

Early Achievers

Participant Operating Guidelines



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I. Introduction:

a. Overview: What is Early Achievers?

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) has developed Early Achievers, Washington’s quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), to help early care and education programs offer high-quality care that supports each child’s learning and development. Early Achievers is a *voluntary* program designed to:

- Support child care providers to provide high-quality care by providing resources including training, coaching and incentives;
- Help parents and caregivers find high-quality child care and early learning programs that fit their needs by providing information about facility quality; and
- Ensure that children have high-quality early learning experiences that help them develop the skills they need to be successful in school and life.

Early Achievers is a key strategy of the Statewide Early Learning Plan, Washington’s roadmap to improving early learning so that all children can start school ready to succeed. In addition, Early Achievers is the centerpiece of Washington’s Race to the Top- Early Learning Challenge grant application. In December 2011, Washington was one of nine states to win Race to the Top, a competitive federal grant designed to support states’ efforts to improve early learning and development programs for young children. Washington will receive \$60 million over four years to build upon its existing early learning efforts to ensure that all children are ready for success in school and life. Early Achievers expansion rolled out in regions across the state between July 1, 2012, and July, 1, 2013, and is now available in all communities.

Early Achievers is designed to align, support, and build upon other key early learning programs in Washington, particularly WaKIDS, Washington’s Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills, and the professional development career lattice. Creating seamless programs for children and families in Washington is key to helping all children grow, develop, and successfully transition from early childhood into early elementary.

b. History in Washington

Early Achievers was developed in collaboration with child care providers across the state. For two years, the Department of Early Learning (DEL) and Thrive by Five Washington worked with approximately 90 providers in five communities to test and implement elements of QRIS including coaching and program assessment. An independent evaluation of the field test found that when child care providers receive

one-on-one coaching and a modest amount of money to make changes to their program, the quality of the care they give children starts to quickly increase. Through their commitment to quality improvement and supporting children and families in their care, participants provided valuable insight and feedback to DEL that has helped shape and refine the Early Achievers model.

c. Commitment to Continuous Quality Improvement

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) refers to the *ongoing* process of:

- Learning about strengths and areas to grow using multiple sources of information;
- Creating a plan with goals, timelines and responsibilities;
- Testing and implementing solutions; and
- Evaluating the results and revising the plan.

Early Achievers is committed to CQI at multiple levels:

- *Facility level:* Early Achievers empowers facility staff and leadership to identify and achieve quality improvement goals and improve practice through work with Technical Assistance Specialists, Rating Readiness Consultants, and Coaches. Early Achievers encourages ongoing quality improvement work that builds facility capacity and includes methods such as observation, reflection, self-assessment, and participation in communities of practice.
- *Partner level:* Partners working to implement Early Achievers (e.g., TA Specialists, Coaches, Regional Coordinators, trainers, and evaluators) participate in ongoing professional development such as training, mentoring, and reflective practice, and gather lessons learned from participants to recommend and develop improvements in service delivery.
- *State system level:* The Department of Early Learning reviews implementation of Early Achievers, consults with implementing partners, and considers successes and lessons learned in order to adjust and improve policy on an ongoing basis, and communicate reasons behind changes.

d. Purpose of the Operating Guidelines

This document is designed to:

- Help facilities understand key components of Early Achievers to ensure successful participation;
- Provide a detailed overview of Early Achievers policies and expectations; and

- Serve as a reference tool throughout participation.

While it is the facility's responsibility to read, understand and follow the guidelines in this document, your regional Child Care Aware of Washington agency is available to work with you to answer questions or concerns, and help you successfully implement these guidelines. The term **facility** will be used throughout this document to indicate child care centers and family home child care participating in Early Achievers.

e. Updates to Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

Participant Operating Guidelines will be updated annually in July. The current version of the Operating Guidelines is always available on the Department of Early Learning (DEL) website in the *Early Achievers Participant Toolkit*. The Operating Guidelines posted on the DEL website replaces all former versions of the Operating Guidelines. Participants are responsible for reading and adhering to the current Operating Guidelines.

In the event that an Early Achievers policy change is made in between annual updates, the information will be sent to Early Achievers participants via an email from DEL, titled, "*Operating Guidelines Update*". In addition, Operating Guidelines updates will be available on the DEL website at www.del.wa.gov/care/qris.

II. Early Achievers Partners: Roles within the System

a. Agency Roles

There are many organizations across the state that are critical to the success of Early Achievers, including the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges and Thrive by Five Washington Early Learning Coalitions. The following agencies are key partners in direct implementation of Early Achievers, and have distinct roles as described in Figure 1:

- The Department of Early Learning (DEL)
- Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA of WA)
- University of Washington (UW)

Figure 1: Implementation Partners

Q (Quality)	All agencies promote child care quality and a commitment to continuous quality improvement.
R (Rating)	The University of Washington (UW) is the lead agency for evaluation, assessment and rating assignment. UW is also responsible for development of the Early Achievers Coach Framework, coach training, and ongoing coach mentoring.
I (Improvement)	Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA of WA) is the lead agency for coordinating improvement activities including coaching, technical assistance, professional development and training. Regions have Regional Coordinators, who oversee implementation across the region, and regional Child Care Aware of Washington agencies that work directly with participating facilities. CCA is responsible for offering training, coaching, technical assistance, and rating readiness consultation.
S (System)	The Department of Early Learning (DEL) is the lead administrative agency for systems development and integration, and Early Achievers policy. DEL owns and manages the data systems used in Early Achievers, and includes child care licensing, which is the foundation of Early Achievers Level 1.

Each region has a regional Child Care Aware of Washington agency that manages and coordinates local efforts, and will be your point of contact throughout participation. The term **local lead agency** will be used throughout this document to indicate the regional

Child Care Aware of Washington agency responsible for Early Achievers implementation in your community.

b. Mandated Reporting

All Early Achievers staff, including but not limited to data collectors, community liaisons, coaches and technical assistance specialists, are mandatory reporters under Washington State Law, and as such any instances of suspected child abuse and neglect must be reported directly to Child Protective Services.

III. Eligibility

a. Facility Type

The following facility types are eligible to participate in Early Achievers:

i. **Licensing and certification requirements:**

- **Licensed or Certified child care centers or family home child care**
- **Tribal, school based, and military facilities that are *Certified for Payment Only***
 - Military, school based, and Tribal facilities that wish to participate in Early Achievers will need to become ***Certified for Payment Only*** with the Department of Early Learning in order to participate in Early Achievers participation.
 - To download forms to request Certification for Payment only, visit: www.del.wa.gov/publications/licensing/
 - For more information about the tribal certification process, visit: www.del.wa.gov/government/tribal/certification.aspx

ii. **Head Start and ECEAP programs**

ECEAP (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program) and Head Start are comprehensive preschool programs that provide free services and support to eligible children and their families. ECEAP is funded by Washington State. Head Start is funded by the federal government. Facilities that serve Head Start or ECEAP funded slots will follow one of two Early Achievers participation pathways based on the following criteria:

-  *Percentage of total facility slots that are funded by Head Start and/or ECEAP*
- **Head Start/ECEAP Early Achievers Pathway**
 -  **Eligibility: 75% or more of total facility slots are Head Start or ECEAP slots**
 - A separate Early Achievers pathway has been designed specifically for Head Start and ECEAP that recognizes and builds upon existing quality standards, streamlines participation, and reduces duplication of efforts. This pathway was built based on feedback and lessons learned from a 2012-13 pilot led by the Department of Early Learning. The Head Start and ECEAP Early Achievers participation pathway is led by the grantee or contractor, and has different requirements, supports and incentives than

described in this document. Please contact your grantee or contractor for more information.

- **Licensed Child Care Early Achievers Pathway**

- ** Eligibility: Facility is licensed and less than 75% of total facility slots are Head Start or ECEAP slots**

- Facility will participate fully in the traditional Early Achievers pathway as described in this document.

iii. Ages of children served

Eligible facilities serve children between the ages of birth to five; facilities serving school age children *only* are not eligible to participate in Early Achievers at this time.

b. Child Enrollment Requirements

i. During Early Achievers Registration and Level 2 participation

DEL understands that enrollment can fluctuate, especially in family child care. Therefore, low enrollment will not impact a facility's eligibility to *register* for Early Achievers and begin to work on Level 2 requirements; however, facilities must ensure that there are three children birth to 5 enrolled before requesting an on-site evaluation after completion of Level 2.

ii. On-site evaluation

- There must be a minimum of three children ages birth to 5 enrolled and present at the time of the on-site evaluation in order for an assessment and rating to take place. If a facility requests an evaluation and does not have at least three children ages birth to 5 enrolled and present during the on-site visit, the evaluation visit may be cancelled and the facility will remain a Level 2.
- If a facility evaluation is cancelled due to low enrollment, the facility will be required to wait a minimum of one application cohort period (3 months) before they are considered eligible to receive another evaluation visit. Facilities must demonstrate that they have three children enrolled and present per classroom prior to a 2nd data collection visit. Regional Coordinators cannot approve on-site evaluation requests for facilities who do not meet this policy.
- If a second data collection is scheduled and there are not a minimum of three children present when the data collection team arrives, the facility must wait a minimum of one year before a 3rd request for on-site evaluation will be considered.

- Children who attend on a regular basis (at least once a week) will be considered for Early Achievers. Families who have children enrolled in a program regularly for a minimum of one day a week will complete an Early Achievers consent form.
- Children who attend less than once a week, on a drop in basis, will not have their files reviewed during the records review process. These families still must be notified of the sites participation in Early Achievers and be alerted to the possibility that a Data Collector will be conducting observations in the child’s classroom. The responsibility for notifying these parents is with the provider. The Community Liaison should help providers to identify the files of children that do not attend the program regularly to prevent data collectors from inadvertently reviewing them. Information about children on drop-in schedules and how the files have been identified should be provided to data collectors prior to the file review so the files can be excluded.

iii. Ongoing requirements (after completion of Level 2)

- Facilities are expected to report enrollment on a yearly basis via the MERIT /Early Achievers Tab.
- Facilities that drop below a minimum enrollment of three children are required to notify their Coach (Level 3-5 facilities) or assigned Technical Assistance (TA) Specialist (Level 2 facilities) from their local lead agency within seven business days. Coaches or TA Specialists will work directly with facilities to develop a plan to increase enrollment.
- If a facility has **no children** enrolled for 60 calendar days, the local lead agency reserves the right to initiate the termination process described in *Participation Requirements and Expectations: Criteria for Termination* (Section 8: part h).

c. Licensing Status

i. Requirements: definition of good standing for participation:

- Facilities must be in **good standing** with licensing in order to participate in Early Achievers defined as having an active license that is **not** suspended, revoked or on probationary status.

ii. How licensing status affects registration and participation

- **Initial License**
 - **Registration:** Facilities that hold an initial license may register to participate in Early Achievers and can begin to complete Level 2 requirements. However, the facility cannot submit the Early Achievers Application for Level 2 or move forward with the rating process until the facility receives a full license.

- **No Referral Status**
 - **Registration:** Facilities that are on “no referral status” may register to participate in Early Achievers.
 - **During Participation:** If a facility is placed on “no referral” status they may continue participating in Early Achievers activities.
- **Revocation**
 - **Registration:** Facilities with a license that is revoked may not register to participate in Early Achievers.
 - **During participation:** If a facility’s license becomes revoked while enrolled in Early Achievers, the facility will be immediately terminated from Early Achievers, regardless of facility rating. All activities related to Early Achievers will be terminated.
- **Summary Suspension**
 - **Registration:** Facilities with a license that is on summary suspension may not register to participate in Early Achievers.
 - **During participation:**
 - If a facility’s license is put on summary suspension while enrolled in Early Achievers, all activities and services related to Early Achievers will be put on hold pending the outcome of the investigation. In addition, a facility may not request or participate in on-site evaluation while on summary suspension.
 - If the summary suspension leads to a full restoration of the facility’s license, the facility may continue full Early Achievers participation. If summary suspension leads to revocation of the facility’s license, the facility will be immediately terminated from Early Achievers and all activities related to Early Achievers will be terminated. If summary suspension leads to a probationary license, please see requirements below.
- **Probationary License**
 - **Registration:** Facilities that hold a probationary license may register to participate in Early Achievers and begin to complete Level 2 activities. However, to remain in Early Achievers, the facility’s license must be reinstated as a full license within six months of registering for Early Achievers. If the probationary license is not reinstated as a full license within 6 months, participation in Early Achievers will be terminated. Facilities cannot submit the Early Achievers Application for Level 2 to

achieve Level 2 status until the probationary license status is reinstated to a full license.

