

Steps to Quality

Idaho's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for child care



Supporting child care to provide a setting where all children thrive



What is Steps to Quality?

Children benefit from high quality early care and education. Steps to Quality is a child care Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which measures the quality of child care in center and home-based settings.

Steps to Quality provides child care programs with a set of tools to cultivate a high quality setting. We offer a plan for the sustainable growth of your business. We measure the developing quality of your child care program. We publicly recognize your program's success and share it with families throughout Idaho. The goal of Steps to Quality is to help Idaho's child care programs provide a setting where children thrive.

At each step, we'll help you grow the quality of your program in these areas:

- Health and Safety
- Staff Education
- Classrooms and Outdoor Space
- Inclusion of all Children
- Partnerships with Families and Communities
- Professional Business Practices



In Steps to Quality, a program evolves as it moves through steps 1-6. A successful program implements the quality indicators in its current step, while maintaining the quality of the previous steps. Continuous quality improvement has deep roots.

Steps to Quality is a building block system, meaning that each step is verified through documentation and observation before the program moves on to the next step. Verification at any step means the program implements the quality indicators in that step, and all previous steps.

Participation in Steps to Quality is one of the best choices your child care program can make to demonstrate its commitment to quality. Information about Steps to Quality is included in all IdahoSTARS programs. Any engagement with IdahoSTARS is recognized as a commitment to a higher level of quality, which is formally recognized in Steps to Quality.



What are the steps?

Steps to Quality is designed to celebrate and reward child care programs that choose to participate in quality improvement activities. As a program moves across the steps, it is acknowledged as each step is verified. **A program becomes STAR rated when it is verified in Step 3.**

As your program moves through the steps, Steps to Quality will acknowledge you along the way. To move from one step to the next, apply for Step Verification. This happens at your own pace, according to your own schedule. Your program can stay in step 1-6 as long as you choose, as long as you demonstrate active participation. Annually, Steps to Quality will conduct an Annual Confirmation visit during your program's anniversary month, to confirm that the quality indicators are still in practice. This annual confirmation keeps the system fair and accurate for parents and participants.

Every step in the system consists of six areas of quality, called Quality Standards. Together, the Quality Standards define the areas of child care that are measured in Steps to Quality. The Quality Standards are:

Health and Safety

Program provides a safe and healthy learning environment that promotes healthy nutrition and physical activity.

Staffing and Professional Development

Program supports a teaching staff with the educational qualifications, knowledge and professional commitment to foster children's learning and development.

Child Growth, Development and Learning

Program provides a positive intentional learning environment, based on each child's unique needs, interests, and abilities that is nurturing, responsive, and developmentally appropriate.

Children with Diverse Abilities

Program embeds access, participation, and supports for successful participation of children with diverse abilities.

Strengthening Families and Communities

Program fosters trusting and collaborative relationships with families to build family strengths and support children's learning and development, embracing all abilities, cultures and backgrounds.

Leadership and Management

Program implements policies, procedures and systems that support program management so all children, families and staff have high-quality experiences.



What is the process?

Programs are considered to be participating in Steps to Quality when an application is approved. As a participating program, you agree to:

- **Maintain regular contact with the Regional Consultant**
- **Participate in Annual Confirmation Visits**
- **Document progress on Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)**
- **Update staff information upon request**
- **Maintain eligibility criteria***

As a participating program, you work closely with a Regional Consultant to develop a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). The plan creates goals related to the quality indicators, and tracks progress toward meeting them. In addition, you are responsible for completing an annual update, which includes an annual visit, an update to the Quality Improvement Plan, and Environment Rating Scale Assessments (in Steps 1-5).



While participating in Steps to Quality, your program will receive technical assistance and support from Regional Consultants, including visits from a Consultant during the program's anniversary cycle. Consultant support may be a personal visit or Skype/telephone/email consultation. Programs must maintain compliance with Steps to Quality Eligibility and Participation Criteria at all times. In addition, if the licensing designation, physical location of a program changes, the program will return to participating status and re-apply for steps 1-6. If the ownership of a program changes, the program will be reviewed for participation and may return to participating status.



Quality Improvement Plan

Participating programs work with the Consultant to create a **Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)**.

A Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) is a tool to help programs identify goals and activities to promote quality and improved outcomes for children and families. It is also an action plan for long-term change, and measures progress over time. Your QIP is a unique reflection of your program's strengths, challenges and resources.

