

Alabama Quality STARS

QUALITY RATING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM

Center-Based Guidelines

"Look for the STARS"



Alabama Quality STARS Quality Rating and Improvement System

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“Look for the STARS”
www.alabamaqualitystars.org

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ALABAMA QUALITY STARS

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FOREWORD

This publication provides:

- An overview of the Alabama Quality STARS Quality Rating and Improvement System
- Alabama Quality STARS eligibility requirements, application process, and center-based standards.

Alabama Quality STARS is administered by the Alabama Department of Human Resources, Child Care Services Division.

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ALABAMA QUALITY STARS

Quality Rating and Improvement System

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Alabama Quality STARS is available to every licensed early care and education center in Alabama. It is also available to centers that cannot be licensed by DHR (e.g., military, public school, Alabama Community College System and university, Tribal, etc.). The system is designed to help centers improve day-to-day operations, learning environments and programming for children, and to establish proven administrative practices. Tools and training are available for center staff as they move along the path through the five (5) Alabama Quality STARS levels.

Thank you for your interest in Alabama Quality STARS. We are grateful to all those who worked to create Alabama Quality STARS: Every child deserves our best!

ALABAMA QUALITY STARS OVERVIEW

Alabama Quality STARS provides a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education programs. While program types will include center-based care, family/group home care, and school-age care, Alabama Quality STARS only grants ratings to center-based programs at this time.

Alabama Quality STARS is a “building block” system. Centers must meet all requirements at a STAR level before moving to the next level. Because Minimum Standards licensing requirements are the foundation on which Alabama Quality STARS is built, participating centers must be licensed. Centers that cannot be licensed by DHR (e.g., military, public school, Alabama Community College System and university, Tribal, etc.) are also eligible for participation and must be evaluated to determine the appropriate STAR rating. The requirements at 1 STAR and 2 STARS of Alabama Quality STARS help the program and administrator start the process of quality improvement. However, 3 STARS, 4 STARS, and 5 STARS reflect higher indicators of quality.

Resources are available and have been specifically designed to help center staff understand how to meet each requirement. These resources will help center staff become more knowledgeable and capable as they participate in Alabama Quality STARS.

GUIDELINES

1.00 REGULATORY AUTHORITY

1.01 These guidelines are promulgated as part of the Alabama Department of Human Resources, Child Care Services Division.

1.02 These guidelines shall govern the Alabama Quality STARS Quality Rating and Improvement System.

2.00 PURPOSE

2.01 It is the purpose of these guidelines to set forth the policies and procedures for the operation of the Alabama Quality STARS Quality Rating and Improvement System.

2.02 Participation in Alabama Quality STARS is voluntary. The system is intended to verify and report the quality of early care and education programs relative to Alabama Quality STARS Center-Based Standards, as set forth in these guidelines.

2.03 A designated STAR rating of an early care and education center may qualify the center for certain incentives, as determined by the Alabama Department of Human Resources.

3.00 ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

AELG	Alabama Early Learning Guidelines
CDA	Child Development Associate Credential
DHR	Alabama Department of Human Resources
ECERS-R	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Revised
ITERS-R	Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale - Revised
MAECTE	Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education
NAA	National AfterSchool Association
NAC	National Accreditation Commission
NECPA	National Early Childhood Program Accreditation
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
PAS	Program Administration Scale
QRIS	Quality Rating and Improvement System
SACERS	School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale
Aggregate	Collect and tabulate results using a graphic organizer to see progress overtime
Developmentally Appropriate	Appropriate for the age span and developmental levels of children
Parent Engagement	Parents and staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children, with parents actively participating in the program, feeling welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to staff, and to the children
Parent Orientation	Meeting with parents to provide information about program policies and procedures, introduce staff, tour the facility, and to give parents the opportunity to express their expectations and how they can support and be involved in the program
Parent Resource Area	Designated space containing information about children's learning and healthy development, both at home and at the program, and identifying resources specific to the needs and interests of the program's families, such as having information in various languages

4.00 AGENCY RESPONSIBILITY

4.01 The Alabama Department of Human Resources, Child Care Services Division (the Division), will coordinate and administer Alabama Quality STARS.

4.02 The Division Director will have final approval of applications for STAR ratings as reviewed and recommended by the Alabama Quality STARS staff.

4.03 By October 31st of each year, the Division Director will be responsible for providing verification to the Commissioner of the centers that received STAR ratings in the previous fiscal year.

4.04 The Division will verify the licensing status of applicants as well as determine if the center is in “good standing” with DHR. Centers that cannot be licensed by DHR must provide documentation of having policy and procedures for addressing parent and/or community complaints for the Division to review.

