



PARTICIPANT GUIDE

State Fiscal Year 2022*

1

* **Effective 1.1.2022.** Policies are subject to change and may be updated during the fiscal year. Please visit the Quality First Extranet's Resources page to ensure you have the most up to date policy information.

Welcome to Quality First

Quality First — a signature program of First Things First — partners with child care and preschool providers across Arizona to improve the quality of early learning for children birth to 5. Child care centers, home-based providers and preschools participating in Quality First receive coaching, professional development and financial incentives to help improve their programs. Your participation in Quality First shows that you are committed to improving the quality of your program to best serve the children in your care.

Purpose of the Participant Guide

The Quality First Participant Guide provides a central source of information about the benefits, policies and guidelines of Quality First. The purpose of the guide is to assist you in understanding your responsibilities as a participant as well as the supports available to your program.

How to use the guide

The guide is a tool for you to use throughout your journey with Quality First. Use the guide:

- At the beginning of your participation to learn about the program.
- During your participation to understand specific processes that occur at certain times, such as goal planning, assessment, and accessing financial incentives.
- When you have questions about policies or what to expect.
- To learn more about specialized support and resources to respond to your unique needs.

Structure of the guide

Each section has information to support your understanding of the different components of Quality First. You will notice Quality First policies are included throughout, in blue boxes with white text. Additional information about the processes that go along with each policy immediately follows the policy box if needed. Strategies for success are included throughout the guide to provide you with concrete tips for making the most of your participation. At the end of the guide you will find resource documents and forms.

What you need to know

The information contained in the Participant Guide is updated annually. As a Quality First participant, it is your responsibility to review and agree to the policies and procedures described in the Participant Guide annually. Policies are subject to change and may be updated during the fiscal year. To ensure you have the most updated information, visit the Quality First extranet's Resources page for policy announcements and updates.

For assistance and support

If you have any questions related to the policies or procedures please consult with your Quality First coach or contact the Quality First team at qualityfirstaz.com or 602.771.5000

To learn more, visit our website at qualityfirstaz.com. There you will find program information, answers to frequently asked questions, and a blog full of tips and inspiration.

Highlights for SFY2022

The following information includes the major updates for fiscal year 2022. The information should not be used in isolation. Please refer to the remainder of the Participant Guide as well as ongoing communication from Quality First for important information and updates.

Newest Highlights for SFY2022 (added 1.1.22)

The Public Rating Policy has been updated to allow participants to benefit from tiered DES reimbursement rates as efficiently as possible. (page 33)

Public Rating Policy: All Quality First participants will receive an initial rating. This initial rating is not public unless the participant achieves a quality level (3, 4, or 5) rating or submits the Request for Public Rating form. If a quality level rating is achieved, the rating will be public * and shared with DES for the purpose of qualifying for DES tiered reimbursement rates.

Following the initial assessment, all participants will receive subsequent regular assessments to establish a public star rating. Regardless of star rating level, these subsequent ratings will be public* and shared with DES for the purpose of qualifying for DES tiered reimbursement rates.

*In light of the upheaval to families and the child care system due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the FTF Board approved a temporary adjustment to the Quality First Public Rating Policy. Participants assessed in SFY22 will not have their new star rating automatically publicly posted on the Quality First website, but they will have the option to request a public posting.

Additional Highlights for SFY2022 (added 8.20.21)

The First Things First board approved the following updates, recommended by the First Things First Quality First Team and First Things First's CEO:

Updated Quality First Star Rating Scale approved by the FTF board July 13th, 2021 (page 13)

In consultation with the Quality First Advisory Committee and with approval from the First Things First Board, we are excited to share the Quality First Star Rating Scale has been updated. These technical changes will help ensure the star rating scale measures the quality practices that help children be ready to succeed in school and in life.

Updates to the scale include:

- Including CLASS Infant scores in the calculation of a rating
- Adding minimum CLASS scores that all classrooms must meet to achieve a 3-5 star rating
- Increasing the minimum ERS score that all classrooms must meet to achieve a 5-star rating

Highlights for State Fiscal Year 2022

- Assigning a rating to nationally accredited and Head Start programs using only the CLASS assessments and with a minimum rating of 2 stars
- Moving the Quality First Points Scale assessment into a programmatic component

Temporary Adjustments to Quality First Policies* *approved by the FTF board August 18th, 2021*

In light of the upheaval to families and the child care system due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the following temporary adjustments apply to Board-approved Quality First and Quality First scholarships policies for Quality First participants assessed in SFY22. These temporary adjustments will be in place for these participants until they are re-assessed in their next assessment cycle (about SFY24). Your program's star rating as of June 30 will determine your financial incentives for the upcoming year. (page 39)

1. The participants will not have their new star rating automatically publicly posted on the Quality First website, but they will have the option to request a public posting. (page 33)
2. The higher of the new star rating and the immediately previous star rating will be used with respect to all policies related to Quality First incentives and scholarships, including incentive amounts and scholarship eligibility and reimbursement rates. (page 39)

Important Notes:

- The number of Quality First Scholarships funded will continue to be determined by the regional council and allocated to programs based on the Quality First rating as of April 1.

**These temporary modifications ONLY apply to participants that are assessed in State Fiscal Year 2022 (through June 30, 2022).*

Quality First Star Rating

Your program will receive ongoing assessments on a regular basis. Following your initial rating, your program will be contacted for assessment every 24 to 26 months. (page 33)

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (Smart Support)

Through expansion funded by pandemic relief federal dollars, consultation will also be available to participants in any FTF region who serve children in the care of the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) from October 2021 through June 30, 2024. (page 46)

Highlights for SFY2022 (effective 7.1.21)

Temporary Changes

In response to health concerns as a result of COVID-19, temporary changes have been made to certain Quality First activities. Here is a summary of what you can expect as a result:

Highlights for State Fiscal Year 2022

- **Health and Safety** - Before an on-site visit from a Quality First coach or other technical assistance provider occurs, you can expect an over-the-phone health screening about current conditions at your program. You will be asked questions about possible exposure to COVID-19, symptoms, and concerns. Any visitors from Quality First will follow national health recommendations for hand hygiene, personal protective equipment, physical distancing and limiting cross-contamination. They will also follow your additional health and safety practices as appropriate.
- **Formal Assessment**- Quality First paused all formal assessment activities in March 2020. We are resuming formal assessment in September 2021. You will be contacted to begin your assessments once formal assessments resume. If you are currently rated, your star rating remains valid until your program is reassessed.

Policy Updates

Section Four: Financial Incentives

- **Financial Incentives for Staff Salaries/Bonuses** (pages 41-42)
 - For 1-2 star programs, incentives may not be used for staff salaries or bonuses in most cases, though approval may be granted if this is tied to the quality improvement plan and the coaching agency determines that the incentives are not needed for materials, equipment and furnishings.
 - For participants that otherwise make incentive purchases through a coaching agency, their coaching agency will provide the incentive dollars approved for use for salaries and bonuses in the form of a direct payment to the participant; the coaching agency will not pay a participant's individual staff members directly. Incentives cannot be used by any participant to pay the salary of or a bonus to a program owner.

Table of Contents

Overview of First Things First and Quality First	9
What is First Things First?.....	9
First Things First Regions	10
What is Quality First?	11
What Does a Quality Early Care and Education Program Look Like?	11
SECTION ONE: Quality First Participant	14
THE ROLE OF THE QUALITY FIRST PARTICIPANT	14
Participant Acknowledgement	14
Program Designation.....	15
The Commitment to Quality.....	15
STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPATION.....	16
SECTION TWO: Quality First Coaching	18
THE ROLE OF THE QUALITY FIRST COACH	18
QUALITY FIRST COACH ACTIVITIES	18
QUALITY FIRST COACH VISITS	18
QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLANNING	19
STRATEGIES FOR A SUCCESSFUL COACHING RELATIONSHIP	21
SECTION THREE: Quality First Assessment	22
THE ROLE OF THE QUALITY FIRST ASSESSOR.....	22
QUALITY FIRST ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES.....	23
QUALITY FIRST ASSESSMENT TOOLS	26
QUALITY FIRST ASSESSMENT REPORTS	30
QUALITY FIRST STAR RATING.....	33
ADDITIONAL ASSESSMENT POLICIES	33
STRATEGIES TO HELP PREPARE FOR A SUCCESSFUL ASSESSMENT	35

Table of Contents

SECTION FOUR: Quality First Financial Incentives	37
LICENSING FEE ASSISTANCE	37
QUALITY FIRST INCENTIVES	38
QUALITY FIRST CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIPS.....	42
SECTION FIVE: Quality First Specialized Assistance	44
TYPES OF SPECIALIZED ASSISTANCE	45
Child Care Health Consultation (CCHC)	45
SUPPORTING ALL CHILDREN: ASSISTANCE TO HELP YOU PREVENT EXPULSIONS.....	48
STRATEGIES TO BENEFIT FROM SPECIALIZED ASSISTANCE	51
SECTION SIX: Quality First Professional Development	52
ARIZONA EARLY CHILDHOOD CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORK	52
STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFULLY USING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.....	54
SECTION SEVEN: Quality First Administrative Practices	55
APPEALS.....	55
CLARIFICATION AND CONCERN RESOLUTION	56
CLARIFICATION, CONCERN RESOLUTION AND APPEALS PROCESS	57
CODE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT (NAEYC)	59
CONFIDENTIALITY	59
CRITICAL INCIDENT REPORTING	59
DISENROLLMENT	59
ENROLLMENT	60
E-VERIFY AND LAWFUL PRESENCE	60
External Funding.....	61
EXTRANET (DATA SOURCE).....	61
LICENSED CAPACITY VERIFICATION (LCV).....	61
MANDATED REPORTING.....	62
OWNERSHIP CHANGE.....	63

Table of Contents

PARTICIPATION ELIGIBILITY	63
PROMOTING YOUR COMMITMENT TO QUALITY	63
REDISTRIBUTION OF MATERIALS.....	64
REGIONAL FUNDING.....	64
REGULATORY STATUS.....	65
RELOCATION/MOVING.....	65
STAR RATING MASKING.....	65
STATE STANDARDS	66
TARGETED SUPPORT PROCESS	67
TEMPORARY CLOSURE.....	68
Participant Guide Resources.....	69

Overview of First Things First and Quality First

WHAT IS FIRST THINGS FIRST?

In November 2006, Arizona voters passed Proposition 203, a citizen's initiative that funds quality early childhood development and health programs. The Proposition created a new state level board, the Arizona Early Childhood Development & Health Board, also known as First Things First.

At First Things First, getting Arizona's children ready for kindergarten means a statewide financial commitment. Ninety cents of every tobacco tax dollar received by First Things First goes to programs like Quality First that benefit children birth to 5 years old.

To learn more about First Things First, our regional partnership councils, investments, latest news and more, visit our website at firstthingsfirst.org.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

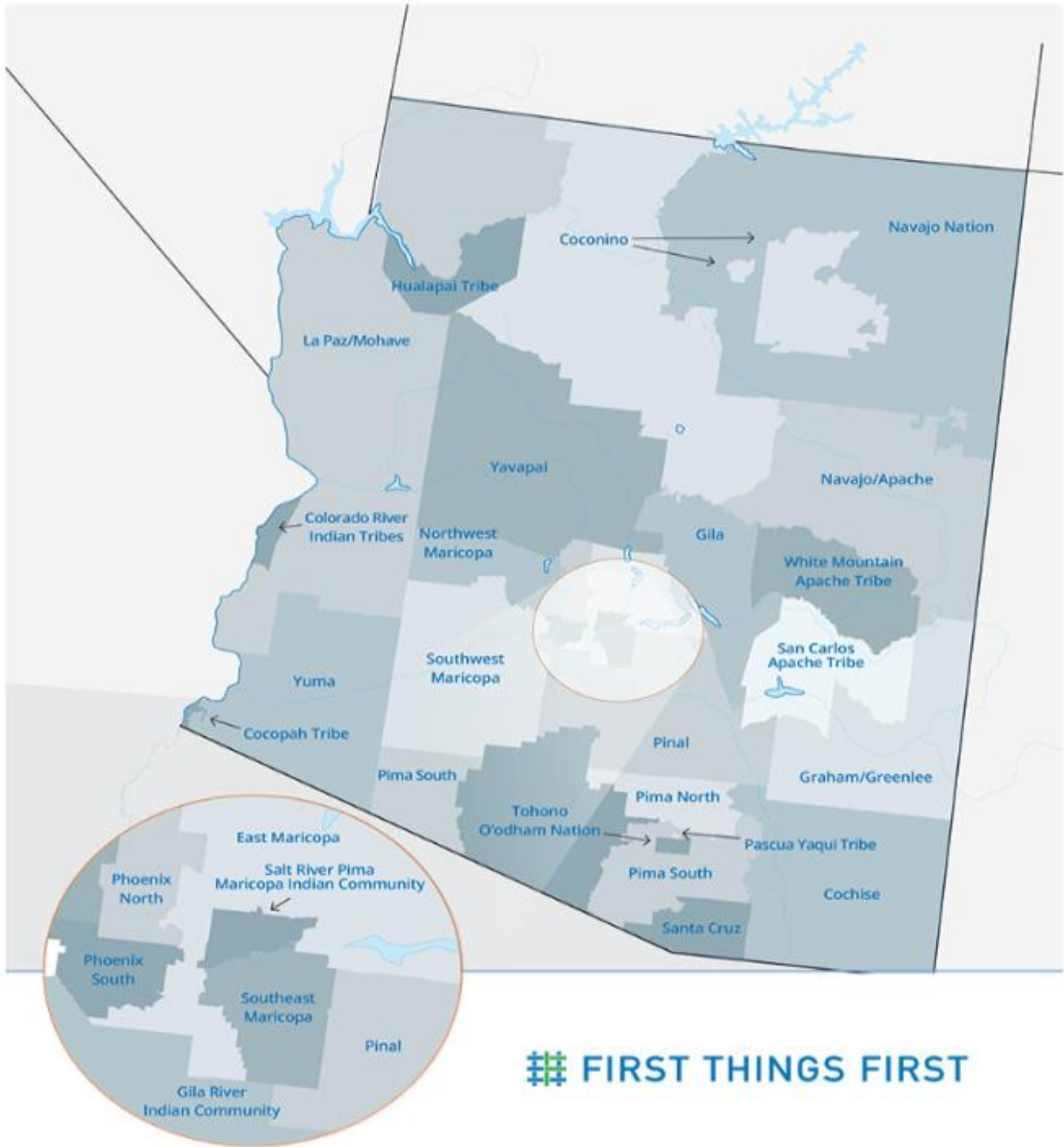
OUR VISION

All Arizona's children are ready to succeed in school and in life.

