed for 90 days or more must have a written performance evaluation on file. Each evaluation must include a self-evaluation, as well as an evaluation done by the direct supervisor. All evaluations are kept confidential.

Note: If the Director reports to a Board of Directors, Program Owner, or other higher entity, the evaluation of the Director is completed by the higher entity. If the Director is also the Program Owner and there is no Board of Directors or other supervisor in place, the Director only needs to complete a self-evaluation.

Note: If a program is in its first year of operation, *annual* performance evaluations are not required. However, the program will have written performance evaluations for Lead Teachers and Directors who have been employed for more than 90 days.

5. Staff Disciplinary Policy and Procedures
   The staff disciplinary policy and procedures must describe a program's behavior expectations for staff and the consequences for unacceptable behaviors. The written disciplinary policy details the following:
   - Behaviors that are subject to disciplinary action
   - Consequence(s) for violations (including more severe consequences for repeated violations)
   - Timeframe for notification of a violation
   - How disciplinary action is done in private between the employee and supervisor
     - A broad program confidentiality policy is accepted if it includes a statement specific to disciplinary action with staff

6. Grievance Policy and Procedures
   The program's grievance policy and procedures describe the process an employee will use if they disagree with the program's actions and/or decisions. The written grievance policy explains:
   - Who a staff person should notify in the case of a grievance
   - How the grievance should be reported
   - How the grievance will be evaluated

VERIFICATION

The Consultant will review all documents containing information about the six listed employment policies and procedures, including the employee handbook, job descriptions, and performance evaluations, along with any additional materials requested by the Consultant. This will include confidential review of at least 25% of randomly selected Lead Teachers and the Director's completed evaluations for the most current year.

Indicator: Strategic Planning around Staff Retention - Required for 5 Stars

A strategic planning process that is focused on improving the workplace is essential in a high-quality program, because a positive working environment leads to high-quality programming and improved staff retention. Educators who have supportive and responsive work environments more effectively work with young children and their families and are more likely to remain at the program.

Programs must demonstrate the following:

Item 1: The program director/administrator must have read one of these resources:

- *Model Work Standards* – 2019 revised edition or previous edition – Center for the Study of Child Care Employment
  - https://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2019/11/The-Model-Work-Standards-Center-Based_FINAL.pdf
- *Blueprint for Action: Achieving Center-Based Change Through Staff Development* – Paula Jorde Bloom
- *Program Administration Scale* (PAS) – Teri N. Talan and Paula Jorde Bloom
- *A Great Place to Work* – Paula Jorde Bloom, Ann Hentschell, and Jill Bella

Item 2: The program must have held a strategic planning meeting focused on improving the working environment with at least 75% of staff in attendance. The meeting must have included opportunities for all staff to participate. A written agenda and meeting notes are required for verification.

Item 3: At least one goal and an action plan have been developed with all staff having had an opportunity to provide input. The goal and action plan must:

- Identify how the work environment will be improved
- Identify who is responsible for implementing each part of the action plan
- List next steps that may be required

Item 4: Programs having met this indicator in the previous rating year must show evidence of progress on at least one goal from the previous rating year. There must also be evidence that staff provided feedback on evaluating the progress made toward the goal.

VERIFICATION

The Consultant will interview the program director to learn which resource has been read and to understand the strategic planning process. The following documentation will be required:

- Meeting attendance records, including the date of the meeting(s) and who attended
- Identified goal(s) and action plan
- Evidence of the participatory process (e.g., survey)
- Progress on previous years goal, if applicable

High-Quality Practices

Using research completed by the University of Wisconsin – Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty, seven High-Quality Practices have been identified that are most closely linked to improved child outcomes:

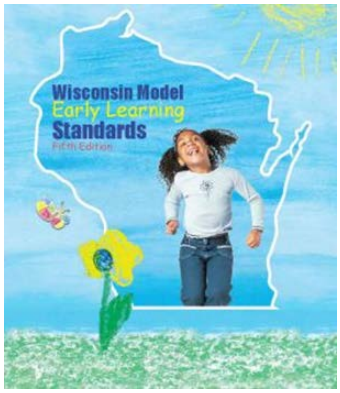
1. Curriculum Aligned with WMELS/SACF
2. Individual Child Portfolios
3. Intentional Planning to Improve Child Outcomes
4. Developmental Screening
5. Tracking Child Outcomes
6. Social Emotional/Inclusion Training
7. *Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education with Mandated Reporter* Training

To earn a **4 Star rating**, programs must demonstrate at least **4 of the 7** High-Quality Practices.

