



Information and Policies for the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System

November 2013

This packet contains information intended to assist programs with their application; the pages that follow are for reference and do not need to be returned to BrightStars.

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Welcome to BrightStars!

BrightStars is Rhode Island's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for child care, early learning, and school-age programs. Through BrightStars, Rhode Island is creating a sustainable infrastructure of diverse and high-quality early care and school-age programs using research-based standards that promote positive outcomes for children and families. BrightStars is part of the state's aligned continuum of program standards, with linkages to the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) state licensing, Basic Education Plan (BEP) for public schools regulation, and RI Department of Education (RIDE) Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Approval (CECE).

BrightStars works to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early learning and school-age care settings. BrightStars address programs at their current level of quality, using a strengths-based approach that guides them to decisions about quality child care. A BrightStars rating is an objective tool to support program quality improvement and assist families in making informed choices when selecting child care and early education programs.

BrightStars assesses child care and early learning programs in six quality domains:

- Health, Safety & Nutrition
- Enrollment & Staffing
- Staff Qualifications & Ongoing Professional Development
- Administration
- Early Learning & Development
- Family Engagement

Since 2005, BrightStars has received invaluable guidance and support from an Advisory Committee that includes representatives from all sectors of the early learning and child care field. BrightStars is a public-private partnership managed by the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children. Key partners include United Way of Rhode Island; CVS Caremark Charitable Trust; Rhode Island Department of Human Services; Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families; Rhode Island Department of Education; Rhode Island Department of Health; Rhode Island KIDS COUNT; and the hundreds of BrightStars-participating child care programs across Rhode Island.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who can participate in BrightStars?

All licensed child care providers and public school preschool programs are eligible to participate. This includes child care centers, preschools, family child care homes, and stand-alone licensed school-age child care programs.

Is there a fee to participate in BrightStars?

There is no fee to participate in BrightStars.

What are the benefits/incentives for joining BrightStars?

- Support in setting and achieving quality improvement goals and accessing state resources.

- Recognition for going above and beyond licensing requirements and state regulations and committing to a path of quality improvement.
- Support to market or promote your program, including free parent brochures, marketing materials, and access to the BrightStars logo. BrightStars programs are also featured on our website, www.BrightStars.org, and in our statewide database of child care, early learning, and school-age programs.
- Priority referral to parents searching for care through our online and phone-based referral services.

What is the difference between BrightStars and state licensing/regulation?

State licensing (through the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and regulation (Public School Basic Education Plan Compliance) requirements establish the foundation for operating child care, early learning, and school-age programs. These regulations specify the minimum standards that must be met to operate legally, and are the first step in a quality rating and improvement system. Higher levels in quality rating systems recognize programs for exceeding basic regulatory requirements and implementing practices that research shows are best for children.

Can programs increase their star rating?

Programs may request an increase to their star rating at any time, but may not receive more than two (2) Environment Rating Scale (ERS) assessments per year.

What happens if I am not happy with my program's star rating?

Programs may appeal the rating decision to the BrightStars Appeals Committee. Whether or not a program submits an appeal, BrightStars welcomes feedback about its programming and processes. Written feedback may be directed to the BrightStars Executive Director.

Will my program's information be kept confidential?

A program's star rating, the level achieved for each BrightStars standard, and other basic program information (address, phone number, ages served, etc.) will be made available on the BrightStars website. Information submitted as part of your BrightStars application will be shared within the state data system at an aggregate level. BrightStars participation is required for programs participating in the Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), and ending your participation in BrightStars will be communicated to DHS. See Policy below.

What if I need more information before deciding to apply?

BrightStars staff are available to answer any questions you may have. Please contact us by phone, mail or email at any time. In addition, BrightStars offers general information sessions to provide information and materials to interested programs. Visit our website www.BrightStars.org for more information.