OUR MISSION

First Things First is one of the critical partners in creating a family-centered, comprehensive, collaborative and high-quality early childhood system that supports the development, health and early education of all Arizona's children birth through age 5.

FIRST THINGS FIRST REGIONS



My region _____

To find your First Things First region, visit firstthingsfirst.org and select “find your region”

WHAT IS QUALITY FIRST?

Quality First supports child care and preschool providers across Arizona to improve the quality of their early learning programs for children birth to age 5. Quality First establishes a statewide standard of quality for early care and education programs and funds quality improvements that research proves help children thrive. This includes assessment to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement, professional development for teachers and caregivers to expand their skills in working with young children, technical assistance and coaching to help programs provide learning environments that nurture the emotional, social, language and cognitive development of every child.

There are funding options for Quality First participation that do not include all services and benefits outlined in this guide. Please refer to your enrollment agreement and/or contract for details.

WHAT DOES A QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?

A high-quality child care or preschool setting has teachers and caregivers with expertise in working with children age 5 and younger, includes a learning environment that nurtures the emotional, social, and academic development of every child and prepares children for kindergarten.

Quality child care and preschool settings build on basic health and safety practices to include:

- Teachers and caregivers who create positive, nurturing relationships with children
- Learning environments that are engaging and encourage creativity and imaginative play
- Hands-on activities and interactions that stimulate brain development and positive connections
- Caregivers who communicate regularly with families about the development of their child

Component Overview*



RISING STAR	PROGRESSING STAR	QUALITY	QUALITY PLUS	HIGHEST QUALITY
    	    	    	    	    
Commitment to quality improvement	Approaching quality standards	Meets quality standards	Exceeds quality standards	Far exceeds quality standards
ERS Average Program Score 1.0 – 1.99	ERS Average Program Score 2.0 – 2.99	ERS Average Program Score 3.0 – 3.99 <i>No classroom score below 2.5</i>	ERS Average Program Score 4.0 – 4.99 <i>No classroom score below 3.0</i>	ERS Average Program Score 5.0 and above <i>No classroom score below 4.0</i>
CLASS Average Program Score N/A	CLASS Average Program Score N/A	CLASS Average Program Score ES CO IS 4.5 4.5 2.0 <i>No classroom score below</i>	CLASS Average Program Score ES CO IS 5.0 5.0 2.5 <i>No classroom score below</i>	CLASS Average Program Score ES CO IS 6.0 6.0 3.0 <i>No classroom score below</i>
		ES CO IS 4.25 4.25 2.0	ES CO IS 4.75 4.75 2.25	ES CO IS 5.0 5.0 2.75

ERS = Environment Rating Scales

- ECERS = Early Childhood Environment
- ITERS = Infant/Toddler Environment
- FCCERS = Family Child Care Environment

CLASS = Classroom Assessment Scoring System

- ES = Emotional Support (Pre-K), Emotional and Behavioral Support (Toddler), Responsive Caregiving (Infant)
- CO = Classroom Organization (Pre-K)
- IS = Instructional Support (Pre-K), Engaged Support for Learning (Toddler)

ERS is not administered for Head Start/Early Head Start or nationally accredited programs. If the program does not meet the CLASS threshold scores for a 3-star rating, the program receives a 2-star rating.

SECTION ONE:

Quality First Participant

THE ROLE OF THE QUALITY FIRST PARTICIPANT

As a Quality First participant, you are the leader of your quality improvement process. Your vision for your program will drive the process of improvement and determine the guidance needed from your coach and technical assistance professionals.

Leader of the Process: Your improvement process will be based on the values, culture, vision and goals that you identify. Your vision for your program will lead your quality improvement process.

Program Expert: As the program's leader, you know your program best. You understand your program's history, successes and challenges. All goals and strategies should align with what you are comfortable and confident in trying.

Director of Quality Improvement Efforts: With the guidance of your coach and technical assistance professionals, you will be the driver for change within your program. As the leader in your program, you will review the practices of your program, staff, and other resources on an ongoing basis. When you have questions, review this guide and the resource documents included. If you are unable to find the information you need, your coach or other technical assistance professionals can act as a secondary resource.

PARTICIPANT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Participant Acknowledgement Policy: For the purpose of confirming agreement with all Quality First requirements and responsibilities, enrolled participants must review and acknowledge the Participant Guide Acknowledgement and the Participant Roles and Responsibilities Agreement within the first 90 days of each fiscal year of participation. Both documents must be acknowledged in order to access incentive funds. Failure to comply with the signed roles and responsibilities may result in a Targeted Support Plan and/or disenrollment.

You will be given the opportunity to ask questions about the Participant Guide's policies and procedures to ensure your understanding before signing. This ensures your continued participation and allows for ongoing discussion about the expectations of participation. Additional forms are required to access Quality First financial incentives. (See Quality First Incentives Policy in section four of this guide.)

PROGRAM DESIGNATION

Program Designation Policy: For the purpose of supporting clear communication and participation in quality improvement, all Quality First participants must identify the key personnel who will be responsible for leading and coordinating quality improvement. Select consistent personnel to be the Main Contact. This individual will meet regularly with the Quality First support team and share information from the support team with staff members. It is also beneficial to identify a backup person (Primary Program Designee) to meet with the Quality First support team in the event that the Main Contact is not available.

Upon enrollment, the coach will ask you to complete a Program Designation form. To make changes to your program's designated individual(s), submit a new Program Designation form to the coach and update the contact information in the extranet.

THE COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

Planning for change is an important part of the improvement process. Working to improve quality alongside your staff will take time, effort and adjustments. Some of this work will include identifying goals and action steps, motivating your staff, and creating an environment where practicing new strategies is encouraged and supported. Remember—mistakes are a part of the learning process! Your commitment through the ups and downs of this learning process is crucial.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPATION

As the leader of your program and your quality improvement efforts, the following strategies will help you make the most of your Quality First participation:

- Select a consistent individual(s) onsite to lead your quality improvement efforts. Identify those in a leadership role that can make decisions about changes, lead improvement efforts and communicate with staff and families about the quality improvement process. The Program Designation Policy and Designation Form provide more information about the Primary Program Designee and Main Contact roles. It is up to you to identify who will fill these roles and keep this information updated.
- Identify and request program supports that will assist you in your quality improvement efforts. Coaches and other technical assistance professionals are knowledgeable experts in their fields; however, you are the expert on your program and staff. Let the Quality First support team know if there are specific practices, policies, or resources you would like them to assist you with.
- Schedule time in your calendar to work with your staff on your quality improvement efforts. Your leadership makes a big difference in how staff contribute to the success of your goals.
- Plan to allow staff members time outside of the classroom if possible, away from the responsibilities of caring for children, so that they can work with coaches and other technical assistance professionals. This will allow them to focus on their quality improvement goals. Depending on the time of day, this may require you to schedule a different staff member who is able to cover classroom supervision.
- Actively plan and monitor your goals on a regular basis. The goals you identify for your Quality Improvement Plan will serve as a map for your quality improvement process. By monitoring your goals from visit to visit, you will be able to determine whether you are reaching your goals, if strategies need to be varied or if you need to modify the supports you are receiving.
- Create an organizational system, such as a Quality First communication binder, that is easy to access by staff and technical assistance professionals. Your organizational system will include all your Quality First contacts, forms, reports and resources you may want to share with staff. This system provides organization of activities and resources for quality improvement in one place.
- Schedule time in your calendar to review and update information about your program, staff, and contact information in the extranet and Registry on a quarterly basis.
- Work with your staff to align your administrative practices, staff handbook and parent handbook with any new practices you have identified as a part of your Quality Improvement Plan. Well-defined administrative practices will help to ensure that your quality improvements are sustainable over time.

New Participant Process

STEP 1

Selection notification

When your program is selected for Quality First participation, you will receive an email notification. Programs are selected throughout the year based on available funding.

STEP 2

Contact from a Quality First coach

Within 15 calendar days from your selection notification, a coach will contact you to explain the next steps in the enrollment process and to schedule an initial visit at your program. During the initial visit, you will work with the coach to create a schedule for on-site visits to begin the coaching partnership.

STEP 3

Assessment contact and scheduled visit

You will receive a phone call from an assessor to schedule your initial assessment visit.

STEP 4

Assessment results available

The timing of the availability of these results depends on the number of assessments to be completed and the size of your program.

STEP 5

Enrollment

Your Quality First coach will meet with you to review your assessment results and discuss how they are related to your own quality improvement ideas. You will sign the Enrollment Agreement and your star rating will be available for your review but not posted on the public website unless you achieve a quality level (3, 4, or 5) rating. Once enrolled, Child Care Health Consultation services become available.

STEP 6

Quality improvement planning

A Quality Improvement Plan with action steps will be developed together with a Quality First coach and any other technical assistance providers supporting your program. The plan will be uploaded to the extranet. Financial incentives are available to support quality improvement efforts each fiscal year until April 15.

SECTION TWO:

Quality First Coaching

Quality First coaching services provide focused support in the form of regular visits, communication and technical assistance. Participating in the coaching process supports you in providing high quality early learning experiences to the children in your care, so they are ready to succeed in school and in life.

THE ROLE OF THE QUALITY FIRST COACH

The role of a Quality First coach is to act as a quality improvement consultant for your program. As a partner on your improvement journey, they will work alongside you and your staff in creating a vision for your program, supporting your identified quality improvement goals, pinpointing productive action steps and monitoring your progress. While your program's quality improvement process is driven by you, a coach can bring additional insights and support your progress.

Quality First coaches are selected based on their knowledge and experience in the field of early childhood education with a focus on promoting adult learning and positive interactions. Coaches receive initial and ongoing training in the quality improvement process, all assessment tools, early learning standards and development guidelines. Every effort is made to create positive connections between participants and coaches. The coach makes it a priority to respect your program, its practices and its culture and create a trusting relationship with an emphasis on confidentiality. Coaching assignments may change periodically based on a variety of factors such as staffing changes, scheduling needs, and to establish the best fit between coach strengths and participant needs.

QUALITY FIRST COACH ACTIVITIES

The coach is your primary contact in Quality First. Once contact has been made and the coach has visited your program and met your staff, they will begin to learn about your vision for quality. You and your coach will review data about your program's practices and create a plan to improve the quality of your program.

QUALITY FIRST COACH VISITS

The Quality First coaching services are available to you based on the funding option of Quality First you participate in.

- **Level 1-** Participants receive four to six hours of coaching support monthly depending on star rating:

- Participants at the Rising Star (1-star) and Progressing Star (2-star) levels receive six hours of on-site coaching each month to support their quality improvement process.
- Participants at Quality (3-star), Quality Plus (4-star), and Highest Quality (5-star) levels receive four hours of coaching support each month to support their quality improvement process.
- **Level 2-** Participants receive 24 hours of coaching services per year. This time can be scheduled as needed throughout the span of the cycle in order to best meet the needs of your program and staff.
- **Level 3-** Participants receive 4 hours of on-site coaching each month to support their quality improvement process.
- **Level 4-** Participants receive assessment and rating services. Coaching services are not included.

Quality First Coaching Visit Policy: For the purpose of providing support to facilitate quality improvement efforts, regular visits with a Quality First Coach are a required component of participation. Your coach will work with you to identify a schedule for regular visits. In the event you or another designated staff member is unable to meet for a planned visit, it is your responsibility to notify the coach in advance. Cancellation of coaching visits results in reduced coaching hours and may affect progress toward your goals. A pattern of repeated cancellations may result in a Targeted Support Plan and/or disenrollment.

Coaching visits may include but are not limited to meeting with the program director/administrators for planning and reviewing progress, observing and modeling in classrooms, providing feedback, opportunities for reflection, and resource materials. With permission from the participant, coaches may use digital video recording to highlight successes and to provide staff opportunities to reflect on their practice and interactions with children. Coaches may work with identified staff who act as an on-site quality improvement mentor.

After each visit, the coach will create a summary of activities accomplished and any plans for upcoming visits. A copy of the summary will be provided to you. This information is also entered in the Quality First data system and shared with First Things First to track quality improvement activities.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

Quality Improvement Planning Policy: For the purpose of documenting goals and action steps to promote high quality early learning experiences for children, Quality Improvement Plans are a required part of program participation. For each assessment cycle, goals must be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely (S.M.A.R.T.).

Every journey requires a roadmap. Your Quality Improvement Plan is the map that details the action steps, supports, and checkpoints you identify to work toward your goals. Quality Improvement Plans are goals created by synthesizing information from multiple sources. These sources include your firsthand knowledge of your program's practices, informal observation from a coach or other technical assistance professional, and information gathered using valid and reliable tools.

A Quality First coach and other technical assistance professionals will assist you in documenting these goals and your progress towards achievement. This document will also be uploaded to your program profile in the Quality First extranet where progress will be noted monthly as action steps are completed.

