



## What Is Quality?



Every parent and family wants the best education for their child. A quality child care provider:

- Understands that learning begins at birth
- Provides a safe and welcoming environment
- Offers lots of activities where children can learn



## What Do the Stars Mean?

Quality Counts for Children awards “star level” designations based on the number of points a program receives for meeting specific quality standards. These standards and indicators have been selected as a result of a thorough review of research literature and promising practices in other communities. Current research confirms that early care and education programs that focus on improving these standards can enhance children’s positive outcomes. The indicators for each standard do not represent all aspects of quality, but rather the essential elements that lead to higher levels of quality.



Sponsorship by Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County, Inc., State of Florida, Agency for Workforce Innovation  
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# Quality Counts for Children

A Pinellas County Continuous Quality Improvement Program



# Parent Guide

## Program Overview

We know now what parents have felt intuitively for years: the early years are the most important! Recent research on the brain has provided scientific evidence about how children learn. 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 can all agree that parents are a child's first and best teachers, but for many families, child care is a necessity and a fact of life. A child's out-of-home teacher must provide love and respect in the context of a nurturing environment. The parents' selection of a quality child care program is extremely critical.

We also realize that providing this quality care is not an easy task. We know that the 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.

Pinellas County child care programs participating in our Quality Counts For Children initiative are committed to providing the highest quality program possible and are working toward that goal. Participants agree to have their program assessed objectively, their strengths and limitations reviewed, and goals set for quality improvement.

Quality Counts for Children is designed to measure and continuously enhance the quality of child care services in Pinellas County. It is a collaborative effort with many community partners, including the JWB Children's Service Council, the Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County, Inc., Coordinated Child Care of Pinellas, Inc. and the Pinellas County License Board. It is a voluntary early care and education improvement initiative that seeks to improve the quality of child care.

## Project Goals/Process

- To improve the quality of Pinellas County child care programs which, in turn, produce positive outcomes for children; and
- 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 program

Quality Counts for Children is a voluntary quality improvement program that uses licensing standards as a foundation and sets a continuum of five clearly defined levels of increasing quality. This continuous quality improvement program is based on a point system in which a program receives points for every quality benchmark it achieves.

The overall goal of the Quality Counts for Children initiative is to improve the quality of all of Pinellas County's early care and education programs. The Quality Counts for Children rating system will:

- Ensure that children throughout Pinellas County are provided with the best possible early learning experiences through high quality early learning programs
- Provide information and support to early learning programs to improve and sustain the quality of their programs; and
- Provide families with an easy to use tool to select the best program for their child.

Quality Counts for Children will significantly raise the standards of quality in our child care programs. All participating Quality Counts for Children providers are committed to the long-term continuous quality improvement process.

## What Does It Measure?



Curriculum: The program needs to have a dynamic curriculum for all age groups that describes specific developmentally appropriate goals and experiences that meet the needs and interests of the individual children.

Family Engagement: The program needs to communicate regularly and effectively with families and also provide opportunities for families to participate in the program and/or increase their parenting skills.

Learning Environment: The Environment Rating Scales document the environment provided for children. It is a tool that is used world-wide to assess early childhood programs. Emphasis is placed upon activities that will develop children's school readiness skills, as well as their social and emotional development.

Program Administration: The program follows sound administrative and business practices in order to provide a stable, consistent, and good quality program for the children. In addition, it assures a professional working environment.

Ratios/Group Size: These are two of the most important indicators of program quality. Programs with lower ratios and smaller groups size allow quality individual learning experiences based on the needs of the children. Ratios and group sizes in the Quality Counts for Children programs meet and/or exceed local licensing levels.

Staff Education and Training: Research has shown us that another very important quality indicator is 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.

Screening and Identification of Special Needs: The programs work collaboratively with families to identify and seek services for children with developmental delays or disabilities.