○ **During participation:**

- If a facility is issued a probationary license during completion of Level 2, the facility may continue Level 2 participation. However, facilities cannot submit the Early Achievers Application for Level 2 to achieve Level 2 status until the probationary license status is reinstated to a full license.
- Facilities with a probationary license are not eligible to request or participate in on-site evaluation for rating.
- The facility may continue to work with a Coach or TA Specialist in partnership with the facility licensor. Since licensing is the foundation (Level 1) of Early Achievers, it is important during probationary status to actively involve the licensor in order to address issues and timelines regarding licensing compliance. The Coach or TA Specialist will meet regularly with the facility licensor to ensure that all support given to facility during the probation period focuses on reinstatement of a full license. All technical assistance and coaching provided during the probation period must focus on the reinstatement of a full license.
- To remain in Early Achievers, the facility's license must be reinstated as a full license within six months of the date the license was initially placed on probationary status. If the probationary license is not reinstated as a full license within 6 months, participation in Early Achievers will be terminated.

iii. Future participation

In the case that a facility is terminated from Early Achievers due to license revocation, summary suspension that results in revocation, or probation that is not resolved within six months, the facility may reapply for participation after one year from the date of termination following the procedures outlined in *Participant Requirements and Expectations: Reapplication to Early Achievers* (Section 8: part k). In order to be eligible to reapply for participation in Early Achievers, the facility must not be in a suspended, revoked or probationary status.

IV. Early Achievers Quality Standards

a. Overview

Early Achievers, Washington’s quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), provides a common set of expectations and standards to define and measure the quality of early learning settings. The Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards (also known as the Quality Standards) promote and support comprehensive facility quality and help ensure that quality practices are having direct impact on individual children’s progress. The Department of Early Learning (DEL) and the University of Washington (UW) developed the standards based on learnings from a QRIS field test.

All licensed and certified early learning settings are included in the framework, though participation is voluntary: licensing or certification is the foundation of Early Achievers and is considered Level 1; programs that choose to participate in Early Achievers earn rating Levels 2 through 5 based on participation and evaluation. The following section describes the structure of the rating system, what the rating levels mean, and how facilities earn ratings.

b. Rating Structure

Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) across the nation use the following approaches to create ratings:

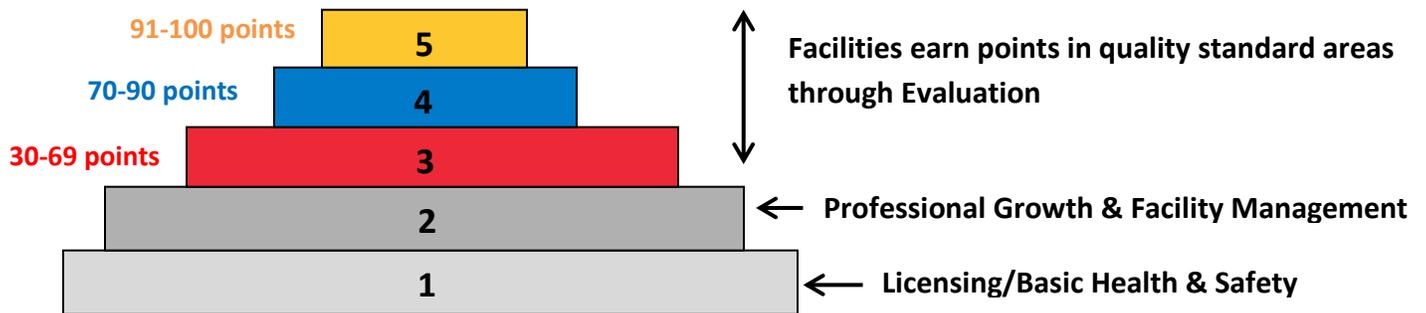
- **Building Block Approach:** Facilities must meet every component of each standard in each level before moving to the next level
- **Point System Approach:** Facilities earn points in quality standard areas and rating is based on total cumulative points
- **Hybrid Approach:** A combination of building block and points system approaches; requires that all facilities meet the same basic foundational quality, while allowing for facilities to achieve additional points based on program strengths, philosophy, approach, etc.

Early Achievers is a **hybrid model**, meaning that all participating facilities share the same basic foundational quality at Levels 1 and 2, and earn points to achieve Levels 3-5.

Figure 2: Overview of Early Achievers Levels 1-5

Level 1	Licensing or certification that includes child care centers and family child care, military, tribal, Head Start and ECEAP programs. Early Achievers is a voluntary program and facilities must register to participate. No facilities will be automatically enrolled in Early Achievers and facilities that choose not to participate will not be publically identified as Level 1.
Level 2	Level 2 is considered <i>Professional Growth and Facility Management</i> and is designed to help facilities understand Early Achievers, the quality standards and program requirements, and the child outcome and school readiness goals of the system. Program leaders (child care center directors and family home child care primary providers) complete a series of activities to prepare the facility for successful participation and evaluation including training, self-assessment and participation in MERIT.
Level 3	Upon completion of Level 2, facilities that choose to pursue rating will earn points based on evaluation on four quality standard areas: Child Outcomes; Curriculum, Learning Environments, & Interactions; Professional Development & Training; and Family Engagement & Partnership.
Level 4	
Level 5	

Figure 3: Overview of Early Achievers Points by Level



c. **Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards (Quality Standards)**

The Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards (Appendix A) focus on achieving positive child outcomes for each child in care. There are four **quality standard** areas:

1. **Child Outcomes**
2. **Facility Curriculum & Learning Environment & Interactions**
3. **Professional Development & Training**
4. **Family Engagement & Partnership**

Each quality standard area is made up of several **components**, which describe ways in which a facility may demonstrate quality within the Quality Standard area. For example, “*Developmental Screening is conducted within 90 days of enrollment and results are shared with parents*” is one component within the Child Outcomes Quality Standard area.

The Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards provide a common set of standards for all programs, while recognizing that quality looks different in different settings based on program philosophy and the needs of the families and children served. Therefore, participants can demonstrate quality practices in a variety of ways.

The following table provides *general* examples of the types of facility practices that the quality standards measure in each area. Please refer to the Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards (Appendix A) for specific components.

Figure 4: Quality Standard Areas: Examples

Quality Standard Area	Examples of how facilities earn points in this Standard Area:
Child Outcomes (10 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen children to spot developmental concerns • Provide ongoing assessment to learn about each child’s strengths and needs • Share information about children’s growth and progress with families to promote school readiness • Use information about each child’s strengths and needs to plan activities and curriculum

<p>Curriculum & Learning Environment & Interactions (70 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment Rating Scales (ERS) Assessment: measures availability and variety of learning materials and activities; organization of space, materials, schedule and routine to enhance learning; interactions between children and providers; use of materials to promote learning • Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Assessment: measures how providers interact with children to create supportive, nurturing relationships, enhance learning, and provide instruction • Implement a curriculum that aligns with the Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines and supports child development and individualized instruction • Provide planning time and supports for staff for professional growth and learning
<p>Professional Development & Training (10 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary/ Secondary QRIS Contacts and teaching staff that are assigned to a facility in the Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation have approved applications in MERIT verifying a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, state Early Childhood Education (ECE) certificate or credential, AA degree, BA degree or MA degree in ECE or related field of study as defined by the Washington State Education Matrix
<p>Family Engagement & Partnership (10 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the modified Strengthening Families Self-Assessment and develop a Plan of Action, based on the research-based Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework • Provide resources to families such as evidence-based parenting programs, and information about community resources • Partner with families to determine perception of child strengths and needs • Design and implement transition policies that involve parents and support children

d. **ERS and CLASS**

i. **Description of assessment tools**

Early Achievers incorporates two standardized program assessments as part of the Quality Standards: the **Environment Rating Scales (ERS)** and the **Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)**. The ERS and CLASS measure child care center classroom/family home child care quality and focus on the different types of supports available to children. While both tools measure the quality of children’s experiences, each focuses on different elements in the environment. Use of both tools therefore provides a comprehensive assessment of facility quality.

Environment Ratings Scales (ERS):

- Measures the quality of the environment in a child care center classroom/family home child care, including how the available materials, activities, routines, schedules, and interactions support learning. Scoring is assigned on a 7-point scale with descriptors for 1 (inadequate), 3 (minimal), 5 (good), and 7 (excellent).
- Consists of sets of scales for different settings and ages of children. The following scales are used in Early Achievers:
 - Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (**ITERS**)—child care center classrooms serving children birth to 2 ½ years.
 - Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (**ECERS**)—child care center classrooms serving children ages 2 ½ to 5 years.
 - Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (**FCCERS**)—family home child care.

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS):

- Measures the quality of interactions between providers and children. CLASS is scored on a 1-7 continuum; with 1, 2 considered low; 3, 4, 5 considered middle; and 6, 7 considered high. CLASS looks at the following areas, or *domains**:
 - **Emotional Support /Emotional & Behavioral Support:** warm and respectful relationships, positive communication, responsive caregivers, and awareness of children’s needs.
 - **Classroom Organization:** proactive behavior management, organized routines that maximize learning time and children’s involvement, and children who are active and engaged in activities and learning.

- **Instructional Support/Engaged Support for Learning:** discussion and activities that encourage development of children’s reasoning and logic skills, frequent conversations with open-ended questions and advanced language, use of children’s past knowledge and understanding to build upon and increase learning, and active and engaged children.
- Consists of sets of assessments for different ages of children:
 - Toddler CLASS -- ages 15 to 36 months
 - PreK CLASS – ages 3 to 5 years
 - Combined CLASS – family home child care

*In the Early Achievers Quality Standards, the Emotional Support and Classroom Organization domains in PreK CLASS are combined for scoring purposes.

ii. Minimum thresholds

A facility must achieve designated minimum CLASS and ERS scores in order to achieve a rating of Level 3, regardless of total facility points scored. Each assessed child care center/family home child care must score at least a 2 on Instructional Support/Engaged Support for Learning in the CLASS, a 3.5 on Emotional Support and Classroom Organization/Emotional and Behavioral Support, and a 3.5 on the ERS. For child care centers, the facility ERS and CLASS scores are averages based on the scores of all assessed classrooms. These scores, or **minimum thresholds** represent the foundational level of quality that all facilities must have in order to be rated Levels 3-5. Facilities that do not meet the minimum thresholds will receive a rating of Level 2, regardless of total facility points earned.

e. How the Quality Standards are “weighted”

Although facilities have flexibility in how they achieve points towards ratings, one Quality Standard area, Facility Curriculum & Learning Environment & Interactions, represents the most total points (70 out of 100) of the four standard areas. Within Facility Curriculum & Learning Environment & Interactions, ERS and CLASS scores make up 55% of a facility rating, with 40% determined by CLASS scores and 15% from ERS. The CLASS score makes up a significant portion of overall facility rating because effective and positive social and instructional provider-child interactions are associated with important achievement gains for children.

