



Rising Stars for ME: Maine's Quality Rating and Improvement System

What is a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS)?

Maine has a new QRIS, called *Rising Stars for ME*. *Rising Stars for ME* is a five-Star program designed to increase awareness of the importance of quality early childhood and out-of-school time experiences

Rising Stars for ME has three goals:

- To recognize early childhood and out-of-school time programs that meet standards of evidence-based quality practices.
- To encourage and support programs to engage in continuous quality improvement efforts.
- To provide families with identifiable standards of quality.

Rising Stars for ME takes the place of *Quality for ME*, Maine's QRIS first implemented in 2008. During the revision process, many stakeholders throughout the state, representing family child care, out-of-school time programs, Head Start, center-based care, accredited and non-accredited programs, families, and partner agencies participated in focus groups, surveys, and statewide meetings to share their ideas. Their feedback helped to shape the revised system.

Why is *Rising Stars for ME* important?

Rising Stars for ME is important because we all care and want what is best for Maine's children. Studies have shown that children in quality early care programs have better developed language skills, motor skills, and reasoning ability when they get to school. They are more likely to be successful throughout their school years, less likely to repeat grades, and more likely to graduate from high school.¹ If all children receive high quality early care, not only will they be better prepared for the future, but communities can also expect to spend less on remedial school programs where the costs for correction are much higher.

Is participation with *Rising Stars for ME* required?

Yes. As of 2021, all licensed child care programs in Maine must be enrolled with the QRIS. On March 27, 2023, all programs moved from the *Quality for ME* system into *Rising Stars for*

¹ Burchinal, M. R., Kainz, K., Cai, K., Tout, K., Zaslow, M., Martinez-Beck, I., & Rathgeb, C. (2009). *Early care and education quality and child outcomes*. (OPRE Research-to-Policy Research-to-Practice Brief No. 2009-15). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services.





ME. All programs retained their enrollment and shifted up one rating to accommodate the shift to the five-Star system.

In addition to licensed child care programs, all non-relative license-exempt providers receiving Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP) funds must also participate with *Rising Stars for ME*. Those programs are automatically assigned to Star 1. **All licensed programs receive a minimum rating of Star 2.**

What is the difference between the Maine Roads to Quality Registry and *Rising Stars for ME*?

The Maine Roads to Quality Registry is a part of the Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN). MRTQ PDN is a collaborative partnership between the Catherine Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine, the University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies, the Maine Afterschool Network, and the Department of Psychology at the University of Maine.

Both MRTQ PDN and *Rising Stars for ME* are systems for which individuals or programs complete applications and are assigned a level or rating. For this reason, the differences between the two can be confusing. The chart below clarifies the important distinctions:

 <p>RISING STARS FOR ME Maine's Quality Rating and Improvement System</p>	 <p>MAINE ROADS TO QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK</p>
<p><i>Rising Stars for ME</i> is a system for the PROGRAM.</p>	<p>The MRTQ Registry is a system for INDIVIDUALS.</p>
<p><i>Rising Stars for ME</i> uses program data on specific Standards to give PROGRAMS a rating from 1 to 5 Stars.</p>	<p>The MRTQ Registry uses education, training, and experience to assign INDIVIDUALS to a Level on their chosen Career Lattice.</p>
<p>Enrollment with <i>Rising Stars for ME</i> must be renewed every two years.</p>	<p>Registry membership should be updated regularly, but never expires.</p>



How is *Rising Stars for ME* different from Child Care Licensing?

The State of Maine regulates the need for and provision of a license to operate a child care program. Licensing regulations set the minimum standards that ensure the basic health, safety, and developmental needs of children are being met. Participation in *Rising Stars for ME* is intended to recognize and promote higher quality care and to support and reward programs that engage in continuous quality improvement efforts to move up the Stars.

Both Child Care Licensing and Rising Stars for ME are administered by Maine's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), but each is managed within a different division. Licenses are issued and monitored by the Division of Licensing and Regulatory Services, Child Care Licensing Unit. *Rising Stars for ME* is administered by the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), Child Care Unit. The divisions will share information regarding a program's current licensing status and compliance history, but Child Care Licensing staff do not make decisions about the Star Rating of a program. OCFS makes the final determination on a program's Star rating and issues the appropriate certificate.