To earn a **5 Star rating**, programs must demonstrate at least **5 of the 7** High-Quality Practices.

High-Quality Practice 1

Curriculum Aligned with Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS)/ School-Age Curricular Framework (SACF)



The WMELS and SACF are frameworks that guide decisions about what and how to teach young children, and in what order skills and behaviors are built. The WMELS and SACF are supported by evidence-based practices and provide developmental expectations including what children should know and be able to do as they develop. Aligning curriculum with the WMELS and/or SACF ensures that programs are providing opportunities for children to grow in all areas of development. Neither the WMELS nor the SACF is a curriculum or an assessment tool.

To meet the requirements of this High-Quality Practice, programs must demonstrate the following:

1. Lesson plans reflect the WMELS five domains and/or SACF* nine content areas

   * All SACF content areas do not have to be addressed each day. The program determines how many times per week each area will be addressed. These guidelines should be included in the family handbook, employment policies, and/or staff training materials.

2. Goals/learning objectives for the whole group or individual children are documented on, or as an attachment to, lesson plans, activity plans or individual child learning plans

3. Developmentally appropriate learning materials, activities, and experiences are selected and used to help individual children and/or the whole group of children reach their goals/learning objectives

4. Information about the WMELS/SACF is communicated to families using two or more of the following:
   - Posters
   - Family handbook
   - Family conferences
   - Newsletter
   - Family orientation materials

VERIFICATION

Verification of this indicator will include review in one randomly selected classroom from each of the following age groups: birth up to age 3, age 3 up to age 5, and age 5 and older. If there are fewer than four classrooms in the program, the Consultant will verify documentation in every classroom. If all age groups are not represented, the Consultant will verify three randomly selected classrooms. The Consultant will review lesson plans and goals from the last consecutive four weeks, as well as parent communication.

High-Quality Practice 2

Individual Child Portfolios

A portfolio is a way to keep track of the ongoing development of an individual child. It is more than a collection of the child's work, but rather an intentionally planned process of collecting evidence of a child's learning and development. Documentation can include work samples, anecdotal notes, photographs with anecdotes, journaling, video clips, as well as goals for the child. Throughout this process, teachers can evaluate and record a child's growth by observing the child in naturally occurring daily activities.

To meet the requirements of this High-Quality Practice, programs must demonstrate the following:

1. At least one year of portfolio use in every classroom.

2. Portfolios are used for all children attending at least 50% of the time (up to 40 hours) the program is open for the specific age group.

3. Each portfolio includes documentation from each of the following categories:
    - The child's interests (e.g., favorite activities, experiences, materials)
    - The child's friends (e.g., who the child interacts with or plays with)
    - The child's family (e.g., stories the family has shared, photos of siblings, pets, or other important people in the child's life)
    - Developmental information (e.g., matching the child's everyday work with developmental expectations, observing and collecting information for all domains of development)

Note: A single piece of documentation may represent more than one category.

4. For children birth – five years: At least one piece of documentation (e.g., work sample, anecdotal note, photograph with anecdote) is added to each child's portfolio each month. All documentation entered in the portfolio must include the date, the child's name, and the observer's name.

    For school-age children: At least one piece of documentation is added every three months. All documentation entered in the portfolio includes the date, the child's name, and the observer's name. If the program is only open for part of the year, pro-rate based on the number of months the program is open. For example, if the program is only open for three months, documentation must be added at least one time.

    For summer-only school-age children: At least one piece of documentation must be added every six weeks.

Note: For children who are new to a program, the first month of attendance should be used to get to know the child. After the first month, follow the guidance above.

Note: School-age children can take an active role in the portfolio process by choosing documentation they would like to have included in the portfolio.

5. Goals/learning objectives for each individual child must be updated and/or added to the portfolio each month. Each goal/learning objective needs to be dated with the month and year.

Note: For summer-only school-age children, goals/learning objectives must be updated and/or added to every six weeks.

6. When a child has mastered a goal/learning objective, the portfolio must contain supporting evidence.

Note: Documentation for school-age children can include the enrollment inventory
- https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/enrollmentinventory.pdf

VERIFICATION

Verification of this high-quality practice will include review of portfolios for 25% of randomly selected children from a classroom in each age group served: birth up to age 3, age 3 up to age 5, and age 5 and older. If there are three or less classrooms in the program, the Consultant must verify portfolios for 25% of the children in every classroom. If all age groups are not represented, the Consultant will verify three randomly selected classrooms.

