



# BrightStars

Recognizing, Improving, Connecting  
Quality Care & Learning

## Family Child Care Quality Framework

Updated September 2025

# Introduction

**BrightStars is Rhode Island's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for Early Care, Education, and School-age Programs**

Early childhood experience affects the architecture of children's maturing brains. Like the construction of a house, brains are built from the bottom up, with early experiences setting the foundation for the rest of development. This is why high quality child care, education, and school-age programs are so important to Rhode Island.

Through BrightStars, Rhode Island is supporting a sustainable infrastructure of diverse and high quality early care, education, and school-age programs using research-based practices that promote positive outcomes for children and families.



BrightStars' five-level QRIS works to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care, education, and school-age programs. BrightStars meets programs where they are, using a strengths-based approach to continuous quality improvement (CQI).

**DHS Child Care Licensing Regulations** establish the foundation for operating early care, education, and school-age programs. These regulations specify the minimum standards that must be met to operate legally and are the first step in a QRIS. Each incremental quality rating recognizes programs for exceeding basic regulatory requirements and implementing best practices that research shows is best for children.

Since its inception, BrightStars has received invaluable guidance and support from the **BrightStars Advisory Committee** that includes representatives from all sectors of the early learning and child care field, state department leaders, early learning programs, and key local experts and advocates.



**BrightStars supports programs in six quality domains:**

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

BrightStars is a public-private partnership managed by the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children. Key partners include the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS), the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), the Rhode Island Governor's Office, the Local SEIU Education Support Fund (ESF), and the Center for Early Learning Professionals.



## Domains + Standards at A Glance

Health, Safety, + Nutrition



Learning  
Environment



Staff-Child  
Ratio



Teacher  
Qualifications



Continuous  
Quality  
Improvement



Curriculum



Child  
Assessment



Inclusive  
Classroom  
Practices



Family  
Communication  
+ Involvement

Enrollment + Staffing

Administration

Family Engagement

# Standard One: Learning Environment

Daily activities and interactions show that the program is providing a **safe, healthy, and stimulating environment**. The program provides **indoor and outdoor space** to support varied and enriching experiences for children. Daily interactions demonstrate that **educators respect, care for, and enjoy working with children**. The program **supports the inclusion of children with disabilities and developmental delays**, responds to the **cultural and linguistic diversity** of the population it serves, and promotes the acceptance of diversity among staff, families, and children.



| Level 1                                                                      | Level 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Level 3                                                                                    | Level 4                                                                                    | Level 5                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Program is Licensed by DHS</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Compliance with DHS Licensing Regulations</li></ul> <b>AND</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learning Environment Training</li></ul> <b>OR</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• LearnERS Participant</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Average FCCERS-3 score of 3.0 or higher.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Average FCCERS-3 score of 4.0 or higher.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Average FCCERS-3 score of 5.0 or higher.</li></ul> |



# Standard Two: Minimum Staff-Child Ratio

The program has enough staff members at all times to supervise the children and to support early learning and development. This standard reiterates what is expected of programs through compliance with state regulation.

| Level 1                    | Level 2-5                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Program is licensed by DHS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Compliance with Staff-Child Ratios<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ 1:6*</li><li>◦ 2:8**</li><li>◦ 2:12 (applies to group family child care homes only)***</li></ul></li><li>• Staff-Child Ratio Posted</li></ul> |

\*Of these six (6) children, there must be no more than two (2) children under the age of eighteen (18) months, in care, at any time. If all children in care are under three (3) years old, a maximum ratio of four to one (4:1) should be maintained.

\*\*Of these eight children, no more than four children can be less than 18 months old.

\*\*\*Of those 12, no more than four can be under 18 months. If all children are under three years of age, the max ratio of 4:1 must be maintained.



