

Better Beginnings

Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System



Provider RULE BOOK

Arkansas Department of Human Services
Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND HISTORY

In 1993, the legislature passed a bill enabling the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (the “Division” or “DCCECE”) to create a system by which licensed childcare and early childhood education entities could be certified as “quality.” A goal of this system was to help the families of Arkansas to understand that providers, achieving this certification, consistently provided an early care and education environment above the minimum licensing requirements. The larger goal was to encourage and achieve better lifelong outcomes for children, by helping to assure that their time in childcare and early childhood education is nurturing, enriching, and meaningful.

In 2004, the state of Arkansas was awarded a State Maternal and Child Health Care grant which created the Arkansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative (AECCS). Over almost five (5) years, committees, which involved more than two hundred (200) childcare and early childhood related professionals met, researched, and created an improved approach to “quality.” The result was a tiered quality rating and improvement system for our state called “Better Beginnings,” implemented in 2010.-Since this time, the state has dedicated much time and many resources to finding ways to meet the needs of the children, and to assist programs in overcoming obstacles to participation.

“Better Beginnings,” Arkansas’ revised tiered quality rating and improvement system is available to every licensed and registered childcare provider in Arkansas. The system is designed to help programs improve their day-to-day environment for children, and to establish proven administrative practices. Tools and trainings are readily available for providers as they move along the path from Better Beginnings levels one through six (1-6).

Better Beginnings is available to every licensed and registered childcare provider in Arkansas. Whether you are a family home, an out-of-school time program, or a childcare center, your participation is imperative for the future of Arkansas. We are grateful to all who have worked to create Better Beginnings and make it what it is today. Every Child Deserves Our Best!

Better Beginnings Overview

Better Beginnings is a tiered quality rating and improvement system (TQRIS) which is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education programs. Program types include center-based care, family child care, and out-of-school time programs.

Better Beginnings is a “building block” approach, which means that programs must meet all requirements at one level before moving to the next. Licensing, or Minimum Licensing Requirements (MLR), is the foundation on which Better Beginnings is built. The requirements at level one (1) of Better Beginnings align with MLR and help the director or primary caregiver begin the journey towards quality improvement. At level two (2), the staff becomes more involved in the process. Levels three (3) and above set even higher requirements for all components.

Resources are available and have been specifically designed to help providers understand and meet each requirement. The resources will help providers become more knowledgeable and effective for Better Beginnings in the lives of children.

1.0 RULES AND REGULATIONS

1.00 REGULATORY AUTHORITY

1.01 These regulations are enacted pursuant to Arkansas Code Ann. §20-78-201-226 as amended.

1.02 These regulations shall be known as the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education regulations governing Better Beginnings, Arkansas's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

2.00 PURPOSE

2.01 It is the purpose of these regulations to set the general guidelines for the operation of Better Beginnings.

2.02 Providers who choose to receive Child Care Development Block Grant Funding (CCDBGF) must be a Better Beginnings participant at the level determined by the Division. This system is intended to certify quality status to childcare facilities that meet Better Beginnings requirements as set forth in these regulations.

2.03 Designation of certified status for any childcare facility will qualify taxpayers for the following:

- A. Under Act 820 of 1993, corporations that build and equip a certified childcare center will be exempt from the state compensating tax levied by Ark. Code Ann. §26-53-101 et. seq (1987). Construction materials and furnishings purchased for use in the initial construction and equipping of a childcare center, for the exclusive purpose of providing childcare to the corporation's employees, will be subject to this exemption.
- B. Under Act 820 of 1993, a business that qualifies for the exemption from the Gross Receipts Tax under Ark. Code Ann. §26-52-401(29), shall be allowed an income tax credit of three and nine-tenths percent (3.9%) of the annual salary of employees employed exclusively in providing child care services.
- C. Under Act 1268 of 1993, enhanced income tax credits in the amount of twenty percent (20%) of the federal childcare credit as allowed under Section 21 of the Internal Revenue Code will be available to qualified taxpayers who incur child care expenses at childcare facilities that are certified at Better Beginnings level two (2) or above.

3.00 ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

3.01

ADE	Arkansas Department of Education
ABC	Arkansas Better Chance
AEDC	Arkansas Economic Development Commission
BAS	Business Administration Scale
CARF	Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities: Child and Youth Services Standards
CDA	Child Development Associate Credential
DCCECE	Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education
DHS	Department of Human Services
Director	The person who meets MLR as director and is on site a minimum of 50% of the operational day.
ECERS	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale
ERS	Environment Rating Scale
FCCERS	Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale
ITERS	Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale
MLR	Minimum Licensing Requirements
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NAFCC	National Association for Family Child Care
PAS	Program Administration Scale
PDR	Professional Development Registry
PQA	Program Quality Assessment
SACERS	School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale
TQRIS	Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System
YPQI	Youth Program Quality Intervention

4.00 AGENCY RESPONSIBILITY

4.01 The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) will coordinate and administer Better Beginnings.

4.02 The Division is authorized to make temporary revisions to these rules as deemed necessary during a Governor declared public health emergency or natural disaster impacting the State of Arkansas. These revisions will be posted on the Better Beginnings website.