4.05 The Division will provide technical assistance to centers desiring to achieve STAR ratings.

4.06 The Division will be responsible for the process of rating centers (See Sections 7.00 Application, 8.00 Application Review Process, and 9.00 Maintaining STAR Rating).

4.07 Centers will be notified of the STAR rating they have achieved.

5.00 ELIGIBILITY

5.01 All licensed centers that have been in operation for at least 12 months are eligible to apply for a STAR rating. Centers that cannot be licensed by DHR according to Code of Alabama 1975, Section 38-7-2, (4), (e.g., military, public school, Alabama Community College System and university, Tribal, etc.) and that have been in operation for at least 12 months may apply for a STAR rating. Centers will be evaluated to determine the STAR rating.

5.02 Entities with multiple center sites, each having a separate license number, must apply for a STAR rating for each center. Each participating center must be evaluated by the Division to receive a STAR rating.

5.03 Licensed centers must be in “good standing” with DHR. A center in “good standing” is not currently under adverse licensing action. Centers that cannot be licensed by DHR must have written policy and procedures for addressing parent and/or community complaints and documentation that there is follow through when complaints are received.

5.04 A STAR rated center which becomes the subject of an investigation may retain its current STAR rating until the investigation is concluded. The outcome of the investigation may be considered in determining the continuation of the STAR rating.

5.05 Centers must be accessible for Alabama Quality STARS program reviews and environmental assessments.

5.06 Centers that have been denied a STAR rating or have had a STAR rating revoked by reason of ineligibility according to any rules of this section will be eligible to re-apply in twelve (12) months, unless otherwise notified.

6.00 COMPONENT AREAS, REQUIREMENTS, AND STAR RATINGS

6.01 There are four component areas in Alabama Quality STARS: Staff Qualifications and Professional Development, Management and Administrative Practices, Learning Environment and Curriculum, and Family Involvement and Community Partnerships. There are requirements to be met in each component area for each of the five (5) STAR ratings. The goals, components, and STARS Standards are in Section 12.00 Alabama Quality STARS – Center-Based Requirements.

7.00 APPLICATION

7.01 To apply for a STAR rating, the Alabama Quality STARS Application Packet must be submitted to the Division for review. Division approved forms will be provided.

7.02 The Alabama Quality STARS Application Packet will consist of the following items:

- (A) Alabama Quality STARS Application;
- (B) Alabama Quality STARS Self-Assessment Checklist;
- (C) Documentation identified in the Alabama Quality STARS Self-Assessment Checklist that meets the intent of each associated requirement for the STAR rating applied for;
- (D) Center staff list that includes all staff that are required to obtain annual training hours; and
- (E) Consent Form for data collection and reporting.

8.00 APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

8.01 The Alabama Quality STARS Application Packet is used to verify the eligibility of the center.

8.02 The Application and submitted documentation are reviewed to determine if each item submitted meets the intent of the associated requirement.

8.03 The center may not be eligible for the STAR rating applied for when submitted documentation does not meet the intent of each associated requirement. The center may request to be considered for a lower STAR rating.

8.04 When submitted documentation meets the intent of each associated requirement for the STAR rating applied for, the center will be notified that assessors will be assigned to conduct the Program Review. For STAR levels 1 and 2, the Program Review consists of a verification of compliance with the Alabama Quality STARS Standards. For STAR levels 3, 4, and 5, the Program Review will consist of the Program Administration Scale (PAS) and environmental assessments, in addition to verification of compliance with the Alabama Quality STARS Standards.

8.05 Applicants will receive the highest STAR rating at which all requirements are met as determined by review of all documentation and assessments. The center's STAR rating certificate must be posted in a conspicuous place in the center that can be easily seen by parents and the general public.

9.00 MAINTAINING STAR RATING

9.01 A STAR rating is valid for 36 months; unless the center becomes ineligible for a STAR rating according to Section 5.00 Eligibility or Section 10.00 Changes in STAR Rating.

9.02 STAR rated centers must re-submit all application documents, as outlined in Section 7.00 Application, thirty-three (33) months after the date of the last STAR rating. Failure to submit required documentation may jeopardize STAR rating status. A STAR rating will be granted based on meeting requirements (See Section 8.00 Application Review Process).

9.03 Programs requesting to be reviewed for a higher STAR rating must wait at least six months after the last STAR rating date. A complete Alabama Quality STARS Application Packet must be submitted according to Section 7.00 Application and will be processed according to Section 8.00 Application Review Process. Centers meeting higher STAR rating requirements will be rated at the appropriate STAR level. Centers not meeting higher STAR rating requirements will be assigned the STAR rating achieved according to Section 8.00 Application Review Process.

9.04 STAR rated centers that change location must submit a new application for Alabama Quality STARS according to Section 7.00 Application. Applications will be processed according to Section 8.00 Application Review Process. The center will retain the current STAR rating until the application review process is completed.