STRATEGIES FOR A SUCCESSFUL COACHING RELATIONSHIP

Working with a Quality First coach requires a commitment to a strong professional working partnership. Here are some tips to make the most of this relationship:

- Talk with the coach about the type of communication that works best for you. If you prefer to meet at a certain time or would appreciate regular phone calls, emails or text messages, let the coach know.
- If you employ staff, introduce them to the coach at the beginning of your participation. This will help to establish a familiarity and a comfort level for coaching activities. Be sure that the children are introduced to the coach as well to reduce any stranger anxieties.
- Let your families know that your program is participating in Quality First and that you will have regular visits from a coach to provide ongoing support for your program. Families will appreciate knowing who will be working in your program and how these efforts can benefit their children. A parent letter is included in the Quality First Marketing Toolkit, available on the extranet's Quality First dashboard, under "Quality First Resources."
- Plan ahead for coaching visits with questions, needs, or clarifications. This will save time during meetings so that you and the coach are ready to work on any activities you have planned.
- Communicate with the coach about your preferences for support, your plans for implementing change, your program's philosophy and how you want your staff involved. If you are unsure about how a strategy is working, or if you want to try something different, let your coach know. You and your coach can modify plans so they best meet your needs.
- As you accomplish your goals, consider how to sustain the quality improvements you have made. Identify who will be responsible for ongoing implementation and monitoring, how the new practices will be included in staff training and what written policies and procedures should be updated.

SECTION THREE:

Quality First Assessment

Quality First assessment is a valuable support for your program in the improvement process. The purpose of receiving ongoing assessments is to offer objective and reliable measures of the everyday experiences of the children in your program. You will gain a clear picture of your program—what is great about it and the opportunities to do even better.

Quality First Assessment Policy: Quality First assessments are a required component of participation. Assessment is designed based on high quality standards using valid and reliable tools and conducted by highly trained objective observers.

- All Quality First participants will receive an initial rating. This initial rating is not public unless the participant achieves a quality level (3, 4, or 5) rating or submits the Request for Public Rating form.
- Following the initial assessment, all participants will receive subsequent regular assessments to establish a public star rating.

Failure to participate in the assessment process may result in disenrollment.

THE ROLE OF THE QUALITY FIRST ASSESSOR

Quality First assessors are experienced professionals in the field of early childhood and receive extensive training on the assessment tools to ensure they are measuring program practices accurately.

The assessment reports you receive provide important information for you to build upon your strengths as well as to identify areas where improvements can be made.

A Quality First assessor will visit your program to complete an assessment at the very beginning of your participation. This assessment provides a baseline of information that is the foundation for you to build on in establishing program improvements. During your assessment observation, the assessor will focus on maintaining a professional stance at all times. The assessor will remain objectively removed from social interactions with staff in order to gather as much information as possible according to the tools being used. While the assessor is in your program, they will not initiate or extend an interaction with a child but will never ignore a question, curiosity or a request for attention.

Quality First assessors are dedicated to the same measures of confidentiality as coaches and other technical assistance providers and will show respect in a professional manner.

Although the assessor will be collecting information during the visit, no feedback will be provided at that time. Your program's written assessment results will be available for your review in the extranet once reports have been completed and approved.

QUALITY FIRST ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

The Quality First process begins with your initial assessment, which will provide objective information to guide your quality improvement efforts. This is the beginning stage and will provide information to help you move forward – setting a starting point for quality improvement efforts. This initial rating is not public unless the participant achieves a quality level (3, 4, or 5) rating or submits the Request for Public Rating form. If a quality level rating is achieved, the rating will be public and shared with DES for the purpose of qualifying for DES tiered reimbursement rates.

The following represents some general activities related to your Quality First assessment:

- **Accreditation** - Head Start/Early Head Start and accredited programs will be assessed with the CLASS tools only. If the program does not meet the CLASS threshold scores for a 3-star rating, the program receives a 2-star rating.
- **Assessor Objectivity** - Whenever possible, different assessors will conduct the observations for each set of assessment tools. This is to ensure objectivity for each observation.
- **Blackout Dates** - You will have an opportunity to inform the assessor of dates that would preclude an assessment visit. For instance, days your program is closed, planned field trips, special events such as picture day, scheduled emergency drills, scheduled Quality First support team visits (including coaches and other technical assistance professionals) and days when you will typically have low attendance or staff absences may all interfere with a proper assessment.
- **Children with Special Needs** - Prior to assessing a classroom, the assessor will ask you if there are any enrolled children with an IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan), IEP (Individualized Education Plan), documented gifted needs, and/or medically diagnosed conditions (i.e., asthma, diabetes, severe allergies) to determine if accommodations that are observed need to be taken into account. As this information is confidential, assessors will not need to view the individual child plans.
- **Classrooms/Care Groups** - It is your responsibility to share information about your program's classroom and care group structure with Quality First before beginning the assessment process. For programs in their initial assessment, the Quality First coach will assist you with entering this in the extranet. For all subsequent assessments, you are responsible for ensuring individual classrooms/groups are noted in the extranet. For assessment purposes, Quality First considers a unique roster of children assigned to a specific lead teacher or classroom space as an individual classroom/group. For example, a program may have a single lead teacher with an a.m. class roster and a p.m. class roster. Each of these roster groups is considered an individual classroom/group. To

assist the assessor in identifying the number of assessments as well as age-appropriate tools for your program, it is important that you discuss with the assessor how many classroom/child groupings your program contains.

- **Eligibility for Assessment in 5 Year-Old Classrooms** - In center-based programs, if a majority of children in a classroom (51 percent) had their 5th birthday after September 1 of the current school year, the classroom is included in the random draw for assessment with one exception. Random draws occurring in the month of July will not include classrooms where a majority of the children are 5 years old since those children will be starting kindergarten in a few weeks.
- **Extranet Data** - Before conducting the assessment, the assessor will review your information from the extranet to determine how many classrooms/groups of children to assess and which tools to use during the assessment based on the age groups you serve. The classrooms/groups identified on the first day of assessment will be utilized throughout the assessment process. Assessors will verify this information over the phone and also in person on the first day of assessment at your program.
- **Initial Phone Call** - An assessor will contact your program to schedule the date of your initial assessment. It is your responsibility to contact the assessor within 72 hours of a phone call or email message. Your initial assessment will be scheduled for a mutually agreed-upon date and timeframe. In subsequent years, you will be provided a three-week time frame in which the assessment will be conducted. The assessor can come at any time within these three weeks other than specified blackout dates.
- **Moving/Relocation During Assessment** - If your program moves to a new location in the middle of the assessment process, the assessment team will re-complete all of the assessments at the new location. Rescheduling of the assessments will be done on a case by case basis. If a program moves after the rating is final, the rating will apply until the next assessment cycle.
- **Multiple Assessors** - More than one assessor may attend during an observation visit for the purpose of training, reliability testing and/or to accommodate the size of your program. You will be notified in advance if this is a possibility for your program.
- **Random Draw** - If your program has more than one classroom or grouping of children, the assessor will ask you to conduct a random draw to determine which classrooms/groups to assess upon arrival. The assessor will ask that the random draw be witnessed by a member of your staff to ensure accuracy and also have a participant signature at the time.
- **Special Considerations to Share with the Assessor** - When you are contacted by an assessor to schedule your initial assessment or set up your three-week assessment window, you should discuss any special considerations or specific educational philosophies that your program practices that you would like taken into consideration as the assessment team prepares for your visit. Topics you may

want to discuss with the assessor when they call include but are not limited to languages spoken in your program, children with special needs or potential triggers to children who have experienced trauma. In some cases, children who have had traumatic experiences may become triggered by an unexpected visitor in their classroom. Certain elements of the assessor's appearance can be adapted to reduce the potential for triggering a trauma response; for example removing the name tag, removing the clipboard or wearing more casual/nondescript clothing. Programmatic philosophies or practices such as Montessori, Parent Cooperatives, Student Teaching or Primary Caregiving should be communicated. Programmatic philosophies or practices that you would like the assessment team to be aware of must be identified in your Parent/Family Handbook or in written policies and procedure information that you share with families. The assessor may request to view this documentation.

- **Staff Verification** - The assessor will ask you to verify the staff assigned to each classroom based on the current staff you have listed in the extranet. For programs in their initial assessment, the Quality First coach will assist you with entering this in the extranet. For all subsequent assessments, you are responsible for ensuring staff names are included in your program's extranet profile. Please identify the regular teaching staff and their roles in each classroom or child care group and share any staffing considerations such as new staff or substitute teachers. This information guides the assessor in determining whether or not a classroom is eligible for assessment. (For more information, see the Quality First Staffing Guide included in the Resources section at the end of this guide.)
- **Summer Closures** - If your program is closed for the summer and your next assessment cycle is scheduled to begin during your summer break, your assessment window will be opened no earlier than October 1. Nine-month programs with an assessment cycle scheduled to open after April 30 will have their assessment deferred until on or after October 1. The assessment team uses the information from your program's extranet profile summary to determine your dates of operation.

QUALITY FIRST ASSESSMENT TOOLS

A variety of assessment tools are used to collect information about the average experience of the children in your program. Research indicates that gathering meaningful big picture information to establish the level of quality practices in an early childhood program requires an in-depth look at the program's environment, interactions and administrative practices. Quality First assessors will select the appropriate assessment tool(s) to be used in your program's assessment based on Quality First policies and procedures.

ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALES (ERS; Thelma Harms, Richard M. Clifford and Debby Cryer) - measuring elements of a quality environment.

Environment Rating Scale (ERS) Assessment Policy: ERS assessments will be conducted to assess early care and education environments. The ERS assessment will be conducted on-site for approximately three hours by a qualified assessor. Quality First participants that are Head Start or nationally accredited will not have an ERS conducted (a list of National Accrediting Organizations is included in the Resources section at the end of this guide).

Establishing high quality learning environments has been shown to positively support the development of young children and their early education. The ERS are observational tools used to assess the quality of the environment in early care settings. Observations using the ERS provide a brief snapshot of the classroom environment, as well as the children's experiences in that classroom. There are three versions of the ERS utilized by Quality First, each designed to assess a specific age group and early care setting.

1. Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)

This scale is designed to assess the quality of preschool environments located in center-based child care settings.

2. Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS)

This scale is designed to assess the quality of care environments serving infants and toddlers in center-based child care settings.

3. Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS)

This scale is designed to assess the quality of the environment in family child care settings with mixed-age groups.

More information can be found at <http://ersi.info/>

THE DAY OF AN ERS ASSESSMENT

For your initial assessment, the assessor will call to schedule your program's assessment. In subsequent years, you will receive a three-week window for assessment. For centers, the assessor will assess your classrooms/care groups based on the charts below. If you care for infant/toddlers and preschoolers, both an ITERS and ECERS will be completed.

In each age group (Infant/Toddler or Preschool) your program serves, the assessor will determine the number of classrooms/care groups in that age group (based on classroom rosters) to be assessed based on the chart below.

- 1-3 classrooms = 1 classroom assessment
- 4-6 classrooms = 2 classroom assessments
- 7-9 classrooms = 3 classroom assessments
- 10-12 classrooms = 4 classroom assessments
- 13+ classrooms = 1/3 of the number of classrooms

In center-based programs, if the majority of the children in a classroom/care group (51 percent) had their 5th birthday after September 1 of the current school year, the classroom/care group will be included in the random draw for assessment.

Family child care homes will have the areas assessed that are part of the child care program and utilized on the day of the observation by the children present.

When the assessor arrives, they will need to gather some initial information regarding the total number of children enrolled, the number of children in attendance that day, children with special needs, the birthdates of the youngest and oldest child enrolled in the classroom selected, the outdoor space used by children and the staff assigned to each classroom/child care group.

If more than one classroom/care group is being assessed, the assessor will ask you to randomly draw which classroom will be assessed that day. Each assessor will only assess one classroom per day. In order to maintain the integrity of the assessment, the participants cannot choose which classrooms will be assessed.

The assessor will remain at your program for at least three hours when conducting the ERS assessment. An assessor may stay longer if they need to gather information not collected during the first three hours. The assessor will not talk to the staff during the assessment. An assessor is unable to answer questions or provide information during the assessment. An assessor will move around the classroom, collect data on materials, watch interactions and routines and write notes.

Once the observation is complete, the assessor will leave the site and begin scoring and report writing using the notes collected at your program. Once the report is complete, you and your Quality First coach will receive notice that the assessment is ready for review. You and your coach will review the results and move forward with the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

If you have questions or concerns about the assessment, please contact the Assessment Program Manager, Katie Romero, at 602.633.8652 or kromero@swhd.org. The assessor is not permitted to share any results or information about the assessment with the program, nor are they allowed to provide technical assistance.

It is important to prepare the classroom staff for the assessment. The coach can facilitate a meeting to discuss further the assessment process with the teaching staff. It is important to inform them that an assessment will occur as part of your participation in Quality First.

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT SCORING SYSTEM (CLASS; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2005) - measuring quality interactions

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Policy: CLASS assessments will be conducted to assess adult-child interactions. Quality First programs must achieve a level of 3.0 or higher on the ERS assessment with no individual classroom score below 2.5 to have a CLASS assessment conducted (Head Start and nationally accredited programs will begin with a CLASS assessment). A CLASS assessment will be conducted by a trained assessor who will observe the classroom in four back-to-back 20 minute observation cycles with a designated scoring time in between. Programs that operate four hours or less will have modified observation cycles. In these programs, the assessor will complete four back-to-back 15 minute observation cycles with designated scoring time in between.

Research shows that positive adult-child interactions in early care and education settings are a vital part of supporting children's learning and development. The CLASS is a system for observing and assessing the quality of interactions between teachers and students in infant, toddler and preschool classrooms. The CLASS examines social-emotional and instructional interactions that contribute to children's social competence and academic achievement in center and home-based programs serving children from birth to 5 years of age.

Quality First currently uses the CLASS Pre-K, CLASS Toddler and CLASS Infant in the Rating Scale, each designed to assess a specific age group.

1. CLASS Pre-K

This scale is designed to assess the quality of interactions within preschool environments (children 3 - 5 years of age).

