

# Steps to Excellence Program for Child Care Centers

1. **Regulatory Compliance** is key to program quality because:

- Child care centers in states with more stringent regulations have higher-quality care, and children in those programs score higher in tests of school readiness, language comprehension, and social behavior. (*Building Quality Child Care in Los Angeles County: Key Research Findings and Recommendations*, compiled by the Center for Improving Child Care Quality at UCLA)
- Unfortunately, under standards implemented during the state budget crisis in 2003, the California Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing Division implemented a monitoring schedule which conducts on-site inspections of child care programs only once every five years, one of the least-frequent monitoring programs in the nation.

Standards to be Assessed	Step 1 = Licensed	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
<p><b>1. Regulatory compliance history</b></p> <p>The same standard applies for all levels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source: Review of administrative records.</li> </ul>	<p>Program has secured and holds a child care license. License is not probationary and program is not involved in a compliance plan. Program has not been fined by DSS/CCLD for failing to correct a deficiency in a timely manner or repeated offenses.</p> <p>Program has passed annual health and fire inspections, and has not been subject to administrative hearings or actions for failure to correct deficiencies.</p>	<p>See Step 1.</p>	<p>See Step 1.</p>	<p>See Step 1.</p>	<p>See Level 1.</p>

2. **Teacher/Child Relationships** are key to program quality because:
- adult-child ratios are a key predictor of child care quality,
  - smaller class size and lower adult-child ratios are correlated with greater program effects, and
  - children with closer relationships to their preschool teachers have better thinking/attention skills, are more sociable over time and show fewer problem behaviors. (*Building Quality Child Care in Los Angeles County: Key Research Findings and Recommendations*, compiled by the Center for Improving Child Care Quality at UCLA)

Standards to be Assessed	Step 1 = Licensing	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
<p><b>2. Teacher/Child Relationships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher-to-child ratios.</li> <li>• Group size.</li> <li>• Rating on Adult Involvement Scale.</li> <li>• Source: Observation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Title 22 ratios</b></p> <p><b>Infants</b> (birth to 2 years): 1 teacher to 4 infants or 1 teacher to 12 infants, and at least 2 aides, each supervising no more than 4 infants for a 1 to 4 staff-to-child ratio. No group size requirement.</p> <p><b>Toddler Option</b> (18 to 30 months): 1 teacher to 6 children, or 1 teacher and 1 aide to 12 children, maximum group size is 12 children for a 1 to 6 staff-to-child ratio.</p> <p><b>Preschool</b> (2 or 2.5 years to K): 1 teacher to 12 children; 1 teacher + 1 aide to 15 children, or 1 teacher + 1 aid with 6 units to 18 children. No group size requirement.</p>	<p><b>Exceeds Title 22 ratios.</b></p> <p><b>Infants</b> (birth to 2 years): 1 teacher to 10 infants with at least 2 aides, each aide supervising no more than 3 infants for a staff-to-child ratio of 1 to 3.3. No group size requirement.</p> <p><b>Toddlers</b> (18 to 30 months) 1 teacher to 5 children, or 1 teacher and 1 aide to 10 children, maximum group size is 10 children for a 1 to 5 staff-to-child ratio.</p> <p><b>Preschool</b> (2 or 2.5 years to K): 1 teacher to 10 children; 1 teacher + 1 aide to 14 children, or 1 teacher + 1 aid with 6 units to 17 children.</p> <p><b>Average Score</b> on the Adult Involvement Scale is between 3.0 and 3.9.</p>	<p><b>Title 5 ratios</b></p> <p><b>Infants</b> (birth to 18 months): 1 teacher to 18 infants, with 5 aides for a staff-to-child ratio of 1/3. No group size requirement.</p> <p><b>Toddlers</b> (18 to 36 months): 1 teacher to 16 children, with 3 aides for a staff-to-child ratio of 1 to 4. No group size requirement.</p> <p><b>Preschoolers</b> (36 months to K), 1 teacher + 2 aides for a staff-to-child ratio of 1 to 8. No group size requirement.</p> <p><b>Average Score</b> on the Adult Involvement Scale is between 4.0 and 4.9.</p>	<p><b>Title 5 ratios + Exemplary Standards Group Sizes</b></p> <p><b>Infants</b> (birth to 18 months): 1 teacher to 18 infants with 5 aides for a staff-to-child ratio of 1/3. Group sizes of 6-8 children.</p> <p><b>Toddlers</b> (18 to 35 months): 1 teacher to 16 children, with 3 aides for a staff-to-child ratio of 1 to 4. Group sizes of 12–14 children.</p> <p><b>Preschoolers</b> (3 years to K), 1 teacher + 2 aides for a staff-to-child ratio of 1 to 8. Group sizes of 24 children.</p> <p><b>Average Score</b> on the Adult Involvement Scale is between 5.0 and 5.9.</p>	<p><b>NAEYC ratios and group sizes</b></p> <p><b>Infants:</b> birth to 15 months 1 teacher to 8 children, 1 staff to 3 or 4 infants, max group size 8.</p> <p><b>Toddlers thru Two</b> (12-28 months) 1 teacher to 12 children, 1 staff to 3-4 toddlers, max group size is 12.</p> <p>(28-36 months) 1 teacher to 12 children, 1 staff to 4-6 children, max group size 12.</p> <p><b>Younger preschool: 2.5- to 4-year-olds</b> (30-48 mo.) 1 teacher to 18 children, 1 staff to 6-9 children, max group size is 18.</p> <p><b>Older preschool: 4- to 6-year-olds,</b> 1 teacher to 24 children, 1 staff to 8-10 children, max group size is 24. <b>3 staff 1 of whom is a fq teacher</b> <b>Average Score</b> on the Adult Involvement Scale is equal to or over 6.</p>

