

## **What is the Pinellas 5-Star Quality Improvement System?**

Pinellas 5-Star Quality Improvement System (QIS) is a voluntary program for providers who have agreed to have their programs assessed by highly trained and reliable staff, using the Environment Rating Scales (ERS). These scales, developed by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina, are used internationally and provide an extremely valid view of the program.

## **Why was the Pinellas 5-Star QIS created?**

A number of recent studies have proven that high quality early childhood experiences are a major factor in children's development and ability to succeed once they reach school and even later in life. The research has proven that the first years of a child's life are extremely critical in a child's learning and emotional development. Eighty-five percent of a person's intellectual, emotional and cognitive ability is formed by the age of 5. We realize that providing quality child care is not always an easy task. We know that child care programs in our community want to offer high quality care for their families, but financial constraints often make this very difficult for even our most dedicated providers. Based upon their scores and other criteria such as ratios, group size, staff qualifications and accreditation, the program can receive up to 5 stars. Their "star rating" makes them eligible for a stipend which will help defray the costs of providing quality care.

## **What are the goals of the Pinellas 5-Star QIS?**

- To improve the quality of Pinellas County child care programs which will, in turn, produce positive outcomes for children.
- To help educate families to recognize, expect and seek out quality in child care programs, and
- To provide the financial incentives so that providers can improve and maintain the quality of their programs.

## **Why should a provider participate in the Pinellas 5-Star QIS?**

The child care providers set the course for the level of quality in their program, and this course includes every aspect of the program from staff to child to families. The level of quality in a child care setting affects the life of every child that comes through its door and, as research shows us, this impact lasts a lifetime. Although continuous quality improvement can be a lot of work, the Pinellas 5-Star Quality Improvement System offers resources and support to help each program enhance quality. The annual assessments and detailed, written summary reports serve as the basis of each program's quality improvement plan. Pinellas 5-Star providers also have access to on-going training, technical assistance and financial incentives to help create better programs for the children they serve.

## **What are the key components of the Pinellas 5-Star QIS?**

- The 5-Star program is voluntary. Providers can choose whether or not to participate. However, contracted providers will still be assessed using the ERS as the tool for their contractual assessment.
- Assessment visits will be unannounced and be conducted annually.
- After their assessment, 5-Star providers will have the opportunity to purchase resources that will help improve their programs, especially in areas on the assessment that showed the need for improvement.
- CCC is truly committed to assist providers on this journey. We offer a series of three trainings on the implementation of the ERS, offered once a month and repeated as necessary. Provider consultants will be available to give you as much assistance as you feel you need.
- Participating providers: must be contracted with CCC for at least one year; must have a regular license; must have no administrative actions in the past year; and must have no outstanding licensing compliance issues since last inspection
- A score of 3.0 must be maintained in all sub-categories in order to qualify for a 5 Star stipend.
- Assessors will be maintain the highest level of reliability, as determined by the authors of the ERS
- An appeal process will be available for providers to contest their scores
- Incentive allocations will be distributed annually

## **What do the stars mean?**

Generally, the more stars, the higher the quality of services was at the time of the assessment. However, remember the ERS instrument includes very high quality standards. For example, the national average for preschool classrooms is 3.86 of a possible 7. Therefore, there will be participants in the Pinellas 5-Star program who have not yet attained the criteria to receive a star. Their participation in the program notes their commitment to quality and their desire to continually improve the quality of their program.

## What are the rating criteria?

### Number of Stars

### Quality Score/Additional Factors

1	3.0-3.49 No Additional Factors
2	3.5-3.99 No Additional Factors
3	4.0-4.49 No Additional Factors
4	4.5-5.49 / Plus a Minimum of 1 CDA Per Classroom or Family Child Care Home; and the Staff-Child Ratio and Group Size (Minimum) listed below.
5	5.5-7.0 / Plus all of the 4-Star Level factors; plus Approved Accreditation System (Gold Seal); and AA/AS or Higher in 50% of All Classrooms or 100% for Family Child Care Homes

Age	Ratio	Group Size
0-12 (Infants)	1:3	6
12-24 (Toddlers)	1:5	10
2 Year Olds	1:8	NA
3 Year Olds	1:13	NA
4 Year Olds	1:16	NA
5 Year Olds	1:21	NA

Family child care homes: The group size can be no more than 5 children and no more than 3 of the children can be under 2 years of age.