2. CLASS Toddler

This scale is designed to assess the quality of interactions within toddler environments (children 15 - 36 months of age).

3. CLASS Infant

This scale is designed to assess the quality of interactions within infant environments (children 0 - 18 months of age).

The most appropriate assessment tool for each age range will be determined using classroom rosters of enrolled children. The CLASS assessment will not be conducted during the same visit as the ERS assessment; you will be contacted to schedule the CLASS assessment if it is required. More information can be found at teachstone.com/class

THE DAY OF A CLASS ASSESSMENT

For your initial assessment, the assessor will call to schedule your program's assessment. In subsequent years, you will receive a three-week window for assessment. For centers, the assessor will assess one-third of your preschool classrooms/care groups (ages 3-5) using the Pre-K CLASS and one-third of your infant/toddler classrooms/care groups using the Infant (birth to 18 months) or Toddler CLASS (15 to 36 months). The assessor will use the assessment tool designed to best capture the age range in a classroom, based on the ages of the children included on the classroom rosters.

In each age group (Infant/Toddler or Preschool) your program serves, the assessor will determine the number of classrooms/caregroups in that age group (based on classroom rosters) to be assessed based on the chart below.

- 1-3 classrooms = 1 classroom assessment
- 4-6 classrooms = 2 classroom assessments
- 7-9 classrooms = 3 classroom assessments
- 10-12 classrooms = 4 classroom assessments
- 13+ classrooms = 1/3 of the number of classrooms

For family child care homes, the assessor will look at the ages of the children birth to five to determine which CLASS tool is appropriate in the setting using the following guidelines:

- If the expected attendance at the family child care home on the day of the assessment is made up of children between the ages of 3-5, the Pre-K CLASS will be conducted.
- If the expected attendance at the family child care home is made up of children between the ages of 15-36 months, the Toddler CLASS will be conducted.
- If the expected attendance at the family child care home is made up of children between the ages of birth to 18 months, the Infant CLASS will be conducted.
- If the expected attendance on the day of the assessment is split between age groups, birth to 5 the Toddler CLASS will be conducted.

When the assessor arrives, they will need to gather some initial information regarding the total number of children enrolled, the number of children in attendance that day, the age composition of the classroom, and the teaching staff assigned to each classroom/child care group.

CLASS assessments will be conducted in the same classrooms that were randomly selected for the ERS assessment.

Head Start/Early Head Start and nationally accredited programs begin their assessment process with CLASS. If more than one classroom is being assessed, the assessor will ask you to randomly draw which classroom will be assessed that day. Each assessor will only assess one classroom per day. In order to maintain the integrity of the assessment, participants cannot choose which classrooms will be assessed.

The assessor will remain at your program for approximately two to three hours for a CLASS assessment. The assessor will complete four CLASS cycles during the assessment. One cycle includes a 20 minute observation period immediately followed by a 10 minute coding period. The assessor will conduct another cycle if any of the four cycles are less than 20 minutes in length, making the observation incomplete. Programs that operate four hours or less will have modified observation cycles. In these programs, the assessor will complete four back-to-back 15 minute observation cycles with designated scoring time in between. At the end of the CLASS assessment, the assessor will ask the staff in the classroom if there are any children with an IEP/ISFP present in the classroom just assessed.

If you have questions or concerns about the assessment, please contact the Assessment Program Manager Katie Romero at 602.633.8652 or kromero@swhd.org. The assessor is not permitted to share any results or information about the assessment with the program, nor are they allowed to provide technical assistance.

It is important to prepare the classroom staff for the assessment. Your coach can facilitate a meeting to discuss the assessment process with the teaching staff. It is important to inform them that an assessment will occur as part of your participation with Quality First.

QUALITY FIRST ASSESSMENT REPORTS

You will not receive direct feedback from the assessor on the observations or any assessment data collected during the assessment visit. An assessment report will be available online through the Quality First extranet (Assessment Summary tab) and can be printed. Each tool that is used to conduct an assessment has a unique report with specific scores related to the indicators identified in each tool. You will find areas designated as strengths in your program as well as areas of opportunity for growth. Quality First coaches can help you review the information contained in these reports and assist you in highlighting specific areas for goal setting.

Assessment Report Clarification Policy: For the purpose of clarifying content contained in an assessment report, assessment clarification is offered. The Assessment Report Clarification Request must be submitted within 40 days of the assessment results being approved. A response will be provided within 14 days as possible. All Assessment Report Clarification Requests must be sent via Word document to allow for timely response. PDF or scanned documents may require extra time to process. If the clarification warrants a change in scores, this will be noted in the extranet and the assessment report will be updated. Video or audio recordings or photographs will not be considered in the Assessment Report Clarification Process. The assessment process is conducted using live, on-site observations to capture the entire context of the learning environment and interactions.

In the event that you have a question about your report or if you find any information that seems inconsistent based on your program specifics, you have the opportunity to submit an Assessment Report Clarification Request form. A copy of this form is available in the extranet on the Quality First Dashboard, in the Forms section under Quality First Resources.

In the event you are having difficulty reviewing your assessment reports online, please contact the extranet Help Desk for assistance at extranet@firstthingsfirst.org.

QUALITY FIRST STAR RATING

Once all of the assessment reports have been completed and approved, you will have the opportunity to review this information on the Quality First extranet. Your program's assessment reports will remain confidential and are only available for review by you and the Quality First team.

- Your new Quality First star rating will be available for viewing on your extranet page two business days after you receive the email notification that your assessment reports are available for viewing.
- You may find your current assessment cycle end date on your program's extranet profile page.
- Your program will receive ongoing assessments on a regular basis. Following your initial rating, your program will be contacted for assessment every 24 to 26 months.

Public Rating Policy: All Quality First participants will receive an initial rating. This initial rating is not public unless the participant achieves a quality level (3, 4, or 5) rating or submits the Request for Public Rating form. If a quality level rating is achieved, the rating will be public* and shared with DES for the purpose of qualifying for DES tiered reimbursement rates.

Following the initial assessment, all participants will receive subsequent regular assessments to establish a public star rating. Regardless of star rating level, these subsequent ratings will be public* and shared with DES for the purpose of qualifying for DES tiered reimbursement rates.

*In light of the upheaval to families and the child care system due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the FTF Board approved a temporary adjustment to the Quality First Public Rating Policy. Participants assessed in SFY22 will not have their new star rating automatically publicly posted on the Quality First website, but they will have the option to request a public posting.

ADDITIONAL ASSESSMENT POLICIES

Early Assessment Policy: Participants may request to have an assessment conducted prior to the regular cycle. The request will be reviewed to determine if this option is available, and you will be notified by the assessment team whether or not your request is approved. A response will be provided within five business days as possible. An early assessment may not be conducted if the assessment cycle is less than 10 months, and participants at the Rising Star and Progressing Star levels may not be approved two assessment cycles in a row.

Assessment Deferment Policy: Participants may request to have an assessment deferred due to unforeseen circumstances. A Request for Assessment Deferment must be submitted to the Assessment Program Manager. Deferment requests will be reviewed to determine eligibility, and notification will be sent by email to the participant whether or not the request is approved. Deferment requests are not guaranteed and will be reviewed on a case by case basis. Newly selected programs in the initial assessment cycle may not request deferment.

Informal Assessment Policy: Informal assessments are offered to provide feedback in the form of a narrative report through the Quality First Assessment team outside of the standard assessment cycle. An informal assessment includes a classroom observation using a CLASS or ERS tool, based on request. Informal assessment is offered based on the schedule and availability of the assessment team and is not guaranteed. The formal Quality First assessment process cannot be delayed or deferred due to a delay in informal assessment. Following the observation, a written summary will be emailed to your program including feedback about strengths and opportunities for improvement.

Copies of the Request for Public Rating, Request for Early Assessment, Assessment Deferment Request and Informal Assessment Request forms are available in the extranet on the Quality First Dashboard, in the Forms section under Quality First Resources.

STRATEGIES TO HELP PREPARE FOR A SUCCESSFUL ASSESSMENT

In order to make the most of your Quality First participation and to help prepare your program for successful assessments, here are some considerations:

- Review the assessment tools. A Quality First coach is available to support you to ensure that you have a complete understanding of how your program's practices will be observed.
- Share information about the assessment tools with your staff, potentially through staff meetings before the observation.
- If you employ staff, talk with them about what to expect— how the assessor will be in the classroom, how long the assessor will be there, what they will be observing, and how to maintain a natural environment for the children.
- Be sure that your program information is current in the extranet and Registry and that all class rosters are updated in advance. Gathering all the birthdates of the children in each child care group is helpful in planning ahead.
- Although assessors will not need to look at the individual plans for children with special needs or special health care conditions, it is helpful to make the assessor aware so that they are able to focus on the environment in terms of the child's unique needs.
- Prepare your families in advance by letting them know an assessor will be visiting your program. This supports their understanding of your program's involvement in Quality First and your commitment to improvement.
- Consider the unique needs of your program in planning for your assessment. The assessor will ask about your program's specifics, such as language of instruction or a unique population served in order to support individual requirements.
- Plan your time so you are available in case the assessor needs additional information.
- Have the teachers talk to the children about the role of the assessor to alleviate any fears and to help them to feel comfortable with the assessor's presence. You have the option of introducing the assessor to the children when he or she is ready to observe the classroom.
- If you are unsure about any part of the process before, during, or after the assessment is complete, be sure to ask questions of the assessor or the coach or seek clarification using the Assessment Report Clarification Request form (available in the extranet on the Quality First Dashboard, in the Forms section under Quality First Resources).

- The written feedback you receive provides valuable information to help guide your quality improvement efforts. Share this information with staff to support their understanding of your program's strengths and opportunities for improvement.

SECTION FOUR:

Quality First Financial Incentives

Programs enrolled in Quality First have access to different forms of financial incentives to support the improvement process. Regional councils budget an amount for each Quality First participant in their region per fiscal year (July 1– June 30). The amount budgeted supports the different components of Quality First including coaching, assessment, financial incentives, specialized technical assistance and professional development.

There are funding options for Quality First participation that do not include the financial incentives outlined in this section. Please refer to your enrollment agreement and/or contract for details.

There are two different types of financial incentives offered to Quality First participants:

- Licensing fee assistance – for participants licensed by the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS)
- Quality First Incentives – for eligible participants to overcome barriers in support of improvement efforts

LICENSING FEE ASSISTANCE

Quality First provides assistance with paying ADHS licensing renewal fees to support programs in covering the administrative costs of operating a regulated program in Arizona.

Licensing Fee Assistance Policy: Licensing fee assistance is provided to regionally funded Quality First participants with an ADHS license. Fifty percent of licensing fees will be covered by First Things First with the additional fifty percent paid by the participant when the license is renewed every three years. It is the responsibility of each Quality First participant to provide their updated licensing information to Quality First within two weeks of the previous license expiring. The licensing fee assistance does not apply to family child care programs certified by the Department of Economic Security (DES), programs certified by the military or tribal programs not licensed by ADHS.

Once you are fully enrolled in Quality First, you will receive assistance with payment of licensing fees if you are regulated by ADHS. Quality First licensing fee assistance is paid directly to ADHS by First Things First.

The chart below shows the 50 percent amount you will be responsible for paying to the Arizona Department of Health Services every three years, upon renewal of your license:

ADHS licensed capacity (all children)	GROUP HOME (up to 10)	CENTER (5 to 10)	CENTER (11 to 59)	CENTER (60+)
Reduced licensing fee	\$500	\$500	\$2,000	\$3,900

QUALITY FIRST INCENTIVES

Making improvements in your program can be challenging due to the associated costs, which may become a barrier in the process toward providing high quality care. To assist you in overcoming these challenges, Quality First Incentives are available to enrolled, eligible Quality First participants, to make program improvements.

Quality First Incentives Policy: Financial incentives are available to eligible Quality First participants to overcome barriers to high quality practices. Financial incentives will be accessible once enrollment in Quality First is finalized. Incentives may be used to purchase materials and supplies that will enhance the learning environment, to offset costs of facility improvements, and to support professional development opportunities for program staff. E-Verify documentation and/or Lawful Presence documentation must be completed and submitted (if applicable) for Quality First participation and to be eligible for incentives.

Each year, you will need to complete and submit the Incentive Management Agreement, Participant Guide Acknowledgement and Participant Role and Responsibilities Agreement to gain access to Quality First financial incentives. To allow year-end processing and record keeping, Incentive Order Forms must be submitted by April 15.

Once you have signed the required forms as outlined in the Enrollment Policy and Quality First Incentives Policy, financial incentives will be available to your program. The Quality First coach will assist you in accessing your incentives. The following represents the total incentive amount that will be available to you for the fiscal year (beginning July 1). Quality First incentive funds cannot be carried over from year to year if the full amount is unused.

Temporary Modifications for SFY22

In light of the upheaval to families and the child care system due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the FTF Board approved a temporary adjustment to the Quality First incentives and scholarships policies for Quality First participants assessed in SFY22. The higher of the new star rating and the immediately previous star rating will be used with respect to all policies related to Quality First incentives and scholarships, including incentive amounts and scholarship eligibility and reimbursement rates. These temporary adjustments will be in place for these participants until they are re-assessed in their next assessment cycle (about SFY24).

Your program’s star rating as of June 30, 2022 will determine your financial incentives for the upcoming year.

The table below represents the incentive levels based on star rating and program size:

PROVIDER TYPE	1 & 2 STAR	3 STAR	4 STAR	5 STAR
LARGE CENTER 151+ CHILDREN	\$8,400	\$9,400	\$10,400	\$11,400
MEDIUM CENTER 51–150 CHILDREN	\$5,250	\$5,875	\$6,500	\$7,125
SMALL CENTER 1–50 CHILDREN	\$3,675	\$4,125	\$4,575	\$5,025
GROUP HOME 5-10 CHILDREN	\$2,100	\$2,350	\$2,600	\$2,850
FAMILY HOME 1-4 CHILDREN	\$1,050	\$1,175	\$1,300	\$1,425

The implementation of financial incentives in Fiscal Year 2022 will be as follows:

- 1 - 2 star programs have access to financial incentives to purchase materials, equipment, facility improvements, transcript payment, professional development, consultation and specialized services tied to a program’s Quality Improvement Plan. Materials will be purchased through the coaching agency and delivered to your program.