4.03 The Better Beginnings Program Administrator or designee will have final approval of applications for certification as reviewed and recommended by the Better Beginnings staff.

4.04 By December 31 of each year, the Division will be responsible for providing verification to the Department of Finance & Administration of the childcare facilities that were qualified for certification at level two (2) and above, in the current calendar year.

4.05 Each December, the Division will be responsible for providing verification to the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) of the childcare facilities that qualified for Better Beginnings certification in the current calendar year.

4.06 The Division or Division consultants will provide technical assistance to any facilities desiring to achieve certification.

4.07 The Division will be responsible for the process of recertifying facilities (See Section 7.00 Application, 8.00 Application Review Process, and 9.00 Maintaining Certification).

4.08 Facilities will be notified of their certification status. The certification notice will denote the level of certification achieved.

5.00 ELIGIBILITY

5.01 All licensed, registered, and church operated exempt childcare facilities, as defined under Ark. Code Ann. §20-78-202, exclusive of foster homes, group homes, and custodial institutions, are eligible to apply for certified status.

5.02 All childcare facilities, except those excluded in section 5.01 above, operating under a New Provisional or Regular license, registration, or church operated exemption as issued by the Division are eligible to apply. Entities with multiple sites, each holding a separate license number must apply for certification for each site individually.

5.03 All facilities must be in good standing with the Department of Human Services. A facility in “good standing” is not currently debarred, defunded, excluded, or under adverse action with licensing or other DHS programs.

5.04 Applicants and certified facilities must make their facility accessible at all times during the regular program hours for program reviews and environmental assessments. Such assessments may be unannounced.

5.05 Any of the following situations (including but not limited to conditions below) may result in an application being denied, a reduction in level, or removal of Better Beginnings status:

- A. Ineligibility to participate according to section 5.00 Eligibility;
- B. Application documentation which is incomplete or does not meet the intent of the requirements according to sections 6.00, 7.00, 8.00, or 9.00;
- C. Failure to continue to meet the requirements for the component areas for the level which the facility is assigned;
- D. Numerous or serious deficiencies cited by licensing;
- E. Substantiation of complaints received by the Division;
- F. Being placed on Adverse Action by any program in DHS;
- G. Changes in the license status of the facility; or
- H. Falsification of any document or submission of false information to any DHS Division.

5.06 Facilities that have been denied certification or have had certification removed by reason of ineligibility, according to any rules of this section, may be eligible to re-apply in twelve (12) months unless otherwise notified by the Division Director.

6.00 COMPONENT AREAS, REQUIREMENTS, AND LEVELS

6.01 There are four (4) component areas in Better Beginnings:

- Administration
- Staff Qualifications and Professional Development
- Learning Environment/Environment Assessment
- Child Health and Development

There are requirements to be met in each component area in each of the levels. The components, requirements, and levels are on the following pages.

ARKANSAS BETTER BEGINNINGS CHILD CARE CENTER REQUIREMENTS

All facilities must be in good standing with the Department of Human Services.

COMPONENTS	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2 Must meet all requirements for Level 1	LEVEL 3 Must meet all requirements for Level 1 and Level 2	LEVEL 4 Must meet all requirements for Levels 1 - 3	LEVEL 5 Must meet all requirements for Levels 1 - 4	LEVEL 6 Must meet all requirements for Levels 1 - 5
A. Administration	<p>1.A.1 The facility has a license in New Provisional or Regular status.</p> <p>1.A.2 The facility may have a program review completed by a certified PAS assessor. School age programs using YPQI may have a PQA Form B review completed by a reliable assessor.</p>	<p>2.A.1 The facility shall have a PAS review completed by a certified PAS assessor. School-age programs using YPQI shall have a PQA Form B review completed by a reliable assessor.</p> <p>2.A.2 The director shall complete a Strengthening Families training listed on the PDR.</p>	<p>3.A.1 The facility shall score an average of 4.00 or higher on PAS items 1-21 (items 5 and 6 are scored but are not included in the average). School-age programs using YPQI shall have a PQA Form B score of 3.75 or higher.</p> <p>3.A.2 The director shall complete the Strengthening Families online self-assessment for three (3) or more Strategies.</p> <p>3.A.3 The facility shall develop a Strengthening Families action plan and implement at least one (1) action step.</p>	<p>4.A.1 The facility shall score an average of 4.00 or higher on PAS. School-age programs using YPQI shall have a PQA Form B score of 4.00 or higher.</p> <p>4.A.2 The director shall implement at least one (1) additional Strengthening Families action step for a total of two (2).</p>	<p>5.A.1 The facility shall score an average of 5.00 or higher on PAS. School-age programs using YPQI shall have a PQA Form B score of 4.25 or higher.</p>	<p>6.A.1 The facility shall score an average of 6.00 or higher on PAS. School-age programs using YPQI shall have a PQA Form B score of 4.75 or higher.</p>
B. Staff Qualifications and Professional Development	<p>1.B.1 The facility has a license in New Provisional or Regular status.</p>	<p>2.B.1 All directors and at least fifty percent (50%) of teaching staff shall complete "Early</p>				