V. Early Achievers Supports and Incentives

a. Overview

Early Achievers includes a range of supports and incentives to assist participants with quality improvement efforts throughout their participation. Supports in early stages of Early Achievers (Level 2) focus on director-level training and technical assistance to increase successful Early Achievers participation and evaluation readiness. After a facility receives an on-site evaluation and rating, a package of supports is available to facilities that achieve rating Levels 3 through 5. All supports in Levels 3 through 5 are designed to support facilities to implement goals based on evaluation results, increase assessment scores, and ultimately increase facility quality.

b. Level 2 Supports

i. **Technical Assistance**

Technical Assistance (TA) is a service provided by regional CCA of WA agencies and is designed to meet the needs of diverse adult learners and help them understand the policies and navigate participation in Early Achievers. Participants access TA services through their regional CCA of WA agency.

Upon registration for Early Achievers in MERIT, facilities will be assigned a TA Specialist by their local lead agency to support them as they move through Level 2 requirements. The TA Specialist will work with the child care center director/family home child care primary provider to develop a work plan and timeline for moving through Level 2. The work plan will identify specific required activities of Level 2 as well as additional resources available to help the facility meet the Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards.

Technical assistance is delivered in multiple ways including individual sessions and group sessions. Participants will work individually with TA Specialists on their unique work plans in a set number of one-on-one TA sessions in Level 2. Additionally, in order to build community connections and peer support, the regional CCA of WA agency will offer small group TA sessions including, but not limited to topics that address continuous quality improvement and the Early Achievers Quality Standards. TA Specialists are also available by phone and email.

The goals of TA are:

- Participants will **understand** Early Achievers program requirements, quality standards, and the process to successfully complete Level 2 activities

- Participants will **apply** new knowledge gained from Self-Assessments, the Level 2 Professional Training Series, and personal reflections by **developing** action plans that prepare them to receive a facility rating
- Participants will begin to **value and embody** the concept of continuous quality improvement, laying the groundwork for deeper goal-setting through coaching in Levels 3-5

To learn more about technical assistance, read the *Early Achievers Technical Assistance Framework*, located in the *Early Achievers Participant Toolkit* on the DEL website www.del.wa.gov/care/gris/participants.aspx.

ii. **Training**

The Professional Training Series described in *Moving Through Level 2/entrance to completion: Professional Training Series* (Section 6: part d) is available to the primary and secondary contact of a participating facility, is free of charge and includes STARS hours. The trainings provide background and context for key elements of the Quality Standards, and are designed to prepare facilities for successful participation in Early Achievers. All six training must be completed by either the primary or secondary contact in order to move beyond Level 2.

iii. **Rating Readiness Consultation**

Facilities that successfully complete all Level 2 activities and intend to pursue an on-site evaluation have the opportunity to access *Rating Readiness Consultation*. Rating Readiness Consultation is customized on-site support to help facilities prepare for a rating of 3 or above. This support will focus on key elements of the quality standards that have the most impact on ratings, including preparing for the CLASS and ERS assessments. **Consultation is based on need and is time limited.** Facilities will sign a *Rating Readiness Consultation Services Agreement* outlining the scope of services. At the point that the Rating Readiness Consultant determines that the facility is ready for an on-site evaluation, the primary contact will submit their Rating Readiness Tool to the Regional Coordinator for final approval and request an on-site evaluation in MERIT.

c. **Coaching Services**

i. **Background**

Coaching is a foundational support of Early Achievers. In the QRIS field test, coaching was found to be a highly effective method of improving the quality in child care settings, and participants reported that their relationships with coaches were key to

their professional growth and quality improvement progress¹. Coaching remains a central element of the Early Achievers model. Coaches are highly trained early learning professionals with experience and education in early childhood education, and participate in ongoing professional development and consultation with the University of Washington. To learn more about the coaching model, read the *Early Achievers Coach Framework*, located in the *Early Achievers Participant Toolkit* on the DEL website at www.del.wa.gov/care/gris/participants.aspx.

ii. Coaching Services

Coaching is a long-term continuous service available to all rated facilities. Coaches are employed by Child Care Aware of Washington. After an Early Achievers facility receives their first rating, they will be assigned a Coach by their local lead agency. The role of the Coach is to help facilities:

- Understand and use Early Achievers ratings and assessment data
- Identify goals and make plans to achieve goals
- Access resources to support achievement of goals
- Implement quality improvement

The Early Achievers rating is a measure of *facility* quality, rather than specific classroom quality, so coaches and center directors/family home child care primary providers will work together to best allocate coaching resources across the facility to different teaching staff. The total amount of coaching that a facility receives will be flexible and vary based on the areas of need identified in the facility Quality Improvement Plan, and the facility's rating Level. Coaching services will change as facility rating increases, with rated Level 2 and 3 facilities receiving more coaching than rated Level 5 facilities.

Coaches *partner* with participants through the quality improvement process; the facility is ultimately *responsible* for implementing and maintaining positive changes. Upon assignment, the Coach will provide the center director/family home child care primary provider with a Coaching Services Agreement which will outline how the Coach and facility will work together. In an effort to maintain individual privacy, information shared with coaches regarding a specific child in their care will remain confidential; however coaches' documentation of their work with facilities is subject

¹The Seeds to Success Modified Field Test: Findings from the Impact and Implementation Studies (Boller, et al. 2010) http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/EarlyChildhood/seeds_to_success_mft.pdf

to public disclosure law as described in Participation Requirements and Expectations: Information Sharing (Section 8: part d).

iii. Quality Improvement Plan

Participants set goals with their coaches based on their facility evaluation results including:

- ERS and CLASS assessment scores
- Components of the Quality Standards
- Overall facility rating
- Components of the Early Achievers Coach Framework

These goals make up the facility **Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)**. Coaches work with participants to apply evaluation data to develop a QIP that addresses program strengths and areas of growth identified by evaluation results. The QIP acts as a “roadmap” for the ongoing continuous quality improvement process, and will guide the work of the facility and the Coach.

Participants and coaches create QIPs together—coaches approve final QIPs and enter them into the WELS data system. Participants can review completed QIPs through the Provider Portal in WELS (described in Section 5: part g).

d. Professional Development Scholarships

Scholarships are available to students that are employed in Early Achievers facilities to pursue CDA programs, state stackable certificates, Associates Degrees and Bachelor’s Degrees in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Early Achievers Opportunity Grants and Washington Scholarships for Child Care Professionals are two student financial aid resources that are prioritized for students who are employed by Early Achievers facilities. Each scholarship has different eligibility criteria and financial benefits. To learn more about each scholarship, visit the DEL website and look for *Professional Development System: Financial Support*.

i. Washington Scholarships for Child Care Professionals (WA Scholarships)

Washington Scholarships is administered by Child Care Aware of Washington and supports educators working towards their CDA (Child Development Associate), state stackable certificate, and AA/AAS and BA degree in Early Childhood Education. Washington Scholarships also offers CDA Assessment fee Scholarships once students have completed CDA coursework. Participants interested in Washington Scholarships should contact Child Care Aware of Washington.

ii. Early Achievers Opportunity Grants

Opportunity Grants are administered by the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, and help employees at Early Achievers facilities pursue Early Childhood Education credits towards state stackable ECE certificates and Associate’s degrees in ECE. Participants interested in Early Achievers Opportunity Grants should contact their college’s financial aid department for more information on how to apply.

e. Quality Improvement Awards

Quality Improvement Awards are awarded to participating child care centers that achieve rating Levels 3 through 5 and participating family home child care that achieve rating Levels 2 through 5. Quality Improvement (QI) Awards recognize achievement and support facilities to implement quality improvement goals.

i. Award eligibility

To be eligible to receive QI Awards, facilities must:

- Achieve an Early Achievers rating of Level 2*, 3, 4 or 5
- Be an eligible Early Achievers participant as defined in *Eligibility* (Section 3)
- Agree to create a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) with assigned coach
- Maintain active participation throughout the 3-year rating cycle by participating in ongoing coaching and maintaining the goals set in the facility’s QIP

*Level 2 Quality Improvement Awards are only available to family home child care providers at this time.

ii. Award amounts

QI Awards are distributed *annually* as follows:

Figure 5: Child care center Quality Improvement Award amounts:

Level 3	\$5000
Level 4	\$7500
Level 5	\$9000

Figure 6: Family home child care Quality Improvement Award amounts:

Level 2	\$750*
Level 3	\$2000
Level 4	\$2250
Level 5	\$2750

*QI Awards are provided to Level 2 rated providers until June 30, 2015.

iii. Distribution of award funds

QI Awards will be distributed to the facility between 30 to 60 days from the date that a facility’s participation status is publically released. Facilities that re-rate to a higher level during the rating cycle and have already received a quality improvement award for the year will receive the difference payment for the updated Level at the time of public release of the re-rating. A facility will *not* receive another **full** quality improvement award payment. (For example, if a family home child care earned a Level 3 rating and received a quality improvement award of \$2000 then re-rated to a Level 4 within the first year, they would receive the difference of \$250, *not an additional \$2250*. The facility would continue to receive \$2250 for each remaining year of the rating cycle.)

iv. Purpose of award funds

All QI Award funds must be used towards achievement of quality improvement goals outlined on coach-approved, facility QIP and must align with the Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards.

v. Allowable uses

Award funds may **only** be used in the following categories based on the Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards:

1. **Child Outcomes:** Funds may be used for materials, tools and resources to support ongoing child assessment and developmental screening.
2. **Facility Curriculum and Learning Environment and Interactions:** Funds may be used to strengthen and enhance a facility’s capacity to provide high quality, individualized experiences and environments for children in the following areas:

- **Program/classroom materials:** Examples of acceptable items include but are not limited to: developmentally appropriate materials, educational toys, and equipment to support learning and basic routines.
 - **Curriculum:** Examples of acceptable items include but are not limited to: curriculum guides, reference books, and other resources that supplement the curriculum.
 - **Observational Assessment resources:** Examples of acceptable items include tools that help facilities document children’s growth and development and increase staff ability to individualize programming for children. Facilities may also use funds to purchase tools and supporting materials for Early Achievers assessments, including Environment Rating Scales (ERS) books and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) guides.
3. **Family Engagement and Partnership:**
- **Parenting education/support program:** Funds may be used to support implementation of parenting support and education.
 - **Strengthening Families Plan of Action implementation:** Funds may be used to strengthen and enhance the facility’s work with families based on the results of their Strengthening Families Plan of Action. Examples of acceptable items include but are not limited to: parent education resources and training materials; program materials to create a welcoming environment for families; and social/educational gatherings/events for families.
4. **Professional Development and Training:**
- **Staff Development:** Funds may be used for staff professional development including but not limited to staff training and conferences. Note: funds may be used for registration/tuition/materials only, and may not be used for travel, hotel or related attendance expenses.
 - **Wage Enhancements:** Funds may be used to increase or supplement staff salaries. Grant funds are not intended to fund in full teacher, assistant director, or director salaries.
 - **Staff Bonuses:** Funds may be used to provide bonuses to staff
 - **Release Time:** QI funds may be used for staff to engage in quality improvement activities that are beyond the normal scope of work. Examples include but are not limited to: substitute pay, out of classroom planning time for lead teachers, and participation in family partnership activities.

- **Continuing Education:** QI funds may be used towards credit-bearing coursework for staff. Facilities should first explore existing Early Achievers scholarship opportunities (WA Scholarships and Early Achievers Opportunity Grants) described in this section in *Professional Development Scholarships* before using QI funds for this purpose.
- **Technology:** QI Awards may be used towards technology that supports facility implementation of QI goals, including computers, software, cameras and video cameras.

vi. **Restrictions**

In addition to the requirements outlined above about allowed fund usage, award funds may **not** be used to purchase items considered to be:

- **Capital Improvements:** From the Child Care and Development Fund: “No funds shall be expended for the purchase or improvement of land, or for the purchase, construction, or permanent improvement of any building or facility. However, funds may be expended for minor remodeling, and for upgrading child care facilities to assure providers meet State and local child care standards, including applicable health and safety requirements.”
- **Religious Activities:** From the Child Care and Development Fund: “Funds provided under grants or contracts to providers may not be expended for any sectarian purpose or activity, including sectarian worship or instruction.”
- **Gift Cards:** Grant funds should not be used to purchase monetary equivalents such as gift cards, gift certificates, traveler’s checks, money orders, or the like.

vii. **Documentation and reporting**

DEL is not responsible or liable for any tax reporting or financial liability for the Internal Revenue Service that may be applicable for participants choosing to receive QI awards. It is recommended that Early Achievers participants contact their facility’s accountant, auditor, and/or financial advisor for guidance on fiscal reporting.