**3. Learning Environments** are a key to program quality because:

- Considerable research over the past 15 years has provided clear documentation of the effects of the quality of the classroom environment. Results shown to relate to the quality of the preschool environments include cognitive development; social skills; classroom behavior and language development. (*Pre-kindergarten Learning & Developmental Guidelines*, California Department of Education)
- Two national studies of child care that included samples in Southern California, less than 15 percent of available child care offers good quality environments. (*Building Quality Child Care in Los Angeles County: Key Research Findings and Recommendations*, compiled by the Center for Improving Child Care Quality at UCLA)

Standards to be Assessed	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
<p><b>3. Learning Environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess program using appropriate Environmental Rating Scale(s).</li> <li>• Source: Observation using <i>Early Childhood or Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scales</i></li> </ul>		<p><b>Score of 3</b> on all appropriate rating scale(s), verifying that care meets custodial needs and some basic developmental needs are being met.</p> <p>Possible scales include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS)</li> <li>• Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Score of 4</b> on appropriate rating scale(s), verifying that care meets custodial needs and more basic developmental needs are met than in Level 2.</p> <p>Possible scales include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ITERS</li> <li>• ECERS</li> </ul>	<p><b>Score of 5</b> on appropriate rating scale(s) verifying that basic dimensions of developmental care are present.</p> <p>Possible scales include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ITERS</li> <li>• ECERS</li> </ul>	<p><b>Score 6</b> on appropriate rating scale(s), verifying that additional dimensions of high-quality care are present.</p> <p>Possible scales include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ITERS</li> <li>• ECERS</li> </ul>

4. **Identification and Inclusion of Children with Special Needs** is a key to program quality because:

- Identification of special needs accompanied by intervention during infancy or the preschool years can improve a child's health, learning and social emotional development in ways that might be impossible just a few years later.
- Use of a reliable screening tool could boost the identification rate of children with special needs to 75 percent. (*Accurate and Inexpensive Developmental Screenings* by M. Dunkle, L. Vismara, Children& Families, Spring 2004)
- Supporting and accommodating children's individual needs, creates opportunities for them to participate in program activities alongside their peers. Using inclusive practices creates an environment where children and families feel that they belong, not as a guest or an outsider, but as a full member of the group. (*Successful Strategies for Integrating Infants and Toddlers: Recommendations for Practice* by Brault, L.M.J, 1992)