Contact Information

Rhode Island AEYC & BrightStars

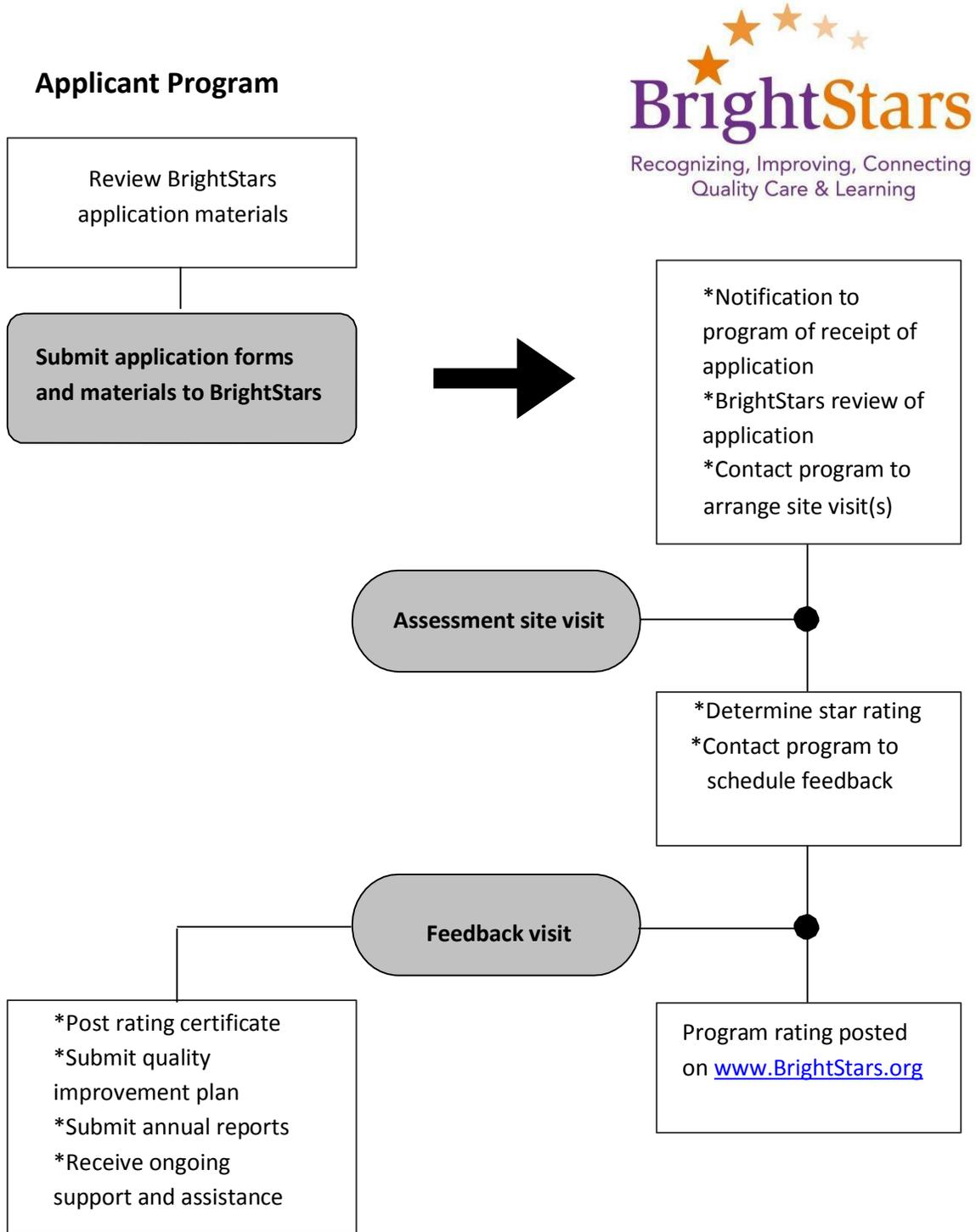
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BrightStars Process

The following describes the process of applying to and participating in BrightStars.



BrightStars Policies

Professionalism

It is the responsibility of BrightStars staff/consultants to be courteous and helpful, and to represent Rhode Island AEYC and BrightStars in a professional manner. Staff are expected to provide a high level of customer service that involves taking responsibility for identifying problems and providing solutions.

Confidentiality

BrightStars is firmly committed to the principle that the confidentiality of each program's or individual's data must be protected. A program's star rating, the level achieved for each BrightStars standard, and other basic program information (address, phone number, ages served, etc.) will be made available on the BrightStars or Exceed websites. Information submitted as part of your BrightStars application will be shared within the state data system with state agency partners, including the RI Department of Human Services (DHS), the RI Department of Education (RIDE), the RI Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and the RI Department of Health (DOH) and at an aggregate level for the purposes of data reporting. Identifiable and specific information about your program may be shared with state agency representatives for the purposes of record keeping, data analysis and program assessment in a situation where a program applies for RIDE Comprehensive Early Childhood Education (CECE) Approval. Identifying information may be shared with others only with your specific, signed permission.