Facilities that receive Early Achievers QI Award funds are required to:

- Work with local lead agency twice a year to provide information about how QI Awards were used towards QIP goals using a provided template.
- Keep all documentation including records, receipts, and paperwork related to spending of QI Awards on-site for a minimum of seven years.

DEL will conduct audits of QI Award expenditures and tracking for randomly selected facilities.

viii. Fraudulent use of funds

Fraudulent use of QI Award funds will result in immediate termination from Early Achievers as outlined in *Participation Requirements and Expectations* (Section 8: parts h, i). Fraudulent use of funds is defined as: use of funds for any purchases **not** included in *Allowable Use of Funds*; use of funds for any purchases included in *Restrictions*; and use of funds for purposes **not** related to coach-approved facility QIP.

f. Family Home Child Care Needs-Based Grants

Family home child care providers participating in Early Achievers may be eligible to receive a Needs-Based Grant of up to \$500 for the purpose of improving scores on the Environment Rating Scales (ERS). The facility will work with their Technical Assistance Specialist or Coach to prepare and submit a Needs-Based Grant Proposed Spending Plan and Submission Form.

i. Grant eligibility

In order to be eligible, family home child care providers must meet the following criteria:

- Enrolled in the Tier 1 food program; or
- Live within a school district that serves at 20% low income children based on OSPI data; and
- Receive a recommendation from a Technical Assistance Specialist or Coach.

ii. Distribution of grant funds

- Needs-based grant awards will be distributed to the facility between 30 to 60 days from the date that a facility's grant application submission is approved by DEL.

iii. Allowable uses

- To purchase items such as books, science materials, and gross motor equipment
- Substitute time
- Other items identified by the Technical Assistance Specialist or Coach
- All expenditures must be approved by the Technical Assistance Specialist or the Coach

iv. Restrictions

In addition to the requirements outlined above about allowed fund usage, award funds may **not** be used to purchase items considered to be:

- **Capital Improvements:** From the Child Care and Development Fund: “No funds shall be expended for the purchase or improvement of land, or for the purchase, construction, or permanent improvement of any building or facility. However, funds may be expended for minor remodeling, and for upgrading child care facilities to assure providers meet State and local child care standards, including applicable health and safety requirements.”
- **Religious Activities:** From the Child Care and Development Fund: “Funds provided under grants or contracts to providers may not be expended for any sectarian purpose or activity, including sectarian worship or instruction.”
- **Gift Cards:** Grant funds should not be used to purchase monetary equivalents such as gift cards, gift certificates, traveler’s checks, money orders, or the like.

Facilities that receive a Needs-Based Grant are required to keep their receipts. The Needs Based Grants are available through July 1, 2015 or until funding is exhausted, whichever comes first.

g. Tiered reimbursement

i. Level 2 incentives

Recent legislation making statutory changes to the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 43.215.545 allocates a 2% increase to the Working Connections Child Care subsidy base rate for providers enrolled in Early Achievers who advance to a rated level of 3 or higher within 30 months of enrolling in Early Achievers. This change went into effect September 1, 2013, therefore providing each participant 30 months from September 1, 2013 or their own date of enrollment in Early Achievers, if it is the later of the two dates.

ii. Levels 3, 4, and 5* incentives

Facilities who receive a Level 3 through 5 rating are eligible to earn a higher incentive added to the Working Connections Child Care Subsidy base rate as follows:

- Level 3: 4% above the base rate
- Level 4: 10% above the base rate
- Level 5: 15 % above the base rate

*Levels 3 through 5 tiered subsidy incentives are effective July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015.

h. MERIT and WELS

Early Achievers participants will use the MERIT and WELS databases to track and access information about their participation.

i. MERIT

MERIT (Washington’s Managed Education and Registry Information Tool) is an online tool used to document and recognize the professional achievements of early care & education and school-age professionals in the State of Washington. Participants will use MERIT to:

- Create a Facility Registration and professional record
- Access the Early Achievers Registration and Application for Level 2
- Access Level 2 activities
- Track facility completion of Level 2 activities
- Document staff education qualifications for facility rating

ii. WELS

WELS (Web-based Early Learning System) is the data system for Early Achievers and holds information about coaching and evaluation. The Primary QRIS Contact will access WELS through a link in their MERIT/Early Achievers Tab once their Early Achievers Request for On-Site Application is approved. The *WELS Provider Portal* allows facilities to:

- View their Early Achievers Rating Report;
- View their Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) that they create with their coach; and
- Access resources and video content that are shared by their coach to support QIP implementation.

Please see the *WELS Provider Portal Step-by-Step guide* in the Early Achievers Toolkit on the DEL website for more information.

VI. Registering for Early Achievers

a. MERIT

Use of MERIT is a requirement to participate in Early Achievers and is necessary to successfully complete the following steps:

- The Primary QRIS Contact will access the Early Achievers Registration and the Early Achievers Application for Level 2 in MERIT
- The Primary QRIS Contact will access all Level 2 activities through MERIT
- MERIT will track and provide evidence of facility completion of Level 2 activities

Before a facility can access the Early Achievers Registration in MERIT:

- Child care center director/family home child care primary provider must have a professional record in MERIT
- Child care center director/family home child care primary provider must have current employment listed in their professional record
- Child care center director/ family home child care primary provider must complete a Facility Registration in MERIT and list themselves as the current director/family home child care primary provider for the facility
- Child care center director/family home child care primary provider must attend an Early Achievers Orientation in their regions held by their local lead agency

There are numerous resources, including step-by-step guides, to support participants through each MERIT application. Please visit the MERIT homepage of the DEL website for links to user manuals.

b. Early Achievers Orientation

The first step of participation in Early Achievers is director/family home child care primary provider attendance at an Early Achievers Orientation. Regular orientations will be held in each region and will provide information about the requirements, benefits and available resources for Early Achievers participants. Orientation attendance is required before a facility can register for Early Achievers in MERIT. Facilities interested in orientation can contact their local lead agency to register for a local orientation or visit the DEL website to view a list of dates and locations across the state.

c. **Early Achievers Participation Agreement**

The Primary QRIS Contact must sign an Early Achievers Participation Agreement in order to participate in Early Achievers. The Early Achievers Participation Agreement is an agreement between the participating facility and their local lead agency, and outlines the requirements and responsibilities of Early Achievers participation. Interested participants will receive an Early Achievers Participation Agreement from their local lead agency staff. Participants must return signed agreements to their local lead agency, and keep a copy of the signed agreement on-site.

Local lead agencies are responsible for documenting that a facility has signed a Participation Agreement in MERIT. Facilities that do not have a signed Participation Agreement documented in MERIT within 14 days of Early Achievers Registration will be withdrawn from Early Achievers participation. In the event of withdrawal, facilities will receive email notification from DEL. Facilities may re-apply to Early Achievers by re-submitting the Early Achievers Registration application.

d. **Early Achievers Registration**

After Early Achievers Orientation attendance is entered into MERIT, a director/FCC primary provider who has completed the steps described above will have access to the Early Achievers Registration by accessing the MERIT /Early Achievers sub tab, located under the Facility/Site tab. The Early Achievers Registration includes:

- Basic facility information and demographics; and
- A link to the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines (this document). Applicants must check off that they have read and agreed to the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines before submitting registration. Submission of the Early Achievers Registration is completed with an electronic signature by the applicant.

Upon submission of Early Achievers Registration, the facility's Primary QRIS Contact will receive an *Early Achievers Registration Confirmation* email from DEL. The facility is now considered an **Early Achievers Level 2 participant**.

VII. Moving through Level 2: Entrance to completion

a. Level 2 Overview

Early Achievers Level 2 is designated for *Professional Growth and Facility Management* and requires facility leadership (family home child care primary provider/child care center director) to complete a series of Early Achievers preparation activities and training. Upon DEL approval of completion of Level 2 requirements (via Application for Level 2 in MERIT), the facility will achieve Level 2 status and be eligible to request an evaluation for facility rating. Your local lead agency will provide technical assistance to help facilities complete Level 2 and rating readiness consultation for facilities that are preparing for the on-site evaluation.

b. Primary and Secondary QRIS Contacts

The child care center director/family home child care primary provider will be designated the *Primary QRIS Contact* and is responsible for oversight and completion of all Level 2 activities. In facilities where there is multiple administrative staff, the director may appoint a *Secondary QRIS Contact*, such as a Program Supervisor, to support participation and complete the Professional Training Series described below. In this section, *Primary QRIS Contact* will refer to the facility child care center director or family home child care primary provider who has registered for Early Achievers. Only staff with the job titles in MERIT of owner, family home child care provider, licensee, director, assistant director, program supervisor and site contact/manager will have the ability to assign themselves as the Primary Contact.

c. Completion of Required Level 2 Activities

After successful registration the primary contact may access the Level 2 application in MERIT. The Early Achievers Application for Level 2 is ongoing and contains multiple parts. It collects facility information and tracks completion of each of the following Level 2 requirements:

- Staff Professional Records in MERIT
- Facility Profile
- Professional Training Series
- Facility Self-Assessment

i. **Staff professional records in MERIT**

The Primary QRIS Contact must ensure that all facility staff have entered professional records in MERIT. Staff must associate themselves with a facility by logging into their own MERIT professional records and entering their current employment at a facility.

In addition, if a facility wants to earn points towards their rating for staff education, staff must verify* their education qualifications by completing the following steps:

Step 1: Fill out an education application in MERIT

- Log into your MERIT account.
- Under the Applications Tab select Education Application then fill out the application.
- Follow steps 2–5 below to submit your supporting documents.

Step 2: Copy your transcripts –*We now accept copies of official transcripts—you keep the originals.* Have all college or university transcripts mailed to you at your home. Copy the **front and back** sides of the transcripts.

Step 3: Copy your certificates and high school diploma.

Step 4: Write your STARS ID on the top of the copied official transcript(s) and certificates or diplomas and also on the outside of the envelope (next to your name).

Step 5: Place the copies of your transcripts and certificates into one envelope and mail it to:

Centralia College CFS, Attention MERIT
600 Centralia College Blvd.
Centralia WA 98531-4035

***Please note:** Education Applications must be APPROVED before the Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation is submitted to be considered for the professional development portion of your rating.

MERIT is the source of evidence during evaluation for staff education qualifications for facility Professional Development & Training Standard points. **It is important that facilities prioritize this task early in Level 2 participation in order to ensure ample time to gather, submit, review and process transcripts.**

ii. Facility Profile

The Primary QRIS Contact will complete the Facility Profile, which is a series of four open-ended reflective questions about facility management practices. The content of the answers will not be judged by DEL based on “right” answers; rather, the profile is intended to prompt facilities to reflect on how their current practices can support successful Early Achievers participation and ongoing quality improvement efforts. Please note: the MERIT system will “time out” after 60 minutes of inactivity due to

security reasons. Users that do not plan to finish the facility profile in one sitting should compile the information in a backup source, such as a Word document.

iii. Professional Training Series

- **Overview:** The Professional Training Series consists of **six** core trainings that are completed online or in-person depending on the training. Trainings are offered free of charge to the Primary and Secondary QRIS Contact and will provide STARS hours.
- **Who is required to attend:** The Primary QRIS Contact is responsible for attendance at all six trainings. In the case that a facility has appointed a Secondary QRIS Contact such as a Program Supervisor, the Secondary QRIS Contact may complete the trainings on behalf of the facility. In this case, the Secondary QRIS Contact must complete all six trainings. The Primary QRIS Contact will remain responsible for all other Level 2 requirements. Additional facility staff may participate in the free online trainings at:
<http://www.wachildcaretraining.com>.

