

FEBRUARY 1, 2023



PROGRAM GUIDE





Introduction

High-quality early childhood programs can have a lifelong positive impact on young children and their families. Early learning builds the foundation for skills needed in school, work and life.

The Step Up to Quality program guide will help you understand the program and its benefits. It is your roadmap on your path to higher quality.

Step Up to Quality is not a typical rating system — it's a path. No matter where you are on the path — at Step 1 or Step 5 — you are making a statement: that you want your program to be the best it can be so you can best serve children and families. Step Up to Quality programs go beyond what is required because they strive to do better for their children's and families' futures.

Our goal is to help programs reach their full potential so they can better serve children and families. Step Up to Quality programs have access to coaching and resources that help them on a path to higher quality. These resources enable any provider or educator, big or small, to take quality to the next level.

You can change a child's path with Step Up to Quality. The work you are doing today has a lifelong impact on young children and their families.

Thank you for your commitment and dedication to Nebraska's young children and their families. Together, we can make a difference to set up children and their families for future success.

Table of Contents

Quality Matters	4
Benefits	5
Overview of Steps	8
A Detailed Look at Each Step	9
Step 1	9
Step 2	11
Steps 3-5	12
Quality Standards and Indicators	16
Program Administration	16
Child Outcomes	17
Professional Development and Training	17
Family Engagement and Partnerships	18
Learning Environments and Program Curriculum	18
Rating Grievance Process	19
Program Changes that May Affect Participation	21
Withdrawing from Step Up to Quality	24



Quality Matters

Early child care and education are crucial to a child's future success, with 90% of brain development occurring before age 5. Children who receive quality early care and education are more likely to:



The need for quality early child care and education is clear to Nebraska parents. Access to high-quality early childhood education is not just an issue for parents, though.

- It's an economic issue, with the potential to boost employment and development in rural and urban communities alike.
- It's a human resource and job skills issue, as early childhood education becomes a more robust and rewarding lifelong career choice.
- It's a societal issue: research has proven time and time again that children who are cared for in supportive, educational and creative environments where play is prioritized in their first five years of life are more likely to be ready to learn and be successful in elementary school and beyond.



Who can participate?

Step Up to Quality supports all child care and early childhood education programs, including:

- Licensed family child care homes and child care centers
- Head Start and Early Head Start programs
- Public school-operated early childhood programs
- Licensed preschools

Step Up to Quality is voluntary for most child care and early childhood education programs.

Programs that receive more than \$250,000 annually in child care subsidy dollars are required to participate.

Step Up to Quality: Nebraska's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

A QRIS helps states assess, improve and communicate the level of quality in early childhood programs. Programs are awarded quality ratings for meeting a defined set of program standards. Back in early 2013, when the Nebraska Legislature introduced [LB507, the Step Up to Quality Act](#), not every state had a QRIS. Now, [nearly every state](#) does. Step Up to Quality officially launched in 2014 as Nebraska's QRIS and continues to grow every year in the number of providers who are participating (see more in our [annual report](#)). Learn more about [QRIS frameworks on our blog](#).

Benefits

Step Up to Quality programs have special access to supports and resources that improve quality.

Search Tool & Provider Web Pages

We want to make it as easy as possible for parents to find your program. Our intuitive search tool makes narrowing down child care choices simple for parents in Nebraska. Only providers who are participating in Step Up to Quality are searchable within our tool. And, each provider gets their own web page on the Step Up to Quality website, which outlines their program features and contact information. This information is fed directly from NECPRS, so be sure to keep your account updated once enrolled.

Use the search tool at: stepuptoquality.ne.gov

Coaching

You won't be on this journey alone! Step Up to Quality coaches are early childhood experts. They help programs, big or small, create individualized goals and action plans to improve quality. Your coach will help you identify and maximize your strengths and support you along your path to quality improvement.

You are not required to have a coach. However, most participating programs agree that coaching is the most beneficial form of support offered by Step Up to Quality. Coaches provide an extra layer of support and encouragement as you work toward your goals.