OCFS makes the final determination on a program's Star rating and issues the appropriate certificate. Star ratings are valid for two years, unless a program no longer meets the standards for their assigned Star.

What if my program has a conditional license?

A conditional license is a type of license that "may be issued by the Department when the licensee or applicant fails to comply with the applicable law and rules and, in the judgment of the Commissioner, the best interest of the public would be so served by issuing a conditional license. The department shall specify in writing when and what corrections must be made during the term of the conditional license" (see [Child Care Licensing Rules](#)).

Issuance of a conditional license will result in a temporary change to Restricted Status.

In the event this should happen, it is the program's responsibility to inform families of the change in status and to revise any publications used for marketing that refer to the program's participation in *Rising Stars for ME*.

A program given a Restricted Status will receive a written plan of corrections from Child Care Licensing to resolve the non-compliance. Upon completion of the plan and/or determination that the program is in compliance, the program may update their application and be rated at a Star 2 or higher.

How does national accreditation fit into *Rising Stars for ME*?

Accreditation is awarded by national professional organizations to programs that meet designated standards of quality. Although accreditation is part of the requirement to obtain a Star 5 rating, a few additional standards are unique to Maine included in *Rising Stars for*



ME. A number of organizations award accreditation to early childhood and out-of-school time programs, but for the purposes of placement at Star 5, *Rising Stars for ME* recognizes the following accrediting bodies:

- The National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
 - Family child care programs
 - Small facilities
- The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
 - Child care programs licensed for thirteen or more children that serve children age 8 and younger
- The American Montessori Society (AMS)
- Head Start Programs that meet performance standards as evaluated by Head Start
- The Council on Accreditation (COA)
 - Out-of-school time programs
 - Social service agencies with an early childhood or out-of-school time component

What are the incentives for being part of *Rising Stars for ME*?

- Parents or guardians of any dependent child(ren) enrolled in programs at a Star 5 with *Quality for ME* are eligible to receive a double child care tax credit on their Maine income tax.
- Families receiving Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP) funding can receive a reduction in their Parent Fee:
 - Choosing a program at a Star 4 will result in a 10% reduction in Parent Fee determination.
 - Choosing a Star 5 program will receive a 20% reduction in their Parent Fee determination.
- Programs who accept CCSP funds are eligible for higher tiered reimbursement rates at Stars 3, 4, and 5 with *Rising Stars for ME*.
- Programs who pay state taxes and have a Quality Improvement Plan may apply for a Child Care Investment Tax Credit for expenses made to improve quality.
- Star rating information is displayed for all programs in the search results on Child Care Choices (<https://childcarechoices.me>). Coming soon – programs at Stars 4 and 5 will have the option to display additional programs information on Child Care Choices, including a photo, tag line, and web address.

What are the supports available to programs participating with *Quality for ME*?

One of the goals of *Rising Stars for ME* is to encourage and support programs engaging in continuous quality improvement efforts to increase their rating. Those supports include:



- Technical assistance, including on-site or virtual consultation, from MRTQ PDN.
- Programs that choose to pursue national accreditation through NAFCC, NAEYC, or COA may be eligible for targeted technical assistance and financial support through accreditation support cohorts.
- Programs will be able to access resources that will aid them in meeting many of the criteria within *Rising Stars for ME*.

What are the steps to applying with *Rising Stars for ME*?

The following steps are the general process for enrolling a program with *Rising Stars for ME*:

1. Ensure that all direct service staff (including administrative staff who work with children) are members of the MRTQ Registry. [Join the MRTQ Registry here.](#)
2. At least one Program Owner/Director or designated administrator must have [Director of Record Access \(DoRA\)](#). (DoRA requires MRTQ Registry membership.)
3. Once all staff are current Registry Members and at least one DoRA has been designated, the program can apply for *Rising Stars for ME* at <http://risingstarsforme.org>.
4. Complete application instructions are available on the [OCFS website](#).