- **List of trainings:**

Online trainings

- Introduction to the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Overview²
- Introduction to the Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines
- Introduction to the Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals

In-person trainings

- Introduction Into Cultural Competence
- Strengthening Families Training for Early Learning Professionals
- School Readiness

For more information about the training series, please contact your local lead agency.

² Facilities that were 2011-2012 Early Adopters are not required to take the Introduction to ERS and CLASS Overview training.

iv. Facility self-assessment

The Primary QRIS Contact will access and complete the facility self-assessment with their Technical Assistance Specialist. The purpose of a facility self-assessment is to:

- Promote reflection about current practice
- Build familiarity with the Early Achievers standards and assessments
- Determine readiness to request evaluation

The facility is strongly encouraged to complete their self-assessment as accurately and thoroughly as able and use the information gathered to prepare for evaluation. Self-assessment contains two parts:

- **Environment Rating Scales (ERS):** Child care center classroom/family home child care assessment that looks at the materials and practices in the environment that supports children. Child care centers are required to complete at least one ERS per age group (Infant/Toddler-ITERS; Preschool-ECERS); however, it is *recommended* that centers complete ERS for each classroom that serves children birth to 5, as the facility will not be notified in advance of which classrooms will be assessed by the evaluators.
- **Washington’s Quality Standards:** Facility-level assessment based on the components of the Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards in the following areas: Child Outcomes; Curriculum and Staff Supports; and Family Engagement and Partnership.

d. Staff Change before completion of Level 2

i. Primary QRIS Contact

If the Primary QRIS Contact leaves the facility during Level 2 completion and before facility achievement of a Level 2 status:

- The facility must designate a new Primary QRIS Contact to assume responsibility for oversight and completion of Level 2 requirements by completing a new facility registration and accessing the Early Achievers application in MERIT.
- The new Primary QRIS Contact is *required* to complete all six trainings in the Professional Training Series. It is *recommended* that the new Primary QRIS Contact also attend Early Achievers Orientation.

In the case that the facility has a designated Secondary QRIS Contact that completed the Professional Training Series **and** is still employed at the facility, the new Primary QRIS Contact will not be required to complete the Professional Training Series.

ii. Secondary QRIS Contact

If the Secondary QRIS Contact leaves the facility during Level 2 completion:

- If Secondary QRIS Contact was designated training participant in QRIS Application, all six trainings will need to be taken by Primary QRIS Contact or by newly designated Secondary QRIS Contact.
- If Secondary QRIS Contact was not the designated training participant no action is needed.

iii. Facility information

The facility Early Achievers Registration and Application will remain active in MERIT regardless of staff change. Thus, facility information including demographics and program information, Facility Profile, and staff professional records will remain in the system and are not required to be entered again.

e. Staff Change after Completion of Level 2

If the Primary QRIS Contact leaves the facility *after* the facility has achieved Level 2 status, the facility will not be required to redo Level 2 activities. However, it is the responsibility of the facility to ensure that new leadership staff is informed of facility participation status and is equipped to participate in Early Achievers. It is recommended that new directors attend an Early Achievers orientation. The new director is also required to submit a new facility registration application in MERIT.

f. Achievement of Early Achievers Level 2 Status

Upon completion of all Level 2 requirements, facilities will apply for and achieve Level 2 status as outlined below.

i. Submission and Review of Application for Level 2

Upon completion of Level 2 requirements, the Primary QRIS Contact will submit the Early Achievers Application for Level 2 in MERIT. The Application cannot be submitted until all requirements are complete as indicated in MERIT. Upon submission, facilities will receive an email confirmation from DEL stating that Early Achievers Application for Level 2 has been received and is in the process of review.

ii. Notification of Level 2 status

Upon application approval, facilities will receive an email from DEL stating the application has been approved and the facility has been awarded **Early Achievers Level 2 status**. A Level 2 facility will continue to be designated as “participating in Quality Improvement” in Child Care Check and in the Child Care Aware of Washington

referral database. If an application was not approved, DEL will provide the reasons for denial and steps that a facility can take to address issues.

g. Facilities that remain Level 2

i. Scenarios

Upon completion of Level 2 requirements, facilities may remain a Level 2 in the following scenarios:

- Facility chooses to remain a Level 2 (no evaluation)
- Facility participates in on-site evaluation and is awarded a Level 2 rating because facility does not meet minimum thresholds for Levels 3 through 5

ii. Responsibilities of facilities that remain Level 2

In the future, Level 2 facilities as described in the above scenarios may be required to participate in additional quality improvement activities, as well as access the Early Achievers sub tab under the Facility/Site tab in MERIT to provide updates and reporting on such activities.

VIII. Evaluation and Rating

a. Overview

On-site evaluation based on the Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards is conducted by the University of Washington (UW) in order to assign facility ratings. The UW evaluation team includes Data Collectors and Community Liaisons as described below. Participation in evaluation is a requirement to achieve rating Levels 3, 4, and 5. Facilities that wish to be rated will work with their local lead agency staff to prepare for evaluation. The following section describes the process to request and participate in evaluation, how evaluation data is used to create a facility rating, and how ratings are distributed and posted.

b. Request for evaluation

i. Eligibility

In order to be eligible to request an evaluation for rating, facilities must:

- Complete all Level 2 requirements and be awarded Level 2 status by DEL;
- Have a minimum of three children birth to five enrolled and present at the time of on-site evaluation;
- Work with their local lead agency staff to prepare for evaluation, including completion and approval of the Rating Readiness Tool; and
- Have a completed, approved, Rating Readiness Tool on-site.

c. Evaluation preparation

i. Rating Readiness Tool

As part of evaluation preparation, facilities will work with their local lead agency staff to complete a Rating Readiness Tool (RRT). The RRT is a checklist created by the UW that helps facilities and the evaluation team plan for a successful, efficient on-site evaluation visit. The RRT collects facility information for use of the evaluation team including:

- Site map, classroom schedules, and other relevant facility details
- Confirmation that facility has collected consent from all families (described in *Parent Consent* below)
- Location of documentation and files for Data Collector review
- Which Quality Standard components the facility plans to demonstrate during the on-site evaluation visits

Facilities may indicate on the tool that they choose to “*opt out*” of certain components of the Quality Standards. Facilities might choose this option when a component does not align with their program philosophy or if their facility does not have plans to implement the component at this time. Marking a component *opt out* means that the data collector will not look for documentation for that component during the on-site rater visit. *All* components will be used to determine total facility points, regardless of whether a facility opts out, so scores may be negatively impacted by opting out.

The Primary QRIS Contact will submit their completed Rating Readiness Tool to their Regional Coordinator for review. The Regional Coordinator will review and approve the RRT and return it to the facility prior to evaluation. This signed copy is considered the *official Rating Readiness Tool* of record, and cannot be modified after approval without additional review by the Regional Coordinator. A copy of the completed Rating Readiness Tool should be kept on-site at the facility.

The Regional Coordinator will review the RRT to determine the facility’s readiness for evaluation based on the following key questions:

- Does the facility have the minimum documentation in place required for on-site evaluation visits, i.e., parent consents?
- Does the facility have documentation and other evidence available and ready for the evaluation team?
- Does the completed tool indicate that a facility has evidence of a minimum of 5 quality standards points necessary to achieve a Level 3?

***Please note: Regional Coordinators and other local lead agency staff cannot guarantee a facility rating.** The Rating Readiness Tool does not account for future facility ERS and CLASS assessment scores, which will determine a large portion of the facility rating.

The Regional Coordinator will approve the Rating Readiness Tool when a facility is ready to move forward with evaluation. If the Regional Coordinator determines that the facility is not ready, the facility will continue to work on the Rating Readiness Tool.

d. Parent Consent

Facilities are responsible for notifying families of their Early Achievers participation in on-site evaluation. Although no individual child will be assessed, child files will be reviewed by Data Collectors to measure whether a facility meets certain Quality Standards components, such as completion of child assessment and developmental screenings. In addition, child care center classrooms/family home child care will be

observed live for CLASS and ERS assessments. Therefore, families are required to give consent in order for their child's files to be reviewed as part of the facility rating process. Consent is between the facility and the family.

A consent form template will be provided as part of Level 2 participation that:

- Describes the purpose of Early Achievers on-site evaluation for facility rating and quality improvement;
- Describes how facility information will be gathered including review of child files; and
- Allows families to indicate if they are willing to participate in an interview as part of the data collection process (optional).

Facilities are required to:

- Distribute and collect signed consent forms from parents or guardians for each child in care (family home child care) or each child in a classroom serving children birth to five (child care centers).
- Document families that do not give consent for their children to participate. Data Collectors will not review files of children without parent consent in place.
- Show evidence of signed consents during Community Liaison site visit (consent forms will stay on-site at the facility and should be sorted by classroom).
- Notify Community Liaison if there are families that did not sign consent.

In the case that a facility uses videotaping as an option for CLASS observations due to language accommodations or other special circumstances, the facility is required to include language about videotaping in their parent consents, and to notify Community Liaisons of children that may not be videotaped.

e. **Process to submit request for evaluation**

i. **Request for On-site Evaluation in MERIT**

After DEL approval of Early Achievers Application for Level 2, a facility can request an evaluation for rating using the *Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation* application. The application is located under the Facility/Site tab, Early Achievers sub tab and includes:

- Update of facility demographic information
- Normal facility operating hours and days of the week

Facilities will receive unannounced on-site evaluation visits during a 2-month window, as outlined in the Cohort Calendar. **Please note:** Facilities will work with their

Community Liaison to document “block-out” dates of when the facility is not available for evaluation visits.

Facilities should be completely ready to receive on-site evaluation visits at the point that they submit the Request for On-Site Evaluation, including the approval of all staff education in MERIT.

ii. Rating Cohort Calendar

Facilities must consider the cohort calendar when submitting the Request for On-Site Evaluation. The benefit of using a cohort calendar is that facilities, grantees, contractors and sites can request an on-site evaluation based on the cohort/dates that work best for them, will know exactly when their rating will be finalized and when their quality improvement award will be processed for payment.

It is important to note that each cohort has specific dates in which the request for on-site evaluation must be approved in order to be included in that cohort. If a cut-off date is missed, the facility will move to the next cohort. Facilities must allow enough time for approval of the on-site evaluation request.

Figure 7: Rating Cohort Calendar

Cohort	Request for on-site evaluation is approved between	On-site evaluation occurs between	Rating is finalized, emailed to facility primary contact
Cohort 1	August 2 – October 1	November 16 – January 15	February 15
Cohort 2	October 2 – December 1	January 16 – March 15	April 15
Cohort 3	December 2 – February 1	March 16 – May 15	June 15
Cohort 4	February 2 – April 1	May 16 – July 15	August 15
Cohort 5	April 2 – June 1	July 16 – September 15	October 15
Cohort 6	June 2 – August 1	September 16 – November 15	December 15

Please note: Applicant Cohorts were designed to efficiently process a high volume of Early Achievers ratings requests across the state. As Early Achievers ramps up, if there is a lower number of rating requests than anticipated, rating requests may be accepted on a rolling basis outside of the Applicant Cohort schedule. Please contact your Regional Coordinator for more information and to check if this option is available.

iii. Approval of evaluation request

After a facility submits their Request for On-Site Evaluation in MERIT, the facility's Regional Coordinator is responsible for approving or denying the request. The facility's Rating Readiness Tool must be approved before the Regional Coordinator will approve the request for evaluation.