Note: If programs send portfolios home with families, the process must be explained in the family handbook, including approximate dates for when portfolios are sent home. The Consultant will verify that new portfolios are being created for the new group of children.

High-Quality Practice 3

Intentional Planning to Improve Child Outcomes

Early childhood assessment practices help educators communicate important growth and development milestones to families. Additionally, with information from individual assessments, educators can intentionally plan how they will best support children as they grow. When educators use assessment data to make decisions about the materials, experiences, and activities they provide, the environment becomes more supportive of the developmental needs of each child. A program should use documentation, including work samples, anecdotal notes, developmental checklists, and photographs (items found in the child's portfolio) to inform their formal assessment.

To meet the requirements of this High-Quality Practice, programs must demonstrate the following:

1. All classrooms use an ongoing child assessment tool to assess individual children. The following are required:
    - A formal assessment is completed for each child at least two times per year (or the frequency recommended for the tool)

Note: For summer-only school-age children: A formal assessment is completed for each child at least once every twelve weeks (or the frequency recommended for the tool)

    - The specific date each assessment was completed for each child is noted
    - The assessment tool must include the use of a developmental continuum (showing the progression of development from birth to five or older)
    - The assessment tool is aligned with the WMELS and/or the SACF
    - Assessments that are designed by the program may be used if they are developmentally appropriate and meet the above requirements. The Consultant will determine if the assessment meets the requirement.

2. Lead Teachers are trained on the program's chosen assessment tool (e.g., attending a training, reading a book, watching a video, or training from within the program)

3. Lead Teachers monitor individual child development through (at least) a monthly review of progress, documented in an assessment summary. An assessment summary is a brief written description of the child's progress after reviewing collected documentation, goals and developmental checklists. The summary is used to set the next goal/learning objective for the child.

4. Children's daily activities, experiences, and material choices are individualized and linked to assessment data

5. Assessment data is shared with families, preferably during conferences. If families are unable to participate in conferences, a signed form on file acknowledges assessment data was shared and that the program attempted to contact the family.

VERIFICATION

Verification of this indicator will include review of assessment documentation for 25% of randomly selected children who are in regular attendance from a classroom in each age group served: birth up to age 3, age 3 up to age 5, and age 5 and older. Children in regular attendance are those attending at least 50% of the time (up to 40 hours) the program is open for that age group. If there are three or less classrooms in the program, the Consultant must verify assessment documentation for 25% of the children in every classroom. If all age groups are not represented, the Consultant will verify assessment documentation for 25% of the children in three randomly selected classrooms. Documentation required includes:

- Lesson plans: most recent consecutive four weeks of documentation
- Family meeting and/or refusal to meet form
- Completed assessments/developmental milestone checklists/portfolios – including dates for frequency of documentation
- Consultant interview with the Lead Teacher to understand the following:
    - How the Lead Teacher was trained on the assessment tool
    - The classroom process for conducting assessments
    - The frequency of child assessment
    - How the Lead Teacher uses assessment data to inform goal setting and planning

High-Quality Practice 4

Developmental Screening

The ongoing use of developmental screeners provides families and educators with a snapshot of a child's development. A screener provides point-in-time information about a child and is not a tool to measure progress over time. One purpose of a developmental screener is to identify children who may benefit from further assessment and may have a possible need for early intervention services.

To meet the requirements of this High-Quality Practice, programs must demonstrate the following:

1. A developmental screener that matches the ages of children served is used in all classrooms. Developmental screeners are intended to be completed by families. Developmental screening tools that can be used include:
    - Ages and Stages Questionnaires – 3 (ASQ-3) (2 months - 60 months)
        - If using the ASQ:SE, the program must also use the ASQ-3 to earn this practice
    - Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDS) (birth - 7 years 11 months)
    - YoungStar School-Age Enrollment Inventory (School-Age)
      - https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/enrollmentinventory.pdf

2. Director, or identified staff is trained (e.g., read a book, watched a video, or attended a training) on the developmental screening tool used in the program.

3. A completed developmental screening, from the most recent 12 months, is on file for all regularly attending children that have been enrolled in the program for 45 days or longer. If any family chooses not to complete a screener, a signed waiver is on file for the child.

Note: A sample waiver can be found here:
- https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/samplescreeningwaiver.pdf

4. The family handbook includes a policy stating that developmental screening opportunities are offered annually to all families or more often if recommended by the tool.