Large family child care homes: The ratio is no more than 6 under the age of 2 for 2 caregivers.

## What does the ERS Measure?

- **Environment** - The Pinellas 5-Star Quality Rating Improvement System uses the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) to assess the quality of early education programs. According to Dr. Thelma Harms, one of the authors of the Environment Rating Scales, all children have three basic needs:
  1. Protection of health and safety;
  2. Building relationships with children, parents, extended family and community; and
  3. Opportunities for stimulation and learning from experience.

All three of these basic needs must be considered when evaluating the quality of early education programs. While children of all ages and backgrounds have the same basic needs, the expression of those needs – therefore their environment – changes as children grow. Consequently four different scales, each designed to address a different part of the early child care environment, are used to assess the environment in which providers care for children:

1. ITERS-R for children from birth through 2 ½ years of age;
2. ECERS-R for children in their preschool years (2 ½ to 5 years);
3. SACERS for children of elementary school; and
4. FCCERS-R for family child care homes

The Environment Rating Scales are tools that can be used to assess an early education provider's ability to address these three basic needs. The ERS document a program's physical environment, health and safety, language development, learning activities and staff/child interaction with emphasis place upon activities that will develop children's school readiness skills, as well as their social and emotional development. All four scales have been extensively tested, used widely, and are well-respected. Providers and parents can be confident of the results of an assessment. The carefully designed scoring process and continued support and training of assessors leaves little room for personal biases to impact the scoring process.

- **Ratios/Group Size** – Two of the most important indicators of program quality are teacher/child ratios and group size. Programs with lower ratios and smaller group size allow quality individual learning experiences based upon the needs of the children. Ratios and group size in the QRIS system meet and exceed local licensing levels.
- **Staff Education and Training** – Research has shown us that other very important quality indicators are the education and training level of the staff who are working with the children. Highly educated and trained staff are more likely to provide quality learning environments and more positive interactions with children because they understand how children develop and learn. The Pinellas 5-Star Quality Rating Improvement System encourages staff to increase their level of training and education.
- **Accreditation** – The Pinellas 5-Star Quality Rating Improvement System recognizes those programs who have achieved a Gold Seal status, as designed by the State. In order to do so, they must complete a self-study process and follow national standards of high-quality early childhood education that are set by the accrediting agency.

### **How will the assessment process work?**

Programs will be assessed using one of the four Environment Rating Scales. The correct scale for each assessment will be chosen based on the ages of the children. The ERS are internationally recognized for their reliability and validity and are based on research that supports best practices when providing appropriate environments for young children. The program will be evaluated by highly trained assessors. The authors of the ERS have trained all assessors on each of the scales. As part of their training, assessors complete multiple practice observations under the direction of the authors of the scale. In addition, their reliability is checked on a monthly basis by the Pinellas County 5-Star Program Administrator.

### **What will happen on the day of the assessment visit?**

- Assessment visits are unannounced.
- The assessor will arrive at the program between 8:00 – 8:30
- Assessors will observe at least 50% of the total number of groups, observing one group per day. A group will be randomly selected for the assessment for that day. On that day, the assessor will explain to the provider how classrooms are to be selected. No groups are excluded in the selection process even if they were observed the previous year.
- The assessment will last approximately 3-4 hours
- During the assessment, the assessor will remain as “invisible” as possible and will not interact with staff or children
- After the assessment, the assessor will spend about 30 minutes interviewing the provider in order to obtain information about indicators that were not observed
- Occasionally, more than one person may observe a classroom or family child care home at the same time to ensure inter-rater reliability. Inter-rater reliability is the percentage of validity between two assessors and their individual scores. Pinellas County assessors are checked monthly by the 5-Star Program Administrator who serves as the Anchor and are expected to maintain an 85% inter-rater reliability score. This level of reliability ensures that providers are being assessed fairly and accurately.

### **How can providers prepare for the assessment?**

- Make sure you and your staff are familiar with the rating scales and assessment process by attending the three part training offered by CCC.
- Conduct a “self-assessment” prior to the observation.
- Contact your provider consultant and develop a quality improvement plan prior to your assessment visit.
- Make sure a copy of your daily schedule is up-to-date and have a copy available for the assessor.
- Complete a class list including birthdates for each group of children. (n/a for School age programs).
- Make arrangements for staff to meet with the assessor for up to 30 minutes following the observation.