If the Regional Coordinator determines that the facility is ready to move forward with the evaluation process:

- Regional Coordinator will approve the evaluation request
- Facility will be referred to the UW evaluation team and the evaluation process will begin

If the Regional Coordinator determines that the facility is not ready to move forward with the evaluation process:

- The Regional Coordinator will deny the evaluation request and provide the reason(s) the facility was deemed not ready, or if the facility does not have three children enrolled per child care center classroom or family home child care setting
- Facility is responsible for addressing reasons for denial before submitting another request for evaluation

f. On-site Evaluation

The on-site evaluation includes 2 stages, each with distinct purposes described below.

i. Step 1: Community Liaison visit

In order to ensure that the on-site evaluation is conducted as efficiently and unobtrusively as possible, the UW will send out a Community Liaison *prior* to the on-site data collection visit. The Community Liaison is a member of the UW evaluation team whose purpose is to support the facility and the Data Collectors to have a successful visit by:

- Explaining the on-site visit and answering any facility questions and concerns;
- Reviewing the completed Rating Readiness Tool with the facility;
- Confirming that all facility documentation and files are ready and in place for data collection (Note: *the Community Liaison does not approve the content of the documentation, but rather confirms and documents the availability and*

location of the materials so the raters are able to easily locate and review during visit);

- Gathering information for Data Collectors about the facility layout, including classroom/facility maps, classroom schedules, and other pertinent logistical information; and
- Gathering certain data collection information through staff interviews.

The Community Liaison will review the RRT with the Primary QRIS Contact, sign it, and take a picture of the front page to serve as a record of their visit to the facility. Upon successful completion of the visit, the Community Liaison will notify the Data Collectors that the facility is ready for the on-site evaluation visits.

Additionally, the Community Liaison will carry out the child care center director/family home child care primary provider interview during the course of their visit. Lastly, the Community Liaison will also conduct all parent interviews following the data collection visit(s).

ii. Step 2: Data Collector visit

After completion of the Community Liaison visit, UW Data Collectors will visit the facility to conduct on-site evaluation. The visits will be unannounced and will occur within the facility-selected cohort as described above. Facility information, or *data*, will be collected by the Data Collectors through a variety of methods including:

- Child care center classroom/family home child care observations
- Director/FCC/staff/parent interviews
- Review of facility records and documentation including child files

The data collection visit will take place over three days for centers, and 1-2 days for family child care, ***on average***, depending on facility size. In child care centers, up to 100% of classrooms serving children birth through age five will be observed using one or more measures of quality, depending on facility size. The facility will not be notified in advance about which classrooms will be observed.

The data collection team will use the facility's RRT to understand which components of the Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards the facility is attempting to meet. The RRT also serves as a reference for Data Collectors, helping them locate and access materials in a way that works best for the facility. The Data Collectors will make notes in the designated area on the front page of the RRT about

any items that were listed but not in place during the data collection visit. Both the Data Collector and the Primary QRIS Contact, or their designee, will sign and date the document. The Data Collector will take a picture of the front page of the document and upload the image into WELS. The completed RRT will provide a history of the facility's evaluation process.

iii. Post-Visit Surveys

A Post-Visit Survey link will be provided to teachers, by Data Collectors, following each CLASS or ERS observation that occurs in their classroom. Teachers should complete this online survey within three business days following the observation.

An additional survey link will be provided to all facilities via email after their final on-site evaluation visit. This survey should be completed by the primary QRIS contact. A paper copy of either survey can be requested from the facility's Community Liaison.

The purpose of these surveys is to document any concerns or feedback about the visits immediately after the visits. The surveys must be completed and submitted online within three business days of receipt of survey. The rating cannot be published until the survey is complete. The UW evaluation team will consider concerns documented in the survey and contact the Primary QRIS Contact directly to address concerns if applicable.

g. Rating Assignment

i. Creation of ratings

Early Achievers ratings are created based on facility data collected in the four categories of the Quality Standards: Child Outcomes; Facility Curriculum & Learning Environment & Interactions; Professional Development & Training³; and Family Engagement & Partnership. The UW evaluation team is responsible for compiling and analyzing facility data to determine total facility points and make a rating recommendation. The Department of Early Learning will assign the final Early Achievers rating level based on UW recommendation.

³ Staff Education information is not collected by evaluation team during on-site visit. All family home child care and child care center staff education qualifications will be verified through the existing MERIT verification process. Facilities are responsible for ensuring that all staff information is complete prior to requesting an on-site evaluation.

ii. Rating notification

Upon completion of evaluation, facilities will receive access to their Early Achievers Rating Report based on the quarterly rating release date of their assigned Applicant Cohort⁴ (see Figure 8: *From Request for On-Site Evaluation to Rating: Visual*). Ratings Reports list overall facility rating, facility-level ERS and CLASS assessment score averages, and points earned in each Quality Standard area. Ratings Reports will be available to participants in the WELS Provider Portal accessed via the Facility/Site tab, Early Achievers sub tab in the Primary or Secondary contact's MERIT record. In addition, DEL will mail Early Achievers Rating Certificates to facilities. Certificates will highlight the facility's Early Achievers Level and additional information about facility strengths, or *Area(s) of Specialization*. Areas of Specialization provide additional recognition of high quality and provide more substantive information to families. Areas of Specialization are based on total points earned in each Quality Standard area:

- **Child Outcomes:** facilities that receive 8 of a possible 10 points
- **Interactions and Environment (ERS/CLASS):** facilities that receive 35 of a possible 55 points
- **Curriculum and Staff Supports:** facilities that receive 12 of a possible 15 points
- **Professionalism (Professional Development):** facilities that receive 7 of a possible 10 points
- **Family Engagement and Partnerships:** facilities that receive 8 of a possible 10 points

Ratings results will help facilities identify and prioritize areas for quality improvement as they develop Quality Improvement Plans (QIP) with their coaches. Rating Levels also determine facility eligibility to receive coaching services and Quality Improvement Awards, and are tied to Quality Improvement Award amounts.

iii. Publication of Early Achievers participation status

A key goal of Early Achievers is to provide information to families about child care quality in order to help them make informed choices. Facility Early Achievers participation status will be posted on the Department of Early Learning's Child Care Check website to acknowledge the commitment of participating facilities and provide information to families. In addition, Child Care Aware of Washington will share Early Achievers participation status as part of the child care referral service.

⁴ Release date of rating reports subject to change based on unexpected volumes or other factors.

Participation status will be displayed publically as follows:

 **Status: *Participating in Quality Improvement***

Displayed when:

- Facilities have registered for Early Achievers
- Facilities are in the process of completing Level 2 activities
- Facilities have achieved Level 2 status but have not been rated
- Facilities are rated Level 2 after an on-site evaluation

 **Status: *Quality Level of Excellence***

Displayed when:

- Facilities are rated Level 3, Level 4 or Level 5

While Early Achievers rating levels will not be publically posted by DEL at this time, facilities are encouraged to share their ratings with families and staff to show their hard work and commitment to quality. On occasion, however, DEL is required to share facility specific ratings data with other government organizations. One example of this occurring happens in order to provide elevated subsidy reimbursements. Ratings information is also subject to the rules and regulations of chapter 42.56 RCW, the Public Records Act.

iv. Length of time that rating is valid

Facility ratings are valid for three years from the date of issue of Early Achievers Rating Report. At the end of three years, facilities are required to participate in an on-site evaluation for re-rating in order to receive another rating. In order to maintain facility rating for the full three year period, the facility Primary QRIS Contact will be required to submit an annual facility update by accessing via the Facility/Site tab, Early Achievers sub tab to confirm that the facility is still an active participant.

v. Request for Re-Rating

Family Home Child Care Facilities Approved for Rating by June 30, 2015. In accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding, negotiated between the State of Washington and family home child care providers' union SEIU Local 925, re-rating at no charge will be offered to family home child care providers who receive a Level 2 rating as follows:

- Early Achievers family home child care facilities that receive a Level 2 rating in their initial rating qualify for a partial re-rating in the facility’s deficiency area(s) ERS and/or CLASS. Facilities have until June 30, 2015 to notify their Regional Coordinator to make a request and be approved for a re-rate.
- During the re-rating process, the status displayed in Child Care Check will be “Participating in Quality Improvement”.
- Eligible re-rating for family home child care facilities approved by June 30, 2015 is free of charge to the facility.

Minimum Threshold Re-Rating for Rated Level 2 Early Achievers Facilities

- Early Achievers facilities that receive a rated Level 2 having not met the minimum required thresholds on the ERS and/or CLASS to achieve a Level 3 during their initial rating will qualify for a partial re-rating in the facility’s deficiency area(s) of ERS and/or CLASS if they have come within a close proximity to the minimum thresholds. Child care facilities that rated a Level 2 and are within the margin outlined below are eligible for the free re-rating:

Area	Early Achievers Minimum Thresholds	Early Achievers Re-Rating Margin
Instructional Support	2.0	1.7
Emotional Support/Classroom Management	3.5	3.3
Environmental Rating Scale	3.5	3.0

- The Level 2 re-rating is free of charge to the participating child care facility. Facilities that meet the eligibility requirements for this policy must have their Regional Coordinator request their partial re-rating **four months** prior to their one year rating anniversary date to ensure there is adequate time for the UW evaluation team to complete an assessment(s) in the deficiency area and assign a rating.
- A partial re-rating will be conducted in the facility area that did not meet minimum thresholds **only:** Environment Rating Scale (ERS) and/or Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) assessments. No additional facility information will be considered beyond the information needed to address the minimum thresholds.
- During the re-rating process, the status displayed in Child Care Check will be ‘Participating in Quality Improvement’.

- Eligible Level 2 re-rating is free of charge to the facility.

Rated Levels 3-4:

- Facilities that rate a Level 3 or Level 4 are eligible to request a re-rating.
- Level 3 and 4 facilities that wish to be re-rated will pay a fee to cover the cost of re-rating.

Facilities that are interested in re-rating should contact their local lead agency for more information about eligibility and process. **Please note:** Facilities are only eligible to exercise one Level 2 re-rating option referenced in these Guidelines one time during the course of the 3-year rating cycle. Additionally, choosing to be re-rated is different from appealing an existing rating due to suspected errors or dispute in calculation. The Rating appeal process is addressed below (see Ratings Appeals, part h).

h. Ratings Appeals

i. Overview

The following section describes what Early Achievers rating information can be appealed, what steps a participant must take, and what DEL will do to address the appeal. **Please note:** Rating appeal is different from requesting a re-rating. Rating Appeal should only be used as described below in, *Purpose of Rating Appeal Process* (section iii).

ii. Eligibility

- The Early Achievers Ratings appeals process applies only to Early Achieves participants that have participated in on-site evaluation and received a facility rating **on or after July 1, 2012**. Ratings received during the QRIS field test or Early Adopters year may not be appealed.
- Facilities may pursue one rating appeal per Early Achievers rating cycle.

iii. Purpose of rating appeal process

Facilities may pursue a rating appeal after the receipt of their Early Achievers Rating Report for the following reasons:

- Facility suspects errors in calculation of points or other technical errors
- Facility claims that their practice at time of on-site evaluation should have earned at least one Level higher (e.g., from Level 3 to Level 4) based on the Early Achievers Quality Standards

The Early Achievers Rating Appeals process **does not** address the following scenarios:

- Facilities may not pursue a rating appeal in order to provide new evidence or documentation of facility practice.
- Facilities must address all concerns about on-site evaluation visits such as inappropriate or unprofessional behavior by on-site evaluators or perceived conflict of interest between Data Collectors and facility through the University of Washington’s (UW) Post-visit Survey, described in above in *Post Visit Survey* (Section 7: part e).

iv. Criteria for appeal

Facilities that wish to pursue a rating appeal must demonstrate through the use of the DEL-provided *Early Achievers Rating Appeal Form* that that a successful appeal would result in a rating increase of at least one rating level, e.g., an increase from Level 3 to Level 4. This form is located on the DEL website.

