



QUALITYstarsNY Program Standards: Laying the Foundation for Quality

The QUALITYstarsNY Standards were developed by leading experts in the field of early childhood development and learning across New York State to provide a common framework for the elements of high quality in early care and education programs. There are standards for center-based programs, including Head Start and pre-K, family home providers and primary schools with pre-kindergarten classrooms. A program's rating is determined using a point system based on 75 different indicators, resulting in a one- to five-star rating with "five stars" denoting highest quality. To augment the rigor of the point system, an independent evaluation of a site's classrooms or a provider's home using the Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) tool is used.

The Standards are organized into four categories:

Learning Environment – There is substantial evidence that classroom environment features are central to program quality. Research shows that the quality of teacher-child interactions contributes to quality in early care and education settings. Teachers and providers who are attuned and responsive to the unique strengths of each child through ongoing observation and assessment can plan curriculum that is meaningful and engaging to promote children's individual learning goals. Additionally, high quality programs support children's health and well-being through healthy lifestyle habits and ample opportunities for gross motor play.

Family Engagement – Research shows that family engagement and parent-provider communication is related to child development outcomes. High quality programs promote family engagement by maintaining regular communication with parents about their child's daily activities and development, supporting a family's home language and honoring a family's culture, connecting families to needed supports and services in their communities, and facilitating transitions into, within and out of the program.

Qualifications and Experience – Teacher education and training, as well as professional development for program leaders, has been shown through research to be related to other measures of program quality. QUALITYstarsNY recommends that those in leadership positions possess the relevant education background and at least three years supervisory or management experience. Moreover, staff turnover can have a negative effect on the children in the program's care. High quality programs strive to maintain at least an 80% staff retention rate.

Management and Leadership – Program leaders are responsible for establishing the philosophy and organizational culture of their programs. High quality programs utilize tools to assess their current practices and use data to inform continuous quality improvement efforts. Program leaders maintain appropriate fiscal oversight, and ensure that policies and procedures are thoughtfully developed and updated. Furthermore, program leaders consider fair staff compensation and benefits, as well as support for staff planning time and access to resources.

By the end of the current fiscal year, QUALITYstarsNY will serve approximately 750 programs across all 10 economic regions in New York State. These programs have access to a wide range of resources, including ongoing coaching and technical assistance from a designated Quality Improvement Specialist to help them systematically and intentionally improve upon the quality of services they provide to young children and families. QUALITYstarsNY provides an evidence-based standards framework and uses a data tracking system to ensure maximum accountability and the efficient, effective use of public funds.