



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



### Connecticut Administered State-Funded Program General Policy A-07

#### Quality Assurance Requirements

- X OEC Early Start CT Programs
  - X OEC Smart Start CT Programs
- 

This general policy applies to Early Start Connecticut (ESCT) Contractors, subcontractors and programs, and Smart Start grantees which are funded in full or in part by the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). The policy provides guidance to programs to comply with legislative and contractual requirements for Quality Assurance.

#### **POLICY**

##### **Compliance**

All state-funded Early Care and Education (ECE) programs are required to achieve and maintain either National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation+, National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) accreditation, and/or Head Start, Early Head Start approval. (Collectively referred to in this document as “High-Quality Requirements”).

- State-funded ECE programs shall achieve initial High-Quality Requirements within three (3) years from the date that children are enrolled, as recorded by the OEC in the OEC Registry.
  - The three-year accredit-by date is **not** extended if:
    - The program is awarded additional funding, or
    - The OEC-funded spaces are transferred to a site that is not accredited or has not received Head Start/Early Head Start approval.
- Accreditation is granted to the overall program, not to individual classes within a program, including classes that operate during the summer.
  - If a specific program or classroom located in a facility seeking accreditation wishes to be excluded from the accreditation, it shall comply with the accrediting agency related policies.
- Family child care providers agree that accreditation is granted to all areas of the home accessible to children.
- State-funded ECE programs serving only school age children are required to achieve and maintain OEC’s Elevate Member+ status within eighteen (18) months of the date that children begin to attend the program.

##### **Interim Quality Assurance Process**

Non-accredited programs shall participate in the OEC’s Interim Quality Assurance process.



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



- At the program's expense, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales (ERS) assessment shall be administered annually by an OEC-approved assessor.
- The program is required to have an ERS designed for the population served by the state funding.
  - The ERS report shall be uploaded to the Program's OEC Registry account within 30 calendar days of completion of the ERS assessment.

OEC may require ESCT programs to have an ERS by a randomly assigned, OEC- approved ERS evaluator, within a period specified by the OEC. This assessment will be based on the most recent ERS-approved extension for achieving initial accreditation or reaccreditation or other independent observation of program quality.

### **Accreditation Extension Requests**

Under specific circumstances and only once during the period of the contract, programs may submit a request to extend the three-year time period to achieve initial High-Quality Requirements or renewal. To request an extension:

- The program administrator shall request an extension a minimum of 90 calendar days prior to the accredit-by date or date of expiration. The request shall include detailed:
  - information regarding the need for the request, including the reasons why the timeline could not be met;
  - timeline of efforts made to date to achieve or maintain High-Quality Requirements;
  - timeline specifying what steps will be taken to achieve and maintain High-Quality Requirements and a proposed extension term.
- OEC will grant or deny the request for extension within 30 calendar days of receipt
  - If an extension is granted, it will include:
    - The time period in which the program shall develop and implement an action plan to complete the accreditation process or obtain Head Start/Early Head Start approval;
    - The Interim Quality Assurance Process which the program shall participate in; and
    - Any required participation in OEC Quality Improvement Initiatives.

### **Revocation of High-Quality Requirements**

Programs that lose compliance with High-Quality Requirements through deferral, denial, revocation or inability to complete the renewal process shall:

- Within seventy-two (72) hours of receipt from NAEYC, NAFCC or the Office of Head Start (OHS), submit the accreditation decision report (or OHS letter of termination or denial of refunding) to the assigned OEC Program Manager and ESCT Liaison.
- Promptly meet with the OEC Program Manager to:
  - address the specific reason(s) for the loss of High-Quality Requirements and



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



- discuss options for continued state funding.
- submit a written program improvement action plan which includes:
  - staff roster;
  - detailed action steps to be taken to achieve High-Quality Requirements; and
  - timeline indicating when action steps will be completed.
- OEC will review the information provided and notify the program regarding next steps.
  - If OEC-funding is removed, the OEC Program Manager will inform the program when enrollment of children in state-funded spaces shall stop and when state funding will end.

### **OTHER POLICY INFORMATION**

Center-based, group homes, licensed-exempt, or family child care providers that pursue NAEYC accreditation shall achieve and maintain NAEYC's Accreditation+ tier, by their program's accredit-by date.

- Programs funded on or after July 1, 2025, are required to achieve NAEYC Recognition tier within eighteen (18) months of the date that children begin to attend the program.
- Programs shall report any programmatic changes to the OEC and comply with high-quality reporting requirements, for example:
  - Administrator changes;
  - A new age group is added to a program; or
  - If a program relocates to a new site.
- A program that is not accredited may not gain accreditation by becoming a satellite location to an already accredited site.
- Kindergarten classrooms in public schools are not required to be NAEYC accredited.

