

Continuous Quality Improvement and the Quality Improvement Plan

Rhode Island is working hard to ensure that all of its children receive the best early education possible and that their early learning experiences result in positive social and academic outcomes. The state is determined to reduce the achievement gap and eliminate as much as possible any differences in educational achievement between those who have and those who have not. To accomplish this mission, the state has established a rigorous system of supports for early care and education programs to embrace a culture of continuous program improvement.

Early care and education programs now have access to a quality continuum that maps out the steps they can take to improve their program in incremental ways as they strive to reach the highest standards. The foundations of the quality continuum are the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) licensing regulations and the Department of Education Basic Education Program (BEP) regulations; from there, the continuum advances to the BrightStars Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement Standards and culminates with the Department of Education Comprehensive Early Childhood Education (CECE) Program Standards for Approval. The graphics below illustrate this continuum for center-based programs, family child care programs, and school-based programs. Larger versions of the graphics can be found in *Appendix A*.

This Tip Sheet describes the steps programs can take to ensure *continuous quality improvement*.

Center-based Programs



Family Child Care Programs



School-based Programs



Program leaders who aspire to be on the path of continuous improvement must put in place a process with a number of steps that are repeated over time. These steps include:

1. Assess your program.

Through program assessment, early care and education programs build their internal capacity to determine where they are on the quality continuum.

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Programs at the foundational and 1-star level will want to reflect on DCYF regulations or the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) BEP regulations, the BrightStars standards, and their own assessment of their program’s strengths and challenges to determine how they need to grow to obtain a 2-star rating.

Programs at the 2-star level and above develop a more formal system of self-assessment to demonstrate their commitment to continuous quality improvement.

These programs design a system that takes a close look at all aspects of the program to determine strengths and areas that need improvement. Programs use a variety of tools to gather data about their program quality. These include observation tools that allow programs to observe services in action, reflection tools that focus on current practices, and interview and survey tools that gather information from staff and parents.



As programs progress along the quality continuum, they commonly add tools and data sources to the self-assessment process. Center-based programs that have progressed to the 5-star rating and RIDE CECE approval may use a combination of internal and external data sources to conduct a comprehensive self-assessment. Family child care providers at the 5-star level may use a combination of internal and external data as well. The more data sources that programs use, the stronger the system of self-assessment. Examples of internal data

sources include family surveys, aggregated child assessment data, and Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDPs) for staff; examples of external data sources include DCYF Monitoring Reports, BrightStars Assessment Reports, BrightStars and CECE CLASS¹® Observations, Environment Rating Scale Reports, and NAEYC² Accreditation Reports.

2. Use the results of your assessment to develop and prioritize a set of goals.

Once the assessment data is collected, programs examine the data to determine the direction they will take to advance on the quality continuum. They identify areas they want to strengthen and formulate goals that articulate what their program plans to accomplish.

For example, a center-based program at the 2-star BrightStars rating may aspire to increase to a 3-star level. Using its BrightStars Assessment Report and its staff members’ IPDPs as sources of evidence, the program identifies “Teacher Qualifications” as an area for potential growth. Although all of the teachers in

¹ Classroom Assessment Scoring System

² National Association for the Education of Young Children

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the program have a professional development plan, several do not meet the requirements for Level 3 in *Standard 4: Teacher Qualifications*. With this in mind, the program identifies the following goal:

- **Goal 1:** Within 24 months, 75 percent of program teachers will meet the qualifications for Level 3 in *Standard 4: Teacher Qualifications* (a CDA³ and 9 college credits in early childhood education or a related field **OR** 12 college credits in early childhood education or a related field).

Programs often come up with a large number of potential goals after reviewing their data. While programs are encouraged to undertake an ambitious improvement plan, they should take stock of the resources available to them and choose goals that can be reasonably accomplished during the next year.

3. Determine the action steps that are needed to achieve program goals.

After programs have selected their goals, they break down each goal into manageable action steps.

For example, imagine a family child care provider who wants to achieve a 3-star BrightStars rating. Following her self-assessment, she determines that one of her goals will be to plan and implement family-teacher conferences, which she needs if she wants to achieve a 3-star rating in *Standard 8: Family Communication and Involvement*.

Her action steps might include

- 1) researching information about best practices in conducting effective family-teacher conferences in a family child care setting,
- 2) developing a form that can be completed about each child to guide the conversation during the conference,
- 3) deciding on potential dates and times for family-teacher conferences, and
- 4) preparing for and distributing an invitation flyer that describes the purpose and benefits of the conference.



4. Identify resources.

Next, programs identify the resources they need to tap to help them make progress toward each of their goals. These resources might include classroom materials, technical assistance, and professional development. To explore the resources and supports that might be available across the state, programs

³ Child Development Associate

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are encouraged to contact the Center for Early Learning Professionals InfoLine at www.center-elp.org or 401-734-1292.

5. Complete the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

All programs need a road map or plan of action that not only outlines goals and action steps but includes time frames and persons responsible for specific actions. Programs document this information in a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) that summarizes their program's plan for advancing along Rhode Island's quality continuum. Programs are encouraged to use the common QIP form, which meets requirements for DCYF licensing, BrightStars participation, and CECE program approval. The form can be downloaded from the following websites:

- Center for Early Learning Professionals: center-elp.org/resources/forms/
- BrightStars: brightstars.org/educators/quality-improvement-resources

6. Evaluate progress and revise the QIP, as needed.

A program's work is not over when the QIP is complete. In fact, this is when the real work begins. Programs should view their QIP as a living, working document. They should refer to it often to track progress and identify barriers to moving forward. Programs commonly make adjustments to their plan as they discover new strategies and resources that can support their change efforts. In some cases, new data may cause programs to rethink their goals and establish new priorities.

For example, consider a center-based program with a 4-star BrightStars rating. The program has previously identified staff and administration qualifications as one of its strengths, and the program's current QIP includes goals for enhancing family communication and involvement, which will move the program toward a 5-star rating. However, the program unexpectedly experiences change in its administrative team when the education coordinator resigns. The newly hired education coordinator has completed the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) trainings in foundations of early education and curriculum but not the trainings in standards-based classrooms or programs. This affects the program's ability to continue to meet the required qualifications for its current star rating in *Standard 5: Program Leadership*. Although the program director does not remove any of the existing QIP goals related to family communication and involvement, she does add an additional goal to address *Standard 5: Program Leadership*.

Updated QIPs are submitted to BrightStars yearly as part of the annual reporting requirements. Programs with CECE Approval have their plans reviewed annually by RIDE.

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The following graphic illustrates the process that programs can undertake on a yearly basis to achieve continuous quality improvement.



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Resources to Extend Your Learning

- Center for Early Learning Professionals InfoLine (www.center-elp.org)
- The Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) professional development courses: *Implementing a Standards-Based Classroom*, *Implementing a Standards-Based Program* (www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/EarlyChildhoodEducation/Workforce.aspx#23021-rields-professional-development)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (www.naeyc.org)
- BrightStars: Rhode Island's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) (www.brightstars.org)
- Caring for Our Children from the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (cfoc.nrckids.org)
- *Data in Head Start and Early Head Start: Digging Into Data*. (2014). Head Start National Center on Program Management and Fiscal Operations. (eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/operations/data/data2)
- *Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children Birth through Age 8*. (2003). Position Statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/CAPExpand.pdf)
- Talan, T. N., & Bloom, P. J. (2011). *Program Administration Scale: Measuring Early Childhood Leadership and Management*. New York: Teachers College Press.

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APPENDIX A

Center-based Program Quality Continuum



School-based Program Quality Continuum



Family Child Care Program Quality Continuum