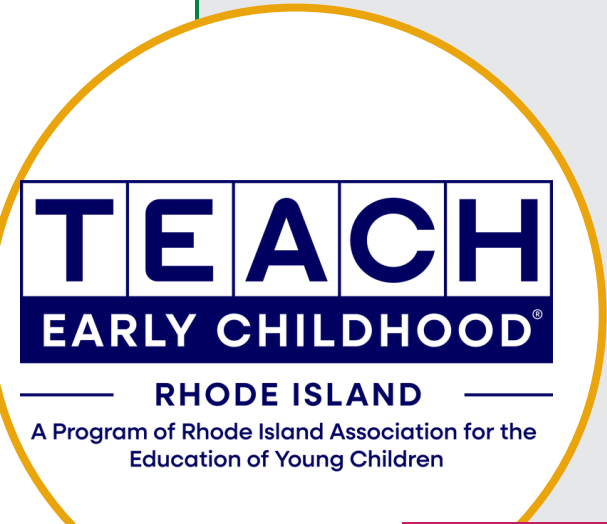
For additional clarification related to Staff-Child Ratio requirements, please refer to DHS Child Care Licensing Regulations

# Standard Three: Educator Qualifications

The Educator has the formal education and professional preparation to work with children in his/her care



| Level 1                                                                    | Level 2                                                                                                                   | Level 3                                                                                                                                                                     | Level 4                                                                                                                                                                                               | Level 5                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Program is licensed by DHS</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The educator completes an <b>Individual Professional Development Plan</b></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The educator has a <b>CDA</b></li><li><b>OR</b></li><li>The educator has <b>3 college credits</b> in ECE or a related field</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The educator has <b>12 college credits</b> in ECE or a related field <b>PLUS</b></li><li>The educator completes relevant introductory RIELDS training</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The educator has <b>24 college credits</b> in ECE or a related field <b>PLUS</b></li><li>Associate's degree <b>OR</b></li><li>60 college credits <b>PLUS</b></li><li>The educator completes relevant RIELDS training</li></ul> |



TEACH Early Childhood RI supports the academic advancement of early childhood educators. Visit [teach-ri.org](http://teach-ri.org) for more information.



# Standard Four: Continuous Quality Improvement

The program conducts a comprehensive self-assessment, at least once a year, to assess compliance with regulations and standards and to determine its effectiveness in meeting the needs of the children and families it serves. The program then uses this information to create program goals to continually improve quality and documents progress towards achieving these goals



| Level 1                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Level 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Level 3                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Level 4                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Level 5                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Program is licensed by DHS</li></ul> <p><b>PLUS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Quality Improvement Plan completed within 90 days of rating</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Compliance with DHS Licensing Regulations</li></ul> <p><b>PLUS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Comprehensive Program Self Assessment that includes:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>at least 2 sources of evidence</li></ul></li></ul> <p><b>PLUS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Quality Improvement Plan completed within 90 days of rating</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Comprehensive Program Self Assessment that includes:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>FCCERS findings, if applicable</li><li>at least 2 other sources of evidence</li></ul></li></ul> <p><b>PLUS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Quality Improvement Plan completed within 90 days of rating</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Comprehensive Program Self Assessment that includes:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>FCCERS findings, if applicable</li><li>at least 3 other sources of evidence</li></ul></li></ul> <p><b>PLUS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Quality Improvement Plan completed within 90 days of rating</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Comprehensive Program Self Assessment that includes:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>FCCERS findings, if applicable</li><li>family survey results</li><li>at least 3 other sources of evidence</li></ul></li></ul> <p><b>PLUS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Quality Improvement Plan completed within 90 days of rating</li></ul> |



# Standard Five: Curriculum

The program uses curriculum, aligned to the RI Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) and in partnership with the State's Curriculum Framework for Early Learning, for all age groups served, including infants and toddlers. Teaching staff have emotional connections with children and respond appropriately to individual early learning and development needs. Classroom schedules and routines maximize time spent in early learning and development activities. The program provides many opportunities for children to learn and practice skills in all domains of the RI Early Learning and Development Standards



| Level 1                                                                      | Level 2                                                                                     | Level 3                                                                                | Level 4                                                                                                                                  | Level 5                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program is licenced by DHS</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compliance with DHS Licensing Regulations</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lesson plans aligned with the RIELDS</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lesson plans aligned with the RIELDS <b>PLUS</b></li> <li>Curriculum Outline Questions</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lesson plans aligned with the RIELDS <b>AND</b></li> <li>Curriculum Implementation Plan</li> </ul> |





# Standard Six: Child Assessment

The program connects families to developmental screenings for their children, and systematically and routinely gathers information about each child in order to meet the individual needs of children and provide differentiated learning experiences

| Level 1                                                                     | Levels 2-3                                                                          | Level 4                                                                                                                                   | Level 5                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Program is Licensed by DHS.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Developmental Screening Information</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Developmental Screening Information<br/><b>PLUS</b></li><li>2 methods of Child Assessment</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Developmental Screening Information<br/><b>PLUS</b></li><li>The program collaborates with Early Intervention and/or Child Outreach to provide on-site developmental screenings or provide families with specific days and locations<br/><b>PLUS</b></li><li>3 methods of Child Assessment</li></ul> |