Family child care providers shall achieve and maintain either NAFCC accreditation or NAEYC accreditation+.

OEC encourages, but does not require, Head Start programs to achieve NAEYC accreditation+.

### **Interim Quality Assurance**

Interim Quality Assurance measures will be implemented for programs that have not yet achieved Accreditation.

Programs shall use the ERS Report to create a program improvement plan, which shall be made available for review upon request by OEC, the ESCT Contractor, or the ESCT Liaison.

Programs voluntarily engaged with OEC Quality Improvement initiatives, such as OEC funded



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



consultation or technical assistance from Accreditation Quality Improvement Support (AQIS) or Staffed Family Child Care Networks (SFCCN), are encouraged to share their ERS results with technical assistance providers to inform work toward a goal of achieving accreditation or Head Start/Early Head Start approval.

ESCT Program Managers may require a program to engage in additional state-funded quality improvement initiatives based on the results of the ERS(s).

- Support may include consultation with OEC's Quality Improvement System Elevate, Consultation Quality Improvement Support, Accreditation Quality Improvement Support, Staffed Family Child Care Network/Hub, and Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Coaching.

### **Extension Requests**

Programs granted an extension to achieve initial or renewal of High-Quality Requirements will be subject to quality assurance monitoring by OEC or an ESCT Liaison. If the program fails to demonstrate progress as agreed to in timeline, the OEC may remove funding.

### **Revocation of High-Quality Requirements**

Programs that lose OEC funding and later achieve High-Quality Requirements may re-apply for OEC-funding.

## **DEFINITIONS**

**Accredited or Accreditation:** Designation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or by the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), used when referring to facilities that serve infants, toddlers or preschoolers

**Accredit-by Date:** The timeframe in which a program shall successfully complete the accreditation process or obtain Head Start/Early Head Start Approval

**Environment Rating Scales (ERS):** Structured, research-based observation tools used to assess the quality of a child's experiences in a child care setting

**Head Start/Early Head Start Approval:** designation by OHS within the, Administration for Children & Families Agency (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that a program is a Head Start/Early Head Start grant recipient or delegate

**High-Quality Requirements:** Term used by OEC to describe state-funded Early Care and Education (ECE) programs are mandated to achieve and maintain either National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation+, National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) accreditation, and/or Head Start, Early Head Start approval.



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



**Interim Quality Assurance Process:** OEC-internally designed process for quality improvement monitoring for programs that have not received High-Quality Requirements

**Monitoring Review Reports:** documentation provided to Head Start/Early Head Start grant recipients regarding their compliance with Head Start requirements

**National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC):** professional organization that administers NAEYC Early Learning Program Quality Assessment and Accreditation System

- *NAEYC Recognition:* an initial tier of accreditation that focuses on identifying key policy components and baseline practices upon which high-quality early learning experiences and environments can be built, programs shall achieve Recognition to move forward to Accreditation
- *NAEYC Accreditation:* Approval, based on both document-based and observation-based assessment items, that an ECE program demonstrates policies, structures, and practices indicative of a high-quality care and learning environment. Accreditation decisions are based on document review with the potential for site visits. Programs shall first achieve Accreditation to move forward to Accreditation+
- *NAEYC Accreditation+:* Indication that an ECE program demonstrates policies, structures, and practices indicative of the highest levels of quality care and learning, requires at least one mandatory site visit

**National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC):** Professional organization that administers Family Child Care accreditation

**Notice of Grant Award (NoA):** U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) document given to an organization indicating an award has been made, the amount of Federal funds authorized, and the budget period for the approved project

**Quality Assurance:** systematic measurement, comparison with a standard, monitoring processes and an associated feedback loop, such as those afforded by the NAEYC or NAFCC accreditation and Head Start/Early Head Start Approval processes, to ensure that standards of quality are met

**Quality Improvement Monitoring:** assessment of a program's performance based on applicable legislative, contractual, administrative standards, data collected from accreditation and Head Start/Early Head Start Approval tools and reports, and other data including, but not limited to, licensing inspections, OEC Registry and ECE Reporter submissions, or Environment Rating Scales.



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



This page is intentionally blank.

*In the unlikely event that any provision of this General Policy is found to be inconsistent with any contract or grant provision, the contract or grant shall govern.*

For further information concerning this GENERAL POLICY please contact your OEC Program Manager or visit <https://www.ctoec.org/contact-us/>