9.05 STAR rated centers that change center directors must submit a new application for Alabama Quality STARS according to Section 7.00 Application. Applications will be processed according to Section 8.00 Application Review Process. The center will retain the current STAR rating until the application review process is completed.

9.06 STAR rated centers may receive random, unannounced visits throughout the 36 month rating period. These visits help to ensure that centers are continuing to meet the Alabama Quality STARS Standards so that children benefit from high-quality early care and education. An inconsistent STARS review may result in additional professional development, technical assistance, etc., and/or a change in STAR rating.

10.00 CHANGES IN STAR RATING

10.01 Changes in STAR rating include denial, reduction, or revocation of rating status. Changes may result from:

- (A) Ineligibility to participate according to Section 5.00 Eligibility;
- (B) Application documentation which is incomplete or does not meet the intent of requirements according to sections 6.00, 7.00, 8.00, and 9.00;
- (C) Substantiation of complaints; and
- (D) Falsification of any document or submission of false information.

10.02 Centers that have their Alabama Quality STARS rating denied, reduced, or revoked are eligible to re-apply after 12 months, unless otherwise notified.

11.00 APPEAL PROCEDURE

11.01 Centers that are denied or determined ineligible for a particular STAR rating, have their STAR rating reduced or revoked, or have a legitimate dispute concerning published requirements or program review procedures, may request an appeal. A written request for appeal must be submitted to the Alabama Quality STARS Program Director, within thirty (30) days of the notice of action, asking that the rating status decision be reviewed.

11.02 Upon receipt of the request for appeal, the Division Director will conduct an internal review to ensure that the appropriate processes were followed and to determine the validity of the decision. The Alabama Quality STARS Program Director will review the findings with the Division Director and transmit the findings of the internal review to the center within 30 days of receipt of the appeal request.

11.03 If the center finds the outcome of the internal review to be unsatisfactory, the center has ten business days to ask for further review by the Alabama Quality STARS Appeal Review Committee. The committee will schedule a hearing and notify the center administrator in writing of the date and time of the hearing. The committee members are appointed by the Deputy Commissioner for Family Resources. The decision of the Alabama Quality STARS Appeal Review Committee is the final DHR administrative decision.

12.00 ALABAMA QUALITY STARS – CENTER-BASED REQUIREMENTS

**Alabama Quality STARS
Quality Rating and Improvement System
Center-Based Standards**

GOALS of Alabama Quality STARS

1. To improve the quality of early care and education programs
2. To increase the number of high quality early care and education programs
3. To increase the number of children enrolled in quality early care and education programs
4. To establish recognizable ratings that identify quality early care and education programs
5. To reward participating quality early care and education programs

Alabama Quality STARS Components

- A. Staff Qualifications and Professional Development
- B. Management and Administrative Practices
- C. Learning Environment and Curriculum
- D. Family Involvement and Community Partnerships

To participate in Alabama Quality STARS, programs must be licensed and in good standing with the Alabama Department of Human Resources.(See Page 18)*

One STAR
1.A. All staff are enrolled in the Professional Development Registry
1.B. Director completes Program Administration Scale (PAS), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Revised (ECERS-R) and Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale - Revised (ITERS-R) basic training
1.C.I. Posts a developmentally appropriate daily schedule in each classroom/program area, which includes a minimum of 60 minutes of vigorous, active play
1.C.II. Completes the Alabama Quality STARS Self-Assessment Checklist
1.D. Shares information on child development and children’s health with families annually

Two STARS <i>Must Meet All Requirements for 1 and 2 STARS to Qualify</i>
2.A. At least one teacher in each classroom meets Level One (AELG Credential) or higher on the Alabama Pathways Professional Development Lattice
2.B.I. Has a written annual budget
2.B.II. Completes a program review by a trained PAS assessor
2.C.I. Posts a developmentally appropriate lesson plan in each classroom/program area, which includes weekly nutrition activities
2.C.II. Completes a program review by a trained ECERS-R assessor and trained ITERS-R assessor and shares results with program staff
2.D. Shares information with families regarding the importance of having a primary health care provider for children

Three STARS <i>Must Meet All Requirements for 1, 2, and 3 STARS to Qualify</i>
3.A.I. At least 50% of the classrooms have a teacher that meets Level Two (CDA) or higher on the Alabama Pathways Professional Development Lattice
3.A.II. All staff obtain four clock hours of training above the Minimum Standards required annual training from an outside source
3.B.I. Completes a program review by a trained and reliable PAS assessor
3.B.II. Scores 2.5 or higher on the PAS
3.C.I. Utilizes a developmentally appropriate curriculum** <i>(See Page 18)</i>
3.C.II. Completes a developmentally appropriate child assessment on each child at least twice annually
3.C.III. Completes a program review by a trained and reliable ECERS-R assessor, and trained and reliable ITERS-R assessor
3.C.IV. Scores 2.5 or higher for 1/3 of classrooms on the ECERS-R and 1/3 of classrooms on the ITERS-R
3.D.I. Holds at least two parent/teacher conferences annually
3.D.II. Holds a parent orientation to include program philosophy, goals, objectives, and expectations