Standards to be Assessed	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
<p><b>4. Identification and Inclusion of Children with Special Needs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assess the frequency and sensitivity of developmental screening.</li> <li>▪ Source: Review of child records, lesson plans and resource materials.</li> </ul>		<p>Families of children with special needs are welcomed to the program.</p> <p>The program is aware of basic early intervention services, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Local Regional Center, and</li> <li>▪ Local School District(s).</li> </ul>	<p>Previous level plus:</p> <p><b>Identification</b></p> <p>All children are screened using a high quality, culturally and developmentally appropriate screening tool within 90 days of starting the program.</p> <p>Families are engaged in the screening process. Results are shared with the family in a confidential and supportive manner.</p> <p>If referrals for further assessment are needed, the family is referred to the appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Regional Center,</li> <li>▪ School District, &amp;/or</li> <li>▪ Other resources.</li> </ul> <p><b>Inclusion</b></p> <p>If a child has an Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) or</p>	<p>Previous levels plus:</p> <p><b>Identification</b></p> <p>All children are screened annually.</p> <p>If referrals for further assessment are needed, families are guided and supported during the referral and assessment process.</p> <p>Program maintains a resource directory of local early intervention and support services which are accessible to families.</p> <p><b>Inclusion</b></p> <p>Staff collaborate with child's team of professionals to implement recommendations to address child's IEP/IFSP goals.</p>	<p>Previous levels plus:</p> <p><b>Identification</b></p> <p>Screenings are completed on new enrollees within 45 days of starting program &amp; bi-annually thereafter.</p> <p>Resource directory of community early intervention and other support services are readily available to families. Staff are available to facilitate connections.</p> <p><b>Inclusion</b></p> <p>A sense of belonging is fostered through maximum integration of children with special needs with their peers. Modifications to daily routine, curriculum, and/or environment are made as needed.</p>

Continued - Identification and Inclusion of Children with Special Needs

Standards to be Assessed	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
<p><b>4. Identification and Inclusion of Children with Special Needs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assess the frequency and sensitivity of developmental screening.</li> <li>▪ Source: Review of child records, lesson plans and resource materials.</li> </ul>			<p>Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the program structures activities and services that are supportive of the Plan.</p> <p><b>Special Needs Training</b></p> <p>At least 1 staff member has specialized college course work/professional development training that prepares them to work with children who have special needs, including administration and interpretation of developmental screens, and is available to assist colleagues.</p>	<p>Accommodations are made to ensure the child with special needs is able to participate in each program component.</p> <p><b>Special Needs Training</b></p> <p>At least one staff member in each classroom has specialized college course work or professional development training that prepares them to work w/ children who have special needs, including administration and interpretation of developmental screens.</p>	<p><b>Special Needs Training</b></p> <p>A majority of teachers, assistant teachers, and aides have specialized college course work or professional development training that prepares them to work w/ children who have special needs and to administer and interpret developmental screens.</p>

5. **Qualifications and Working Conditions** are key to program quality because:

- Research has consistently found that overall administrative practices are crucial for ensuring high-quality outcomes for children and families. Without quality systems in place at the organizational level, high-quality interactions and learning environments at the classroom level cannot be sustained. (*Program Administration Scale* by Teri Talan and Paula Jorde Bloom)
- Employing qualified teachers who are satisfied with their compensation is associated with higher-quality child care experiences. (*Building Quality Child Care in Los Angeles County: Key Research Findings and Recommendations*, compiled by the Center for Improving Child Care Quality at UCLA)

Standards to be Assessed	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
<p><b>5. Qualifications and Working Conditions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrator and teacher education, compensation, and retention.</li> <li>• Source: Review of site records</li> </ul>	<p>Staff <b>meet</b> Title 22 qualifications:</p> <p><b>Director</b> has a minimum of 15 units in ECE and 4 years teaching experience in child care.</p> <p><b>Teaching staff:</b> Each classroom or group is staffed by at least 1 fully-qualified teacher who has completed 12 units in child development and 6 months experience.</p> <p>Aides have completed 6 units in child development, If there are 18 or more children in a group or class, at least one assistant will have completed 6 units in ECE.</p> <p>(No staff stability requirements)</p>	<p>Staff qualifications <b>exceed</b> Title 22, including:</p> <p><b>Director</b> has at least an AA degree in ECE, and 1 year administrative experience.</p> <p><b>Teaching staff:</b> 50 percent of the classrooms or groups are staffed by at least 1 person who holds or has applied for a Child Development Teacher permit. The remaining classrooms or groups are staffed by at least one person who holds or has applied for an Associate Teacher Permit.</p> <p>All other teaching staff, at a minimum, hold/qualify for a Child Development Assistant permit.</p>	<p>Staff <b>meet Title 5</b> qualifications:</p> <p><b>Director</b> holds or has applied for a Child Development Site Supervisor permit.</p> <p><b>Teaching staff:</b> Each classroom is staffed by at least 1 person who holds or has applied for a Child Development Teacher permit.</p> <p>All other teaching staff, at a minimum, hold/qualify for a Child Development Assistant permit.</p> <p>At least one staff member has specialized college course work/professional development training that prepares them to work w/ children who have special needs &amp; is available to assist colleagues.</p> <p><b>Staff Stability:</b> The average teacher retention rate for the past three years was 80%.</p>	<p>Staff qualifications <b>exceed Title 5</b> minimums:</p> <p><b>Director</b> holds or has applied for a Program Director permit.</p> <p><b>Teaching staff:</b> Each classroom or group is staffed by at least 1 person who holds or has applied for a Child Development Master Teacher permit.</p> <p>All other teaching staff hold/qualifies a Child Development Associate Teacher permit.</p> <p>At least one staff member in each classroom has specialized college course work or professional development training that prepares them to work w/ children who have special needs</p> <p><b>Staff Stability:</b> Same as Step 3.</p>	<p>Staff qualifications <b>significantly exceed Title 5.</b></p> <p><b>Director</b> has an MA in ECE or related field, and holds or has applied for Program Director permit.</p> <p><b>Teaching staff:</b> Each classroom or group is staffed by at least 1 teacher who holds a BA/BS degree in ECE or a closely allied field.</p> <p>All other teaching staff hold/qualify for a Child Development Teacher permit.</p> <p>All teaching staff have specialized college course work or professional development training that prepares them to work w/ children who have special needs</p> <p><b>Staff Stability:</b> The average teacher retention rate for the past three years was 90%.</p>

