



**riaeyc**

Rhode Island Association for the  
Education of Young Children

An Affiliate of **naeyc**



# BrightStars

Recognizing, Improving, Connecting  
Quality Care & Learning

**School-Age (K-5)**  
**Quality Framework**

Updated August 2025

# Introduction

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

BrightStars is Rhode Island's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for Early Care, education and School-age Programs. While we know that quality early care can impact a developing brain significantly from birth to three, the importance of quality care and its impacts extend far beyond those ages. Quality school age programming supports children in continuing their learning beyond the school day while also giving them a safe, quality place to go to after school hours. That is why high quality care for all ages is 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 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.

## BrightStars supports programs in six quality domains:

- Child's Daily Experience
- Teaching + Learning
- Staff-Child Ratio + Group Size
- Family Communication + Involvement
- Staff Qualifications
- Program Management





# BrightStars

## Domains + Standards at A Glance

Child's Daily Experience

Enrollment + Staffing

Staff Qualifications



Child's Daily Experience



Curriculum, Child Assessment, and Process of Learning



Staff-Child Ratio



Maximum Group Size



Family Communication + Involvement



Teacher Qualifications



Program Director Qualifications



Program Administration

Teaching + Learning

Family Engagement

Program Administration

# Standard One: Child's Daily Experience

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> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Average SACERS score of 3.0 or Greater with no observed score less than 2.5</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>COA</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Average SACERS score of 4.0 or Greater with no observed score less than 3.0</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>COA</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Average SACERS score of 5.0 or Greater with no observed score less than 3.0</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>COA</li> </ul> |



# Standard Two: Curriculum, Child Assessment, and Process of Learning

The program uses a program plan or curriculum. The program provides many **opportunities for children to learn and practice skills** across a broad range of developmental areas including social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language. The program **systemically 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>• Compliance with DHS Licensing Regulations</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The program's weekly lesson plans include <b>at least one opportunity</b> for the following:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ active, physical play</li> <li>◦ creative expression</li> <li>◦ academic support</li> </ul> <b>PLUS</b> </li> <li>• The program gathers information about each child using <b>one approved method of child assessment.</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The program's weekly lesson plans include <b>at least two opportunities</b> for the following:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ active, physical play</li> <li>◦ creative expression</li> <li>◦ academic support</li> </ul> <b>PLUS</b> </li> <li>• The program gathers information about each child using <b>two approved methods of child assessment.</b></li> </ul> |

**Approved methods of child assessment include:**

- Observations
- Checklists
- Interest inventories
- Family/child surveys or interviews
- School performance information
- Other



# Standard Three: Minimum Staff-Child Ratio

Programs have enough staff members to supervise the children and to support learning and development of each child, including children with disabilities.



| Level 1  | Level 2-5   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Program is licensed by DHS</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Compliance with Staff-Child Ratios</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ 1:13</li></ul></li><li>• <b>Staff-Child Ratio Communicated</b></li></ul> |



# Standard 4: Maximum Group Size

Group size is the number of children who occupy a defined space while engaged in a specific activity. Programs plan for and **provide appropriate group sizes** for children according to the type, complexity, and difficulty of activities as well as the ages, abilities, developmental levels, and needs of children.



| 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>• <b>Group Size*</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ 26 children</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Group Size*</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ 26 children</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Group Space</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ No more than 52 children in a room**</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Group Size*</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ 26 children</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Group Space</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ No more than 26 children in a room**</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

**\*Group size will be determined based on the total number of children in a group or activity throughout the observation; intermingling is permitted. Exceptions to group/activity size include: meals/snacks, outdoor play, arrival, departure, and special activities. Times for these exceptions to group/activity size should not exceed more than 1/3 of the total time children are in attendance.**

**\*\* A room has floor-to-ceiling walls.**





## Standard Five: 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 2-3  | 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><b>1 or more strategies</b> for family communication and involvement</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>2 or more strategies</b> for family communication and involvement</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>3 or more strategies</b> for family communication and involvement.</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 board



# Standard Six: Lead Staff Qualifications

Lead staff have primary responsibility for children in the program. Lead staff should have the **formal education and professional preparation** to work with school-age 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>All lead staff complete an <b>Individual Professional Development Plan</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All lead staff complete an <b>Individual Professional Development Plan</b></li> <li><b>50% of lead staff</b> have 12 college credits</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All lead staff complete an <b>Individual Professional Development Plan</b></li> <li><b>50% of lead staff</b> have 24 college credits</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All lead staff complete an <b>Individual Professional Development Plan</b></li> <li><b>50% of lead staff</b> have an AA or 60 college credits</li> </ul> |



# Standard Seven: Program Director Qualifications

The administrator responsible for the program has the **formal education and professional preparation** to manage the program and act as a pedagogical leader.



| 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> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The program administrator OR site coordinator has an <b>AA (or 60 college credits) in any field.</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The program administrator OR site coordinator has an AA (or 60 college credits) in any field <u>and</u> <b>6 credits in child/youth development</b> or a related field*</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The program administrator OR site coordinator has a <b>BA with 12 credits in child/youth development</b> or a related field*</li> </ul> |

"Related field" can include Human Development, Psychology, Social Work, Education, Pediatric Nursing, Home Economics/Family & Consumer Science, Recreation and Child & Family Studies.



# Standard Eight: Program Management

The program comprehensively assesses overall program operations, establishes **program goals to continually improve quality** and makes progress toward achieving program goals.

| Level 1  | Levels 2-5   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Program is licensed by DHS</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comprehensive Program Self Assessment utilizing:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ RIPQA (Forms A + B)</li><li>OR</li><li>◦ SACERS-U</li></ul></li><li>• Quality Improvement Plan within 90 days of receiving a BrightStars Ratings</li></ul> |



# 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/Youth Development** is specialized coursework required by BrightStars. **Related fields** include human development, psychology, sociology, social work, education, pediatric nursing, home economics/family consumer science, recreation, and child and family studies.

**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.

**Group Size** is the number of children who occupy a defined space while engaged in a specific activity. Group size will be determined based on the total number of children in a group or activity throughout the observation; intermingling is permitted. Exceptions to group size include: meals/snacks, outdoor play, arrival, departure, or special activities.

**Group Space** refers to number of children in a room at one time. A room has floor to ceiling windows.

## Glossary (Continued)

**Lead Staff** one lead staff must be named for every 26 enrolled children. If the program serves Kindergarteners and seeks a rating of 4-Stars or higher, programs must name one lead staff for every 24 children enrolled.

**RI Afterschool Quality Standards** are broken into five major categories: 1) health, safety, and environment, 2) relationships, 3) programming and activities, 4) staffing and professional development, 5) administration.

**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.

**RIPQA - Younger Youth Version** is comprised of two separate tools: the School Age Program Quality Assessment (SAPQA), developed by the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, and an administrative component (Form B), developed in Rhode Island.