While participating in Steps to Quality, you will update your QIP regularly and submit it for the Annual Confirmation. Your Regional Child Care Consultant will help you identify strengths and areas for improvement, goals and strategies, and resources to support the creation of your QIP.

Your QIP is a dynamic, working document that is referenced at all technical assistance visits. It is updated at each visit and submitted for each Step Verification and Annual Confirmation. The QIP goals are tied directly to Steps to Quality indicators and follow the SMART guidelines – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time Based.

In addition, your program may be eligible to apply for a Quality Improvement Grant to meet the goals on the QIP.

Annual Confirmation Visit

During your anniversary month, your program will participate in an Annual Confirmation Visit to monitor your placement in Steps to Quality.

The Annual Confirmation Visit is conducted by your Consultant in Step 1. In Step 2-5, it will be conducted by a Steps to Quality Verifier. In Step 6, programs show proof of a current accreditation (NAEYC, AMS, MSAC, NECPA accredited, NAFCC or Head Start providing child care), a staff update, and any additional requirements. If the indicators for the step are not verified during the Annual Confirmation, then your program will move to the last step which can be verified. This keeps the system fair and accurate for parents and for Steps to Quality programs.



Environment Rating Scale (ERS)

Environment Rating Scale (ERS) assessments are conducted by a reliable network of trained assessors. Annual assessments are required in Steps 2-5 of Steps to Quality. You can use information from the ERS assessments to set goals in your QIP. Steps to Quality conducts one complimentary set of assessments during your program's annual cycle.

Assessments are a part of Step Verification (when a program is ready to move up a step) and Annual Confirmation (the yearly process to confirm placement). ERS assessment results are valid for **90 days** after the Consultant delivers the ERS assessment report(s) to the program. Expired ERS assessments cannot be used for step verification. If ERS assessment results are expired and a program wants to request verification at a higher step, assessments can be purchased by the program.

Scheduling an Assessment

You will work with your Consultant to identify the best time to request Environment Rating Scale assessments for either a Step Verification or Annual Confirmation. It is your responsibility to contact the Consultant and the QRIS Assessment Specialist if circumstances arise and the assessment cannot be conducted, such as a family emergency, or if the only infant enrolled cancels for the day.

Important Assessment Information

If ERS assessment results expire, or if the ERS assessment results do not meet minimum requirements for the overall and interaction scores (in Steps 3-5), Step Verification is delayed. Your program will receive specific technical assistance to address issues. Your program will be eligible to receive another set of ERS assessments again during your next annual cycle, and can report on progress in the QIP.

If an assessor attempts to conduct an ERS assessment twice and the assessment cannot be conducted, your program will be removed from Steps to Quality. If an ERS Assessor arrives and cannot conduct the ERS assessment, your program may be assessed a \$75 reassessment fee.

Appeals

A Steps to Quality program can appeal an ERS assessment result through the Consultant, who will submit an ERS Assessment Appeal. Programs have **30 days** to submit an ERS Assessment Appeal from the day the assessment results are delivered.



Assessments for Centers

- When a program requests a Step Verification, 50% of classrooms are selected for ERS assessment using the Steps to Quality Classroom Selection Procedure for Centers.
- For Annual Confirmation, 33% of classrooms are selected for ERS assessment (with a maximum of two classrooms) using the Steps to Quality Classroom Selection Procedure for Centers.
- ERS assessments are conducted only on classrooms experiencing a typical day, meaning with the regular teachers and the regular routines. If it is not a typical day, another classroom will be chosen at random.
- An Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Revised), Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (Revised) and School Age Classroom Environment Rating Scale (Revised) assessment can only be conducted if more than one child is in attendance.

Assessment for Home-based Providers

- Providers with a family or group licensing designation will receive a Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale- Revised (FCCERS-R).
- A FCCERS-R assessment can only be conducted if there is more than one child in attendance and, if an infant is enrolled, the infant is in attendance.

Step Placement

As your program moves across the steps, it will be acknowledged as each step is verified. To move from one step to the next, apply for **Step Verification**.

Steps to Quality is designed so your program can participate on your own schedule. Your program can stay in any step indefinitely, as long as you demonstrate *active participation* by working closely with your Regional Consultant, updating staff information and your QIP, and participating in the Annual Confirmation in your anniversary month. Your program can request Step Verification through your Regional Consultant at any time, as long as Environmental Ratings Assessment (ERS) results are valid.

