

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

General Questions About ExceleRate® Illinois for Licensed Family Child Care Providers

What is ExceleRate Illinois?

ExceleRate Illinois is the state's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) that emphasizes continuous quality improvement for early learning and development providers. It helps you keep your focus on your top priority—quality services for children and families—by offering resources, tools, support and guidance to make quality improvements that you identify.

As part of the federal Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge initiative, key stakeholders in Illinois came together to create ExceleRate Illinois as a QRIS that is inclusive of all early learning and development programs throughout Illinois—including child care, Preschool for All/Prevention Initiative and Head Start/Early Head Start.

What is a Quality Recognition and Improvement System?

A quality recognition and improvement system includes quality standards, a structure for accountability and monitoring, program supports and consumer outreach to increase availability of high quality early care and education. According to the national Build Initiative QRIS Network, a comprehensive QRIS like ExceleRate Illinois:

- Makes program quality comparable across program types.
- Creates and aligns program standards with early learning and practitioner standards.
- Develops and aligns infrastructure to support quality improvement.
- Assesses achievement along a continuum.

Who is ExceleRate Illinois for?

ExceleRate Illinois is designed to include all Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (IDCFS) Licensed early learning and development programs, Licensed Family Child Care providers, pre-kindergarten programs, Preschool for All and Prevention Initiative programs, and Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

What are the ExceleRate Illinois Circles of Quality?

ExceleRate Illinois includes four circles of increasing quality: **Licensed Circle of Quality**, **Bronze Circle of Quality**, **Silver Circle of Quality** and **Gold Circle of Quality**. Each circle has a distinct set of standards that must be met.

- **Licensed Circle of Quality** is the foundational circle of quality, and recognizes compliance with the licensing standards of the State of Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.
- **Bronze Circle of Quality** recognizes staff qualifications and professional development, with completion of a robust series of trainings for providers. Bronze Circle trainings are aligned with the standards of ExceleRate Illinois and prepare programs for success as they progress through the Circles of Quality.
- **Silver Circle of Quality** recognizes completion of a rigorous self-assessment and implementation of a continuous quality improvement process, as verified by an independent assessor. Silver Circle programs meet or exceed specific quality benchmarks on learning environment and interactions, along with selected business administration standards; provider and assistant qualifications; and professional development.
- **Gold Circle of Quality** recognizes programs which have demonstrated quality on all seventeen standards, as validated by an independent assessor. Gold Circle programs meet or exceed specific quality benchmarks on learning environment, interactions, and most program business standards; group size and staff/child ratios; provider and assistant qualifications; and professional development.

Why participate in ExceleRate Illinois?

By participating in ExceleRate Illinois, providers become part of a national movement promoting the importance of quality settings for young children and the overall importance of early learning and development. ExceleRate Illinois includes opportunities to recognize providers that are committed to higher levels of quality. ExceleRate Illinois participation also means that providers are giving families the ability to make more informed decisions about their early learning and development choices.

What evidence is needed to show standards have been met for Bronze, Silver, Gold Circle of Quality?

Specific evidence is required at each circle. Examples of evidence may include copy of a program policy, verification of training and proof of Gateways Registry membership. On-site assessment scores using rating scales (e.g. FCCERS) are important to this process. Minimum scores must be achieved in order to meet certain standards at the Silver and Gold Circles. For specific evidence at each Circle of Quality, please see the ExceleRate chart at

<http://www.exceleRateillinoisproviders.com/docman/resources/52-fcc-overview-chart/file>

How will licensed homes be assessed?

At the **Silver Circle of Quality**, a self-assessment will be completed by the provider. A Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP) is developed for scores below a designated threshold. (CCR&R Specialists are available to provide free technical assistance and consultation.) Upon application to ExceleRate Illinois a state approved assessor will set an on-site visit to verify the self-assessment scores.

At the **Gold Circle of Quality**, an independent assessment will be completed by a state-approved assessor for each home provider.

FCCERS assessments exclude Personal Care Routines and Parent and Staff subscales as well as Active Physical Play item #26. In order for assessment to occur, at both **Silver** and **Gold** the provider must have at least 2 children present (that are not the provider's own) for at least three consecutive hours.

How are Circles of Quality determined?

Based upon the circle applied for, an on-site assessment may be required. The Circle of Quality will be determined based on a review of the evidence provided, including documentation, on-site assessment scores or accreditation, if applicable. All standards and evidence must be met at a particular Circle of Quality before a circle is awarded.

What happens after a Circle of Quality is achieved?

The **Silver** and **Gold** Circles of Quality awarded will be valid for three years. Each year the program must submit an ExceleRate Illinois Annual Report verifying that all standards at the awarded Circle of Quality continue to be met. Exception: The **Bronze Circle of Quality** must be renewed every two years. Family child care providers can renew their **Bronze Circle of Quality** as long they are working to obtain their Family Child Care Credential.

What if there is a disagreement about the ExceleRate Illinois Circle of Quality?

ExceleRate Illinois has an appeal process at the **Gold Circle of Quality**. A written appeal must be submitted to INCCRRA within 30 days of Circle of Quality award notification. INCCRRA will communicate with appropriate state agencies and provide a response within 60 business days.

What type of support will be available for ExceleRate Illinois participation?

Those that choose to pursue Circles of Quality above State licensing will have access to technical assistance and training to help them through the process of achieving higher Circles of Quality. The ExceleRate Illinois Quality Specialists at the local Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (CCR&R) will provide support in terms of technical assistance, on-site visits and training. Gateways Registry-approved trainings (in person and online) will also be available to ExceleRate Illinois participants including training to prepare for on-site assessments. It is the intent that those seeking a higher Circle of Quality get the help and support needed to achieve their goals.

How will families know about ExceleRate Illinois?

Families will be made aware of ExceleRate Illinois through a variety of public means. Press releases, public service announcements, program newsletters, online advertising, posters, flyers and other communications represent a variety of the ways in which families will learn about ExceleRate Illinois. One of the most important ways in which families can learn more is through the ExceleRate Illinois website. Families will learn what a QRIS is, its importance and how to inquire about a Circle of Quality when choosing care for their children. Circle of Quality early learning and development providers are made public to families as they search through the website and the local CCR&Rs.

Will Circles of Quality be made public right away?

The intent of having an ExceleRate Illinois Circle of Quality is to inform families and consumers regarding levels of quality as

they seek early learning and development choices for their family. Circles of Quality are made public on the ExceleRate Illinois website once the program is awarded the Circle of Quality. Your program's Licensed Circle of Quality recognition is currently available on the public website to inform families searching for early learning and development options for their children.

What type of information is made public about the ExceleRate Illinois Circles of Quality?

Families and other interested parties will receive the following when seeking information online about programs and their ExceleRate Illinois Circle of Quality:

- Program name
- Program address
- Circle of Quality (**Licensed**, **Bronze**, **Silver**, **Gold**)
- Meaning of **Licensed**, **Bronze**, **Silver** and **Gold**
- Date on which Circle of Quality was awarded to program
- Other licensing information, including licensing violation information from the IDCFS Sunshine project

How can I learn more, or get further assistance?

Call toll-free **(866) 697-8278** and ask to speak with an ExceleRate Illinois Counselor, or for answers to your questions email info@excelerateillinois.com.



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ExceleRate™ Illinois is administered through INCCRRA under the joint direction of the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, the Illinois Department of Human Services, and the Illinois State Board of Education.

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