5. Program provides referrals and resources to families as needed.

6. Developmental screenings are reviewed by the program staff and findings are discussed with families.

7. A developmental screener is completed at least annually.

VERIFICATION

Verification of this indicator will include review of screening (or waiver) documentation for 25% of randomly selected, regularly attending children from a classroom in each age group served: birth up to age 3, age 3 up to age 5, and age 5 and older. Children in regular attendance are those attending at least 50% of the time (up to 40 hours per week) the program is open for that age group. If there are three or less classrooms in the program, the Consultant must verify screening (or waiver) documentation for 25% of the children in every classroom. If all age groups are not represented, the Consultant will verify screening (or waiver) documentation for 25% of the children in three randomly selected classrooms.

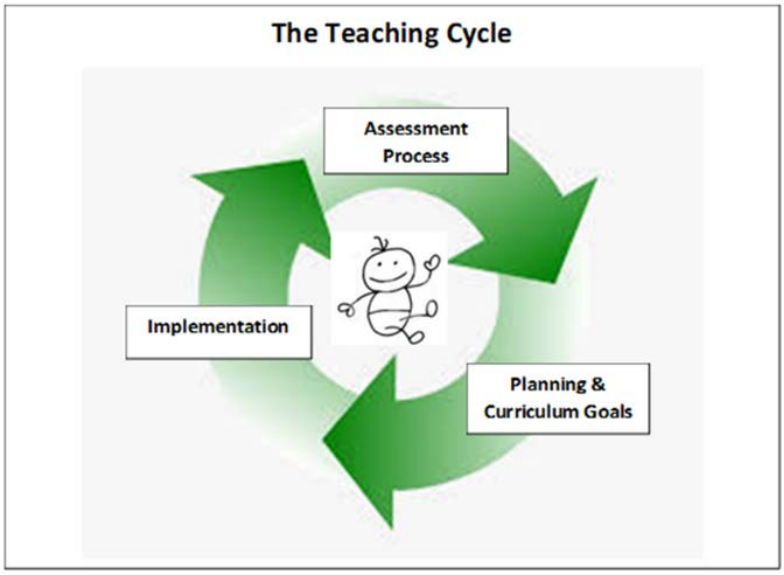
A certificate of attendance for training will be verified or the Consultant can interview the program staff to verify understanding of the tool.

The Consultant will interview the Director for verification on how referrals and resources are provided and how information is shared with families. The Consultant will review the developmental screening policy for frequency of use or verify that there are at least annual completed screeners/waivers on file for each child.

High-Quality Practice 5

Tracking Child Outcomes

The teaching cycle outlines the process educators use to help them determine the next steps in promoting a child's development. Using ongoing assessment data collected in a child's portfolio, along with formal assessment data, a teacher can establish individual child and program goals. With the goals in mind, materials and experiences are chosen for the learning environment (intentional planning) allowing the child opportunities to practice, or work on the goal within the playful, natural environment. The teacher repeats the cycle by observing what the child does when given the opportunity to use these materials and have these experiences. The teacher then documents or tracks the child's outcomes. An intentional tracking system allows the program to document the growth of each child, indicating the progress that has been made over time related to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that children demonstrate.



Note: This High-Quality Practice can only be earned if the program also meets the requirements for the Intentional Planning and Child Portfolios practices. This practice may not be earned if the program has not yet completed assessments for the first time.

To meet the requirements of this High-Quality Practice, programs must demonstrate the following:

1. Director and Lead Teachers can explain how child outcomes are tracked.

Note: Examples of outcome tracking forms can be found here:
- https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/providers/resources

2. Program demonstrates that it has been tracking child outcomes for at least six months and has the following documentation:
    - A recent (completed within the last 12 months) assessment that has been completed for each child
    - Goals/learning objectives that are reflective of assessment data
    - Lesson plans that include activities/experiences/materials that relate to child goals
    - Portfolio observations that include documentation of child meeting or making efforts towards a goal
    - Outcomes tracked using a child outcomes form

VERIFICATION

All classrooms must be able to document at least six months of tracking child outcomes for every child in regular attendance. Children in regular attendance are those attending at least 50% of the time (up to 40 hours per week) the program is open for that age group.

Verification of this indicator will include review of the most recent consecutive four weeks of documentation (lesson plans, activity plans, or individual child learning plans) for 25% of randomly selected, regularly attending children from a classroom in each age group served: birth up to age 3, age 3 up to age 5, and age 5 and older. If there are three or less classrooms in the program, the Consultant must verify the tracking of child outcomes for 25% of regularly attending children in every classroom. If all age groups are not represented, the Consultant will verify the tracking of child outcomes for 25% of regularly attending children in three randomly selected classrooms. For the classrooms selected, the Consultant will also verify that the most recent four weeks of documentation (lesson plans, activity plans or individual child learning plans) reflect individual child assessments and portfolios for the children listed on the lesson plans, activity plans or individual child learning plans selected.