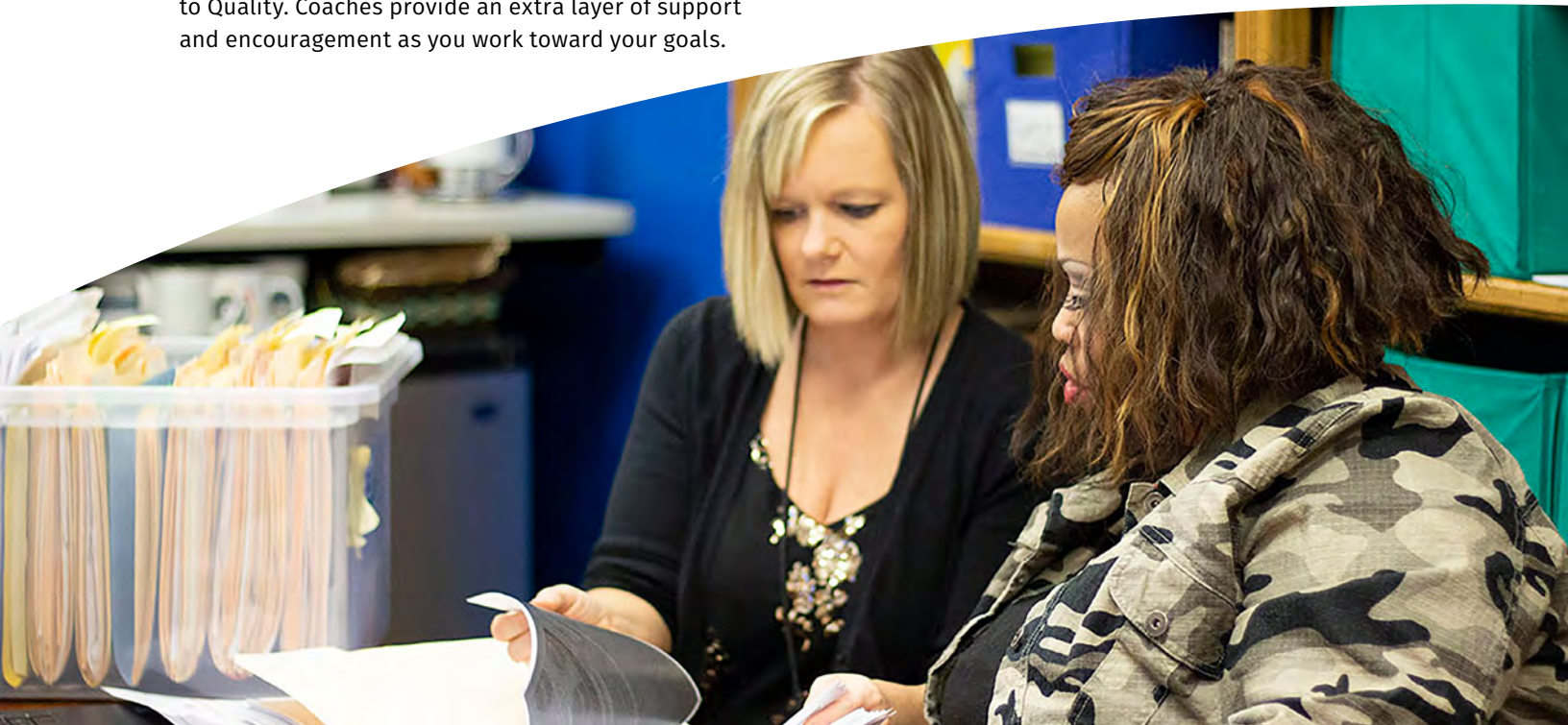
Quality Foundations Coaching

Enrolled providers can begin working with a Step Up to Quality coach once they achieve Step 1 (or enter at Step 3). This coaching will be in the form of weekly virtual meetings where providers will join together to learn about high-quality practices, gain motivation, prepare for one-on-one coaching and build a network of support across the state — all while having fun!

One-on-One Coaching

Programs enrolled in Step Up to Quality can request one-on-one coaching once they complete the requirements for Step 2. If you are interested in a coach, please complete the Coach Interest Questionnaire over the phone with Step Up to Quality so we can learn more about your program's specific interests and needs.

Visit education.ne.gov/stepuptoquality/providers-educators/enrolled-programs/coaching to sign up.



Professional Development and Training

Enjoy a variety of professional development and networking opportunities. Many training opportunities are available at little to no cost. View upcoming trainings at necprs.ne.gov/training-public.