- 3 - 5 star programs receive financial incentives through a direct payment to use at their discretion or through purchasing offered by the coaching agency. Participants must use these incentives to focus on continuation of efforts to maintain or improve the quality of their program through materials, equipment, facility improvements, transcript payment, professional development, consultation and specialized services or staff salaries.

Incentive funds are supplementary in nature, and cannot be used to cover overhead costs (rent, utilities, etc.)

Incentives Payout Expenditure Report Policy: For the purpose of documenting all purchases for Quality First participants receiving an incentive direct payment, the Incentives Payout Expenditure Report is required. Participants are required to provide details about expenditures and maintain records documenting those expenditures. All incentive funds must be fully expended by May 31. The Incentives Payout Expenditure Report must be submitted to the Quality First coach by June 30. A program will not receive an incentive payout until the Incentives Payout Expenditure Report for the previous fiscal year has been reviewed and approved.

To ensure incentive funds are used to support quality improvement, Quality First may complete an onsite review of your program's records, receipts, and materials purchased with incentive funds. If it is determined that funds were not used in accordance with Quality First's policies, future incentives may not be accessible, you may be required to repay funds, and/or your participation in Quality First may be terminated.

Please submit the Incentives Expenditure Report to the coach as soon as spending has been completed. If you have a regular meeting with an accountant or bookkeeper, this is a good time to review and complete this form. Timely submission of the Incentives Expenditure Report supports the review and approval process. Review and approval must be completed before future incentives are accessible.

Incentive funds may not be used for religious purposes or activities, such as faith-based curriculum, religious children's books, faith-based program accreditation, attendance at faith-based conferences, staff salaries for program time spent on religious instruction or worship, or bonuses for staff whose predominant or sole purpose is religious. Incentive funds may be used for facility improvements to buildings or rooms used for religious purposes only if the improvements will not substantially benefit the religious uses of the building or room, as determined by Quality First. Participants will be required to repay any incentive funds determined to have been used for religious purposes or activities.

Quality First Incentive funds can be used for the following types of expenses:

Materials and Equipment: If your program has a specific need for additional learning materials, equipment or furnishings, incentive funds can be used to purchase these items. For participants ordering through the coaching agency, materials may be ordered through an approved vendor.

Consultation and Specialized Services: Incentive funds can be used for consultation and specialized services. For participants ordering through the coaching agency, payment for these services will be provided through the coaching agency based on a quote from the vendor. An example might be to hire a trainer for specialized needs unique to your program.

Facility Improvements: Examples of facility improvement projects might include shelving, cement slabs, fencing, painting or carpet installation. For participants ordering through the coach agency, you will work with the coach to complete a Facility Projects Liability release for approval of these types of projects. (The Facility Projects Liability Release is available in the extranet on the Quality First Dashboard, in the Forms section under Quality First Resources.) A check for payment will be made payable and mailed to the vendor delivering the service after it has been provided. Generally, incentive funding requests for facility improvement projects cannot exceed 30% of a participant's total incentive funds. Approval for requests over 30% may be granted if the coach agency determines that the incentives are not needed for materials, equipment and furnishings. Supportive documentation for these projects is required for payment; the Quality First coach working with your program will provide the needed forms for your completion.

Transcript Payment: Incentive funds may be used to cover the cost of requesting transcripts, credentials, or certificates for staff to submit to the Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry. For participants ordering through the coaching agency, please work with the Quality First coach to request reimbursement for the cost of education documentation using your program's incentive funds.

Professional Development: Incentive funds may be set aside to provide professional development opportunities for staff including regional and national conferences, online trainings, professional development materials to be kept in classrooms or onsite, or payment for professional membership in early childhood organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or the Family Child Care Association (FCCA).

Staff Salaries or Bonuses:

- For 3-5 star programs, incentive funds may be used to offset the cost of staff salaries or bonuses. For example, funds may be used to support hiring of additional teaching or support staff, to provide paid time outside the classroom for teachers to focus on curriculum planning or professional development, or to recognize staff implementation of high-quality practices.
- For 1-2 star programs, incentives may not be used for staff salaries or bonuses in most cases, though approval may be granted if this is tied to the quality improvement plan and the coaching agency determines that the incentives are not needed for materials, equipment and furnishings.

- For participants that otherwise make incentive purchases through a coaching agency, their coaching agency will provide the incentive dollars approved for use for salaries and bonuses in the form of a direct payment to the participant; the coaching agency will not pay a participant's individual staff members directly. Incentives cannot be used by any participant to pay the salary of or a bonus to a program owner.

QUALITY FIRST CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIPS

To better serve the needs of communities, Quality First Scholarships are funded directly by regional councils. The regional councils identify priorities through a strategic planning process that includes reviewing the needs and assets of the community. If selected as a priority, the number of Quality First Scholarships funded will be determined by the regional council and allocated to programs based on the Quality First rating as of April 1.

A participant's tuition rates and fees do not affect the Quality First Scholarships reimbursement rate. Fees include all costs above and beyond the program's tuition rate.

If the Quality First Scholarships reimbursement rate is less than the amount your program charges for tuition and fees, you may decide to charge a copayment to families. Families may be responsible for paying the amount by which your tuition rate plus fees exceeds all scholarships, subsidies, and discounts paid on the families' behalf, including the Quality First Scholarships reimbursement rate. The tuition and fees for Quality First Scholarships families may not exceed the tuition and fees that are charged to families not receiving a Quality First Scholarship. If you choose to charge a copayment to families, it is the recommendation of First Things First that families receiving scholarships pay no more than 10 percent of their gross monthly income on any co-payments that would be charged to the family.

If the Quality First Scholarships reimbursement rate is more than the amount your program charges for tuition and fees, then the family should not be charged a co-pay. It is recommended that these additional scholarship funds above and beyond the tuition be used to support your ongoing quality improvement efforts.

Scholarship reimbursement is based on a child's scheduled hours of instruction. Programs must be open for children to attend in person at least 400 hours over the course of a year and at least 34 hours in a month to be eligible for part-time scholarship reimbursement. Programs must be open for children to attend in person at least 1,120 hours over the course of a year and at least 93 hours in a month to be eligible for full-time reimbursement. Full-time scholarships are most often used for full-time care, but a full-time scholarship can be split into two part-time scholarships, subject to the program minimum hours requirements. Part-time scholarships could be considered if a part-time model best meets the needs of the families.

The Quality First Scholarship annual, full-time reimbursement amount is indicated in the table on the next page. If your program does not operate for twelve months out of the year or meet the minimum monthly full-time hours, the reimbursement amount will be less than what is indicated in the chart:

TYPE	AGE	2 STAR	3-5 STAR
CENTER	0-2 years	\$7,970	\$11,300
	3-5 years	\$6,000	\$7,300
HOME	0-2 years	\$5,625	\$7,600
	3-5 years	\$4,875	\$6,200

Generally, only programs that achieve a star rating at the Quality level and above (3, 4, and 5) will be allocated child care scholarships. Programs at the Rising and Progressing star levels (1 & 2) will continue to receive Quality First Incentives for program improvements. Some regional councils may approve funding for additional scholarships at the Progressing Star (2) level if a specific community need has been identified.

Scholarships allocated to a program that includes religious instruction or worship as part of the program’s activities will be transferable scholarships, meaning the scholarship will follow a child receiving a scholarship under certain conditions. Scholarships allocated to a program that does not include religious instruction or worship as part of the program’s activities will remain with the program for the entire state fiscal year (July 1 – June 30), subject to available funding and reallocation for non-use.

The number of scholarships your program is allocated can be found on the Quality First extranet under the Scholarships tab. Participants receiving scholarships are required to maintain compliance with the Quality First Scholarships Policies and Procedures identified through the contract with Valley of the Sun United Way. Failure to comply with the policies and procedures may result in termination from both the Quality First Scholarships program and Quality First.

For more information about Quality First Scholarships, please visit qfscholarshipsreporting.org or contact the Valley of the Sun United Way Scholarships Team using the contact information noted below:

Valley of the Sun United Way - Scholarships Team

3200 E. Camelback Road, Suite 375

Phoenix, AZ 85018

Participant helpline: 602.240.6325

Parent helpline: 602.240.6324 or 866.973.0012

regionalscholarships@vsuw.org

SECTION FIVE:

Quality First Specialized Assistance

During your participation in Quality First, you may be eligible for additional specialized assistance to support the individual needs of your program. Availability of specialized assistance depends on your geographic region and the funding option of Quality First you participate in.

You and the Quality First coach have the opportunity to work with other technical assistance professionals who may include, Child Care Health Consultants, Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants, Inclusion Coaches, ADE Early Childhood Specialists, ADHS Licensing Surveyors, DES Certification Specialists and Registry and College Scholarship Outreach Coordinators.

Joint collaboration activities may include:

- Joint visits with you, the Quality First coach and other consultants/technical assistance professionals
- Collaboration on goal setting, identifying action steps, and planning visits
- Feedback and input on your program's strengths and opportunities for growth
- Sharing of training resources and materials
- Joint trainings, Communities of Practice, Professional Learning Communities and other events focused on quality improvement goals

Collaboration Meeting Policy: Collaboration meetings are a part of participation in Quality First, to coordinate services efforts to meet a common goal. Collaboration meetings are required at least quarterly and will include the participant, the Quality First coach, CCHC and any additional technical support professionals serving the site (such as Inclusion, Smart Support, and ADE). Documentation of the collaboration meeting will be shared with all participating members and added to the extranet activity log.

The coach will work with you to schedule a collaboration meeting with you and the Quality First collaboration team each quarter. During the meeting, you will discuss your quality improvement plans with the team. One member will keep notes of the discussion and decisions made and provide you with a copy.

TYPES OF SPECIALIZED ASSISTANCE

CHILD CARE HEALTH CONSULTATION (CCHC)

available in First Things First regions to programs participating in Quality First level one funding

A Child Care Health Consultant (CCHC) is a specially trained health professional who provides advice and support to early care and education providers through education and the identification of site-specific health and safety needs. The CCHC provides support by delivering comprehensive technical assistance through:

- Onsite and telephone guidance and consultation
- Staff training on health and safety licensing requirements and evidence based best practices
- Assistance in the development of health and safety related policies and procedures
- Referrals to community resources
- Information to share with parents and children

This may also include supporting your program in meeting the needs of individual children and their specific health needs such as asthma, allergy and diabetes plans.

Child Care Health Consultation Policy: each Quality First participant (level 1) will be assigned a Child Care Health Consultant (CCHC) once enrolled.

Upon enrollment, participants will receive a visit from the CCHC to:

- Discuss CCHC services;
- The needs of your program; and
- Conduct a Health and Safety Checklist

The Health and Safety Checklist assesses for key health and safety standards.

Participants have the option of requesting from three levels of service:

- Tier 1 - phone and email consultation as needed
- Tier 2 - targeted on-site consultation based on a presenting health or safety need
- Tier 3 - regular on-site consultation to help you support the health, safety and well-being of the children in your care

Rising Star and Progressing Star programs must receive a Health and Safety Checklist assessment annually as part of their Quality First participation.

You can seek more information on working with a CCHC by contacting the CCHC designated on your Quality First extranet home page.

The Empower program, provided by the Arizona Department of Health Services, provides guidance toward effective health practices in the early care and education setting.

Empower Policy: To help children and families lead healthier lives, participation in Empower is required of all Quality First participants. Participants are required to sign an Empower agreement and have a written policy and implementation for each standard. Empower standards support program health and wellness including nutrition, breastfeeding, physical activity, screen time, tobacco, oral health, sun safety and staff training.

Your child care health consultant may also provide training and support on Empower topics. To learn more about Empower, please visit azdhs.gov/prevention/nutrition-physical-activity/empower/index.php

Birth to Five Helpline

available statewide to all participants

The **Birth to Five Helpline** links Quality First participants to experts who will provide telephone consultation around the specific question or concern regarding a child birth to five. The Helpline specialists can collaborate with Quality First participants as well as with the child's family. The Helpline specialist can also support the caller with community resources and referrals.

Reach the Birth to Five Helpline at **877.705.KIDS (5437)**

An example of how you could use the Helpline would be in the event a child is showing concerning behaviors and a teacher is looking for guidance in how to respond appropriately or to offer valuable resources to the family.

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (Smart Support)

Funded by Regional Partnership Councils in the following First Things First regions: Cochise, Coconino, East Maricopa, Graham/Greenlee, Hualapai Tribe, Navajo Nation, Navajo/Apache, Northwest Maricopa, Phoenix North, Phoenix South, Pinal, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Southeast Maricopa, Yavapai and Yuma.

Through expansion funded by pandemic relief federal dollars, consultation will also be available to participants in any FTF region who serve children in the care of the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) from October 2021 through June 30, 2024.

Smart Support is an evidence-based strategy proven to support the social and emotional development of all children in care and help providers respond to children with behavioral challenges. In regions that offer this support, consultants are available to work directly with teachers to develop strategies to work most effectively with children in early learning settings.

Contact Smart Support at **1.866.330.5520**

An example of services that might be provided through Smart Support would be training for teachers on helping children to label emotions and create helpful activities that assist children in learning how to deal with strong feelings.

Inclusion of Children with Special Needs (Inclusion Program)

available in the following First Things First regions: Northwest Maricopa, Phoenix North, Phoenix South and Yuma.