5. Qualifications and Working Conditions - continued

Standards to be Assessed	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
<p><b>5. Qualifications and Working Conditions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administrator and teacher education, compensation and retention.</li> <li>Source: Review of site records. (continued)</li> </ul>	<p>(No employee benefits required.)</p> <p><b>Working Conditions</b> – the program has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A written staffing plan, which specifies the qualifications and duties of staff.</li> <li>A plan for in-service education of staff.</li> <li>A consultant and community resources to be used by the child care center as part of its program.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Employee benefits:</b> access to health insurance.</p> <p><b>Working Conditions-</b> the program has items from previous level +:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Written confirmation of job title, salary, and hours.</li> <li>Written job descriptions and salary scale.</li> <li>Formal grievance procedures.</li> <li>4 staff meetings per year.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Employee benefits:</b> Access to partially-paid health insurance or menu of appropriate options.</p> <p><b>Working Conditions -</b> the program has items from the previous levels +:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paid time-off (sick, personal, vacation).</li> <li>Annual evaluations and development plans for teaching staff.</li> <li>6 staff meetings per year.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Employee benefits:</b> Access to partially-paid health and dental insurance (or appropriate menu).</p> <p><b>Working conditions -</b> the program has items from the previous levels +:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A salary scale which rewards education and experience and staff are aware of the salary scale.</li> <li>Paid preparation and planning time.</li> <li>Monthly staff meetings.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Employee benefits:</b> Access to partially-paid health and dental insurance, and pension plan (or appropriate menu).</p> <p><b>Working Conditions:</b> the program has items from the previous levels +:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff are given paid release time to provide professional development training.</li> <li>The salary scale is aligned with the Model Compensation Scale.</li> <li>Paid release time is available for professional development activities.</li> </ul>

**6. Family and Community** connections are key to program quality because:

- Young children’s learning and development are integrally connected to their families. To support and promote children’s optimal learning, programs need to recognize the primacy of children’s families, establish relationships with families based on mutual trust and respect, support and involve families in their children’s educational growth and invite families to fully participate in the program. (*Family and Community Relationships*, National Association for the Education of Young Children)
- Linking families to services and opportunities has been demonstrated to be an effective strategy in strengthening families. (*Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education*, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation/Center for the Study of Social Policy.)