During the Step Verification visit, a QRIS Verifier visits your program and:

- Verifies that all indicators in the current step are met
- Verifies that key indicators in all previous steps are met
- Collects all required documentation, including an updated Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)

Step 1

Anchoring the roots of quality care and education in your child care program.



<i>Standard</i>	<i>Requirements</i>
Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program gathers information on immunizations for individual children. • Directors and teachers have current pediatric first aid and pediatric CPR. • Directors and staff annually review the guidelines for recognizing child abuse and neglect.
Staffing and Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers and Directors are in the IdahoSTARS PDS Registry. • Teachers complete Essential Training 1 or have a minimum of a current CDA or 12 ECE credits. • Directors complete Essential Training 1, a minimum of a current CDA, 12 ECE credits or an approved Director's Credential. • Teachers and Directors demonstrate ongoing professional development.
Child Growth, Development and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directors and teachers complete the Environment Rating Scale: A Tool for Quality Improvement Training. Can be completed in Step 1 or Step 2.
Children with Diverse Abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No requirement for Step 1.
Strengthening Families and Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention policy in parent and staff handbook includes a policy for preventing child abuse and neglect, including sexual abuse
Leadership and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program has a system for tracking staff records and professional development. • Program has an emergency plan. • The program completes a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) annually.

Programs have **one year** from enrollment to be verified at Step 1. If the participating program is not verified at Step 1 during the first year of enrollment, the program will be withdrawn from Steps to Quality.



Step 2

Growing and building upon a budding foundation of quality to ensure solid early care experiences.



<i>Standard</i>	<i>Requirements</i>
Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Items from the Safe Sleeping Practices Checklist are observed in practice.
Staffing and Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers complete Essential Training 2 or have a minimum of a current CDA or 12 ECE credits. • Directors complete Essential Training 2, a minimum of a current CDA, 12 ECE credits or an approved Director's Credential. • Directors complete NAEYC Human Resource Management Training.
Child Growth, Development and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial Environment Rating Scale (ERS) assessment supports improvement of health and safety, positive relationships, & a wide variety of learning opportunities.
Children with Diverse Abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information and resources specific to each community are available to families.
Strengthening Families and Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program communicates with families in a variety of ways. • The Strengthening Families Self-Assessment is completed annually.
Leadership and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy & procedure manual is maintained on-site, with job duties & responsibilities of staff. • Parent handbook includes policy and procedures around the daily operation of the program management.

Programs verified at Step 2 must meet the indicators in this current step, and all previous steps (1).



Step 3

Star Rated. Celebrating and cultivating a strong and growing, level of quality child care that is recognized by the state of Idaho.



<i>Standard</i>	<i>Requirements</i>
Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directors are trained and use IRIS. • Items from the Nutrition and Active Physical Play checklist are observed in practice. • Items from the Thinking Active Physical Play Inventory are observed in practice. • Each classroom completes a Vision and Action Plan for Food and Nutrition annually. • Each classroom completes a Vision and Action Plan for Active Physical Play annually. • The center completes a Vision and Action Plan for Nutrition and Active Physical Play annually
Staffing and Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers complete Essential Training 3 or have a minimum of a current CDA or 12 ECE credits. • Directors have a high school diploma or GED. • Directors complete Essential Training 3, a minimum of a current CDA, 12 ECE credits or an approved Director's Credential. • Directors complete 15 additional hours of approved business management training.
Child Growth, Development and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ERS assessment meets minimum overall and interaction scores. • Guidance policy reflects positive responsive practice. • Program formally documents each child's progress.
Children with Diverse Abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion statement is included in the program's policy and procedures. • Staff agree to practice confidentiality as outlined in the program's confidentiality statement.
Strengthening Families and Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A communication system provides regular opportunities for connecting parents and staff. • Social and educational events and opportunities to volunteer are provided for families.
Leadership and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directors complete the Program Administration Scale self-assessment annually.

Programs verified at Step 3 must meet the indicators in this current step, and all previous steps (1 and 2).



Step 4

Maturing and sustaining a vibrant understanding and implementation of quality child care and business practices.