What is the process for a site visit?

The purpose of this announced and mutually agreed upon visit by OCFS is to review and assess the quality of child care being provided as well as compliance with Department rules and policies. During an on-site review, OCFS will:

- Review the selected documents from the E-Portfolio to validate the Program's self-assessment completed during the *Rising Stars for ME* application;
- Observe the program's typical daily activities, routines, and interactions between adults and children relevant to the *Rising Stars for ME* Standards and requirements.

Programs are selected from a random list of programs with Step 2, 3, 4 or 5 ratings based on geographic regions. This process is important in the continuing efforts to maintain integrity of all programs enrolled in *Rising Stars for ME*.

When a Program is selected for a site visit, OCFS will contact the Program to arrange a date and time for the visit, and provide written notification announcing the site visit to the program no less than 30 calendar days prior to the site visit. OCFS will advise the program what information and materials must be provided to the OCFS employee during the site visit and notify the program when to expect a written summary of the site visit. OCFS will send a letter summarizing the site visit to the program within ten business days.



What if an agency operates multiple sites?

Just as each site requires a separate license, each site will require a separate application for *Rising Stars for ME*.

What if the program does not agree with the Star rating from OCFS?

Programs that believe their Star rating is incorrect, or who do not feel the Star rating granted by OCFS is accurate, may appeal the decision by requesting in writing an informal review by OCFS. If the program is not satisfied with the result of the informal review, they may request an administrative hearing. The following policy is in place for this purpose:

A program must request an informal review and obtain a decision before requesting an administrative hearing. If the program is dissatisfied with the informal review decision, the program owner/operator may write to OCFS at the Department of Health and Human Services to request a hearing provided he/she does so within ten (10) calendar days of the date of the Director's report on the Department's action. Subsequent appeal proceedings will be limited only to those issues raised during the informal review. The Office of Administrative Hearings shall notify the program in writing of the date, time, and place of the hearing, and shall designate a presiding officer. Programs will be given at least twenty (20) calendar days' advance notice of the hearing date. The hearing shall be held in conformity with the Maine Administrative Procedures Act, 5 M.R.S.A. §8001 et seq. and the Administrative Hearings Regulations.

Contact information:

Rising Stars for ME

- By phone at 1-888-900-0055
- By email risingstarsforme@maine.edu

The Department of Health and Human (DHHS), Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), Services Child Care Subsidy Program

- By phone at 1-877-680-5866 or 207-624-7999
- By email CCSP.DHHS@maine.gov
- By fax 207-287-6308

Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network

- By phone at 1-888-900-0055
- By email mrtq.contact@maine.edu



Appendix A: Glossary

Abuse or neglect means a threat to a Child's health or welfare by physical, mental, or emotional injury or impairment, sexual abuse or exploitation, deprivation of essential needs or lack of protection from these, by a person responsible for the Child.

Accreditation means the process that validates a Program employs quality environments, processes, and procedures in delivering programming that conforms to national standards.

Administrative Hearing means a proceeding pursuant to the Administrative Hearings regulations, 10-144 C.M.R. ch. 1. Refer to:
<https://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/rules/10/144/144c001.doc>.

Adult means a person at least eighteen (18) years old and over.

Building Block Approach means all the Standards in each Star Rating must be met by the Program to advance to the next Star Rating.

Career Lattice means Maine Roads to Quality's Career Lattice that awards levels of achievements to persons based on training and employment history or earned credentials. Refer to <https://mrtq.org/registry/>.

Child and Youth Assessment means an ongoing process that includes observation of a child and/or youth that provides information about development over time.

Child or Children means a person or persons under the age of thirteen (13).

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) means the federally funded, State-administered Program that assists low-income families who need child care due to work, work-related training and/or attending school. Includes CCDF Mandatory, CCDF Discretionary, CCDF Matching, TANF Transfer Funds, and State funds used for State match and maintenance of effort.