Inclusion Coaching addresses the need for quality early care and education for young children with special needs ages birth to 5. Specific focus is on improving skills of child care staff and providing training and assistance to support quality inclusive settings. Contact Inclusion via the contact information below:

Maricopa County regions

602.633.8454 or email ecei@swhd.org

Yuma region

928.248.5112

An example of how this specialized assistance could be provided would be to support children who may have difficulty communicating or have challenging behaviors be successful in the classroom by using visual supports or other strategies. The Inclusion Program can also train staff on developmental screenings as well as provide professional development on a variety of topics related to children who have identified or suspected developmental delays.

Arizona Department of Education (ADE)

available statewide to all participants

ADE offers free training to all early childhood professionals (birth through third grade) throughout the state in a number of areas including, but not limited to, the Arizona Early Learning Standards, the Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines, and the Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Education: Birth through Kindergarten. An ADE Early Childhood Specialist may also be available to participants in some regions to support the transition of children from early care and education settings into Kindergarten. Professional development opportunities can be found on ADE's Events Management System at: azed.gov/ece/professional-development/

An example of the services offered through the Department of Education would be to invite a representative to your facility to offer hands-on training for you and your staff to discuss and learn more about the Infant

Toddler Developmental Guidelines. If your group is too small to have a representative at your site, you could partner with another participant in your area or have your staff attend a regularly scheduled training.

SUPPORTING ALL CHILDREN: ASSISTANCE TO HELP YOU PREVENT EXPULSIONS

Young children grow and thrive within stable relationships with caring adults. Maintaining stability in children’s early learning experiences supports their development and their long-term success in kindergarten and beyond. Unfortunately, preschoolers are three times more likely to be expelled than students in kindergarten through 12th grade.¹ This is often due to challenging behaviors that educators feel unequipped to handle. Nationwide, early childhood programs are developing policies to reduce and eliminate expulsion.

As a Quality First participant, your program has access to resources to help you support all children’s success and reduce or eliminate expulsion from your program. Consultation, training and technical assistance helps you and your staff feel more equipped to respond to challenging behaviors in support of all children’s success. For support in preventing expulsions in your program, utilize the resources below:

Call a Specialist

- **Birth to Five Helpline**

available statewide to families, caregivers and professionals

In addition to being a resource for Arizona families, the Birth to Five Helpline is available to all early childhood educators who work with children ages birth to 5. By calling the Helpline, you can access support from Southwest Human Development’s wide range of early childhood development staff including psychologists and master’s level counselors. Services are available in English and Spanish. Other languages can be supported as well. Contact the helpline:

- By phone calling or texting **877.705.KIDS**
- On the website at swhd.org/programs/health-and-development/birth-to-five-helpline
- On the Birth to Five Helpline app available at the Apple App Store or on Google Play

- **Expulsion Prevention Resource Consultants**

available statewide to all DES certified child care centers and family child care homes

Reach out for support and resources at the first sign of challenging behaviors to promote early intervention to prevent suspensions and expulsions. Contact a Resource Consultant:

- By completing an Expulsion Support Request form at www.azccrr.com

¹Gilliam, W.S. 2005. Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems. New Haven, CT: Yale University Child Study Center. Available from http://www.ziglercenter.yale.edu/publications/National%20Prek%20Study_expulsion_tcm350-34774_tcm350-284-32.pdf.

Participate in Training and Technical Assistance

- **AZ Steps Expulsion Prevention Training and Technical Assistance**

*available statewide to all DES certified child care centers and family child care homes**

Southwest Human Development provides caregivers with skills and strategies they need to respond effectively to these challenges through a series of training on expulsion prevention. This new series offers opportunities to learn how understanding child development, attachment, trauma reaction and support of children's developing self-regulation skills can help reduce and prevent expulsion of children from ages birth to 12 years.

- Register online for training through the Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry at azregistry.org. After logging into your account, simply search "Expulsion Prevention."
- Technical assistance is available to provide practical tips and strategies to use in your caregiving environment. For more information regarding technical assistance, please contact Jennifer Atkari-Benavides at **602.633.8730** or jatkari@swhd.org.

*Not a DES certified provider? Contact Southwest Human Development at the contact information above to find out about opportunities that may be available to you.

Access On-site Consultation

- **Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (Smart Support)**

available in the following First Things First Regions: Cochise, Coconino, East Maricopa, Graham/Greenlee, Hualapai Tribe, Navajo Nation, Navajo/Apache, Northwest Maricopa, Phoenix North, Phoenix South, Pinal, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Southeast Maricopa, Yavapai and Yuma.

Through expansion funded by pandemic relief federal dollars, consultation will also be available to participants in any FTF region who serve children in the care of the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) from October 2021 through June 30, 2024.

Smart Support is an evidence-based strategy proven to support the social and emotional development of all children in care and help providers respond to children with behavioral challenges. Consultants can work directly with teachers to develop strategies to work most effectively with children in early learning settings.

- Contact Smart Support at **1.866.330.5520**

STRATEGIES TO BENEFIT FROM SPECIALIZED ASSISTANCE

In order to make the most of the specialized assistance available to you as a Quality First participant, here are some considerations:

- Do some research to find what types of specialized assistance services are available in your area. Visit firstthingsfirst.org and select Find Your Region. Your region page includes the regional council members, publications and helpful local resources.
- Talk with your Quality First coach to discuss your specific needs. Consider your goals and how specialized assistance can help you meet your goals.
- Reach out to the staff you work with. What are their needs in providing the best care to the children they serve? What types of specialized assistance would support their teaching?
- Communicate with your families about the types of specialized assistance that you are using in your program. Introduce families to the coaches and consultants who will be supporting your program as they may see them in your program on a regular basis.

SECTION SIX:

Quality First Professional Development

As an early childhood educator, you value lifelong learning and continued growth. As a Quality First participant, you have access to a wealth of professional development opportunities. As you learn, you will develop new skills based on the most recent research to benefit your program, staff and the children you serve.

ARIZONA EARLY CHILDHOOD CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

The purpose of this valuable resource is to provide information on Workforce Knowledge and Competencies, training and workshop offerings, career opportunities, and access to the Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry for early childhood professionals to document and track their experience, education and knowledge over time. The Network is a comprehensive, consistent, and accessible web-based system designed to meet the professional development needs of Arizona's early childhood professionals from entry to advanced levels and promote high quality professional development. Visit the Network at azearlychildhood.org.

The network includes the following components:

- A professional development website to promote and provide access to a variety of professional development, career and higher education resources to assist early childhood professionals in keeping their skills and knowledge up to date.
- The Arizona Career Lattice, a tool that early childhood professionals can use for individualized professional assessment, setting professional development goals, and documenting their progress in their career development.
- The Arizona Workforce Knowledge and Competencies, a uniform set of expectations that identify the basic knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for early childhood professionals across sectors of early childhood including early care and education, early intervention, mental health, physical health and social services/child welfare professionals. They ensure implementation of quality services for young children and their families.
- A Job Bank that includes information about early childhood jobs submitted from employers seeking employees as well as information pulled from Indeed.com.
- First Things First College Scholarships for Early Childhood Professionals provide access to higher education for the early childhood workforce working directly with or on behalf of young children birth to age 5. These scholarships are available to assist early childhood professionals with credential and degree attainment.

- A web-based Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry to collect and store data about the early childhood workforce. Information such as college credits, work history, workshops completed and site training logs will be stored making it easier for early childhood professionals to keep track of their professional development.

Registry Policy: To track early childhood workforce professional development, education and experience, Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry membership is required of all staff working with children in Quality First participating programs.

To create a registry account, visit azearlychildhood.org and click on the registry link at the top right side of the page. A video on how to create a registry account may be viewed at azearlychildhood.org/resources/videos. Program directors will also need to request administrative access to view and manage their early education program and staffing information. Step-by-step instructions for requesting administrative access, submitting education documentation and more are outlined on the website at <http://azearlychildhood.org/about/using-the-registry>.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFULLY USING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In order to make the most of professional development, here are some considerations:

- Take advantage of professional development opportunities through the Registry. It is never too late to learn new things!
- When you or your staff members attend professional development events or complete college coursework, provide opportunities for the information to be shared among all members of your team. This will create common learning opportunities and skill growth for the person sharing the information.
- Create a mentor or on-site coach role in your program for a staff member who has specialized knowledge or skills so that others can receive ongoing guidance from within your own team.
- Consider the vision, philosophy and values of your program when making professional development plans for you and your staff. For instance, if “risk-taking” for young children is a part of your program philosophy, send your staff to training on how to create safe outdoor play environments that support these types of behaviors.
- Create an environment that encourages and supports staff in putting new knowledge into practice.
- Ensure your program’s entire classroom and administrative staff become members of the Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry. Make enrollment in the Registry a part of your new hire onboarding process, and show new staff how to use the Registry to access professional development. As members, they will have access to professional development opportunities, possible college scholarship opportunities, and a place to track their education and professional development.
- To ensure your program and staff information is up-to-date, make reviewing your program’s Registry information a regular practice. The reports provide you with information about your staff’s professional development and education and are accepted by ADHS Child Care Licensing and DES Child Care Certification specialists to document ongoing professional development. Review these reports regularly to identify strengths and gaps in core knowledge areas (CKAs) in each staff member’s record. This helps you create a plan to attend professional development that meets these needs.
- When you onboard new staff, let them know about Quality First. The Quality First website provides information, tips and answers to frequently asked questions.

SECTION SEVEN:

Quality First Administrative Practices

This section offers guidance on policies and standards to support your participation in Quality First. These practices are listed in alphabetical order for easy review.

APPEALS

Appeals Policy: A participant may only submit a Request for Appeal within 60 days of being notified of a star rating or enrollment termination. The Request for Appeal must be submitted in writing to the Quality First Director at First Things First using the Request for Appeal form. Once received, the Quality First Director and the Senior Director for Early Learning, the Chief Program Officer (CPO), and/or the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) will review the Request for Appeal and provide a written response, which includes a scheduled meeting date, to you within 14 days of the receipt of the request. A copy of the Request for Appeal form is available in the extranet on the Quality First Dashboard, in the Forms section under Quality First Resources.

The Appeals Process only applies when a participant appeals a star rating or an enrollment termination. A participant must go through the Assessment Report Clarification Process before appealing a star rating. If you would like to discuss any other specific challenge that you are having, the Clarification and Concern Resolution process is the appropriate route.

All Quality First services and benefits will end upon enrollment termination with the exception of already awarded college scholarships and FTF Professional REWARD\$. If First Things First re-enrolls the participant in Quality First as a result of the Appeals Process, the participant may be eligible to receive financial benefits withheld during the period of termination.

While an appeal about a star rating is being considered, the participant's star rating will be masked from public view on the Quality First website.

If you are unsatisfied with the result of your Request for Appeal, you may request a formal hearing conducted by an Administrative Law Judge with the Office of Administrative Hearings. First Things First will notify you in writing when the opportunity to request a formal hearing is available. After receipt of that notice, you will have 30 days to file a request for a hearing in writing. Refer to "Administrative Hearing" in the charts on pages 57-58 under "Clarification, Concern Resolution and Appeals Process" for more details.

CLARIFICATION AND CONCERN RESOLUTION

The process for clarification, concern resolution, and appeal is outlined on pages 57-58. If you have questions about your assessment results and/or star rating, review your assessment reports with your coach, using the ERS tools, All About books and CLASS manuals to answer questions. If questions remain, you may initiate the clarification process by submitting an Assessment Report Clarification Request. The Request for Assessment Report Clarification form is available in the extranet on the Quality First Dashboard, in the Forms section under Quality First Resources.

If you have other concerns related to your Quality First experience, begin by speaking directly with the Coach or CCHC working with your program. If your concerns persist after speaking with the Coach or CCHC, contact a supervisor or program manager for support. Program contact information is available in the Quality First Resource Directory available in the Resources section of this guide.

Informal Dispute Resolution Policy: Informal Dispute Resolution is available to resolve concerns related to a participant's Quality First experience. If informal methods of resolving the issue have not successfully addressed the participant's concerns, a Quality First Complaint Form may be submitted to the Quality First Director at First Things First.

The Complaint form is available in the extranet on the Quality First Dashboard, in the Forms section under Quality First Resources. In the Complaint form, you will provide a description of your concern and any attempts made to resolve the issue as well as recommendations of possible solutions.

