

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

ExceleRate® Illinois Award of Excellence for Infant and Toddler Services

ExceleRate® Illinois Award of Excellence for Preschool Teaching and Learning

Why should I go for the Award of Excellence for Infant and Toddler Services?

Your program meets or exceeds the high overall level of quality established by ExceleRate Illinois, and excels in the teaching and learning of infants, toddlers, and their families. This award recognizes your effective implementation of continuity of care, your ability to main a high quality learning environment, your system for screening assessment that drives planning for individualized learning, ideal group size and staff/child ratios, and embedded professional development that includes routines for collaboratively learning as professionals. It recognizes that program leaders have systems for continuous quality improvement in place, including with documentation strategies.

Why should I go for the Award of Excellence for Preschool Teaching and Learning?

Your program meets or exceeds the high overall level of high quality established by ExceleRate Illinois, and excels in the teaching and learning of preschool aged children. The award recognizes that your program fully utilizes screening tools, formative and summative child assessment data and that there are systems in place for documentation as well as safeguards against inaccurate information. In addition to the physical environment, your program demonstrates excellent teacher-child interactions, with specific emphasis on emotional supports. Your additional curriculum for learning, aligned with IELGS, allows for high quality interactions for learning that extend beyond the ordinary to provide extraordinary experiences for young children that increase inquiry and thinking skills for them. Your program has a system in place for screening and assessment that begins immediately after enrollment and includes the use of formative and summative data, including families, to provide a rich, individualized learning experience. Documentation for your programs reveals effective inclusion of children with special needs. At this high level of quality, your program has the organizational supports to implement embedded professional development, with documented routines for planning for learning and peer learning opportunities for all teaching teams. The award demonstrates your program is a high functioning learning organization.

Why should I use the Ounce's Lead. Learn. Excel. Support services?

The foundational training provided through Lead. Learn. Excel. supports the basic framework for the requirements to achieve the most challenging parts of the Award. The experiences in the trainings provide the framework for the evidence and continued documentation to achieve the award and maintain the processes requires for maintaining continuous quality improvements. In addition to foundational training, CLASS training (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) for instructional leaders is available to advance knowledge and skills that increase teacher-child interactions for organization and learning. Training is followed by transferring the knowledge into practice with the support of an Implementation Advisor, through on-site visits and planned technical assistance phone calls. In addition, your program will be involved in a high level peer learning community with other high quality programs.

What is the length of time for the support services provided by the Ounce's Lead. Learn. Excel. program?

The support services provided by the Ounce have an 18 month engagement period, including training, transfer to practice with our Implementation Advisors, and regular Peer Learning Communities. These support services provide the time to build knowledge and to implement embedded professional development routines, and also aid programs in building a community of learners. Ultimately, the Ounce aims to build sustainable processes for continuously increasing instructional quality in early childhood education. Programs can apply for the Award at any time during the support services.

Can I work on both the Award of Excellence for Preschool Teaching and Learning and the Award of Excellence for Infant and Toddler Services at the same time?

Generally most organizations will be engaging the entire staff in an Award of Excellence. However, for a site that has birth to five programs and would like to work on both the Award of Excellence for Infant Toddler Services and Preschool Teaching and Learning, it can be done. It is NOT required, but since the focus for both awards is on organizational supports for instructional excellence, these awards can be applied for simultaneously.

Where are the supports located geographically?

The Ounce is making every effort to provide support services throughout the State of Illinois. Training opportunities are scheduled in at least three different regions around the state, and Implementation Advisors are prepared to travel to participating programs. Funding for programs to travel to trainings is not available through the support services, and programs are responsible for the cost for travel. The trainings, technical assistance, and webinars for peer learning communities is at no cost to participants.

What kind of resources can the supports offer?

The Ounce's Lead. Learn. Excel. support services are based on extensive research and practice. As a part of the support services you will have training on the mindset and practices necessary to build a learning organization dedicated to high quality teaching and learning. The professional staff at the Ounce also provides individualized technical assistance with skilled Implementation Advisors to support learning beyond the trainings. An online resource library will be available to you, with a growing number of resources you can access to achieve the award. Professional learning communities are available through webinars to bring high quality programs together in shared practice.

How do I know if I am eligible to join the Ounce's Lead. Learn. Excel. support services?

If your program is rated in the Gold Circle of Quality, you have met the prerequisites to join the Ounce's Lead. Learn. Excel. support services. The Ounce offers a guided self-study to help you assess where your program is currently meeting the Gold Circle of Quality standards for the criteria aligned to the high expectations of the awards. This will help you determine the path towards continuous learning and improvement with documentation for the Award of Excellence in Preschool Teaching and Learning or the Award of Excellence in Infant Toddler Services.

How do I apply for the Ounce's Lead. Learn. Excel. Support services?

You can sign up for the foundational training on the Ounce's website: <http://www.theounce.org/what-we-do/professional-development-LLE>. If you are rated in the Gold Circle of Quality and are interested in joining a cohort, you can register for the online orientation webinar and the first foundational training.

Do I have to go through the 4 trainings first before getting access to the other supports mentioned in the orientation webinars?

The support services begin with the first training. You will have access to resources and Implementation Advisors and begin the process towards the award(s), as soon as you take the first training.

Who specifically is invited to participate in the Ounce's Lead.Learn.Excel. support services?

Administrators are the key for continuous learning and improvement in programs. Instructional leaders are invited to the trainings and to use the support services, and the expectation is that they will implement the strategies provided with their teaching teams.

I have multiple ExceleRate Gold settings. Is the award linked to the teacher who was present during CLASS/ECRS assessments or the building where these assessments occurred?

The award is linked to the site or school that was assessed. The requirements for successful achievement of the Award of Excellence are met by each site or school. If the school has only one classroom and meets all the requirements of the Award, then they will complete the portfolio with documentation of achievement to be submitted to a review committee.

Are the other dates of the Ounce's Lead. Learn. Excel. trainings set?

The calendar of events can be found on our website: <http://www.theounce.org/what-we-do/professional-development-LLE>. The foundational trainings are held monthly for the first four months, and then award specific training is held bimonthly with webinar hosted professional learning communities (within the cohorts) the following month. Implementation Advisors will establish these.

I have teaching staff that may not be able to be on time for an 8:00am start for the Ounce's Lead. Learn. Excel. support services, due to distance and other factors. Will they still be able to participate in the supports?

It is preferable for everyone to be present on time, but we do understand that it might not be possible. If we know ahead of time that there is a time challenge, it will make it easier for us to hold space to comfortably enter into the training for participants.