

Pinellas 5-Star Quality Improvement System

Coordinated Child Care of Pinellas, Inc is continuing to offer subcontracted providers the option of participating in a voluntary Quality Improvement System (QIS) project. A QIS is a systematic approach to assess, improve and communicate the level of quality in early care and education programs. Similar to rating systems for restaurants and hotels, the QIS awards quality ratings to early care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards. This system provides an opportunity for Pinellas County to 1) increase their quality of care and education for children; 2) increase parents' understanding and demand for higher quality care; and 3) increase the professional development of child care providers. Pinellas 5-Star Quality Improvement System is funded by the JWB Children's Services Council of Pinellas County and the Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County. Participating providers receive mini-grants to purchase classroom resources, based on the assessment categories indicating the need. Based upon the 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. Certificates are issued to all participating providers that include their star-rating. Parents are provided a Parent Guide that explains the meaning of the ratings and helps them make decisions on selecting a quality provider of their choice.

Why was the Pinellas 5-Star Quality Rating Improvement System 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. The Pinellas 5-Star is a voluntary program for contracted 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.

What are the Environment Rating Scales?

- The Environment Rating Scales (ERS) are tools to assess the quality of Early Care and Education programs that are used throughout the world.
- The ERS are research-based, reliable, valid, and suitable for inclusive and culturally diverse programs.
- They are based on best practices in early childhood education and they address worldwide standards.
- The ERS can be used to assess any group of children (ITERS-R – for programs serving children birth to 30 months, ECERS-R for programs serving children 30 months through

5 years, SACERS for programs serving school-age children, and FCCERS-R for programs serving children in Family Child Care homes).

- The ERS cover three basic categories that assess the quality of a program:
 1. Children’s protection, health and safety – scattered throughout the scales (supervision, meals, sand/water, environment);
 2. Building relationships with children, parents, extended family and community; there might be only a few interaction items, but it is also included in other items; and
 3. Opportunities for stimulation and learning from experience

- The ERS are broken down into six subscales which include:
 1. Space and Furnishings;
 2. Personal Care Routines;
 3. Language/Reasoning;
 4. Activities;
 5. Interaction; and
 6. Program Structure

- The ERS yield a total composite score that is an excellent overall indicator of the program’s quality

- The ERS are seven-point, Likert-type scales ranging from 1-7 with 1=inadequate, 3=minimal, 5=good, 7=excellent.

- The ERS provide you with:
 - A global look at your environment;
 - A common unit of measure;
 - A tool for system-wide changes;
 - Opportunities for all of us to closely examine how we prepare the environment for children;
 - Opportunities to quantify and justify our needs; and
 - A tool to reinforce what is expected of us

Some key elements of the current model include: assessment visits that are unannounced and be conducted annually, resources that will help improve their programs, especially in areas on the assessment that showed the need for improvement; trainings on the implementation of the ERS are offered frequently and provider consultants will be available for technical assistance.

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 maintaining 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. The QIS is intended to be a long-term process, as providers continuously strive for improved quality. Their participation in the program is indicative of a providers commitment to quality and their desire to continually improve the quality of their program.