BrightStars participation is required for programs participating in the Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), and ending your participation in BrightStars will be communicated to DHS. The Department of Human Services has access to all data gathered and stored by BrightStars.

Child Abuse and Neglect

If serious health and safety violations are observed while conducting assessments or visiting programs, BrightStars Staff/consultants are responsible for recording and reporting hazards to the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). Areas that may represent imminent risk or actual harm include:

- Child-staff ratio (significant deviation from regulation and/or pattern of non-compliance)
 - Supervision (extremely lax supervision)
 - Over capacity (significant deviation from regulation and/or pattern of non-compliance)
 - Prohibited disciplinary actions
 - Lack of or inappropriate use of passenger restraints
 - Hazards (major environmental health and safety hazards)
 - Other concerns as/when identified
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Objectivity

BrightStars maintains policies and procedures to ensure the objectivity of staff performing duties related to program assessment and rating. First, BrightStars staff disclose any conflicts of interest at the commencement of employment and throughout employment if and when a conflict develops; staff are not involved in the assessment/rating of programs with which they have a conflict. Second, staff involved in a program's assessment/rating do not provide assistance, support, or provide suggestions for improvement to that program. BrightStars maintains an absolute firewall between program assessment and program quality improvement support. BrightStars quality improvement staff may meet with the program at their site of business and assist with the application process. However, staff may not perform any sort of "pre-assessment" before an initial application is submitted.

Reliability

BrightStars staff performing duties related to any aspect of program assessment and/or rating receive training and are closely monitored to ensure that their assessment of program quality is accurate and follows policies and procedures. In addition, comprehensive and specific policies are in place to ensure that assessment staff reliably complete the *Environment Rating Scales* (ERS). Staff may use the ERS for assessment purposes only if they have completed reliability training with FPG/ERSI (ERS authors) or if they have been trained and demonstrate reliability with an individual who has completed reliability training with FPG/ERSI. All staff using the ERS for assessment purposes complete reliability checks on a scheduled basis. During a reliability check, an individual trained to reliability with the authors joins an assessor who is due to have his/her reliability checked. Each completes scoring independently. During debriefing, a consensus score is assigned to each item. The assessor's reliability score is determined based on the percentage of his/her original item scores that agree with the consensus scores. All staff using ERS for assessment purposes must meet the state determined reliability score across reliability checks.

Application Handling

All programs wishing to participate in and receive a star rating by BrightStars must submit an application. Programs participating due to CCAP regulations will complete a Program Profile.

Applications are processed in the order in which they are received. Programs are notified in writing in each of the following situations during the application processing period:

- Receipt of application, within thirty (30) days of receipt
- Incomplete application submitted; correspondence will detail missing application items
- Scheduling of assessment visit window; includes what will be assessed during visit

Program Assessment

BrightStars is a 5-level quality rating and improvement system. In order to achieve a specific star rating, programs must meet all criteria in that level for each of the quality standards. For example, to achieve a 3-Star rating, a program must meet all criteria in Level 3 for Standard 1, all criteria in Level 3 for Standard 2, etc.

The first step in program assessment is a document review based on the program's submitted application. Applications are initially assessed for completeness. Applications are deemed incomplete when they are missing required documents, or when documents submitted do not meet the requirements of the program's requested rating.

Programs have thirty (30) days from the date they are notified of missing materials to submit requested documents. If requested information is not received within that period, a program must submit a new application. A program may be granted a thirty- (30) day extension if the program has reasonably demonstrated they are working on the application and has submitted the majority of missing information.

When applications are reviewed and determined to be complete, staff either complete an assessment report (for 1-Star requests) or communicate with the program regarding their assessment site visit(s). In the latter case, assessment site visit requirements for the requested star rating are communicated to the program, and a visit window is provided.

Assessment site visits are unannounced. However, BrightStars works with programs to ensure that site visits do not occur during planned field trips, special events, etc. and a three-week site visit window is agreed

upon. If for any reason a BrightStars assessor not allowed access to the program and/or classrooms at the time of an assessment visit despite all efforts to accommodate schedules, BrightStars will deny the program's application for participation and will not accept a new application from the program for a period of six (6) months.

Upon arrival at the program on the day of assessment, the BrightStars assessor requests to see the program administrator, designee, or family child care provider and reviews assessment procedures with her/him.