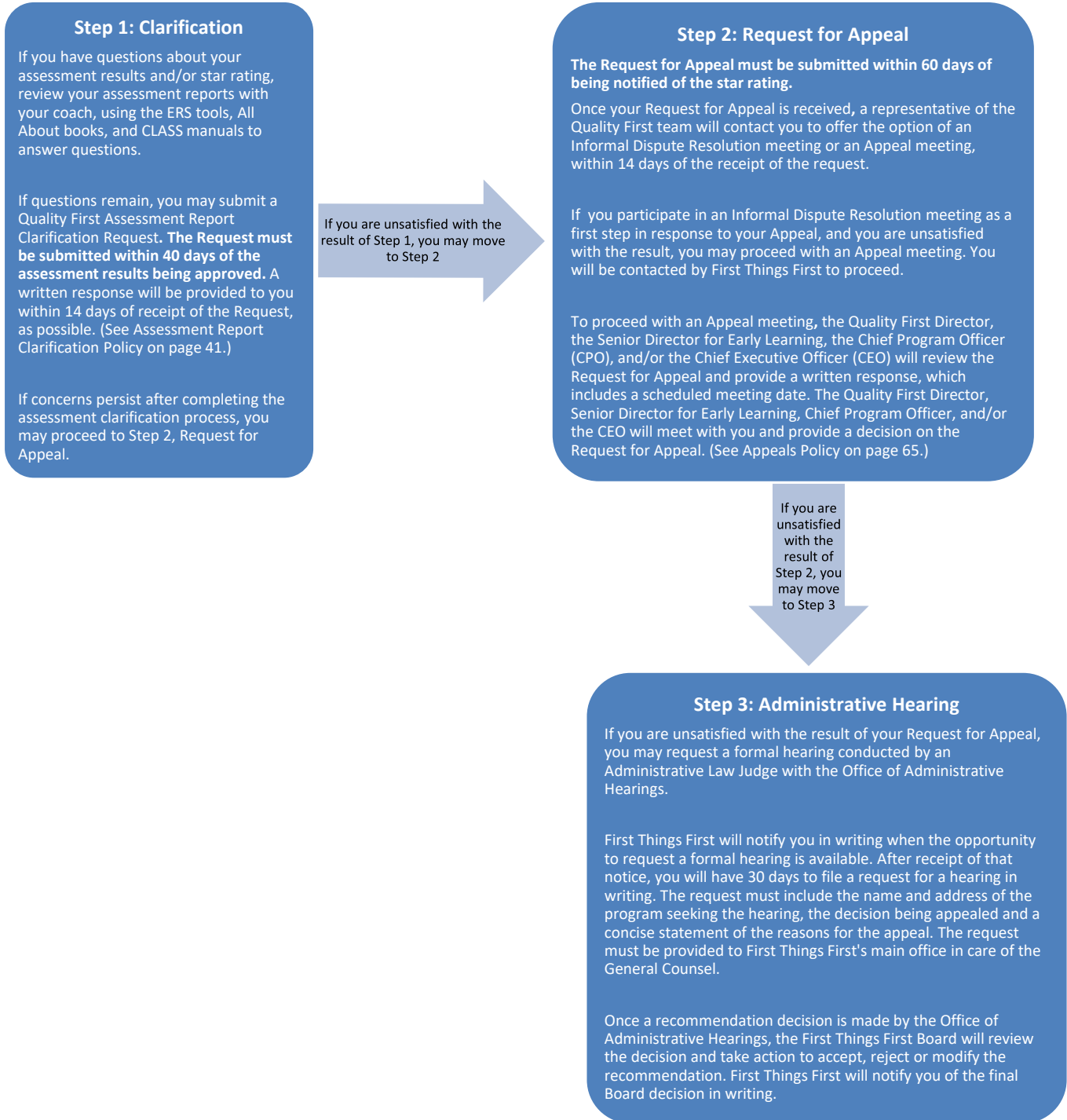
A representative of the First Things First Quality First team will contact you to determine next steps to address your concern either over the phone or by scheduling a meeting with all involved parties, ideally within 14 calendar days of receiving the Complaint. After the meeting, First Things First will make a decision and notify you within 14 days.

This informal dispute resolution process does not apply in the case of an enrollment termination.

CLARIFICATION, CONCERN RESOLUTION AND APPEALS PROCESS

If you have questions or concerns about your participation in Quality First, options are available to you to have these concerns addressed. The processes for clarification, concern resolution, and appeal are outlined in the charts that follow.

If you have questions or concerns about your assessment results or star rating:



If you are appealing termination from Quality First:

Step 1: Request for Appeal

You may submit a Request for Appeal of your termination from Quality First.

The Request for Appeal must be submitted within 60 days of being notified of the termination.

Once received, the Quality First Director, the Senior Director for Early Learning, the Chief Program Officer (CPO), and/or the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) will review the Request for Appeal and provide a written response, which includes a scheduled meeting date, to you within 14 days of the receipt of the request. The Quality First Director, Senior Director for Early Learning, Chief Program Officer, and/or the CEO will meet with you and provide a decision on the Request for Appeal.

If you are unsatisfied with the result of Step 1, you may move to Step 2

Step 2: Administrative Hearing

If you are unsatisfied with the result of your Request for Appeal, you may request a formal hearing conducted by an Administrative Law Judge with the Office of Administrative Hearings.

First Things First will notify you in writing when the opportunity to request a formal hearing is available. After receipt of that notice, you will have 30 days to file a request for a hearing in writing. The request must include the name and address of the program seeking the hearing, the decision being appealed and a concise statement of the reasons for the appeal. The request must be provided to First Things First's main office in care of the General Counsel.

Once a recommendation decision is made by the Office of Administrative Hearings, the First Things First Board will review the decision and take action to accept, reject or modify the recommendation. First Things First will notify you of the final Board decision in writing.

If you have other concerns about your Quality First experience:

Step 1 : Discussion

If you have concerns about your Quality First experience, begin by speaking directly with the Coach or CCHC working with your program.

If your concerns persist after speaking with the Coach or CCHC, contact a supervisor or program manager for support. Program contact information is available in the Quality First Resource Directory available on the Quality First Extranet under Resources.

If concerns persist after discussing the issue with a program contact, you may proceed to Step 2, Informal Dispute Resolution.

If you are unsatisfied with the result of Step 1, you may move to Step 2

Step 2: Informal Dispute Resolution

You may submit a Quality First Complaint form to the Quality First Director at First Things First. In the Complaint form, you will provide a description of your concern and any attempts made to resolve the issue as well as recommendations of possible solutions.

A representative of the First Things First Quality First team will contact you to determine next steps to address your concern either over the phone or by scheduling a meeting with all involved parties, ideally within 14 calendar days of receiving the Complaint. After the meeting, First Things First will make a decision and notify you within 14 days. (See Informal Dispute Resolution Policy on page 56.)

CODE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT (NAEYC)

The Code of Ethical Conduct provides guidance for the early childhood professional in working with families and young children. This Code can help in making ethical decisions and in developing sound policy for your program. As a Quality First participant, you agree to use the principles and ideals of the Code of Ethical Conduct in your work with children, families, colleagues, and the community.

The Code of Ethical Conduct can be found online at:

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/ethical-conduct>.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality Policy: All Quality First partners (coaches, assessors, child care health consultants, supervisors and other technical assistance professionals) are expected to maintain confidentiality about their work with the assigned Quality First participant. Program records, staff information, individual ERS and CLASS scores and quality improvement efforts are not made public, nor are they shared with individuals outside of First Things First, its contracted parties, and state agency partners, except as required by law and state regulatory agencies.

If you feel your confidentiality has not been maintained, please discuss this with the coach, technical assistance provider or their supervisor to address this issue.

CRITICAL INCIDENT REPORTING

Critical Incident Report Policy: For the purpose of documenting critical incidents, the Critical Incident Report is required for all Quality First technical assistance professionals. This policy applies to incidents that cause concern, including when a technical assistance professional witnesses an emergency, serious health or safety violations, or reasonably believes that abuse, neglect or child endangerment has occurred.

In the event of a critical incident, the Quality First coach or technical assistance professional will notify the on-site administrator or supervisor that a report will be made. If applicable, the appropriate authorities will be contacted (i.e. Department of Child Safety, ADHS, DES, or tribal authority) and a Critical Incident Report will be completed. A copy of the completed Critical Incident Report will be provided to you upon request.

DISENROLLMENT

Program Disenrollment Policy: To end Quality First participation and related services, a disenrollment process must be completed. Upon disenrollment you are no longer eligible to receive any financial incentives, including any unexpended financial incentives remaining for the fiscal year.

- Programs may voluntarily disenroll by submitting a disenrollment form to the coach.
- Involuntary disenrollment will be at the discretion of First Things First based on compliance with program requirements or in the event your program is funded by external sources and that funding ends.
- Programs disenrolling from Quality First due to a business closure are advised to redistribute all materials purchased with financial incentives to other providers serving children in the region.
- Programs disenrolling from Quality First but continuing to serve children may retain the materials purchased with financial incentives to support their continued work with children.

ENROLLMENT

Enrollment Policy: Enrollment begins after the Enrollment Agreement is signed by the participant, and all required documentation is submitted. Programs must be in good standing with their regulatory agency (ADHS, DES, military or tribal authority) in order to be enrolled. Quality First services including Child Care Health Consultation and financial incentives may not begin until after a program is officially enrolled.

E-VERIFY AND LAWFUL PRESENCE

E-Verify and Lawful Presence Policy: To determine eligibility for financial incentives, First Things First is required to collect documentation related to E-Verify Participation and Lawful Presence to ensure compliance with federal and state laws.

A participant that is an “employer” as specially defined in A.R.S. § 23-211 must provide proof to First Things First that the participant is registered with and participating in E-Verify. An E-Verify form will be provided to you by your coach. All participants must complete and return the form, but only “employers” must provide proof of registration with and participation in E-Verify.

When a participant's child care program is owned in the name of an individual or a sole proprietorship, the owner must complete the Statement of Lawful Presence & Eligibility to Receive Public Benefits form and submit certain documentation establishing lawful presence and eligibility. First Things First will email you a link to the form if you need to comply with this requirement.

EXTERNAL FUNDING

External Funding Policy: External partners may provide funding to support Quality First participation in addition to the programs supported by regional funding plans. Externally funded participants have a finite period of funding determined at the time of enrollment. External funders pay for Quality First participation through a contract detailing the funding period, the terms of participation, and the participating early childhood program(s). The external funder may choose to extend the funding period according to the terms of the contract. Early childhood programs who have participated in Quality First through external funding are eligible to participate through regional funding after their external funding period is complete. Interested programs must reapply for Quality First at QualityFirstAZ.com.

EXTRANET (DATA SOURCE)

The extranet is where you can find all of your Quality First information in one place and track your improvement data over time. This data is extremely helpful in keeping up to date on staffing trends, enrollment changes and your movement in scores across time. The extranet is also used to determine financial incentives, potential child care scholarship allocations, and assessment scheduling, so the accuracy of this information is critical.

Extranet Update Policy: To ensure accurate and up-to-date information, the Quality First extranet must be updated at least quarterly by the participant. All Quality First participants are responsible for updating information in the areas of program information, classroom enrollment, identification of children with special needs, and staffing information. Contact information in the extranet will be used for all communication.

You will receive an invitation to the extranet with your own personal login and password. If you have challenges logging in or navigating, help is available at extranet@firstthingsfirst.org. See the Extranet User Guide for more detailed information. (A copy of the Extranet User Guide is available in the extranet on the Quality First Dashboard, under Quality First Resources.)

LICENSED CAPACITY VERIFICATION (LCV)

Licensed Capacity Verification Policy: To determine financial incentives and other quality improvement benefits for Quality First participants, the participant's licensed capacity is verified. All Quality First participants are responsible for confirming or updating the total licensed capacity and capacity for children ages birth to 5 each year. The License Capacity Verification Form (LCV) is due no later than March 15 each year. Failure to provide this data may result in future incentives not being accessible. Information about license changes, such as a new license number and/or expiration date, must be submitted within two weeks of the previous license expiring.

The verification process typically takes place between February and March every year. This data is used to determine your financial incentives for the following fiscal year, so accuracy is critical.

In the event an LCV form is not submitted or an incorrect LCV form is not corrected and resubmitted by the **March 15** deadline, the following information will be used to determine both the total license capacity and the birth to age 5 capacity:

- **ADHS Licensed Participants**
 - Total licensed capacity will be based on the capacity noted in the ADHS system on March 1.
 - Birth to five capacity will be based on your reported current fiscal year's birth to five capacity.*
 - *If the current year's reported birth to five capacity exceeds the March 1 capacity noted in the ADHS system, the ADHS March 1 license capacity will be used.
- **DES Licensed Participants** – DES capacity (four children) or the current fiscal year's reported capacity, whichever is lower.
- **Tribal Participants** – Current fiscal year's reported birth to age 5 capacity.

MANDATED REPORTING

As an early childhood provider, you are a designated mandated reporter by law (as outlined in A.R.S. § 13-3620). Mandated reporters are individuals who are obligated by law to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. In general, any person who has responsibility for the care or treatment of a child is a mandated reporter. Under Quality First policy, Quality First technical assistance professionals, including coaches, assessors and child care health consultants, are required to report suspected cases of abuse and neglect as well. Mandated reporter laws are designed to catch child abuse in its early stages so that children are protected from physical or emotional trauma. If you reasonably believe a child in your program is a victim of abuse or neglect, you are required to report this information to the Department of Child Safety or your local law enforcement authority, though a tribal social services agency may be contacted instead for a child who is a tribal member and who lives on a reservation. If you have an incidence of child abuse in your program, it is your responsibility to contact local law enforcement and your regulatory agency to make a report.

OWNERSHIP CHANGE

Ownership Change Policy: To ensure accurate information about Quality First participation location and ownership as related to funding and access to services, ownership changes must be communicated to the Quality First coach. Participants are required to notify Quality First of changes in licensing and/or ownership immediately and a new enrollment agreement must be signed by the new owner to ensure understanding of the Quality First program guidelines and responsibilities. E-Verify and Lawful Presence documentation will be re-gathered for the new owner.

All programs must remain in good standing and work with their regulatory agency to ensure that the proper paperwork has been filed and approved. Any change in information, including the issuance of a new license or modifications to program size or licensed capacity, must be communicated to the Quality First coach and updated in the extranet.

PARTICIPATION ELIGIBILITY

Early care and education providers that care for children ages five and under and are regulated by a monitoring agency are eligible for Quality First participation. Quality First participants are required to remain in good standing with their regulatory body while enrolled in Quality First. Regulatory bodies in Arizona include the Arizona Department of Health Services Bureau of Child Care Licensing (ADHS BCCL), the Arizona Department of Economic Security Child Care Administration (DES CCA), and tribal or military oversight entities.

Early care and education providers must offer in-person care for children a minimum of 12 hours a week to be eligible for Quality First. Additional hours of operation may be required to be eligible for child care scholarships.

PROMOTING YOUR COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

Quality is an extremely important factor for families choosing a child care setting. Participation in Quality First is a clear sign to families that you are committed to improving the quality of your program to best serve the children in your care.

Promoting Your Commitment to Quality Policy: For the purpose of identifying active participation and the current star rating, Quality First participants must display their current star rating certificate in a location easily visible to families. Participants will receive a new certificate each time the program's star rating is updated. The current star rating and certificate are valid until the program is reassessed and a rating is updated.