Summer-only school-age: To earn this indicator, programs must be able to demonstrate the tracking of at least six weeks of child outcomes. The program may demonstrate this by showing the previous year's information combined with the current year's information.

High-Quality Practice 6

Social Emotional/Inclusion of Children with Special Needs Training

The development of healthy social and emotional skills is critical to a child's success throughout their education and into adulthood. A child's ability to get along with others, use impulse control, identify emotions in themselves and others, follow directions, and solve problems begins at birth and continues throughout the early childhood years, when rapid brain development is occurring. Within the context of relationships with nurturing adults and peers, these skills are developed with intentional teaching of social and emotional competencies.

Including children with special needs in a program's activities and daily routines is important for the development and success of all children. Inclusion helps to create a sense of belonging, creates positive social relationships, and helps children understand how differences make each child unique and important.

High-quality training focused on the use of evidence-based strategies in these two areas allows educators to enhance their practices.

To meet the requirement of this High-Quality Practice, programs must demonstrate the following:

4 Star requirement – 50% of classrooms have a teacher listed on The Registry Program Profile that has completed at least one of The Registry-verified social emotional/inclusion trainings listed below.

5 Star requirement – The Director **and** 100% of classrooms have a teacher listed on The Registry Program Profile that has completed at least one of The Registry-verified social emotional/inclusion trainings listed below.

- 3 or more college credits around inclusion
- Wisconsin Pyramid Model for Social and Emotional Competence (24 hours)
- Wisconsin Pyramid Model for Social and Emotional Competence Infant/Toddler (24 hours)
- Wisconsin Pyramid Model e-Modules with Reflective Coaching (24 hours)
- Wisconsin Pyramid Model e-Modules with Reflective Coaching – Preschool (24 hours)
- 15 or more hours of training in Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS)
- 15 or more hours of training in Guiding Children's Behavior in School-Age Care
- 12 or more hours of training in Tribes® TLC
- 24 or more hours of YoungStar-approved, non-credit training on social emotional competencies, inclusive practices, serving children with disabilities, and children with special health needs

Note: A complete list of YoungStar-approved, non-credit training can be found at:
- https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/providers/resources

VERIFICATION

Director and staff training is verified through The Registry Program Profile. When more than one staff person (e.g., Lead Teacher Morgan and Assistant Teacher Regan) is listed in a classroom in the Program Profile, the training of all classroom staff is considered. Staff can be listed in the Program Profile if they are teaching in the assigned classroom for at least 50% of the time the classroom is open (up to 40 hours per week). Teacher training will be counted for staff listed as any of the following in the Program Profile: “Other Teacher,” “Teacher,” “Assistant Teacher.”

High-Quality Practice 7

Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education with Mandated Reporter Training

Strengthening Families is a research-informed approach to increasing family strengths, enhancing child development, and reducing the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. The five protective factors guide educators in understanding how to engage programs, families, and communities in building supports for children and families.

To meet the requirement of this High-Quality Practice, programs must demonstrate the following:

- 50% of classrooms have a teacher listed on The Registry Program Profile that has completed at least one of The Registry-verified trainings listed below:
  - *Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education with Mandated Reporter*
  - *Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education with Mandated Reporter Online* (Wisconsin)
  - Family Services Credential
  - *Touchpoints Birth to Three: Your Child's Emotional and Behavioral Development*

Note: A complete list of YoungStar-approved, non-credit training can be found at:
- https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/providers/resources

VERIFICATION

Staff training is verified through The Registry Program Profile. When more than one staff person is listed in a classroom in the Program Profile, the training of all classroom staff is considered. Staff can be listed in the Program Profile if they are teaching in the assigned classroom for at least 50% of the time the classroom is open (up to 40 hours per week). Teacher training will be counted for staff listed as any of the following in the Program Profile: "Other Teacher," "Teacher," "Assistant Teacher."

Congratulations!

Now that you've taken steps to improve your program's quality, let's think about what comes next.

1. Celebrate the accomplishments you've made so far!

2. Utilize your Quality Improvement Plan and ERS report(s) to continue making progress toward your program goals!

3. Consider implementing additional High-Quality Practices.

4. Consider Practice-Based Coaching during your off-year.

5. Stay in touch with your YoungStar Consultant! They are a valuable early childhood resource.

Visit: https://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/providers