Child Care Facility means a facility licensed as a Child Care Facility (including child care centers, nursery schools, small child care facilities, and other Programs) by the Department.

Child Care Staff Member means a person:

- a. Not related to all Children for whom child care services are provided;
- b. Employed by a Program for compensation (including independent contractors); and, either/or
- c. Whose activities involve the care or supervision of Children;
- d. Who otherwise has unsupervised access to Children who are cared for, or supervised by, a Program.



Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP) means a Department Program that helps eligible families pay for child care so parents can work, go to school, or participate in a job-training program. CCSP is also available for eligible families where the adult(s) are retired and are the legal guardian of a child.

Child Care Subsidy Program License-Exempt Provider Agreement means the agreement between a Child Care Provider and the Department that outlines the conditions under which the Child Care Provider may receive a Child Care Subsidy Payment from the Department.

Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential means the national Early Care and Education credential administered by the Council for Professional Recognition.

Children's Licensing and Investigation Services (CLIS) means a team within the Department that licenses and oversees all Child Care Facilities and Family Child Care Providers in Maine, as well as Children's residential facilities, child placing agencies, and emergency shelters and homeless shelters for youth.

Child with Special Needs means a Child who:

- a. Is up to thirteen (13) years of age who has been determined and documented by a qualified professional to be a "Child with a disability" as defined in section 602 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. §1401);
- b. Is eligible for early intervention services under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. §§1431, et seq.); is eligible for services under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. §701);
- c. Meets the definition of disabled under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) (42 U.S.C. §12102); or
- d. Is considered at-risk for health and/or developmental problems because of established biological risk factors, and/or because of identified environmental risk factors including, but not limited to, homelessness, abuse and/or neglect, lead poisoning, and prenatal drug or alcohol exposure.

Conditional License means a license issued by the Department to a Family Child Care Provider or Child Care Facility for a term not to exceed twelve (12) months, which specifies when and what corrections the licensee must complete to achieve compliance. A conditional license may be issued by the Department, in accordance with 22 M.R.S. §7802.

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Plan means the support provided to Programs to attain, maintain, or advance to a specific Star Rating.

Council on Accreditation (COA) means the international, independent, nonprofit, human service accrediting organization.

Department means the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.



Department-approved means consent by the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) State Child Care Administrator or his/her designee.

Director means a person with primary responsibility for administering a Program and ultimate supervisory authority over any Child Care Staff Members. A Director may or may not be a Program Owner.

Early Care and Education means the care, education, protection, supervision, and guidance of Children from birth through school age.

Early Care and Education Program (Program) means any type of child care programming, such as by a Family Child Care Provider, License-Exempt Child Care Provider, Child Care Facility, Recreational Program, or Head Start.

Early Care and Education Program Improvement Plan means a Department-approved written strategic approach to ensure all Standards will be met by a Program to retain a specific Star Rating.

E-Portfolio means the electronic (uploaded) documentation demonstrating that Standards at each Star Rating are or have been met. The E-Portfolio is part of the *Rising Stars for ME* application process.

Family Child Care Provider means a person licensed as a Family Child Care Provider by the Department.

Family Survey means a series of questions distributed annually to, and completed by, families to gather input on the Program's strengths and opportunities for improvement.

Head Start means the federal Program promoting school readiness of Children ages birth to five (5) from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Infant means a Child six (6) weeks of age through twelve (12) months of age.

Infant and Toddler Maine Early Learning and Development Standards (IT MELDS) means the Infant and Toddler Maine Early Learning and Development Standards, a document first published in 2006 as "Supporting Maine's Infants & Toddlers: Guidelines for Learning and Development" and revised from time to time by Maine's Professional Development Network and OCFS. IT MELDS is available from the Department on request or can be accessed online at <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/support-for-families/child-care/qris>.

Informal Review means a review of all necessary documentation by the Department to determine if the Program Star Rating is accurate.

License means written permission by the Department, whether initial, renewal, temporary or conditional, that authorizes a person to be a Family Child Care Provider or operate a Child



Care Facility. For purposes of this rule, license has the same meaning as the certification referred to in 22 MRS §8301-A.