Facilities may **not** appeal ratings based on the following:

- Additional information gathered by facility *after* on-site evaluation visits
- Components that facility marked “*opt out*” on the completed *Rating Readiness Tool* provided to their local lead agency.
- Self-Assessment scores were higher than official assessment scores
- ERS and CLASS scores from past assessments were higher than Early Achievers evaluation scores
- Date/time of on-site visits if visits occurred during timeframe provided by facility on their Request for On-Site Evaluation in MERIT, including: facility hours/days of operation; three month evaluation window requested by facility; facility-chosen black-out dates(up to two per month). Visits are rescheduled only in the case of facility emergency/natural disaster.
- Selection of classrooms for observations
- Variability of time spent in classrooms
- Typical staff not present during visit
- Classroom or family home child care had new children, sick children, or an otherwise “non-typical” day, including disruptions to regular schedule
- Occurrence of evaluation processes as outlined in the Participation Agreement and Operating Guidelines
- Information was not ready for review by data collectors at time of on-site evaluation visits

- Professional Development and Training Quality Standard Area (Staff Qualifications). Concerns about staff education verification must be appealed using existing MERIT processes before on-site evaluation for rating.
- Facilities with licenses that are on probation, suspended or revoked may not appeal rating.

v. **How to initiate a rating appeal**

The [Early Achievers Rating Appeal form](#) and supporting documentation must be received by DEL no later than 5:00pm Pacific Standard Time (PST) of the 30th calendar day following the rating release. DEL assumes no responsibility for delays caused by any mail delivery service. DEL assumes no responsibility for delays caused by any mail delivery service. Materials received after 5:00pm PST on the 30th calendar day will not be considered. Receipt of Early Achievers ratings is defined as the date that Early Achievers Rating Reports are released to facilities through the WELS Provider Portal. The Primary and Secondary QRIS Contact will access the Rating Report in the WELS Provider Portal through their MERIT/Early Achievers sub-tab (Section 5; part g).

Please note: *In order to protect the integrity of the rating appeal process and ensure that all facility information is fully considered, all communication with the Department of Early Learning regarding a specific facility rating appeal must be handled through the formal rating appeal process outlined below.*

1. Facility Primary QRIS Contact communicates concerns with Regional Coordinator. The Regional Coordinator will review the Early Achievers Quality Standards with the facility to address misunderstandings or questions about *general* ratings calculations.

Note: Regional Coordinators cannot address specific concerns about facility's Rating Report. This initial step is intended to help facilities clarify how ratings are calculated in general based on the Quality Standards, which may prevent the need for rating appeal.

2. If the facility still has concerns, the Primary QRIS Contact will complete the *Early Achievers Rating Appeal Form* and attach detailed **written** information including:
 - Description of why the facility practice **at the time of evaluation** should have earned at least one Level higher based on Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards components (e.g., from Level 3 to Level 4)

- Documentation and evidence of facility practice specific to *each* Quality Standard component under dispute
 - Date(s) of communication with Regional Coordinator
 - A copy of completed Post-Visit Survey, and if applicable, date(s) of communication with UW, and outcome of survey feedback. Participants may request a copy of their completed survey from their Community Liaison.
3. Primary QRIS Contact will submit completed *Early Achievers Rating Appeal Form* to the DEL QRIS Inbox: gris@del.wa.gov. If you prefer, you may mail in the appeal form and supporting documentation. Appeals that are mailed must be sent as certified mail at the participant’s expense to the following address: Department of Early Learning Attention: QRIS Support Services, PO Box 40970, Olympia, WA 98504-0970.

iv. DEL’s Rating appeal resolution process

1. The QRIS Administrator will review facility *Early Achievers Rating Appeal Form* and may request additional documentation from facility and/or partners including the UW evaluation team and the facility’s Regional Coordinator.
2. The QRIS Administrator will make an initial decision within 10 business days of receiving all necessary documents and information to make decision. Written notification of decision will be sent to facility.
3. If facility disagrees with decision, facility must respond in writing either by email or certified mail within 10 business days from date of DEL decision. Correspondence must be received by DEL no later than 5:00pm Pacific Standard Time, of the 10th business day from the date of the DEL decision. DEL assumes no responsibility for delays caused by any mail delivery service.
4. The QRIS Administrator will summarize facility appeal and initial DEL decision and submit to the DEL Assistant Director of Quality Practice and Professional Growth for review within 10 business days.
5. DEL will notify facility of final decision in writing.
6. If Rating Appeal is granted:
 - If it is determined that an error was made in calculation, the scores will be adjusted and the facility will be issued an updated Rating Report. Facility participation status on DEL’s website will be updated if applicable.

- In the case that the appeal outcome requires a re-rating, DEL will contact the UW evaluation team to initiate an on-site evaluation for a re-rating.
Note: *In case of re-rating due to founded rating appeal, no new facility documentation or evidence that was not available during original on-site visits will be reviewed.*
7. If appeal is denied:
 - Facility will be notified in writing of decision including information about why the appeal was denied. Facility rating will remain valid for three years from the date rating was issued.
 8. While a facility is in process of rating appeal:
 - All Early Achievers services including coaching and distribution of Quality Improvement Awards will be put on hold until final rating appeal decision.

IX. Participation Requirements & Expectations

The following section details facility responsibilities and expectations of participation. In addition, facilities should refer to the Early Achievers Participation Agreement for program participation expectations.

a. Recordkeeping

The following records must be kept on-site by facilities:

- All signed agreements including the Early Achievers Participation Agreement, Service Agreements for Technical Assistance, Rating Readiness Consultation and Coaching provided by the local lead agency
- All receipts, records, and documentation of use of Quality Improvement Awards (must be kept on-site for seven years)
- All parent/caregiver consents for children to participate in evaluation

DEL and the local lead agency reserve the right to request and review records pertaining to participation in order to verify enrollment, use of funds, or adherence to the Operating Guidelines at any time.

b. Notification Requirements

Facilities are required to notify local lead agency of significant changes that affect participation within seven business days including but not limited to:

- Address change
- Facility closure
- Change in licensing status: suspension, probation or revocation
- Low enrollment: fewer than three children enrolled
- Voluntary withdrawal from Early Achievers
- Change in Primary QRIS Contact
- Change in licensed capacity: facility no longer serves children birth to age 5
- Changes in ages served (provider preference): facility no longer serves children birth to age 5
- Temporary change in facility circumstances, including but not limited to: temporary closure; and extended absence of Primary QRIS Contact.

c. How address change affects Early Achievers participation

Facilities that physically move to a new location during any stage of Early Achievers participation must re-register to participate in Early Achievers after the facility is re-licensed at the new address. The provider will be withdrawn from participation and the Early Achievers Registration will become available again. The Primary QRIS Contact will still have their orientation attendance and training completions documented in MERIT and will not have to re-complete these activities. Because a large portion of a facility's Early Achievers rating is based on environment, facilities that re-register to participate after moving will be required to go through the evaluation and rating process again.

d. Information Sharing

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) and the University of Washington are subject to chapter 42.56 RCW, the Public Records Act. Early Achievers Facility records in the possession of DEL or the UW may also be subject to disclosure under chapter 42.56 RCW.

e. Internet Usage/Security

Participation in MERIT and the WELS Provider Portal is required as part of Early Achievers participation. These web-based data systems are secure and require user login to access the information. All data entered in MERIT and WELS can be accessed by DEL, Child Care Aware of Washington, and UW for the purpose of supporting quality improvement work and the long-term evaluation of the Early Achievers program. Additionally, all information entered into the data systems are subject to public disclosure requests as described above in *Information Sharing*.

f. Use and Development of Early Achievers Marketing and Outreach Materials

DEL encourages Early Achievers participants to showcase their participation with families and the community online and in their business brochures and flyers. DEL has created materials, including an informational brochure, sample letter to families and a rating certificate, to assist facilities with communication, and will develop additional materials in the future. Facilities are welcome to use their Early Achievers participation in their own marketing materials with the follow guidelines:

i. Facility website

Early Achievers participants may place the Early Achievers logo on their business website **provided** they:

- Use the logo and the phrase, “*We are an Early Achievers Participant*” along with the link to DEL’s Early Achievers section: www.del.wa.gov/care/qris. This is the only logo use approved for a facility’s website.

DEL must be notified when the Early Achievers logo is used on a facility business website. The Early Achievers participant and their Regional Coordinator should coordinate DEL notification by contacting the QRIS Inbox (qris@del.wa.gov) before the logo is live on the website. Please mark, *Use of Early Achievers Logo* in the email subject line.

ii. Facility business brochure/flyer

When an Early Achievers participant wishes to include the Early Achievers logo on their own business brochures and/or flyers to market their facility, the following guidelines are to be followed:

- The logo must not be on the title page of the child care facility promotional brochure; and
- The logo must be accompanied only with the phrase “*Ask us how are demonstrating our commitment to high quality early learning by participating in Early Achievers, Washington’s Quality Rating and Improvement System!*”

The family and community letter as well as the “parent” (family/community) brochure are both valuable tools that Early Achievers receive in their welcome toolkit and which may be accessed via our website <http://www.del.wa.gov/care/qris/toolkit.aspx>. The letter is modifiable so that Early Achievers participants can customize this as needed.

iii. Custom created marketing materials

If Early Achievers participants would like to create marketing materials beyond the materials that DEL provides, the following guidelines are to be followed:

- All outreach, marketing and informational materials (newsletters, flyers, FAQs, PowerPoint presentations and any other tools/resources used to provide information about Early Achievers) developed by participants must use and follow the branding guidelines/style guide approved by DEL (this can be obtained from the local lead agency).
- All outreach, marketing and informational materials developed by participants must be approved by DEL prior to distribution. Please allow two business days for review and approval by the QRIS Project Manager at DEL. Interested facilities should work with their local lead agency to send materials to DEL for approval.

g. **Conflict of Interest**

Early Achievers participants may not be employed as an Early Achievers Coach, Technical Assistance Specialist, Regional Coordinator, DEL staff member, or a member of the UW evaluation team during their participation in Early Achievers.

h. **Criteria for Termination**

The local lead agency reserves the right to initiate termination from Early Achievers process at any time if a facility fails to meet any of the expectations outlined in the Early Achievers Participation Agreement and the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines.

Criteria for termination include:

- Failure to maintain good standing with licensing defined as having an active license that is **not** suspended, revoked or on probation
- Changes in facility licensed capacity: facility no longer licensed to serve children birth to age five
- Changes in ages served (provider preference): facility no longer serves children birth to age five
- Changes in facility enrollment: no children ages birth to age 5 enrolled for 60 calendar days
- Provision of false information on Early Achievers application or any participation documents
- Failure to meet Early Achievers participation expectations including failure to return calls, keep appointments, and submit required paperwork including Quality Improvement Award Funds Use report
- Failure to fully participate in Early Achieves coaching services, including participation in on-site coaching and creation of a Quality Improvement Plan based on evaluation data and Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards
- Fraudulent use of Quality Improvement Award funds
- Failure to maintain all records, receipts and documentation of use of Quality Improvement Awards on-site for seven years
- Failure to report changes to local lead agency that may render facility ineligible for Early Achievers participation
- Failure to adhere to professionalism in conduct and behavior with coaches, regional coordinators, trainers and DEL staff

- Facility is unwilling to adhere to changes made to the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines or administrative and statutory guidelines issued by any state, federal or local government agency

i. **Procedure for Termination**

In the event that a facility has not met the requirements outlined in the Early Achievers Participation Agreement or the Operating Guidelines, or if the facility has committed any acts that may result in Early Achievers termination*, the **local lead agency shall:**

1. **Notify the facility in writing of the need to take corrective action.**
 - The facility has **30 days** to comply with the request for corrective action
 - The local lead agency may request additional documentation from the facility
 - The local lead agency reserves the right to suspend all or part of Early Achievers activities during the review process
2. **Notify DEL that the facility has had corrective action initiated.**
3. **Review all information provided by facility,** including steps that the facility has taken to remedy the issue, in order to determine if there is sufficient evidence that the facility has violated any aspect of Early Achievers participation or has otherwise acted in a way that is unethical to warrant termination of participation.
4. **Determine if the facility should be terminated from Early Achievers or allowed to continue as an Early Achievers participant.**
5. **Notify DEL of recommendation to terminate: DEL will approve all final decisions about facility termination from Early Achievers.**
6. **Notify the facility of final decision in writing within 30 days of receiving all necessary documentation to make a final decision.**

***Please note:** In the event that Early Achievers termination is triggered by facility licensing status, DEL is responsible for termination as outlined in *Eligibility: How Licensing Status affects registration and participation* (Section 3: part c).

j. **Obligations of Participants Upon Termination or Withdrawal from Early Achievers**

Facilities that are terminated or voluntarily withdraw from Early Achievers must:

- Provide local lead agency with all outstanding reports and participation information; and

- Facilities that are no longer Early Achievers participants should not display their Early Achievers Rating Certificate or otherwise use Early Achievers for marketing purposes.

