

Illinois Launches Child Care Quality Pilot

36 Child Care Centers Participating

The Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD) and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) have launched a pilot to test a new approach to child care quality improvement. All licensed child care centers in selected rural counties were invited to participate if at least 40% of their children participate in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP).

Thirty-six (36) centers have committed to testing new Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) practices, and IDHS is supporting those centers through a new method of quality improvement funding. The pilot is supported by the federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) and State child care funds.

Up-Front Funding Supports Enhanced Staffing

The State and the center each make commitments:

- IDHS contracts pay up-front for the salary and staffing pattern enhancements centers need to meet standards beyond basic licensing requirements. Pilot funding is allocated per classroom, not per child.
- Programs implement the Pilot ExceleRate Illinois standards for Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). These standards guide site-based program leaders (director, coordinator, etc.) to establish CQI practices including regular Plan-Do-Review cycles.

These two changes work together. More adequate staffing enables centers to hold regular team meetings focused on quality improvement and child learning.

Assessment Instruments Used for Planning, Not for Ratings

In this pilot, program assessment instruments are used in a new way. Instead of using the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) at the end of the improvement process to determine a rating, the assessments are being used at the beginning to provide baseline data for the center. Centers are using the results to plan and test improvements on a weekly or monthly basis. They do not need to achieve a particular cut score, and the scores for individual centers will not be made public. Instead, Pilot

standards call for every program to work on quality improvement every month. ExceleRate will track aggregate statewide scores and other measures over time to determine if the new approach increases overall quality.

Adequate Staffing Patterns and Salaries Based on Credentials

In order to reduce staff turnover and encourage professional development, pilot funds cover salary increases needed to meet salary standards based on each employee's credentials. Pilot funding also supports a moderate increase in staff numbers, which centers need to implement CQI. Centers continue to collect and use CCAP and tuition payments according to their usual methods.

Support from the McCormick Center and CCR&R Staff

The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National-Louis University is supporting pilot centers by providing site leader orientation, baseline program assessments, and consultation with site leaders who are choosing program improvement goals. State Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs) are also supporting pilot sites by making Quality Specialists and Infant-Toddler Specialists available to address specific needs.

Extra Technical Assistance and Coaching

Some centers have chosen to go beyond the required CQI basics and go more deeply into a particular improvement area. The State is supporting them by providing either:

- Pyramid Model training and coaching to improve children's social-emotional learning.
- Training and coaching by Early CHOICES for identifying (screening) and serving children with disabilities.

Participation in these services meets many of the CQI requirements in the pilot standards.

Pilot Duration

The federal PDG B-5 grant is funded through calendar year 2021 and is renewable for 2022. The purpose of the pilot is to test this approach and continue it beyond 2022 if it works.

Evaluation

Participating centers are sharing their experiences with IDHS contracts and with the standards. GOECD is also collecting data on center staffing changes and financial requirements. Some modifications are already being made based on feedback, and more are expected. A final report will be produced as part of the overall PDG B-5 evaluation.

Participating Centers

Amity Learning Center, Freeport
Bright Beginning Learning Day Care Center, LLC, Harrisburg
Bright Start Child and Family Education Center, Mount Vernon
Buckeroo Early Education Center, Inc., Flora
Bumblebee Child Care Center & Pre-K, Mt. Vernon
Centralia's Mary's House, Centralia
Decatur Day Care, Decatur
D's Day Care, Breese
Educational Child Care Center, Jacksonville
Heartland Kids Early Learning Center, Marion
Kiddie Kollege Early Childhood Center, Fairfield
Kids Corral, Frankford
Kids Day Out, Murphysboro
Knox County YMCA Early Learning Center, Galesburg
Little Angels Learning Center, Harrisburg
Malone's Early Learning Center, Inc., Carterville
Murry's Child Development Center, DeSoto
Prairieland Kids Daycare and Learning Center, Inc., Morris
Presbyterian Church Day Care Center, Jacksonville
Primrose Academy, Sandoval
Rainbow Day Care Center, Inc., Eldorado
RBC Early Education, LLC dba KidZone, Olney
Robin's Nest, Carbondale
Robin's Nest, Carterville
Robin's Nest, Marion
Step by Step, Aquarius in Ottawa
Step by Step, Diamond
Step by Step, McKinley in Ottawa
Step by Step, Morris
Stepping Stones Children's Center II, LLC, Charleston
Stepping Stones Children's Center II, LLC, Mattoon
Sunny Days Child Care & Learning Center, Vandalia
The Learning Zone, Mattoon
The Little School House, LLC, Mattoon
Wee Care Center, Macomb
Yellow Brick Road Learning Adventure, Marion

In combination, these 36 centers include 593 teachers and assistants in 114 infant/toddler classrooms, 65 preschool classrooms, and 37 school-age rooms.

For More Information

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This project was made possible by grant number 90TP0057. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official view of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.