Training to Support Your Step Up to Quality Journey

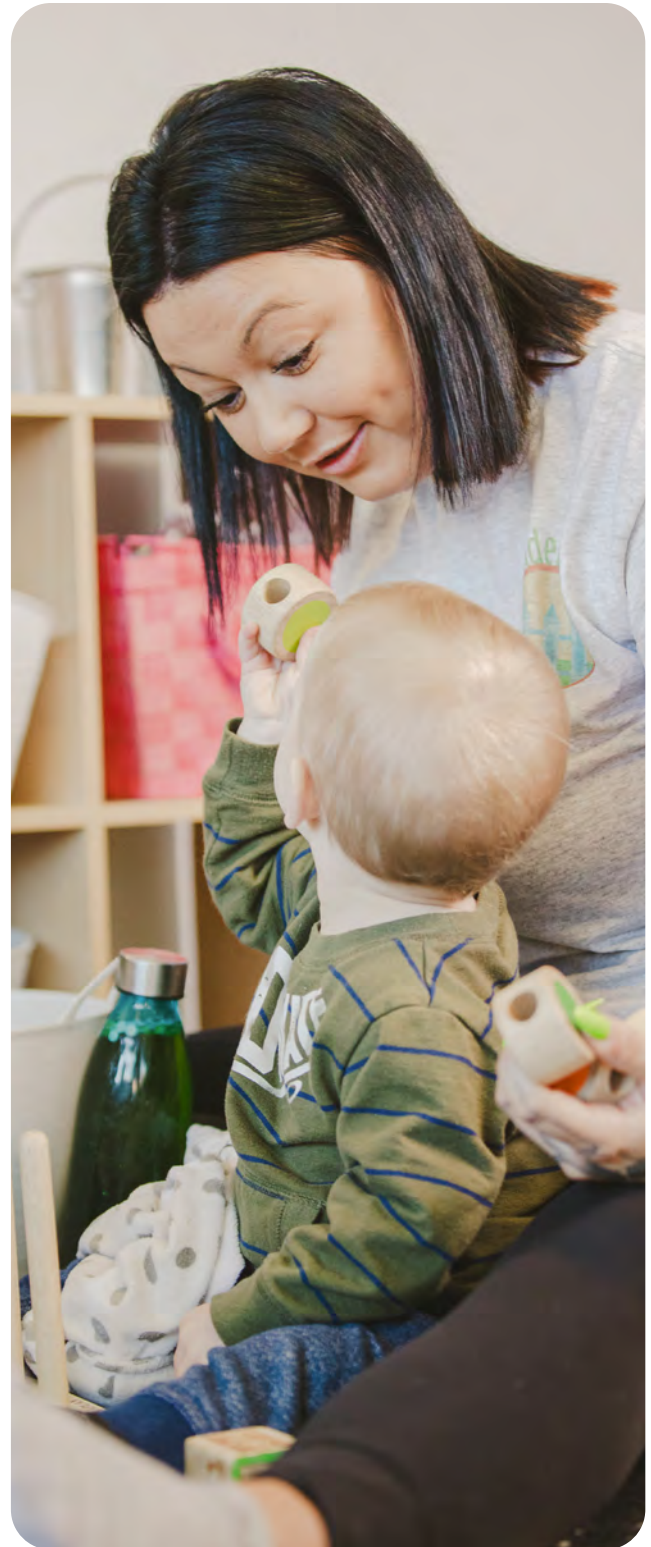
- Special Care
- Environment Rating Scales (ERS)
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
- Go NAPSACC
- Whole Body Classroom
- Safe With You
- Management Training
- Getting Down to Business
- Early Learning Guidelines
- Curriculum Training

Child Care Subsidy Reimbursement

Participants who receive child care subsidies from the Department of Health and Human Services may receive increases to their subsidy rates once they achieve Step 3, 4 or 5.

Head Start programs, public school programs and some nationally accredited programs are eligible to enter Step Up to Quality at Step 3. These programs may also receive an enhanced subsidy rate. In this case, an increase in child care subsidy may not occur until the program achieves Step 4 or Step 5.

For additional questions regarding your subsidy reimbursement rates, contact your Resource Development representative with the Department of Health and Human Services.



Incentive Bonuses

You'll receive an incentive bonus when you move up a Step for the first time. Incentive bonuses are awarded once per Step level achieved.

	Child Care Centers	Family Child Care Homes
Step 2	\$500	\$250
Step 3	\$750	\$400
Step 4	\$1,000	\$500
Step 5	\$1,250	\$600

Financial Support

Your coach can also guide you to resources and information for additional support and funding. Here are a few opportunities made available by Step Up to Quality partners:

- **T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Nebraska scholarships:** A limited number of scholarships are available through the Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children. Scholarships assist individuals working toward a certificate or diploma, or an associate's or bachelor's degree in early childhood education. Learn more at nebraskaaeyc.org/teach-early-childhoodreg.html
- **Child Development Associate (CDA):** Funds are available through the Nebraska Department of Education's Office of Early Childhood to assist early childhood professionals who want to apply for a CDA, a nationally recognized credential. Funds can help pay the fee for initial assessment or renewal. Learn more at education.ne.gov/oec/cda-credentialing-scholarships
- **Quality grants:** Grants are available through the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to assist child care programs working to improve quality. Learn more at dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Child-Care-Grants.aspx



Overview of Steps

A path to quality early child care and education.