If a facility makes a decision to voluntarily withdraw from Early Achievers, they are obligated to notify DEL by sending an email communication to the QRIS Inbox at gris@del.wa.gov in order to finalize their withdrawal.

In the event of termination due to suspected fraudulent use of funds, or failure to keep records, receipts and documentation of fund use, the facility may be liable for damages as authorized by law including, but not limited to, Quality Improvement funds paid to the facility.

k. **Reapplication to Early Achievers**

This section addresses the steps that a facility must take to reapply for Early Achievers after voluntary withdrawal or termination from Early Achievers. In the case of termination, the steps a participant must take to reapply are based on the reasons for termination.

i. **When can a facility reapply immediately to Early Achievers?**

Level 2 facilities in the following scenarios may reapply to Early Achievers at any time if they meet all of the eligibility criteria outlined in ***Eligibility*** (Section 3).

- Participation withdrawn because Primary QRIS Contact did not submit Participation Agreement to local lead agency by deadline
- Facilities terminated due to the following may reapply after one year:
 - Address change
 - Facility Closure—non licensing reasons
 - Low or no enrollment
 - Change in licensed capacity or ages served

In order to reapply, facilities will complete the Early Achievers Registration and the Early Achievers Application for Level 2. Facility information will not be saved from prior participation, but the Primary QRIS Contact will still have their orientation attendance and training completions documented in MERIT and will not have to re-complete these activities.

Recent legislation making statutory changes to the Revised Code of Washington (WAC) 43.215.545 requires that facilities complete Level 2 and rate a level 3 - 5 within 30 months in order to maintain the 2% Early Achievers participation subsidy increase. Upon reapplying to Early Achievers, Level 2 facilities, regardless if a facility completes

Level 2 or is in process, will resume the 30 month timeline where they left off within the 30 month timeframe. For example if a facility withdraws after six months of participation, the 30 month timeline will start at month six, not at month one.

Facilities that are rated a level 3 – 5 may reapply at any time however they will lose their Level 3 – 5 rating and all incentives and supports tied to a Level 3 – 5 rating and must start over at Level 2. Further, they will be required to wait one year to receive a 2nd rating.

ii. When must a facility wait one year to reapply to Early Achievers?

In the case that a facility is terminated from Early Achievers for the following reasons, the facility must wait one year to reapply and follow the procedures for re-application outlined (Section iii) below:

- Failure to maintain good standing with licensing defined as having an active license that is **not** suspended, revoked or on probation
- Provision of false information on Early Achievers application or any participation documents
- Failure to meet Early Achievers participation expectations including failure to return calls, keep appointments, and submit required paperwork including Quality Improvement Award Funds Use report
- Failure to fully participate in Early Achieves coaching services, including participation in on-site coaching and creation of a Quality Improvement Plan based on evaluation data and Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards
- Fraudulent use of Quality Improvement Award funds
- Failure to maintain all records, receipts and documentation of use of Quality Improvement Awards on-site for seven years
- Failure to adhere to professionalism in conduct and behavior with coaches, regional coordinators, trainers and DEL staff
- Facility is unwilling to adhere to changes made to the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines or administrative and statutory guidelines issued by any state, federal or local government agency

iii. Process to reapply to Early Achievers after one year

1. Facilities must wait 12 months from date of termination from Early Achievers before reapplication to Early Achievers.
2. After 12 months, facilities interested in reapplication are required to submit written documentation using a DEL approved template to the DEL QRIS

Program Manager stating how issues that resulted in termination or withdrawal have been resolved and how facility is prepared for successful future participation. Note: facilities that reapply to Early Achievers are subject to re-ratings timeline outlined in *Evaluation and Rating: Rating Assignment* (Section 7: part g).

3. The DEL QRIS Administrator will convene the DEL QRIS Review Team who will review the cause of facility termination or withdrawal, documentation submitted by facility, and information from partners including regional coordinators and local lead agencies if applicable to make a final decision about facility eligibility for participation. DEL may request additional information from the facility during review process. In the case that a facility was terminated due to licensing suspension, revocation, or probation, DEL will consult with the Regional Administrator for recommendations before making final decision.
4. DEL will notify facility of final decision in writing within 10 business days of receiving of all necessary documentation to make decision.
5. **DEL reserves the right to make final decision about reapplication after termination or voluntary withdrawal.**

x. Glossary of Terms

<p>Child Care Aware of Washington</p>	<p>Child Care Aware of Washington is the lead agency for coordinating improvement activities including technical assistance, rating readiness consultation, training, and coaching.</p>
<p>Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)</p>	<p>CLASS is an observation-based assessment tool that measures how teachers/providers interact with children to create supportive, nurturing relationships, enhance learning, and provide instruction. CLASS looks at interactions in three domains: Emotional Support; Classroom Organization; and Instructional Support. The CLASS will be conducted in child care center classrooms and family home child care by UW as part of the facility on-site evaluation for rating. Facility CLASS scores make up 40% of the total Early Achievers Quality Standards points.</p>
<p>Coach</p>	<p>All rated facilities will be assigned a coach who will work with them to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify goals based on evaluation data and Early Achievers Quality Standards • Make plans to achieve goals • Access resources • Implement quality improvements <p>Coaches are highly trained early learning professionals with experience and education in early childhood education, and participate in ongoing professional development.</p>

<p>Community Liaison</p>	<p>The Community Liaison is a member of the UW evaluation team that supports the facility and the Data Collectors to have a successful visit. The Community Liaison visits before the Data Collectors, and works with the Primary QRIS contact to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the on-site visit and answering any facility questions and concerns • Review the completed Rating Readiness Tool with the facility • Confirm that all facility documentation and files are ready and in place for data collection • Gather information for Data Collectors about the facility layout, including classroom/facility maps, classroom schedules, and other pertinent logistical information
<p>Data Collector</p>	<p>The Data Collector is a member of the UW evaluation team responsible for data collection. Data Collectors visit facilities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct observations including ERS and CLASS • Review records and documentation • Conduct staff interviews
<p>The Department of Early Learning (DEL)</p>	<p>The Department of Early Learning (DEL) is a state agency dedicated to helping ensure our state offers world-class, developmentally and culturally appropriate early learning opportunities for all of Washington’s youngest learners, so each child enters kindergarten with a solid foundation for success in school and life, ensuring Washington's children realize their full potential. DEL is the lead administrative agency for Early Achievers.</p>

<p>Early Achievers</p>	<p>Early Achievers is Washington’s quality, rating and improvement system (QRIS), and is a voluntary program designed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support child care providers to provide high-quality care by providing resources including training, coaching and incentives • Help parents and caregivers find high-quality child care and early learning programs that fit their needs • Ensure that children have high-quality early learning experiences that help them develop the skills they need to be successful in school and life
<p>Environment Rating Scales (ERS)</p>	<p>The ERS is an observation-based assessment that measures classroom/family home child care environment quality in the following categories: Space and Furnishings; Personal Care Routines; Language and Reasoning/Listening and Talking; Activities; Interactions; Program Structure; and Parents and Staff. The ERS will be conducted in child care center classrooms and family home child care by UW as part of the facility on-site evaluation for rating. Facility ERS scores make up 15% of the total Early Achievers Quality Standards points.</p>
<p>Facility</p>	<p>In this document, facility refers to the participating child care center or family home child care.</p>
<p>MERIT</p>	<p>Washington’s Managed Education and Registry Information Tool (MERIT) is used to document and recognize the professional achievements of early care and education and school age professionals. Facilities use MERIT to access and complete the Early Achievers Registration and Application for Level 2. MERIT is the source of evidence during evaluation for staff education qualifications for facility Professional Development & Training Standard points. Use of MERIT is a requirement for Early Achievers Participation.</p>
<p>Minimum thresholds</p>	<p>A facility must achieve designated minimum CLASS and ERS scores in order to achieve a rating of Level 3, regardless of total facility points earned. Each assessed child care</p>

	<p>facility/family home child care must score at least a 2 on Instructional Support in the CLASS, a 3.5 on Emotional Support/Classroom Organization, and a 3.5 on the ERS. These scores, or minimum thresholds represent the foundational level of quality that all facilities must have in order to be rated Levels 3-5. Facilities that do not meet the minimum thresholds will receive a rating of Level 2.</p>
On-site evaluation	<p>Facilities participate in on-site evaluation conducted by the University of Washington in order to earn a facility rating. On-site evaluation includes ERS and CLASS observations, review of records and documentation, and staff interviews.</p>
Primary QRIS Contact	<p>The Primary QRIS Contact is the facility child care center director or family home child care provider who is responsible for oversight and completion of all Level 2 activities.</p>
Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)	<p>All Level 3-5 facilities will create a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) in partnership with their coaches based on facility evaluation results, ERS and CLASS scores, components of the Quality Standards, and overall facility rating. The QIP is a plan that includes goals, action steps to achieve goals, timelines and resources needed.</p>
Quality Standards	<p>The Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards (<i>also known as the Quality Standards</i>) is a comprehensive, research-based framework to support positive outcomes in early learning settings. There are four quality standard areas: Child Outcomes; Curriculum & Learning Environment & Interactions; Professional Development & Training; and Family Engagement & Partnership. Each Quality Standard area is worth a set number of points. Facility ratings are based on total points earned during evaluation on the Quality Standards.</p>

Rating Readiness Consultant	Rating Readiness Consultants are highly trained in ERS and CLASS as well as the quality standards. Rating Readiness Consultants provide consultation to facilities to assist in preparation for a rating evaluation. Consultation is time limited and may include one-on-one as well as group support to teachers.
Rating Readiness Tool	The Rating Readiness Tool (RTT) is a document that helps facilities prepare for evaluation and ensure that all requirements are in place before on-site evaluation visits occur. Participants will receive the RRT from their local lead agency; local lead agency staff will help participants complete the tool.
Secondary QRIS Contact	Facilities may appointment a Secondary QRIS Contact to participate in the Professional Training Series on behalf of the Primary QRIS Contact. Designation of a Secondary QRIS Contact is optional.
Technical Assistance (TA) Specialist	All facilities in Level 2 will be assigned a Technical Assistance (TA) Specialist through their local lead agency who will work with the program to develop a work plan and timeline for completion of Level 2 activities and connect them to resources that will help them meet the Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards.
University of Washington (UW)	The University of Washington (UW) is the lead agency for evaluation, assessment and rating assignment. Data Collectors from UW conduct facility on-site evaluation visits. UW is also responsible for the development of the Early Achievers Coach Framework.
WELS data system	WELS is a web-based early learning data system that will be used by Early Achievers partners including DEL, UW and Child Care Aware/local lead agencies to track and maintain data including facility participation, evaluation information, and quality improvement progress. Facilities will use the WELS “Provider Portal” to view their QIP, track their progress, and access resources to support their goals.