Four STARS <i>Must Meet All Requirements for 1, 2, 3, and 4 STARS to Qualify</i>
4.A. At least one teacher in each classroom meets Level Two (CDA) or higher on the Alabama Pathways Professional Development Lattice
4.B. Scores 3.5 or higher on the PAS
4.C.I. Maintains a portfolio for each child, which includes observations of children's progress such as art work, work samples, photographs, and informal assessments such as developmental checklists, anecdotal notes or progress notes
4.C.II. Completes a developmentally appropriate child assessment on each child at least twice annually and uses results to inform curriculum planning
4.C.III. Meets Level Four staff/child ratio and group size***(<i>See Page 18</i>)
4.C.IV. Scores 3.5 or higher for 1/3 of classrooms on the ECERS-R and 1/3 of classrooms on the ITERS-R
4.D.I. Conducts an annual written parent survey that is available to all families
4.D.II. Has a parent resource area that addresses the needs and interests of the families served

Five STARS <i>Must Meet All Requirements for 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 STARS to Qualify</i>
5.A. At least 50% of the classrooms have a teacher that meets Level Three (Child Development Short-term Certificate) or higher on the Alabama Pathways Professional Development Lattice
5.B. Scores 4.5 or higher on the PAS
5.C.I. Completes a developmentally appropriate child assessment on each child three times annually and aggregates data into a written report that documents child outcomes and shares information with families
5.C.II. Meets Level Five staff/child ratio and group size***(<i>See Page 18</i>)
5.C.III. Scores 4.5 or higher for 1/2 of classrooms on the ECERS-R and 1/2 of classrooms on the ITERS-R
5.D.I. Utilizes results from annual parent survey to improve programmatic outcomes
5.D.II. Has a written parent engagement plan

* Centers that cannot be licensed (e.g., military, public school, Alabama Community College System and university, Tribal, etc.) may apply. The programs will be evaluated to determine the appropriate STAR Level rating.

** Screen time (television, computers, video games, etc.) should only be used for instruction purposes, and is prohibited for children less than two years of age. For children older than two, screen time must be planned and indicated on the lesson plan.

***** STAR Level Four - Staff/Child Ratio and Group Size**

Age	Staff/Child Ratio	Group Size
0-18 months	1 to 5	10
18 months – 2 ½ years	1 to 7	14
24 months – 36 months	1 to 8	16
2 ½ - 4 years	1 to 11	22
4 years to school age	1 to 18	36
School age to 8 years	1 to 21	42
8 years and older	1 to 22	44

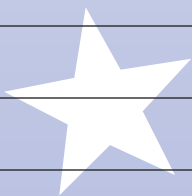
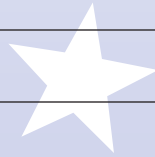
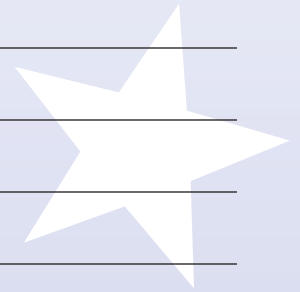
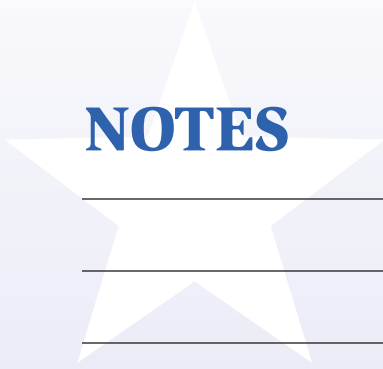
The term “school age” refers to children of lawful school age, as defined on page 9 in the Minimum Standards, who are enrolled in public or private school.

***** STAR Level Five - Staff/Child Ratio and Group Size**

Age	Staff/Child Ratio	Group Size
0-18 months	1 to 4	8
18 months – 2 ½ years	1 to 6	12
24 months – 36 months	1 to 7	14
2 ½ - 4 years	1 to 10	20
4 years to school age	1 to 16	32
School age to 8 years	1 to 20	40
8 years and older	1 to 20	40

The term “school age” refers to children of lawful school age, as defined on page 9 in the Minimum Standards, who are enrolled in public or private school.

NOTES





QUALITY RATING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM

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Alabama Department of Human Resources
Child Care Services Division

All programs of the Department of Human Resources are administered in accordance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and all other federal and state civil rights laws.