<i>Standard</i>	<i>Requirements</i>
Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classrooms with children ages 0-24 months maintain an adult-child ratio of 1:5 and a group size of 10.
Staffing and Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers complete Essential Training 4 or have a minimum of current CDA or 12 ECE credits. Directors complete Essential Training 4, a minimum of a current CDA, 12 ECE credits or an approved Director's Credential. Directors complete 15 additional hours of business management training.
Child Growth, Development and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule and lessons plans for each classroom are posted. A Child Growth, Development, and Learning classroom assessment is completed annually.
Children with Diverse Abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusion Readiness Checklist is completed for each classroom annually.
Strengthening Families and Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program partners with families and/or agencies to support children's retention and success. One parent-teacher conference is offered during the year. Parents and staff have an annual opportunity to give the program feedback.
Leadership and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directors complete the Program Administration Scale Action Plan annually.

Programs verified at Step 4 must meet the indicators in this current step, and all previous steps (1, 2, and 3).



Step 5

Thriving as a child care business and nurturing all children with quality early care and education experiences.

<i>Standard</i>	<i>Requirements</i>
Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All classrooms meet NAEYC guidelines for group size and ratio. • A Child Care Health Consultant visits once a year. • Health information from a recognized health organization is available for parents. • Program hosts one health and safety class for children, parents and/or staff annually.
Staffing and Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers have a minimum of a current CDA or 12 ECE credits. • Directors complete 15 additional hours of business management training.
Child Growth, Development and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy and numeracy activities are incorporated into daily activity plans. • Weekly documentation of each child's progress in daily routines is on file. • A Child Growth, Development and Learning Action Plan is completed in each classroom annually.
Children with Diverse Abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Inclusion Plans are completed with families for children with diverse abilities in each classroom annually.
Strengthening Families and Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families have opportunities to participate in program development. • Two parent teacher conferences are offered during the year. • Protective Factors are referenced in strategic planning, program evaluation, and staff/parent engagement.
Leadership and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No requirement for Step 5.

Programs verified at Step 5 must meet the indicators in this current step, and all previous steps (1, 2, 3, and 4).

Step 6

Firmly rooted in quality, achieving accreditation standards that meet the highest requirements for quality care and education.



<i>Standard</i>	<i>Requirements</i>
Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program is NAEYC, NAFCC, AMS, MSAC, NECPA accredited or Head Start providing child care.
Staffing and Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program is NAEYC, NAFCC, AMS, MSAC, NECPA accredited or Head Start providing child care.
Child Growth, Development and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program is NAEYC, NAFCC, AMS, MSAC, NECPA accredited or Head Start providing child care.
Children with Diverse Abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program is NAEYC, NAFCC, AMS, MSAC, NECPA accredited or Head Start providing child care.
Strengthening Families and Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program is NAEYC, NAFCC, AMS, MSAC, NECPA accredited or Head Start providing child care.
Leadership and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program is NAEYC, NAFCC, AMS, MSAC, NECPA accredited or Head Start providing child care.

Frequently Asked Questions

Step Placement & Verification

1. How are Child Care Programs placed in a Step in Steps to Quality?

As a program moves across the steps, it is acknowledged as each step is verified. To move from one step to the next, programs apply for Step Verification. As programs move through Steps to Quality, they are acknowledged as each step is verified.

Except in Step 1, programs may maintain placement in any Steps to Quality step indefinitely, as long as they demonstrate active participation through the Quality Improvement Plan. In Step 1, a program has one (1) year to meet requirements to continue in Steps to Quality.

2. When may a program request verification for a Step?

A child care program can request Step Verification through their Regional Consultant at any time, as long as ERS assessment results are valid. ERS assessment results expire 90 days after the date the ERS assessment results are delivered to the program. If ERS assessment results are expired, and the program wants to request verification at a higher step, ERS assessments can be purchased for a fee.

A program may choose to be verified in more than one step at a time. For example, a program in Step 1 can request to be verified in Step 3. During the verification, a Steps to Quality Verifier will verify every indicator in Steps 1, 2 and 3 are met.

3. Why is IdahoSTARS requiring a program to have an Annual Confirmation and what is the process?

This helps maintain the integrity of the system, identify system and provider issues early and supports consistent verification practices. IdahoSTARS has done extensive research on other QRIS programs across the country and those that are the most successful conduct an annual verification for all programs.