## **How are providers notified of the assessment results?**

Assessors prepare a detailed summary report that identifies the strengths and areas that need improvement after completing the assessment. The report lists the overall score as well as the score for each subscale. A separate report is prepared for each group that was assessed. These reports are mailed to the provider after all observations are complete. The provider consultant will contact the provider and set up a convenient time to review the assessment and assist the provider in developing a quality improvement plan. The quality score for the program will be determined by the lowest group score. To be eligible for a stipend, that score must be an overall of a 3.0 with no subscale scoring below a 3.

## **What quality supports are available for providers?**

- **Technical assistance** is available for all 5-Star participants. Your provider consultant can help a program create an achievable improvement plan with benchmarks and target dates based on the strengths and challenges identified in the assessment.
- **Assessments** are actually a valuable quality support for programs. The process will identify the strengths as well as the areas that need improvement and can serve as a foundation for improving quality.
- **Mini-grants** are available for programs (subject to the availability of funds) to assist them in purchasing materials in areas needing improvement.
- **Stipends** are awarded to programs that achieve a “star rating” and are based on the number of CCC children enrolled. This number is determined by averaging the number of children enrolled during the past year.

## **Is there an appeal process for providers who need clarification as to how the rating was determined?**

It is common for child care providers to have questions about their facility summary report. Occasionally, child care providers raise objections or disagree with some aspect of the report. The following outlines the steps that providers may follow if they have questions about their report. No appeal will be reviewed unless these sequential steps are followed.

### **Step 1: Talk or meet with your Assessor about your questions or concerns within ten (10) business-days of receiving the facility summary report \***

Your Assessor is available to clarify and offer guidance about the 5-Star quality assessment results. In most situations, questions you raise can be addressed in an informal way (e.g. often with a simple telephone call to the Assessor). However, if requested, a face-to-face meeting may be scheduled. If you still have significant concerns, you may proceed to Step 2.

### **Step 2: Write a letter to the Program Administrator, explaining your appeal within thirty (30) business-days of receiving your report. \***

- A. If you decide to proceed beyond Step 1, we ask that you write a letter to fully describe your appeal. The letter should be submitted to the Program Administrator, within thirty (30) business-days of receiving the facility summary report. You will be given the options of just submitting an appeal letter or submitting the letter and requesting a meeting to discuss the appeal letter. The owner and/or director, classroom teacher and relevant CCC staff could attend the meeting. Generally CCC representatives would include the Assessor and the Program Administrator. The number of provider representatives attending a requested meeting should not exceed 3. This meeting should be held within fifty (50) business-days from the date of receiving the facility summary report. \*

The letter should include the following:

- A. Facility name and contact information (e.g. provider's name, telephone number, mailing address, and email address);
- B. Assessment date(s), rating scale used and Provider Consultant/Assessor name(s);
- C. A specific description of your appeal for each item that relates to the rating you are appealing. Identify the item(s)/indicator number(s) from the facility summary report, as a reference; and
- D. Whether you are just submitting an appeal letter or whether you are also requesting a meeting.

**Step 3: The Program Administrator will provide you with a written response within 60 days.**

The written response will be provided within sixty (60) business-days from the date the original facility summary report was received. \* The letter will include a response to every question or concern raised in your letter and any corrections or changes approved by the Program Administrator.

**Step 4: Submit a written request to CCC's Assistant Director within 75 days from the receipt of the summary report. \***

The letter should request a meeting to discuss any dissatisfaction resulting from Step 3 above (if applicable).\* The Assistant Director has the discretion to (1) confirm the program Administrator's decision or (2) conduct a meeting with the provider. The provider may have up to 3 representatives attend the meeting. The Assistant Director has the discretion to invite additional staff to the meeting. The final decision regarding the appeal rests with the Assistant Director. The provider will receive a written response that will indicate the decision within 90 days from the receipt of the summary report. \*

\* Any deadline may be extended solely at the discretion of CCC.

**How can I get answers to questions or concerns I may have about the Pinellas 5-Star QIS?**

If you have questions or concerns about the 5-Star Program, contact Judy Scott, Program Administrator at 547-4254. You can also e-mail her at [jscott@childcarepinellas.org](mailto:jscott@childcarepinellas.org).