All assessment site visits include direct observation of a random sample of classrooms or groups. In addition to classroom or group observations, BrightStars reviews documentation randomly selected from staff and child files. BrightStars uses a true random number generator in order to select which classrooms and files will be assessed.

BrightStars assessors at all times maintain professionalism, interacting minimally with staff/children so as not to disrupt programming. No assessment results are shared during assessment visit(s).

Participation Requirements

- Programs agree to participate in BrightStars for a three-year period. The program rating is valid for that time, or until the BrightStars standards are next revised (anticipated in 2016). At either of these times, programs may choose to continue or terminate participation and may reapply at any time. If a program chooses to terminate participation during the participation period, the program will not be allowed reentry into BrightStars for a period of twelve (12) months from the date of termination.
 - Programs must notify BrightStars in writing within ten (10) days of any change to their DCYF licensing status.
 - A program's BrightStars rating certificate must be posted in a conspicuous place in the program. Ideal locations for posting include the main entrance used by families or a reception area.
 - A program's star rating, the level achieved for each BrightStars standard, and other basic program information (address, phone number, ages served, etc.) will be made available on the BrightStars website. Information submitted as part of your BrightStars application will be shared within the state data system at an aggregate level. Identifiable and specific information about your program will be shared only with your permission. BrightStars participation is required for programs participating in the Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), and ending your participation in BrightStars will be communicated to DHS.
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Annual Reports

All programs must complete and submit Annual Reports. Annual Reports are due at the time of both the program's first anniversary and second anniversary. The following items are included/required:

- Program Overview form, including number of CCAP children served
 - Copy of current DCYF license (for DCYF-licensed programs)
 - Copy of most recent DCYF Monitoring Report (for DCYF-licensed programs)
 - Permission for BrightStars to confirm BEP compliance with RIDE (for public schools only)
 - Copy of current COA After School Recognition Certificate (for school-age programs only)
 - Updated Quality Improvement Plan
 - Signed Checklist and Signature Form
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Rating Amendment

BrightStars supports continuous quality improvement and knows that many programs participating in BrightStars will seek to increase their star rating. Programs may request an increase to their star rating at any time, but may not receive more than two (2) ERS assessments per year.

When a program requests an amendment to its star rating, BrightStars will re-assess only the BrightStars standards that are requested for review.

Based on BrightStars re-assessment, one of the following will

occur: [a] Star rating is increased

[b] Star rating remains the same (*assessed criteria did not meet the requirements of level requested*)

[c] Star rating is decreased (*the assessed criteria did not meet requirements of the level requested nor the requirements of the program's current star rating*)

Renewal

A program's rating expires on the program's third anniversary of entry into BrightStars or when the BrightStars standards are next revised and made available (whichever comes first). Programs must submit a new application after the end of their three-year participation period in order to continue participation in BrightStars. Programs that are actively engaged in the BrightStars renewal process maintain their current rating until the full re-assessment has been completed.

Program Suspension

When a program is suspended, it is removed from the BrightStars website. Suspended programs are required to remove its Star Rating certificate and bar chart from public view. Programs are suspended in the following circumstances:

- Licensing issues: expired license, probationary license, license suspension, license revocation
- Non-compliance issues on DCYF monitoring report
- BEP compliance issues
- Failure to submit a complete Annual Report
- Failure to submit a Quality Improvement Plan

Suspended programs will be reinstated to full participation by sending in the necessary documents or correcting compliance issues, as long as the program is still within their participation period.

Appeals

A program may choose to appeal its star rating for any reason. BrightStars provides official notification of earned star rating at the Feedback Visit with the program's Quality Improvement Specialist once the application process has been finalized and a star rating has been assigned. BrightStars allows programs seven (7) calendar days from their feedback visit to decide whether to appeal. The program must detail its concerns in writing within thirty (30) days of the feedback visit. These concerns are presented to an Appeals Committee, the members of which are not employees or contractors of BrightStars. The Appeals Committee will return a decision within sixty (60) days. Programs determining whether to appeal or that have an appeal in process are considered "not yet participating," and the program's information is not posted on the BrightStars website.

BrightStars Variance Policy

Through a joint partnership across state agencies, United Way of Rhode Island, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and other stakeholders, the BrightStars Framework was revised in 2013 utilizing the most recent QRIS research findings. BrightStars does not award variances to any standards at any time. Programs must comply with all requirements published in the current BrightStars Frameworks in order to meet desired star rating.