A child care program's anniversary month is the month they are successfully verified at Step 1. Every year a program's placement in Steps to Quality is confirmed during the anniversary month through an Annual Confirmation Visit. During this annual visit, a Steps to Quality Verifier visits the program to verify that all indicators in the current step are met, as well as the indicators in all previous steps.

The Annual Confirmation Visit must be completed and all of the required paperwork submitted to the QRIS office in the program's anniversary month in order for the program to maintain participation in Steps to Quality.

4. Are there any special considerations for Accredited Child Care Programs?

Step 6 is designated for programs with an IdahoSTARS recognized accredited body (such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children *NAEYC* and the National Association of Family Child Care *NAFCC*) and Head Start Programs offering child care.

Programs in Step 6 may be required to provide some documentation in addition to accreditation, such as a staff update. *NAFCC* accredited programs will be required to meet additional ratio and group size standards.

Step 6 programs are eligible for Participation Awards and bonuses, but are not eligible for Quality Improvement Grants. These incentives are contingent upon the program being a certified ICCP vendor (meaning the program's Provider Agreement is current and all required ICCP trainings are complete) and upon maintaining accreditation.

5. What happens if a Child Care Program fails to pass the Annual Confirmation Visit or a Step Verification?

If indicators are not verified during the Annual Confirmation Visit, the program moves to the last step in which all the indicators can be verified. Incentives will also be based on the last step that can be verified.

If a program is unable to verify all the indicators during a Step Verification the program will remain in the step in which it is currently verified.



Incentives

6. What are the eligibility requirements for a Child Care Program to receive incentives while participating in Steps to Quality?

All Steps to Quality incentives are subject to availability of funds. To be eligible, a program must:

- Submit a W-9
- Be a certified ICCP vendor, meaning the program's Provider Agreement is current and all required ICCP trainings are complete
- Participate in an Annual Confirmation Visit during their anniversary month
- Demonstrate active participation in Steps to Quality and progress towards the goals outlined in the Program's Quality Improvement Plan

7. What are the benefits for staff who are working in a STEPS TO QUALITY program?

Staff in a Steps to Quality program verified at Steps 1-6 who are eligible for IdahoSTARS PDS Registry incentives will have access to enhanced professional development and education opportunities, including, but not limited to, funding for CDA training and Director's training.

8. Can IdahoSTARS provide more details around the Annual Participation Awards?

Participation Awards are offered to programs that have been verified at Step 1. This means that, during their anniversary month, the program has had an annual visit to confirm that all relevant indicators are being met. Awards are based on the program's step placement. Programs can apply for a Participation Award once a year, during their anniversary month and after their Annual Confirmation Visit confirms their Step. Programs must also maintain an updated Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and demonstrate active participation towards their goals.

Programs verified in Steps 1 or 2, who have not yet earned a Star, are eligible for a total of three Participation Awards during their participation in Steps to Quality. Programs verified in Steps 1 and 2 can remain in these steps for as long as they choose but will not receive more than three total Participation Awards while in these Steps. Programs verified at Step 3 are



eligible for a Participation Award every year during their anniversary month after their Annual Confirmation Visit confirms their Step placement.

Beginning July 2015, programs verified in Steps 4, 5 or 6 are eligible for Participation Awards every year during their anniversary month after their Annual Confirmation Visit confirms their Step placement.

9. How can programs apply for and use the Quality Improvement Grants?

Quality Improvement Grants are awarded to programs verified at Steps 1-5 to support the Quality Improvement Plan. The award amount is based on the type of program. Grants can be requested at any time during the program's annual cycle.

Materials and professional development may be funded if they are identified in the program's Quality Improvement Plan. Grant funds will be distributed directly to individual scholarship budgets, an educational entity, or to an approved vendor of early childhood materials. No funding will be paid directly to a program and will be reimbursement only.

Professional Development

10. Can IdahoSTARS provide clarification around the indicators in the Staffing and Professional Development Standard?

IdahoSTARS recognizes that quality interactions between teachers and children are one of the best ways to promote quality in a child care setting. This fact has helped drive decisions regarding the indicators in the Staffing and Professional Development Standard.