Step Up to Quality focuses on the following areas, also known as quality standards:

- Program administration
- Child outcomes
- Professional development, training and community engagement
- Family engagement and partnerships
- Learning environments and program curriculum



Step 1

- Complete orientation
- Director, lead designee or family child care home primary provider creates professional record in NECPRS
- All staff create professional records in NECPRS
- Enter program information and submit application in NECPRS

Step 2

- Complete training sessions:
 - Special Care
 - At least 4 of the 7 Early Learning Guidelines Domains
 - Introduction to the Environment Rating Scale OR Introduction to the CLASS
- Complete Go NAPSACC Initial Self-Assessments

Step 3 Only Option (*no observation)

- Gather and organize evidence for quality indicators selected on Rating Request Form
- Submit the Rating Request Form to Step Up to Quality

Steps 3-5 (*with observation)

- Gather and organize evidence for quality indicators selected on Rating Request Form
- Prepare for Environment Rating Scales or CLASS observation
 - Choose either the Environment Rating Scales or the CLASS observation tool
 - Attend relevant observation training sessions
- Submit the Rating Request Form to Step Up to Quality

A Detailed Look at Each Step

These are detailed descriptions of each part of the Step Up to Quality process. Think of these as checklists of what you'll need to accomplish throughout your journey.

Step 1 (Enrollment)

Complete orientation

The director, lead designee or family child care home primary provider must complete a Step Up to Quality orientation session.

The orientation can be found at education.ne.gov/StepUpToQuality/get-started/orientation

Director and staff create professional records in the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System (NECPRS)

Each director/licensee/owner will create a professional record for themselves in NECPRS. Each staff member must also create their own professional record. Staff members must have individual email addresses. The process takes approximately 10-15 minutes per staff member.

Visit necprs.ne.gov to create professional records.

Complete program profile and apply in NECPRS

To participate, programs must apply. Each director/licensee/owner will create a program profile in NECPRS. The program profile is accessed through the director/licensee/owner's professional record. (If you do not have director access for your program, please contact Step Up to Quality.) Apply in NECPRS using the "Step Up to Quality Progress" checklist. If your program has multiple locations, each location must apply separately.

Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System (NECPRS)

The system collects and stores important data about early childhood programs across Nebraska, including:

- Step Up to Quality participation
- Completion of required trainings
- Program staff records

Access the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System at necprs.ne.gov

Professional record information includes:

- Contact information
- Education
- Trainings completed
- Credentials
- Wages
- Work experience

Program profile information includes:

- Program contact details
- Site information
- Benefits provided to staff
- Number of children served
- Rates charged for children of certain ages
- Whether or not the program is serving children with special needs
- Whether or not the program provides transportation to home or to schools
- Whether or not the program serves children eligible for child care subsidy

Head Start, public schools, nationally accredited programs:

Upon completion of the Step 1 requirements, programs where all classrooms at a specific location meet Rule 11 or Head Start Performance Standards, or are nationally accredited*, are eligible to enter at Step 3. Documentation of accreditation will be requested when completing the program profile and application.

Prekindergarten programs established by public schools, Head Start programs and nationally accredited* programs are eligible to enter at Step 3.

**See page 23 for a full list of accepted accreditation types.*

**(Programs on a provisional license are not eligible to move beyond Step 1 until an operating license has been issued. Family child care home programs issued a change of license type may be eligible to retain a previous rating while on a provisional license.)*



Step 2

Complete required training sessions

The director, lead designee or family child care home primary provider must complete the following training sessions:

- Special Care (3 hours)
- At least 4 of the 7 Early Learning Guidelines Domains (at least 24 hours)
- Family child care homes: Introduction to FCCERS-3 or Introduction to Toddler CLASS (4 hours)
- Child care centers: Introduction to ITERS-3/ECERS-3 or any Introduction to CLASS (4 hours)

**Participation in the “CLASS Observation Training” (15 hours) also fulfills the Introduction to the CLASS*

A degree in Early Childhood Education earned after 2005 from an accredited Nebraska college contains the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines and fulfills the ELG requirement.

Training and education is verified through the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System.

Complete Go NAPSACC initial Self-Assessments

Go NAPSACC (Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care) walks child care providers and educators through a series of steps to make healthy changes to their programs.

To reach Step 2, Step Up to Quality programs must submit the initial Self-Assessments covering five areas. Areas include nutrition, physical activity, outdoor play, screen time and breastfeeding and infant feeding.

The Self-Assessments can be accessed at negonapsacc.unl.edu



Advancing to Steps 3-5

Step 3 Only Option

(*no ERS/CLASS observation)

Programs may request a rating review to advance to Step 3 without an on-site ERS or CLASS Observation. A minimum of 50 points must be earned from the indicators selected on the Rating Request Form.

STEPS 3, 4 or 5 Option

(*including ERS or CLASS Observation)

Programs may request a rating review to advance to Steps 3, 4 or 5 including an on-site ERS or CLASS Observation. A minimum of 50 points must be earned from the indicators selected on the Rating Request Form, and a minimum observation score threshold must be met for Steps 4 and 5.