Once enrollment is complete, your program will be provided with a marketing toolkit, including signs and website graphics, to promote your participation in Quality First. These items are sure to catch the eyes of visiting families and start conversations about quality early care and education and your participation in Quality First. The Quality First marketing toolkit includes talking points and key messages to make it easy for you and your staff to have these conversations and spread the word about the great things happening in your program. The digital marketing tools are available on the Quality First extranet and signage will be mailed directly to your program.

Once your program has been assigned a public rating, you will be mailed a star rating certificate. You will receive an updated star rating certificate after each assessment cycle. Replacement certificates are available upon request. Due to the costs of printing and mailing certificates, Quality First reserves the right to limit the number of replacement certificates issue

REDISTRIBUTION OF MATERIALS

If your program closes, it is recommended that all materials purchased with your financial incentives be redistributed to other providers serving children in your region. The Quality First coach will provide assistance to you. If you will be disenrolling from Quality First but continuing to serve children, you may retain the materials purchased with your financial incentives to support your work with children.

REGIONAL FUNDING

Regional Funding Policy: Each regional council creates an annual regional funding plan. As part of developing their funding plans, regional councils decide the number of Quality First programs they will fund for the coming fiscal year. Some regions may choose to prioritize selecting programs into Quality First in high-need areas. The schedule for selecting new Quality First programs, although set annually, may change throughout the year based on the number of Quality First applicants and changes in regional funding. First Things First reserves the right to alter or eliminate Quality First benefits at any time in whole or in part for any reason, including available funding, the availability of third-party service partners, the cost of services, the effectiveness of the benefits or changes in funding priorities.

For more information on regional councils and to find your local region, please visit: <http://www.firstthingsfirst.org/regions/find-your-region>. Early childhood education providers are encouraged to attend their local regional council meetings and become an active participant in the process.

REGULATORY STATUS

Regulatory Status Policy: To ensure all Quality First participants are in good standing with their regulatory agency, regulatory status is reviewed monthly. All Quality First participants are required to maintain regulatory status and remain in good standing to ensure compliance with state regulatory standards (ADHS, DES and/or tribal or military authority). If a program experiences an event that causes it to be placed in enforcement action with ADHS or on probation or suspension with DES, the program will not have access to Quality First Financial Incentives or receive reimbursement for Quality First Child Care Scholarships during that time. While the program is not in good standing, its star rating will not be publicly visible on the extranet or Quality First website. Once the program is removed from this status, access to incentives and reimbursement for all Quality First Scholarships will be restored. If a program is noted as not in good standing with its regulatory body for over 60 calendar days or if there is more than one incident in a 12-month period, participation in Quality First may be terminated or a Targeted Support Plan may be started.

Your program's regulatory status will be monitored on a monthly basis. If your program has been noted as not in good standing, you will receive notification from your coach and the scholarships team (if applicable).

It is important for you to maintain open communication with the Quality First coach and other technical assistance professionals to help in supporting your compliance with state standards. Your licensing surveyor or certification specialists are also available to support you in the process of creating a plan of improvement for your success.

RELOCATION/MOVING

If your program may be moving to a new location, discuss this move with Quality First to determine whether your Quality First participation will be able to transfer. Communicate any program or structure changes that may be occurring as part of the relocation. Depending on regional priorities, your program may be able to maintain participation, your eligibility for Quality First Child Care Scholarships and other specialized services may change, or you may need to reapply for participation at the new location.

STAR RATING MASKING

Star Rating Masking Policy: In order to provide accurate information about quality levels of participating programs, First Things First may temporarily mask a participating program's rating from the extranet and qualityfirstaz.com. Quality First star ratings may be temporarily masked due to the following reasons:

- A participant is not in good standing with their regulatory agency

- A critical incident has occurred at the program and is under investigation by law enforcement or a state agency
- A participant is contesting their star rating through the Complaint or Appeals process
- After the rating was finalized and posted, a participant is granted a reassessment

In these instances, the star rating will only be masked until the situation has been rectified.

In limited situations, a star rating may be masked for other reasons as First Things First deems appropriate. During the masking, the rating will show as “Rating Unavailable” on the public website.

STATE STANDARDS

The Arizona Department of Education offers tools to support you in your efforts to make high-quality opportunities available to all students. The following tools are available free of charge and are excellent sources of information. Trainings are now available online. Please visit the Arizona Department of Education website, <http://www.azed.gov/ece/>, for more information.

Arizona’s Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines

Arizona’s Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines are part of a continuum of early learning guidelines that provide a framework for understanding and communicating a common set of developmentally appropriate expectations for young children, presented within a context of shared responsibility and accountability for helping young children meet these expectations. Specifically, these guidelines describe expectations about what infants and toddlers should know and do across multiple domains of development during specific age ranges, as well as what adults can do to support children’s optimal learning and development. (Click on the link below to access these Guidelines.)

https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/media/Arizonas%20Infant%20Toddler%20Developmental%20Guidelines_2nd%20Edition.pdf

Arizona Early Learning Standards

The Arizona Early Learning Standards have been developed to provide a framework for the planning of quality learning experiences for all children three to five years of age. The standards cover a broad range of skill development and provide a useful instructional foundation for children from diverse backgrounds and with diverse abilities. The standards are intended for use by all those who work with young children in any early care and education setting in urban, rural and tribal communities. (Click on the link below to access these Standards.)

https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2018/09/Arizona%20Early%20Learning%20Standards_Updated%202021.pdf

Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Education: Birth Through Kindergarten

The Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Education: Birth through Kindergarten does not contain a list of requirements, but rather a set of recommended practices for programs to use as they strive for excellence in the care and education of young children throughout Arizona. This document is intended to provide guidance by delineating quality and providing a set of indicators that concretely describe what a program will look like when providing high quality early care and education for children birth through age six. (Click on the link below to access these Guidelines.)

<https://cms.azed.gov/home/GetDocumentFile?id=5879561caadebe0c98a80509>

TARGETED SUPPORT PROCESS

Targeted Support Process Policy: A Targeted Support Plan may be opened to provide short term intensive support to overcome barriers to participation and quality improvement. A Targeted Support Plan identifies barriers toward quality improvement and designates specific steps to be taken to overcome barriers and sustain quality practices. At the end of the 90-day Targeted Support Plan timeframe, you and the technical assistance team will review the plan. This review will identify next steps and whether or not you will continue with Quality First. If you are not able to complete the steps of the Targeted Support Plan, you may be disenrolled from Quality First.

As a Quality First participant, you are the leader in the improvement process, working with your coach and other consultants. Your work with the support team assists you in following the policies and procedures noted in this Participant Guide. If you experience barriers to compliance with these standards, your coach will work with you to develop a Targeted Support Plan. A Targeted Support Plan may be opened if your program has challenges as noted below:

Participation Agreement - As a Quality First participant, you agree to play an active role in the quality improvement process. This is outlined in the Participant Role and Responsibilities Agreement. A Targeted Support Plan may be opened if you have challenges meeting the expectations in the agreement.

Regulatory Status - If your program is noted as not in good standing with its regulatory body for over 60 days or if there is more than one incident in a 12-month period, participation may be terminated or a Targeted Support Plan may be opened.

Expectation of Progress - As a Quality First participant, it is expected that your program will achieve a quality level rating as a result of your efforts and the support provided. If you do not achieve the ratings noted below, a Targeted Support Plan may be opened.

- Programs rated at 1 star must increase their rating to a 2 star or higher within three assessment cycles. This means that a program rated at 1 star will have two years of improvement supports before a 2 star or higher is expected.
- Programs rated at 2 stars must increase their rating to a 3 star or higher within 3 assessment cycles. This means that a program rated at 2 stars will have two years of improvement supports before a 3 star or higher is expected.

During the Targeted Support Plan, financial incentives spending is limited to only purchases needed to support the focus of the plan. This applies to all programs ordering through the coaching agency.

TEMPORARY CLOSURE

Temporary Closure Policy*: In the event of a short-term program closure or not serving children birth to age 5 on-site, temporary closure status may be requested to place a hold on Quality First services without disenrolling. A participant may request to have temporary closure status for up to 45 days; if the participant does not resume services after 45 days, disenrollment may result.

***This policy applies to enrolled participants only. Newly selected participants must be open, serving children up to age 5 on-site and ready to receive services at the time of selection.**

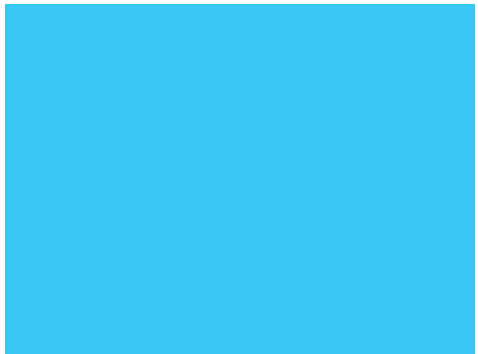
Some examples of a temporary program closure include:

- Facility/property damage due to events such as natural disasters, fire, or flooding
- Health epidemic/personal medical conditions
- Lack of enrollment of children birth to age 5

In the event your program has an unexpected closure, you must complete a Request for Temporary Closure Form and submit it to your Quality First coach. Requests for temporary closure will be reviewed by Quality First. The coach will notify you whether or not the request is approved. Quality First Child Care Scholarships and financial incentives are not available while a program is in temporary closure status. If your program does not resume services after 45 calendar days, your ongoing enrollment in Quality First will be reconsidered, taking into account any extenuating circumstances on a case by case basis.

Participant Guide Resources

State Fiscal Year 2022



Contact Page

CONTACT	NAME	AGENCY	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL
Quality First Coach				
Child Care Health Consultant (CCHC)				
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant (Smart Support)				
Inclusion Coach				
AZ Early Childhood Workforce Registry Outreach Coordinator				
ADE Early Childhood Program Specialist				
ADHS Licensing Surveyor or DES Certification Specialist				
Other				
Extranet User Name		Extranet Password		

National Accrediting Organizations

Transcripts must be received from an accredited institution. “Accredited” means approved by the:

New England Association of Schools and Colleges,
Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools,
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools,
Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges,
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, or
Western Association of Colleges and Schools

National Early Childhood Education Accrediting Organizations

Association Montessori International (AMI)
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
The National Early Childhood Program Accreditation Commission (NECPA)
Association for Christian Schools International
American Montessori Society (AMS)
National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education (NAC)
National Family Child Care Accreditation (NAFCC)

***Head Start programs are also recognized at the same level as accredited program**



Participant Guide Acknowledgement

Participant Site Name and Address:	Participant ID #:
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Quality First is a voluntary program supporting child care and preschool programs across Arizona to improve the quality of early learning provided for children birth to age 5. The Quality First Participant Guide provides a central source of information about the policies and guidelines that support your participation in Quality First. The purpose of the Quality First Participant Guide is to assist you in understanding your responsibilities as a Quality First participant along with the roles and functions of the Quality First supports available to your program. Included with your Participant Guide are resource documents that will provide you with additional guidance as you participate in Quality First. The information contained in the Participant Guide is updated annually. As a Quality First participant, it is your responsibility to review and agree to the policies and procedures described in the Participant Guide annually. If you have any questions related to the policies or procedures described in the Participant Guide, please consult with your Quality First coach or contact the Quality First team at 602.771.5000 or qualityfirst@firstthingsfirst.org.

I, _____, acknowledge that I have received a copy of the SFY22 Quality First Participant Guide. I understand that this Participant Guide and the policies described within it replace any prior editions I have received.

PLEASE READ AND INITIAL EACH ACKNOWLEDGMENT BELOW:

- ___ I have read, understand, and agree to the policies contained in the SFY22 Quality First Participant Guide.
- ___ I understand policies are subject to change and may be updated during the fiscal year. I may access policy updates on the Quality First Extranet’s Resources page.
- ___ I understand participation in Quality First is voluntary and I may elect to decline participation at any time.
- ___ I have received an updated SFY22 Resource Directory.
- ___ I understand that before I gain access to incentive funds, I must review and agree to the terms contained in the SFY22 Incentive Management Agreement.
- ___ I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the Policies and Procedures contained in the SFY22 Participant Guide and Resource Directory.

Participant Name

Participant Signature

Date



Participant Role and Responsibilities Agreement

Participant Site Name and Address:	Participant ID #:
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I, _____, agree to uphold the roles and responsibilities of a Quality First participant.

PLEASE READ AND INITIAL EACH ACKNOWLEDGMENT BELOW

As a Quality First participant, I agree to:

- ___ Maintain my program's compliance with all regulatory requirements set forth by the regulatory body that provides licensure for my program (ADHS, DES, tribal or military authority). If my program experiences an event which causes my program to not be in good standing for a period of over 60 days or if my program experiences more than one event within 12 months, my participation in Quality First may be terminated.
- ___ Take leadership of my quality improvement process. I will work with my Quality First Coach, CCHC, and other technical assistance providers to identify how their supports can complement my quality improvement process.
- ___ If my program includes other personnel such as staff or volunteers, I will communicate my program's goals for quality improvement with them to make sustainable quality improvements to my program.
- ___ Maintain professionalism in my interactions with families, colleagues, staff, and technical assistance providers. I will meet with my coach and technical assistance providers as applicable and as agreed to when scheduling on-site visits. In the event that I cannot attend or will be late, I will notify the appropriate individuals in advance.
- ___ Maintain respectful communication and interaction with children, families, colleagues, staff, and technical assistance providers avoiding prejudice or lack of fairness towards individuals or groups of people. I will respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual, respect diversity in children, families, and colleagues, and recognize that children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust and respect.
- ___ Take a proactive approach to avoid the expulsion of children from my program. My program will strive to build individual relationships with each child and family; make individualized adaptations in teaching strategies, learning environments, and curriculum; and consult with the family so that each child will benefit from the best placement.
- ___ Maintain accurate and up-to-date information about my program (including program operations, staffing, and enrollment) on the First Things First extranet. I will review the information on the extranet regularly and make updates as changes take place, at least quarterly.

Participant Name

Participant Signature

Date