



Infant and Toddler Services

The period from birth to three years of age is marked by extraordinary growth across all developmental domains. Child development during this period is rapid, dynamic and sensitive to social, physical, biological and environmental inputs. A child's experiences from birth to three influence how they develop, learn and interact with the world and set the foundation for future learning and development. There are several core principles related to the growth of infants, toddlers and two year olds which are critical to delivering the highest quality services. These principles offer a foundation for the knowledge of birth to three development that is laid out in the Illinois Early Learning Guidelines for Birth to Three.

- Early relationships are most important and central to young children's development.
- Development occurs across multiple and interdependent domains, in a simultaneous manner.
- Children develop and learn at their own unique pace and in the context of their family, culture and community.
- Play is the most meaningful way children from birth to three learn and master new skills.
- The core principles embodied by the Illinois Early Learning Guidelines are reinforced by research gathered in a Zero To Three policy brief on the impact of quality child care on children from birth to three (2009).
- The quality of the relationship between the child care provider and the child influences every aspect of young children's development. A secure relationship between the infant and the caregiver can complement the relationship between parents and young children and facilitate early learning and social development.
- Quality child care promotes cognitive, language and social and emotional development. Intensive, high quality, center-based child care interventions that provide learning experiences directly to the young child have a positive effect on early learning, cognitive and language development, and school achievement. For virtually every developmental outcome that has been assessed, quality of care also shows positive associations with early social and emotional development.
- Higher quality child care is particularly important to low income children. Low-income children often start behind their peers when they enter school. When child care is of very high quality, as is the case with model early childhood programs, the positive effects can endure into the early adult years, particularly for children from the poorest home environments.

The Award of Excellence for Infant and Toddler Services, part of ExceleRate Illinois, reflects these principles.

Has your program already achieved the Gold Circle of Quality? If so additional technical assistance can be received to work toward this Award of Excellence at www.theounce.org/Lead.

For more information, contact gov.ExceleRateAoEs@illinois.gov.

Standards

Standard 1	<p>Program demonstrates exemplary birth to three classroom learning environments.</p> <p>Evidence: Self-Study and Program Portfolio demonstrate an ITERS average score of at least 5.75 (no classroom below 5.0).</p>
Standard 2	<p>Program implements policies that support continuity of care for children and families, including a policy of ensuring that, to the extent possible, children remain in the care of the same teaching team from birth to age three.</p>
Standard 3	<p>Program uses assessment data collected at the beginning of the year (i.e., within 45 days of enrollment) to identify initial developmental goals for infants and toddlers, including goals in the area of social-emotional/executive functioning and, for children for whom screening data identifies a developmental concern, informs parents of the plans to provide children with additional teaching and learning supports.</p> <p>Evidence: Self-Study and Program Portfolio demonstrates initial goals are identified from assessment data, including goals in the area of social-emotional/executive functioning, OR documentation submitted verifies a score of 6 or higher on PAS item #10.</p>
Standard 4	<p>Program utilizes appropriate assessment tool or tools that align with developmentally appropriate, content-rich curricula to document children's progress overtime with measurable content-learning outcomes; assessment results are used to inform implementation of the curricula's scope and sequence and activities OR to inform the design of project-based learning experiences and content-area instructional practice.</p>
Standard 5	<p>Group size at all times is no more than 8 for children under 36 months*; ratios will not exceed 1:4 for children under age 30 months and 1:5 for children ages 24-36 months; AND for classrooms with children under age 12 months, for at least 70% of the program day, ratio will not exceed 1:3.</p> <p>*Classrooms where all children are over age 24 months may have up to 10 children.</p>
Standard 6	<p>At least 30% of teaching staff assigned to infant-toddler classrooms have a Level 5 or higher ECE Credential or equivalent and a Level 4 or higher Infant-Toddler Credential or equivalent; AND an additional 50% of teaching staff assigned to infant-toddler classrooms have a Level 2 or higher Infant-Toddler Credential.</p>
Standard 7	<p>Programs implement opportunities for peer-to-peer technical assistance to support teachers' ongoing learning, reflection and examination of practice, and improvement of practice. Peer-to-peer technical assistance may include protecting time weekly or bi-weekly for classroom teams to engage in Lesson Study and to design lesson plans collaboratively, and at least monthly to convene as a Community of Practice or Reflective Practice Group to discuss child progress and classroom quality data, observe and examine practice, and collaborate to further develop curricula and improve the responsiveness and effectiveness of learning environments and instruction.</p>