Step 3

Minimum of 50 indicator points earned and Program Overall Observation score **below minimum threshold of 3.75**

Step 4

Minimum of 50 indicator points earned and **at least a 3.75 Program Overall Observation Score**

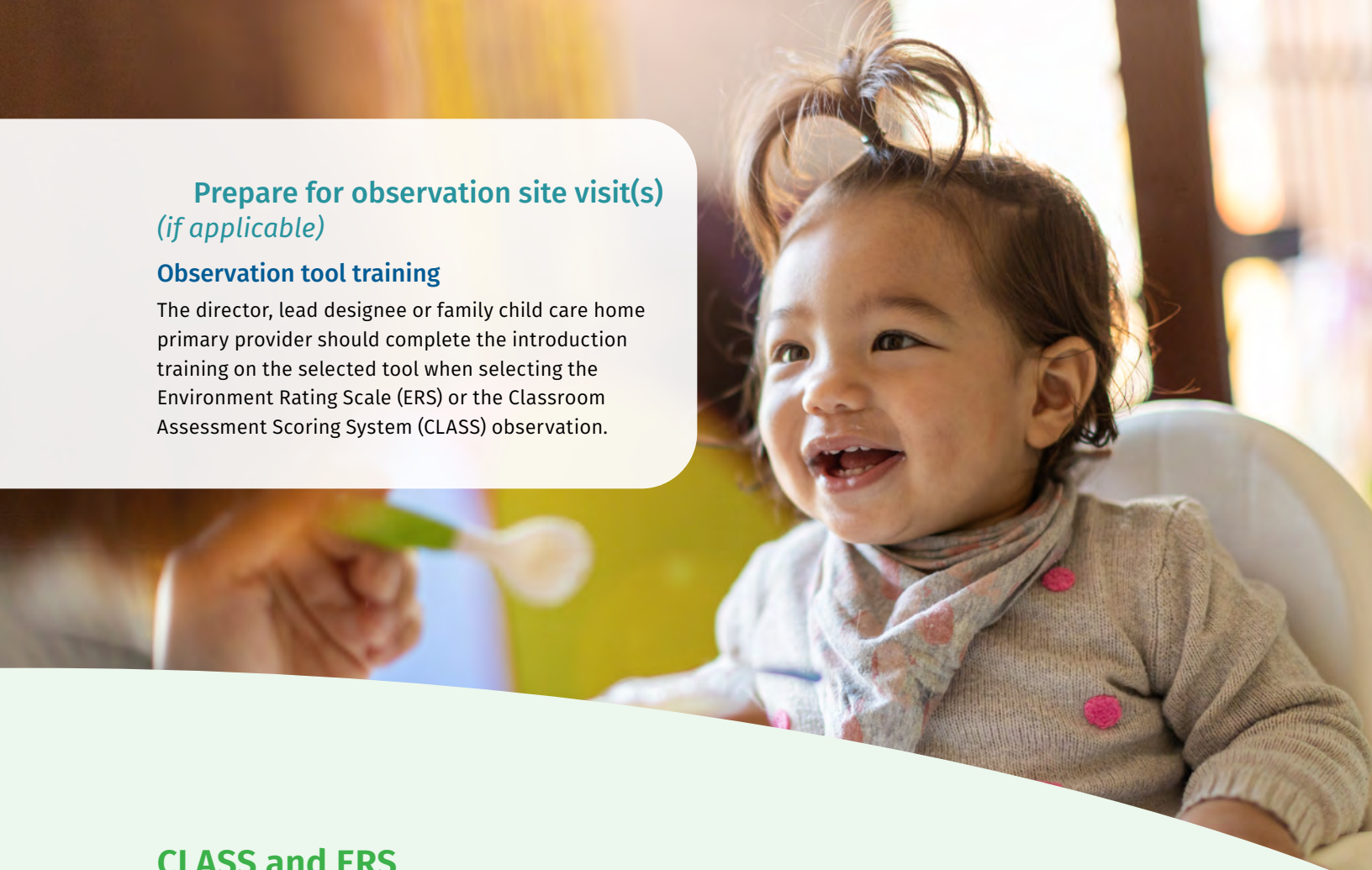
**Both thresholds must be met to achieve a Step 4 rating*

Step 5

Minimum of 50 indicator points earned and **at least a 4.75 Program Overall Observation Score**

**Both thresholds must be met to achieve a Step 5 rating*





Prepare for observation site visit(s) (if applicable)

Observation tool training

The director, lead designee or family child care home primary provider should complete the introduction training on the selected tool when selecting the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) or the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observation.

CLASS and ERS

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

CLASS is an observation tool that focuses on the effectiveness of classroom interactions among teachers and children.