Notable facts about this standard include:

- The education and training indicators will apply to all staff that are eligible to participate in IdahoSTARS' Professional Development System.
- The Essential Trainings are a key link in Steps to Quality. IdahoSTARS has identified key education and knowledge areas that promote quality child care and designed the Essential Trainings to promote these areas.
- Teachers in child care centers and home-based providers are required to have a current CDA, 12 credits in Early Childhood Education or complete the Essential Trainings associated with each step.
- Program directors play a very important role in ensuring quality within a program. Steps to Quality center directors are required to have a High School Diploma



or equivalent in order to be Star Rated. Directors must also have a combination of Early Childhood and business education and/or training. IdahoSTARS will also recognize certain director's credentials in lieu of these Early Childhood and business requirements.

11. Turnover of staff in child care programs can be high. What accommodations has IdahoSTARS made for this issue, especially with the Essential Training and CDA requirements?

Professional Development Plans are an important part of Steps to Quality. IdahoSTARS will accept Professional Development Plans for 50 percent of a program's staff in lieu of all staff meeting the required indicator. The Professional Development Plan must be specific and detail the provider's intent to meet the required professional indicators within Steps to Quality within specific time frames.

12. Can IdahoSTARS provide more details around the CDA requirements?

IdahoSTARS is placing an emphasis on providers obtaining a Child Development Associate Credential (CDA). Important information to remember includes:

- The CDA must be current in order to be recognized by IdahoSTARS.
- A provider pursuing the CDA must have it documented in their Professional Development Plan, with a clear completion date for coursework and CDA assessment.
- A provider has 18 months to earn their CDA (this applies to providers working for a program in Step 5).

Glossary

A.

Action Plan: Plan of action focused on specific Steps to Quality indicators and incorporated into the Quality Improvement Plan. Action plans are developed for each classroom, and the program.

Active Participation in Steps to Quality: Programs actively participate in Steps to Quality when they maintain eligibility and participation criteria, maintain regular contact with Regional Consultants, update the Quality Improvement Plan, and participate in an annual confirmation visit.

Annual Confirmation: An annual process to confirm that a program implements all of the quality indicators in day-to-day practice, based on the program's Step placement. The process includes updating a Quality Improvement Plan, verification of indicators by a Steps to Quality Verifier or Consultant, and Environment Rating Scale assessment (in Steps 2-5).

Annual Confirmation Application: The application that the Consultant and director or home-based provider complete to begin the annual process of confirming the program's Steps to Quality step.

Assessment Request: Form used to request assessments 60 days prior to the program's anniversary month. The request is completed in partnership with the Consultant to identify when the Environment Rating Scale assessments may take place.

Assistant: Employees working at least 12 hours a month or on the premises daily for a home-based provider. A person who works under the supervision of the provider and is not left in charge of children unless he or she meets all licensing or registration requirements.

Assistant Teachers: Center staff who work under the direct supervision of a Teacher. Assistant Teachers/Teacher Aides can work independently in a teacher's absence, but for the vast majority of the time, the assistant teacher/teacher aide works directly with the teacher in the same space with the same group of children.

B.

Black Out Dates: Two dates selected by the program during the two week Environment Rating Scale assessment window. On these dates, programs are assured the assessors will not arrive to conduct ERS assessments.

C.

Checklist of Practice: A teaching tool and resource based on the knowledge of the Essential Trainings. A comprehensive list of best practice that is supported by the Essential Trainings. Posted on IdahoSTARS website by standard and step and Essential Training.

Child Care Consultant: Consultants from the local Child Care Resource Center schedule on-site visits to meet with child care providers and program directors. Consultants, through their experience and education, support child care practitioners' professional development, provide resources and technical assistance to put newly learned concepts and skills into practice, and assist directors with participating in the Quality Rating and Improvement System and other IdahoSTARS opportunities.

Child Care Health Consultant: A health care professional, such as a registered nurse or physician assistant, who has special training and resources to help child care providers address health and safety needs specific to infants, children, and staff.

Child Care Resource Center (CCRC): The staff from the seven regional CCRCs assist parents and families who are looking for child care by sharing information and resources on quality child care and providing referrals that best meet family needs and requests. CCRCs work with child care program directors and owners to assist them with their participation in the Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP) and the IdahoSTARS Quality Rating and Improvement System, connect providers to the IdahoSTARS professional development opportunities and resources, and partner with local agencies to collaborate on issues that affect child care.

Classroom Summary Report: The report generated from the Environment Rating Scale observation. Each report is specific to each classroom and contains information on each scale, subscale and item in the assessment, as well as an overall score.

