

Overview

The state of Ohio was an early adopter of a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) for licensed child care providers. Ohio recognizes the importance of a well-defined, progressive pathway to improving the quality of early learning and development programs. As part of Ohio's Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant, the state expanded its comprehensive rating system to rate and monitor all early learning programs, including programs in school districts, child care facilities and family child care homes (Type A and B) licensed by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) or the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). This expansion will improve the quality of all early learning and development programs that serve high-needs children from birth to 5 years.

The goal is to provide a single definition of quality, inclusive of all program types, that is measurable, easy to understand, and provides the flexibility necessary for early learning and development programs to achieve the highest levels of quality.

History of Determining Quality

In 1999, a group of 60 early care and education stakeholders asked the state to create early learning and development program standards. This was the beginning of Ohio's Step Up To Quality (SUTQ) program. ODJFS began a pilot for SUTQ in eight counties in 2005, and statewide implementation began in late 2006. Currently, participation in SUTQ is open to any ODJFS licensed program. ODJFS licensing specialists verify SUTQ standards through classroom observations, teacher interviews and document review.

ODE monitors state-funded preschool programs operated by school districts, educational service centers and joint vocational schools. In 2010, ODE began using a monitoring and continuous improvement process called the Integrated Monitoring Process and Continuous Improvement Tool (IMPACT). The IMPACT review focused on the indicators outlined in Ohio's Early Learning Program Guidelines. ODE reviewers verified IMPACT standards using documentation submission, desk audits and on-site reviews.

As Ohio implements the Early Learning Challenge Grant, ODJFS and ODE have both transitioned to the new SUTQ model outlined below for ODE and ODJFS licensed programs.

The New Model

Development

A cross-agency team began working in May 2012 to develop a new single framework for quality that the state applies to all early learning and development programs. The team included ODJFS and ODE staff and key external stakeholders. The team's work was facilitated by Anne Mitchell, a national expert, who was able to share current research and models used by other states as the new Ohio vision, goals and standards were developed.

Organization

The program standards are organized into the following four domains:

- **Learning and Development:** Is the program using research-based curricula aligned to Ohio's early learning and development standards for birth to kindergarten entry?
- **Staff Qualifications and Professional Development:** Have administrators, teachers and assistant teachers obtained required credentials and ongoing professional development hours?
- **Administrative and Leadership Practices:** To what extent does the program adhere to an annual continuous improvement process?
- **Family and Community Partnerships:** How well does the program engage families and community partners to support children while they are enrolled in the program and as they transition into and out of the program?

Structure

The original Step Up To Quality program contained three levels of ratings. Programs had to meet all standards for a given level before advancing to the next level.

The new model uses a combination of that building-block approach and a newly designed point system to create "star ratings" that correspond to each level of achievement. A program in level one will receive one star, a program in level two will receive two stars, and so forth. Programs in levels one, two and three must meet all standards at the lower levels before advancing to the next level. Beyond level three, programs will be awarded points for meeting program standards, based on their adherence to level-three requirements, in addition to their ability to achieve additional performance targets. Programs must achieve a minimum of at least one point in each of the four domains and can earn extra points for accreditation, lower staff/child ratios and group size. A program may be awarded four or five stars if it earns sufficient points.

Verification

ODE and ODJFS cross-train staff members to conduct SUTQ reviews and verify the star rating attained by a program. Both agencies worked together to develop the review and verification process and to identify the documentation and other evidence programs need to provide.

Participation

Legislation in HB 487 and SB 316 of the 129th General Assembly requires all publicly funded early learning and development programs to participate in Step Up To Quality as a condition of funding. The new star rating system will be phased in over the next several years. The following chart provides the timeline specified in legislation.

Program Type	Began Participation	All Programs Rated
Early Childhood Education (State PK)	October 2013	July 2016
Preschool Special Education	October 2013	July 2017
Subsidized Child Care Centers/Type A Homes	Already Participating	July 2020
Subsidized Child Care in Small Family Child Care Homes	July 2014	July 2020

Note that all programs licensed by ODJFS and ODE may voluntarily participate even if they are not receiving public funds.

Supporting Resources

ODE and ODJFS have developed a variety of resources to help programs achieve and maintain high star ratings:

- A Guidance Document, available at www.earlychildhoodohio.org details best practices, defines objectives and provides clear guidelines.
 - ODE, ODJFS and their affiliated State Support Teams (SST) and Child Care Resource and Referral Organizations (CCR&R) offer numerous and ongoing professional development opportunities.
 - Staff working at star-rated programs and those working on becoming rated are eligible to receive T.E.A.C.H. scholarships.
- The Ohio Department of Health’s health promotion consultants and the Ohio Department of Mental Health’s early childhood mental health consultants, as well as SSTs and CCR&Rs, assist programs with specific areas of concern.