This includes emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support. These daily interactions promote children's social and cognitive development.

CLASS observation tools have been developed for infant, toddler, Pre-K, K-3, upper elementary and secondary age groups. At every age level, CLASS focuses on interactions that support learning.

If you select CLASS as your observation tool, the appropriate training for family child care homes is the "Introduction to the Toddler CLASS" or the "Toddler CLASS Observation" training. The appropriate training for center and school-based programs is the "Introduction to the Infant, Toddler, or Pre-K CLASS" or the "Infant, Toddler, or Pre-K CLASS Observation" training.

Environment Rating Scale (ERS)

The ERS assesses the quality of interactions between adults and children.

Classroom schedules, materials and space support these interactions and are included in the ERS.

ERS is broadly defined and currently includes:

- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Third Edition (ECERS-3)
- Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Third Edition (ITERS-3)
- Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Third Edition (FCCERS-3).

If you select ERS as your observation tool, the appropriate training is the Introduction to the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS) for family child care homes or the Introduction to the Environment Rating Scale (ITERS/ECERS) for center and school-based programs. (An online introductory training course through the Environment Rating Scales Institute is also an option. Learn more at ersi.info/training_online.html)

Prepare for rating review site visit

Programs can choose from a variety of quality indicators to focus on within each standard area, earning at least one point in each standard area.

Complete and submit the Rating Request Form, gather necessary documentation and have it ready for the on-site rating review visit. All program and staff information in NECPRS should be up to date.

Develop action plans

Programs are encouraged to develop program improvement or action plans based upon self-assessment results. Go NAPSACC consultants can help you develop and implement action plans for Go NAPSACC, while Step Up to Quality coaches can do so for ERS and CLASS.



Rating documentation

Programs will provide documentation to verify whether they are meeting certain requirements. Documentation includes:

- Child files
- Child portfolios
- Parent handbook
- Program policies
- Staff handbook and policies/procedures
- Documentation of staff orientation
- Staffing plans
- Lesson plans
- Daily schedules
- Curriculum plans/activity matrix
- Copies of completed child developmental screening forms
- Copies of completed child assessments
- Newsletters
- Facility website
- Notes from family conferences or meetings
- Information posted in family resource area, library, classrooms, bulletin boards, resource binders, etc.
- Minutes and agendas from staff meetings
- Minutes and agendas from IEP/IFSP meetings

Complete and submit the Rating Request Form

You can find the Rating Request Form on the Step Up to Quality website on the Step Up to Quality Forms page (link to Forms: education.ne.gov/stepuptoquality/providers-educators/enrolled-programs/forms). Choose the appropriate form based on your program type. This is your official request for a rating review site visit and on-site observation, if applicable. Once your Rating Request Form has been submitted and approved, no changes may be made to selected indicators. Please refer to the Rating Request Form for more details.

Send your completed form to nde.stepuptoquality@nebraska.gov or mail it to:

Step Up to Quality
P.O. Box 94987
Lincoln, NE 68509



What to expect after submitting Rating Request Form

- An email will be sent by Step Up to Quality confirming your 90-day window for on-site visit(s) which includes the rating review and the CLASS or ERS observation(s) if applicable
- If a CLASS or ERS observation is requested, you will be contacted by the Program Quality Specialist shortly before the two-week window when your scheduled on-site observation(s) will take place
- Each assigned observer will contact you one business day before the scheduled on-site observation
- You will be contacted by the Rating Reviewer shortly before the scheduled rating review site visit
- Once all site visits are completed and scores are finalized, a Step recommendation will be made to the Department of Health and Human Services. Once confirmed, you will receive your rating results within approximately 30 days.

Step Up to Quality rating cycle

Your program can request an on-site observation and rating review once per year (based on the date printed on your last certificate) if you are ready to move up a step.

Step ratings expire on the following schedule:

- **Step 3:** every two years (unless entering at Step 3)
- **Step 4:** every two years
- **Step 5:** every five years

Programs must submit a Rating Request Form and have it approved within the month prior to their rating expiration date — or the program will return to a Step 2 rating. School district, Head Start and accredited programs will return to a Step 3 rating.

Quality Standards and Indicators

Each quality standard on the Rating Request Form consists of quality indicators, which describe specific expectations and measures of quality. Quality standards and indicators help ensure providers implement high-quality practices across Nebraska.

Step Up to Quality focuses on the following five quality standards:

1 Program Administration

Quality early child care programs have policies and procedures in place to maintain sound business practices and support employee development.

Why are the quality indicators in this standard important?

- Early childhood programs must understand their income and expenses to ensure operational costs are covered and that programs can sustain themselves financially. By having your program's finances in order, you can continue to be a dependable part of your children's lives.
- High-quality programs have stable and consistent providers and educators. Programs can help ensure stability if they provide pay and benefits based on education and experience.