D.

Director: Center Director (sometimes called the program administrator, program manager, administrator, program manager, early childhood coordinator, and principal) is the individual responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating a child care, preschool or kindergarten program. The role of the director covers both leadership and management functions. Leadership functions relate to the broad plan of helping an organization clarify and affirm values, set goals, articulate a vision, and chart a course of action to achieve that vision. Managerial functions relate to the actual orchestration of tasks and the setting up of systems to carry out the organization's mission. Other duties include human resources, finances, quality control, and compliance.

Documented Progress (on Quality Improvement Plan): Consultants monitor progress toward goals on the Quality Improvement Plan. Progress includes meeting goals set from month-to-month, identifying underlying problems, adjusting goals as necessary, and mapping out solutions to effect slow, sustained change over time.



E.

Early Childhood Care and Education Career Pathway: The IdahoSTARS Career Pathway is a framework that helps child care providers track their ongoing education in the field of early childhood care and education while enrolled in the Professional Development System Registry. Child care providers move along the Career Pathway and receive awards for professional development, academic achievement and longevity in the field.

Early Childhood Education and Related Degrees: Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Special Education, Family and Consumer Science, Child, Family and Consumer Studies, Childhood Development, Preschool Education, Childcare and Development, Human Development, Nursery Education, Family Relations and Child Development, and Professional Preschool Education.

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R): The Environment Rating Scale designed to assess group programs for preschool-kindergarten aged children, 2 ½ through 5 years of age. The total scale consists of 43 items.

Environment Rating Scale (ERS): Valid and reliable scales designed to assess process quality in an early childhood or school age care group. Process quality consists of the various interactions that go on in a classroom between staff and children; staff, parents, and other adults; among the children themselves; and the interactions children have with the many materials and activities in the environment, as well as those features, such as space, schedule and materials that support these interactions.

Environment Rating Scale Assessment: An observation conducted by a trained and reliable observer, using an Environment Rating Scale in an early childhood classroom or home-based program.

Enrolled: Program has met eligibility requirements for participation in the IdahoSTARS QRIS, and successfully completed a Steps to Quality Application.

F.

Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised (FCCERS-R): The Environment Rating Scale designed to assess family child care programs conducted in a provider's home for birth through elementary school. The total scale consists of 38 items.

H.

Home-based provider: An adult whose child care program is licensed in Idaho with a group or family child care licensing designation.



I.

Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R): The Environment Rating Scale designed to assess group programs for children from birth to 2 ½ years of age. The total scale consists of 39 items.

Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP): A program of the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare that provides child care assistance to low-income, working families by paying for a portion of child care.

IdahoSTARS Assessment Specialist: The person responsible for the day-to-day coordination and organization of all IdahoSTARS Environment Rating Scale assessments and assessors. The Assessment Specialist promotes opportunities, education, resource development, and technical assistance related to the Environment Rating Scales and the Environment Rating Scale Assessments.

O.

One Time Bonus Awards: Awards for Steps to Quality programs that successfully complete verification at Step 1 and again in Step 3. A program may only receive these bonuses one time while participating in Steps to Quality.

Overview of Steps to Quality: An on-line general introduction to the Quality Rating and Improvement System. After the overview, interested directors can signal their interest in Steps to Quality and they will be contacted by the Regional Child Care Consultant.

Owner: The person who legally owns a child care program that is licensed in Idaho as a large or small center; in the case of a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC), the person authorized and responsible for making financial decisions for the LLC.

P.

Participating: Program is enrolled in the IdahoSTARS QRIS Steps to Quality, and is actively working on quality indicators in Step 1.

Participation Award: Annual award granted to Steps to Quality programs upon confirmation of the program's placement in Steps to Quality, each year during their anniversary month.

Professional Development Plan: An individual approach to professional growth that outlines a time-lined plan for education, training, and supervised work experiences.

Professional Development System (PDS): An IdahoSTARS program that is a voluntary, statewide early childhood education support system designed to provide guidance, encouragement, and recognition to individuals and programs in the early care and education field.

Professional Development System Registry: A voluntary, statewide registry that tracks education of early childhood professionals. Participants move along a career pathway as they increase education in early childhood, earning incentives along the way.



Q.

Quality Improvement Grant: Grant opportunity for Steps to Quality sites verified at Steps 1-5.