License-Exempt Child Care Provider means:

- a. A Maine resident;
- b. Eighteen (18) years of age or older;
- c. Who provides child care services, but is not required to be licensed under Maine law.

Licensing Violations means serious violations of the licensing rule for the Program that pose serious risk to Children.

Maine's Early Learning and Development Standards (MELDS) means Maine's Early Learning and Development Standards, a guide for state and local early childhood educators' efforts to improve practice and programs for young children from the age of three until kindergarten entrance, jointly published by the Department and the Maine Department of Education in March 2015. MELDS is available from the Department on request, or online at <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/support-for-families/child-care/qris>.

Maine's Roads to Quality Registry means an on-line portal that uses a member's work, education, and training histories, along with any professional credentials, to assign a level on the appropriate Career Lattice.

National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) means the national professional association dedicated to promoting quality child care by strengthening the profession of Family Child Care.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) means the national professional association dedicated to improving the well-being of all young Children, focusing on the quality of educational and developmental services for all Children from birth through age eight (8).

Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) means the office within the Department that administers *Rising Stars for ME*.

Out-of-School Time (OST) means a supervised Program that Children regularly attend when school is not in session. An Out of School Time Program may be one of the following: a licensed as a Family Child Care Provider, or Child Care Facility, a License-Exempt Child Care Provider, or a Recreational Program.

Program means an Early Care and Education or Out-of-School Time Program.

Program Owner means a person with any ownership interest in a Program or whose name appears on any license issued by the Department for the Program.



Provider Handbook means the document that includes policies, procedures, guidelines, guidance, or persons employed with a Program.

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) means the system that utilizes Standards to evaluate and document the quality of Programs.

Recreational Program means a Program not licensed as a Family Child Care Provider or Child Care Facility because it is (1) a residential or overnight summer camp established solely for recreational and educational purposes, licensed in accordance with 10-144 CMR Chapter 208, Rules Relating to Youth Camps, Primitive, and Trip Camping, or (2) a Program offering relevant instruction to Children for the purpose of teaching a singular skill such as karate, dance or basketball.

Relative Child Care Provider means a License-Exempt Child Care Provider who:

- a. Provides child care services to no more than two (2) of their grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews, or siblings;
- b. Is eighteen (18) years of age or older;
- c. Resides in Maine; and
- d. Does not live with the relative Children for whom they care.

Requirement means activities and/or education a Program must conduct, provide, or receive in each Rising Stars for ME Standard to attain, maintain, or advance to the next Star Rating.

Restricted Rating means a licensed Program that falls below a Star 2 Rating due to having a Conditional License. The Restricted Rating is for the duration of the Conditional License.

Rising Stars for ME means Maine's QRIS, which assigns Programs a Rating of Star 1 (one) through 5 Stars.

Rising Stars for ME Inclusive Practices Checklist means a document that expands on *Rising Stars for ME* QRIS with explicit indicators that focus on evidence-informed practices that support the inclusion of Children with special needs and/or disabilities.

Standard means a level of achievement identified as necessary in *Maine's Rising Stars for ME* Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Star Rating means a Program's Rating of Star 1 (one) through 5 (five) Stars, assigned by the Department based on satisfaction of the Requirements for its Program type for that Star Rating as provided in this rule.

Self-assessment means the process of self-reflection to refine practices toward Program improvement and the provision of high-quality care.



Site Visit means a formal in-person visit by the Department to a Program to review and assess the quality of child care being provided as well as compliance with Department rules and policies for providing such care.

State Child Care Administrator means the person in the Department responsible for administering the CCDF grant.

Technical Assistance means the provision of targeted and customized supports by a professional with subject matter and adult learning knowledge and skills to develop or strengthen processes, knowledge, application, or implementation of services by recipient.

Toddler means a Child thirteen (13) through thirty-six (36) months of age.

Volunteer means a person who helps or provides services without compensation in a Program.

Youth means a person who has reached their thirteenth (13) birthday, but who has not yet reached their eighteenth (18) birthday.