Standards to be Assessed	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
<p><b>6. Family and Community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source: Review of administrative records, parent survey, observations.</li> </ul>	<p>As per Title 22 requirements, child care centers:</p> <p>Inform parents of their right to visit and/or observe their children in the program, and welcome such visits.</p>	<p>Program staff welcome all families and encourage their involvement as demonstrated by use of 3 Strategies from Section A.</p> <p>The program fosters strong, reciprocal relationships by establishing intentional communication practices as demonstrated by use of 3 strategies from Section B.</p>	<p>Program staff welcome all families and encourage their involvement as demonstrated by use of 5 strategies from Section A.</p> <p>The program fosters strong, reciprocal relationships by establishing intentional communication practices as demonstrated by use of 5 strategies from Section B.</p> <p>The program promotes family strengths, including an understanding of parenting and child development, and facilitates social connections as demonstrated by use of 4 strategies from Section C.</p> <p>The program facilitates meaningful connections between community resources and families as demonstrated by use of 4 strategies from Section D.</p>	<p>Program staff welcome all families and encourage their involvement as demonstrated by use of 6 strategies from Section A.</p> <p>The program fosters strong, reciprocal relationships by establishing intentional communication practices as demonstrated by use of 6 strategies from Section B.</p> <p>The program promotes family strengths, including an understanding of parenting and child development, and facilitates social connections as demonstrated by use of 6 strategies from Section C.</p> <p>The program facilitates meaningful connections between community resources and families as demonstrated by use of 6 strategies from Section D.</p>	<p>Program staff welcome all families and encourage their involvement as demonstrated by use of 8 strategies from Section A.</p> <p>The program fosters strong, reciprocal relationships by establishing intentional communication practices as demonstrated by use of 8 strategies from Section B.</p> <p>The program promotes family strengths, including an understanding of parenting and child development, and facilitates social connections as demonstrated by use of 8 strategies in Section C.</p> <p>The program facilitates meaningful connections between community resources and families as demonstrated by use of 8 strategies in Section D.</p>

## 6. Family & Community Strategies

*Please indicate the strategies your program currently implements by circling the numbers associated with those strategies. Sections C and D continue on the next page. Documentation on how your program implements each of these strategies is to be included in the Program Portfolio.*

### A. Program staff welcome all families and encourages their involvement by providing:

1. A comprehensive orientation to all families
2. A detailed parent handbook that includes the program's mission statement and educational philosophy, and describes its policies and procedures.
3. Written materials in home languages of families.
4. Communications in home languages of families, securing adults to translate as needed
5. A variety of opportunities exist for parents to contribute to the program (in-class helpers, field trips, donated items)
6. Materials and activities incorporating the cultures of enrolled families and the community at large
7. Facilitation of two, well-attended, annual group activities for children and their families.
8. Meeting and event times are determined by family schedules.
9. Opportunities for families to participate in positions of leadership and have decision-making roles in the program (e.g. board members, parent advisory, and program evaluation committee).
10. Staff use creative strategies to adapt programs to meet family needs.

### B. The program fosters strong, reciprocal relationships by establishing intentional communication practices, such as:

1. A system utilizing families' preferred communication means.
2. Staff schedules that allow for meaningful communications with families.
3. One scheduled parent/teacher conference per year to discuss child's progress,
4. Two scheduled parent/teacher conferences per year to discuss child's progress, additional parent conferences available by request.
5. An annual, written developmental report.
6. Calendars of daily schedule and activities readily available to families.
7. A group information dissemination system, such as a newsletter.
8. Annual home visits.
9. Opportunities for families to help shape program practices.
10. Intentional partnering with families, recognizing parents as their child's first and most important teacher.

**6. Family & Community Strategies - continued**

**C. The program promotes family strengths, including an understanding of parenting and child development, and facilitates social connections by offering:**

1. Opportunities for mutual support among families
2. Library services for families to check out books, toys, videos and resource materials.
3. Information and *coaching* about healthy child growth and development
4. To work with families on strategies for creating consistency between home and the program relating to developmentally appropriate practices with children.
5. Child-specific, home-based activity ideas to families based on child's talents and opportunities for growth.
6. Physical space where parents can gather and meet.
7. A support person to families to address areas of need e.g. social worker, legal advocate, early intervention specialist.
8. Opportunities to create family support plans and annual review of such plans (or more often, as needed).
9. Training and support for parents to develop their advocacy skills
10. Support and encouragement for parents to become better informed primary decision makers for their child.

**D. The program facilitates meaningful connections between community resources and families by:**

1. Cultivating working relationships with public and community-based services, i.e. health, education, and social services.
2. Developing and maintaining a current list of community resources.
3. Linking families to identified liaisons in public and community-based services.
4. Qualified staff participating in assessment and evaluation meetings with families, such as Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), Individualized Education Plan (IEP).
5. Initiating discussions about kindergarten at least one year prior to kindergarten entry.
6. Engaging in transition activities in partnership with established school/center liaisons and to include such activities as information sessions, field trips/school visits, and on-site enrollment support.
7. Helping families navigate community resources and providing direct advocacy as needed.
8. Inviting community programs to share their areas of expertise with staff, parents and children (e.g. library, local artists, police, story tellers).
9. Informing families of relevant, local community events
10. Relaying policy changes at local, state or national levels that effect early care and education services to families.