**Accepted Methods of Child Assessment include:**

- Formative assessments
- Work Sampling
- Developmental Checklist
- Anecdotal/Running Records
- Valid and Reliable reports
- IEP/Outreach Screenings
- Family Questionnaire
- Photos
- Video clips



# Standard Seven: Inclusive Classroom Practices

The program **supports the inclusion** of children with disabilities and developmental delays and their families. A higher quality program makes appropriate accommodations and modifications to support children and their families, and they collaborate with key partners to support children with developmental delays and disabilities in the least restrictive environment.



| Level 1                                                                       | Level 2                                                                                     | Levels 3-4                                                                   | Level 5                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Program is Licensed by DHS.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Compliance with DHS Licensing Regulations</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Written Program Philosophy</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Written Program Philosophy <b>PLUS</b></li><li>• Educator collaborates with key partners in early childhood special education services</li></ul> |



# Standard Eight: Family Communication and Involvement

The program communicates regularly with families by engaging in two-way communication with families, offering ongoing opportunities for family involvement, and working to build partnerships with families

| Level 1                                                                      | Level 2                                                                                                         | Level 3                                                                                                                                                                     | Level 4                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Level 5                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program is licensed by DHS</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 or more strategies for family communication and involvement</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 or more strategies for family communication and involvement <b>PLUS</b></li> <li>Family/Teacher Conferences 2x per year</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 or more strategies for family communication and involvement <b>PLUS</b></li> <li>Family/Teacher Conferences 2x per year <b>PLUS</b></li> <li>Annual Family Survey</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 or more strategies for family communication and involvement <b>PLUS</b></li> <li>Family/Teacher Conferences 2x per year <b>PLUS</b></li> <li>Annual Family Survey</li> </ul> |

**Strategies for family communication include:**

- Monthly newsletters
- Family meetings, social events, or workshops
- Ideas and suggestions to support learning at home
- Annual family surveys
- Parent/staff conferences
- Parent advisory committee



# Glossary

**BrightStars Criteria** are specific, measurable benchmarks within a standard that programs must meet in order to receive a BrightStars rating. For example, "Compliance with DHS Licensing Regulations," and "Family-Teacher Conferences" are criteria.

**BrightStars Domain** is a general area of program quality. BrightStars standards are organized into six domains (see p4).

**BrightStars Standard** sets a specific goal for program quality. For example, "Teacher Qualifications" is a program standard.

**Child Development Associate (CDA)** is a nationally-awarded certificate administered by the Council for Professional Recognition. A CDA can be obtained in infant/toddler, preschool, family child care, or home visiting.

**Child Outreach** is a universal developmental screening system designed to screen all children, ages 3-5 years old. Screening serves as a first step in identifying developmental delays or disabilities that could benefit from intervention.

**Early Intervention** promotes the growth and development of infants and toddlers who have developmental delays or disabilities, including children's speech, physical ability, or social skills, and who could benefit from intervention.

**Early Childhood Education/Related Field** includes specialized college coursework completed at an Institution of Higher Education.

**Environment Rating Scales (ERS)** assess process quality in infant/toddler, preschool, school-age, and family child care learning environments. Process quality is what children directly experience in their program that has a direct impact on their development. BrightStars currently uses the ECERS-3, ITERS-3, FCCERS-3, and SACERS-U to assess program quality. **To assess family child care homes, BrightStars uses the FCCERS-3, which entails a three-hour on-site observation of the learning environment.**

## Glossary (Continued)

**Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** is developed by an IEP team for students with disabilities to ensure that the student is provided with a free, appropriate, public education designed to meet their needs and to provide the student with access and opportunity to attain those high standards.

**Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)** is a service plan that is developed after a child becomes eligible for Early Intervention services.

**National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)** is a professional associations focused on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age 8.

**RI Department of Human Services (DHS)** licenses child care centers, family child care homes, and after school programs to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of children while in care outside of their homes.

**Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS)** articulate shared expectations for what young children should know and be able to do. They provide a common language for measuring progress toward achieving specific learning goals.