2 Child Outcomes

Early child care providers and educators should be knowledgeable of developmental milestones, complete regular assessments and communicate with families about children’s skills, strengths and needs.

Why are the quality indicators in this standard important?

- Early identification of potential developmental delays is critical to support each child’s development.
- Staff who are knowledgeable about developmental milestones can share information and help connect families with appropriate services and evaluation.
- Ongoing assessment helps programs learn about each child’s progress and needs. This allows programs to provide individualized instruction that best supports each child’s growth and development.

3 Professional Development and Training

Quality early child care programs employ knowledgeable and professional staff who pursue lifelong learning. Professional development is an ongoing process of education and training to prepare individuals for a career working with young children and families. Actively pursuing professional development ensures that knowledge and skills stay relevant and up to date.

Why are the quality indicators in this standard important?

- Early childhood is a dynamic and ever-changing field. Research is constantly providing new information about young children’s brain development.
- It is essential that early childhood providers participate in ongoing training and education that supports high-quality interactions with children.
- The most successful early childhood professionals make a commitment to lifelong learning. They actively pursue new knowledge as it becomes available.

4 Family Engagement and Partnerships

Early child care providers and educators maintain collaborative relationships with families and the community to help support children’s learning and development.

Why are the quality indicators in this standard important?

- All children need to see themselves represented in the classroom daily. This includes each child’s cultural identity and traditions.
- Early child care providers and educators who share information about their community’s resources provide a connection to services for children and families.
- Connecting families to community and school resources results in greater family resilience.
- Gathering feedback from families helps programs improve services for children and families.

5 Learning Environments and Program Curriculum

Providers and educators actively engage children in everyday learning with teaching approaches to enhance each child’s learning and development. Learning activities are adapted to meet the needs of individual children.

Quality early childhood programs use an evidence-based curriculum aligned with the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines that incorporates child nutrition and physical activity.

Why are the quality indicators in this standard important?

- The interactions, materials and environment provided by the program help children learn and grow.
- Effective teacher-child interactions are associated with higher scores in vocabulary and math and promote healthy social and emotional development.
- Alignment of the curriculum with the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines helps ensure that all children receive developmentally appropriate instruction.
- Children are healthier when they have opportunities for physical activity to develop gross motor skills and are provided with appropriate nutrition.

Rating Grievance Process

Purpose of the Rating Grievance Process

Programs may pursue a rating grievance after the receipt of a Step Up to Quality Rating Report if the program finds errors in calculation of points or other technical errors that would result in the program earning at least one Step level higher.

Initiating a Rating Grievance

Programs may file one rating grievance per Step Up to Quality rating cycle. The program must complete the following steps within *30 days* of receipt of the Step Up to Quality Rating Report:

1. The program director or primary provider must communicate concerns with the Nebraska Step Up to Quality Director. The Nebraska Step Up to Quality Director will review the Step Up to Quality standards and indicators with the program to address misunderstandings or questions about the rating calculations. This initial step is intended to clarify for programs how the ratings are calculated, which may prevent the need for a rating grievance to proceed.

2. If the program still has concerns after this communication, the program director or primary provider shall submit an email to nde.stepuptoquality@nebraska.gov including the following details:

- The date(s) of communication with the Step Up to Quality Director;
- Documentation and evidence specific to each disputed item, including a description of why the program, at the time of observation or review, should have earned at least one Step level higher.

The Step Up to Quality rating grievance process does not address the following reasons:

- Additional information/documentation gathered by the program after on-site review;
- Indicators the program did not select on the completed Rating Request Form;
- The program's ERS or CLASS scores from previous observations were higher than the Step Up to Quality observation scores;
- The date/time of the on-site review (if the review occurred during the timeframe selected by the program on their Rating Request Form);
- The selection of classrooms for observations;
- The variability of time spent in classrooms;
- The primary assigned teacher was not present during visit;
- The classroom or family child care home had new children, sick children or an otherwise "non-typical" day, including disruptions to regular schedule;
- Information was not ready for review by Rating Reviewers/Observers at the time of the on-site visit(s);
- Staff education verification; or
- Programs with licenses that are on probation, suspended or revoked may not file a rating grievance.

Grievance Review and Resolution Process

The Step Up to Quality Steering Committee will review the program’s rating grievance and may request additional documentation from the program and/or the Department of Education’s Office of Early Childhood Step Up to Quality Program. The Steering Committee will make a decision within 30 days of receiving all necessary documents and information. Written notification of the decision will be sent to the program.



