Program Accountability

Programs are required to implement with fidelity all components of the Preschool for All (PFA) Request for Proposals (RFP) and the continuation e-grant. They must also follow the Illinois Administrative Code and align programming to Birth to Five Program Standards as agreed to by signing the PFA Grant Assurances.

Assessors will make regular monitoring visits to observe and evaluate PFA programs to ensure that they are complying with grant requirements and meeting quality standards. Monitoring visits are typically conducted on a three-year basis. The assessor assigned to monitor a program will make contact in advance of the visit to identify a three-week period during which the visit will take place and to provide the program with needed information. Both the administrative and classroom components of the program will be monitored. The visit consists of two parts, which include:

- Classroom observations using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R). Typically, it takes an entire class period to complete the classroom observation
- Program compliance assessment using Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Early Childhood Block Grant 3-5 Compliance Checklist

Tips for Compliance Monitoring

Programs are encouraged to review ISBE’s Tips for Compliance Monitoring and attend training on the monitoring tool provided by the Early Childhood Center on Professional Development or STAR NET prior to the monitoring visit.

Initial Continuous Quality Improvement Plan

Programs will receive follow-up reports, indicating findings based on ECERS-R and the Compliance Checklist. Instructions will also be included to assist in developing a two-part Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP), which should be developed collaboratively by program staff, administrators, and families. The CQIP will address any findings that may need improvement (ECERS-R) or are out of compliance (Compliance Checklist). Programs will have 30 days from receipt of the follow-up reports to complete both the ECERS-R and Compliance Checklist CQIPs and return them to ISBE. A CQIP Instructional Webinar, CQIP Training & Technical Assistance Resources, and an example of an ECERS-R CQIP are on the ISBE Early Childhood web site.

Both CQIP documents must be electronically signed by the program Authorized Official (as indicated in the current year's approved PFA Grant) and submitted to ecpip@isbe.net. After receipt, ISBE will review and communicate changes which may be necessary in order for the CQIPs to be approved.

Follow-Up CQIP

Programs will submit a follow-up to their initial CQIPs each year following the monitoring review. Programs will indicate if each Goal and Action Step on the CQIP has been “met” or is still “in process.” If the Goal or Step is still “in process,” programs will provide an update on their progress. Both CQIP documents must be electronically signed by the program Authorized Official (as indicated in the current year’s approved PFA grant) and submitted to ecpip@isbe.net.

Coaching

Findings from the PFA monitoring visit may result in programs being invited to participate in the PFA Coaching Project. The project is funded by ISBE through the Illinois Resource Center at no cost to programs. Programs receive support, on-site visits, and resources from the PFA Coaching Project to assist in the process of continuous program improvement. PFA coaches are experts in the field of Early Childhood Education and have extensive experience with PFA. Programs previously participating in the PFA Coaching Project have shown strong improvement in follow-up monitoring scores.
Program Self-Evaluation

In addition to monitoring from ISBE, each program must have a written, annual self-evaluation to determine if progress is being made toward achieving all required components of the grant. Information gathered through this self-evaluation should be the basis for the program’s continuous quality improvement. This annual self-evaluation process should inform its individualized staff development plans and can also be used to revise the program’s CQIP.

Methods of program self-evaluation may include some or all of the following:

- parent survey of the program’s services
- staff survey of the program
- review of the children’s progress using their developmental assessments and portfolios
- self-review of the program and classroom(s) using the Compliance Checklist and/or a program quality tool, such as the ECERS-R
- review of the program’s current CQIP

Information that may be collected includes, but is not limited to:

- Where are we?
  - An understanding about the program and its current conditions through an analysis of current program and population served data.
    - What has been accomplished within current program goals?
    - What resources supported these accomplishments?
    - What accomplishment goals have yet to be reached?

- Where do we want to be?
  - Establish or update program goals and measurable objectives, specifically identifying children and families to be served, the program’s demographics, and desired outcomes for serviced populations.
    - What has not yet been accomplished?
    - What new goals need set?

- How do we get to where we want to be?
  - Identify what is needed to help meet the goals.
    - What resources are needed (e.g., staffing, funding, equipment, stakeholders’ support, school/district/state support, community support)?
    - What services should be delivered?
    - What is the quality of instruction and curriculum?
    - What is the timeline for completing steps toward goals?

- How do we know if we are getting there?
  - An analysis of accomplished activities given timelines, with movement toward accomplishing goals and objectives.
    - What is the status of the goals compared to initiation of working towards goals?

After the self-assessment data is gathered, the program should summarize its findings in a written document and set new goals and objectives for the next program year. The new or revised goals and objectives could be added to the current CQIP or a new CQIP could be written. After the new or revised CQIP is in place, programs should determine who will review the goals and objectives to monitor progress.

ExceleRate Information

ExceleRate Illinois is the state’s quality rating and improvement system for early learning and development programs that serve children from birth to age 5. ExceleRate unifies all of the state’s early learning programs under a common set of standards across multiple settings to provide families with important information about quality early learning programs in their community. ExceleRate is a comprehensive system that includes Licensed Child
Care Centers, PFA programs, Head Start/Early Head Start Programs, and Licensed Family/Group Child Care Homes.

PFA sites located in a school-based setting are awarded an ExceleRate Circle of Quality based on its Compliance and ECERS-R scores obtained during regular monitoring visits.

A PFA site located in a licensed center that has any classroom that is not funded by PFA will be rated with the rest of the center through the ExceleRate Licensed Child Care path.

The **Gold Circle of Quality** recognizes programs that have demonstrated quality on all 15 standards, as validated by an independent assessor. Gold Circle programs meet or exceed specific quality benchmarks on learning environment, instructional quality, and all program administrative standards; group size and staff/child ratios; staff qualifications; and professional development.

**Awards of Excellence**

Once a program has achieved the Gold Circle of Quality, it can apply for an ExceleRate Illinois Award of Excellence as the next step toward continuous quality improvement and recognition for excellence in specific areas of program quality. There are five Awards of Excellence in the following content areas - Preschool Teaching and Learning, Family and Community Engagement, Linguistically and Culturally Appropriate Practice, Inclusion of Children with Special Needs, and Infant and Toddler Services. For more information about the Awards of Excellence, visit the ExceleRate website!

**Additional Resources**

- [ExceleRate Illinois](#)
- [ExceleRate Illinois Providers](#)