Quality Improvement Plan (QIP): A formal plan for improving quality in the child care program. Goals of the Quality Improvement Plan may focus on professional development, changes in the environment, human resources, or program structure.

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS): Technical name for **Steps to Quality**. Idaho's system to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care & education and after-school settings.

R.

Regional Child Care Resource Center: IdahoSTARS regional office that provides support for child care providers, including training, education, and technical assistance.

S.

Self-Assessment: Tool used by programs or providers to assess current practice in relationship to best practices.

School Age Care Environment Rating Scale-Updated (SACERS-U): The Environment Rating Scale designed to assess group-care programs for children of school age, 5 to 12. The total scale consists of 47 items.

Staff (Center): Center staff includes teachers, directors, and other adults not considered part of the teaching staff and who are not eligible for IdahoSTARS PDS Registry incentives. This includes:

Cooks, bus drivers, janitorial, or administrative support staff,

Special subject teachers (such as music or art),

Foster grandparents or volunteer reading buddies,

Parents participating in a parent cooperative programs (such as a cooperative nursery school),

Individuals who support the ongoing work of the teacher and assistant teacher by assisting with routine tasks such as room set-up, cleaning, meals, transitions, and supervision of napping children.

Staff (Home-based care): Employees working 15 hours per week or more for a home-based provider.

Star Rating Bonus: The one-time bonus awarded to a program upon verification of Step 3.



Step Agreement: The IdahoSTARS Steps to Quality Agreement for each step, which outlines the participation requirements for each step in Steps to Quality.

- **Step 1:** Program is verified at Step 1 and may be working toward verification of Step 2.
- **Step 2:** Program is verified at Step 2 and may be working toward verification of Step 3.
- **Step 3:** Program is verified at Step 3 and may be working toward verification of Step 4.
- **Step 4:** Program is verified at Step 4 and may be working toward verification of Step 5.
- **Step 5:** Program is verified at Step 5 and may be working toward verification of Step 6.
- **Step 6:** Program is verified at Step 6.

Step Verification: A process to verify that a program implements all of the quality indicators in the Steps to Quality steps in day-to-day practice. The process includes updating a Quality Improvement Plan, verification of indicators by a Steps to Quality Verifier or Consultant, and Environment Rating Scale assessment (in Steps 2-5).

Step Verification Application: The application that the Consultant and director or home-based provider complete to begin the process of verifying a program's placement in a Steps to Quality step.

Substitute (Home-based care): Employees working less than 12 hours a month for occasional care. A person who is left in charge of children when the provider is absent and meets all licensing or registration requirements.

T.

Teachers (Center): Center staff that includes Lead, Assistant Teachers and Teacher Aides. Teachers are defined as:

- Anyone working in a Steps to Quality program and eligible to receive incentives in the IdahoSTARS PDS Registry. These are adults with primary responsibility for a group of children. The teacher must spend the vast majority of time with one group of children who attend at the same time, rather than dividing time between classrooms or floating between groups.
- A group or classroom refers to the number of children assigned for most of the day to a teacher or a team of teaching staff who occupy an individual classroom or well-defined space that prevents intermingling of children from different groups within a larger room or area. Primary responsibility for multiple groups of children, who attend at the same time, cannot be assigned to any one or single teacher.

Technical Assistance: Non-financial assistance provided to directors, home-based providers, or staff by Consultants. It can take the form of sharing information and expertise, instruction, skills training, transmission of working knowledge, and consulting services.



Two-week window: The two weeks during the anniversary month that a program selects to host the ERS assessor(s).

V.

Verification Tool: Checklist of specific documentation used by verifiers to verify quality indicators in each Steps to Quality step and standard.

Verifiers: Trained and reliable independent observers who evaluate and collect documentation on-site for Steps to Quality Verification and Annual Confirmation.

Vision Plan: Visionary plan focused on a specific quality indicator and incorporated into the Quality Improvement Plan for Steps to Quality. Vision plans are developed for each classroom, and the program.

W.

Welcome Packet: Initial introductory packet of materials for centers and home-based programs that are eligible for and interested in participating in Steps to Quality.

Welcome Visit: A staff visit conducted by the Consultant at centers and home based programs that are eligible and interested in participating in Steps to Quality.

W-9: Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification, is one of the most commonly used IRS forms.