If the rating grievance is granted:

- The scores will be adjusted, and the program will be issued an updated Rating Report, if it is determined that an error was made in calculation;
- The program’s participation status on the Step Up to Quality website will be updated, if applicable; and
- The Steering Committee will direct the Step Up to Quality program to conduct an on-site review for a re-rating, if required by the rating grievance outcome.

Note: In the case of re-rating, no new documentation or evidence that was not available during the original on-site review will be considered.

If the rating grievance is denied:

- The program will be notified in writing of the decision, including information about why the grievance was denied. The program’s rating will remain valid for two years (if the program is at Step 3 or 4) from the date the rating was issued.

Program Changes that May Affect Participation

Change in Program Administration

Programs participating in Step Up to Quality must designate the director or lead designee of the program, whether the director oversees one or multiple sites. This person is known as the Director of Record.

Note: In public schools, the Director of Record may be the lead classroom teacher.

Change in Child Care Licensing

Licensing disciplines, probation and suspension

Newly licensed early childhood programs with a provisional license are not eligible to move beyond Step 1 until they have an operating license through the Department of Health and Human Services. Family child care home programs issued a change of license type may be eligible to retain a previous rating while on a provisional license.

If a participating early childhood program's license is placed on disciplinary limitation, probation or suspension, the program shall have its quality rating reduced to Step 1.

If a participating early childhood program's license is revoked, the program will not be eligible to participate in Step Up to Quality or receive a quality rating until the program has been issued an operating license which is in full force and effect.

If a disciplinary action has been initiated, and the program has appealed the action, the license remains in effect, and the program may continue to operate until the hearing outcome/decision. The program's Step rating will also remain in effect until the hearing outcome/decision.

If a program has fulfilled the terms of its discipline, probation or suspension, the program's Step level shall be reinstated to its previous Step rating.

The Director of Record can change after the initial applications are completed. Programs must first update their information with Child Care Licensing (if applicable). To update or change your director information with Step Up to Quality, please complete the Director Change Form at education.ne.gov/stepuptoquality/providers-educators/enrolled-programs/update-my-information

It is recommended that the new director complete:

- Step Up to Quality Orientation
- Special Care training
- Introduction to the Environment Rating Scales or Introduction to the CLASS training



If an Emergency Order has been issued, the program must immediately comply with that Order. If the program appeals this action, and the action is overturned, the program's Step level is reinstated at its previous rating.

The program must contact Step Up to Quality to request the prior Step rating be reinstated once the licensing issue has been resolved.

Prekindergarten Programs Established by a School Board or Educational Service Unit per Rule 11

Early childhood programs operated by a public school or Educational Service Unit are eligible to enter Step Up to Quality at a Step 3 rating. These programs must complete all Step 1 requirements. Public school or ESU-operated programs entering Step Up to Quality at a Step 3 rating are not eligible to receive quality incentive bonuses or a higher subsidy reimbursement rate until they move up at least one Step.

An early childhood education program found in noncompliance with the requirements of Rule 11 may be subject to loss of program approval or loss of grant funding. See [Title 92, Chapter 11: Regulations for the approval of Prekindergarten Programs Established by School Boards or Educational Service Units and for the Issuance of Early Childhood Education Grants](#).

Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start programs are eligible to enter Step Up to Quality at a Step 3 rating. These programs must complete all Step 1 requirements. Head Start and Early Head Start programs must be in good standing with federal and other state or local monitoring systems to participate in Step Up to Quality.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs entering Step Up to Quality at a Step 3 rating are not eligible to receive quality incentive bonuses or a higher subsidy reimbursement rate until they move up at least one Step.



Accredited Programs

Accredited programs are eligible to enter Step Up to Quality at a Step 3 rating. These programs must complete all Step 1 requirements. This includes programs accredited by:

- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
- National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA)
- Council on Accreditation (COA)
- Cognia
- National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA)
- American Montessori Society (AMS)

Accredited programs entering Step Up to Quality at a Step 3 rating are not eligible to receive quality incentive bonuses or a higher subsidy reimbursement rate until they move up at least one Step.

All accredited programs need to submit documentation regarding their accreditation status. Notify Step Up to Quality within 30 calendar days if your program loses, voluntarily discontinues or relinquishes your active accreditation status. If a program is no longer accredited, the Step rating may be reduced.



Withdrawing from Step Up to Quality

An early childhood program may withdraw from Step Up to Quality by notifying Step Up to Quality in writing.

Withdrawal by a program required to participate in Step Up to Quality risks the loss of a child care subsidy agreement and subsequent reimbursement from the Department of Health and Human Services. Withdrawal may also impact the program's child care license.

Once withdrawn, programs will not appear on the ratings map and are not eligible for incentive bonuses or tiered child care reimbursement.





Questions?

Contact

Email: nde.stepuptoquality@nebraska.gov

Phone: 844-807-5712

Website: education.ne.gov/StepUpToQuality