		<p>Learning Standards (ELS) Basics Training.” The director and school-age staff shall complete “Developmental Assets Training.”</p> <p>2.B.2 All directors and fifty percent (50%) of teaching staff shall complete an ERS training; if the facility is using YPQI, all directors and school-age staff shall complete YPQI training.</p> <p>2.B.3 The director and kitchen manager (if applicable) shall participate in at least two (2) clock hours of training on nutrition for children annually.</p> <p>2.B.4 The director shall complete training on developmentally appropriate physical activities for children.</p>				
<p>C. Learning Environment / Environment Assessment</p>	<p>1.C.1 The facility has a license in New Provisional or Regular status.</p> <p>1.C.2 The facility may have an ERS review.</p>	<p>2.C.1 The facility shall score an average of 3.00 or higher on the ERS review. School age programs using PQA shall score a 3.00 or higher on the PQA.</p>	<p>3.C.1 The facility shall score an average of 4.00 or higher on the ERS. School age programs using PQA shall score 3.75 or higher on the PQA.</p>	<p>4.C.1 Staff to child ratios shall be maintained as follows: Birth–18 months 1:4 18-36 months 1:7 2 ½ - 3 years 1:11 4 years 1:12</p>	<p>5.C.1 Staff to child ratios shall be maintained as follows: Birth–18 months 1:4 18-36 months 1:6 2 ½ - 3 years 1:10</p>	<p>6.C.1 Staff to child ratios shall be maintained as follows: Birth–18 months 1:4 18-36 months 1:6 2 ½ - 3 years 1:10 4 years 1:10</p>

	School age programs using YPQI may have a PQA review.		3.C.2 The staff shall maintain a portfolio for each child.	5 years and up 1:18 4.C.2 The facility shall score an average of 5.00 or higher on the ERS. School age programs using PQA shall score 4.00 or higher on the PQA.	4 years 1:10 5 years and up 1:18 5.C.2 The facility shall score an average of 5.50 or higher on the ERS. School age programs using the PQA shall score 4.25 or higher on the PQA.	5 years and up 1:15 6.C.2 The facility shall score an average of 6.00 or higher on the ERS. School age programs using the PQA shall score 4.50 or higher on the PQA.
D. Child Health and Development	1.D.1 The facility has a license in New Provisional or Regular status.	2.D.1 The facility shall document distribution of ARKids First information to families of uninsured children. 2.D.2 The facility shall share information on child development, stages of development, and children’s health with families. 2.D.3 All children, birth to kindergarten, shall have an annual developmental screening. 2.D.4 The facility shall use a Division-approved tool to complete a child nutrition self-assessment and create and implement one (1)	3.D.1 The facility shall share information on nutrition and physical activity for children with families. 3.D.2 The facility shall use a Division-approved tool to complete a (1) physical activity self-assessment and create and implement one action plan in the physical activity module. 3.D.3 The facility shall use the Division - approved tool to complete a second self-assessment in the physical activity module to assess progress.	4.D.1 The facility shall use a Division-approved tool to complete a self-assessment in child nutrition, physical activity, farm to ECE, oral health, breastfeeding & infant feeding, outdoor play & learning, or screen time and create and implement two action plans in that module. . 4.D.2 The facility shall use the Division – approved tool to complete a second self-assessment in child nutrition, physical activity, farm to ECE, oral health, breastfeeding & infant feeding, outdoor play &	5.D.1 The facility shall use a Division-approved tool to complete a self-assessment in child nutrition, physical activity, farm to ECE, oral health, breastfeeding and infant feeding, outdoor play and learning, OR screen time and create and implement two (2) action plans in that module. 5.D.2 The facility shall use the Division – approved tool to complete a second self-assessment in child nutrition, physical activity, farm to ECE, oral health,	6.D.1 The facility shall use a Division-approved tool to complete a self-assessment in child nutrition, physical activity, farm to ECE, oral health, breastfeeding and infant feeding, outdoor play and learning, OR screen time and create and implement two (2) action plans in that module. 6.D.2 The facility shall use the Division – approved tool to complete a second self-assessment in child nutrition, physical activity, farm to ECE, oral health, breastfeeding & infant

		<p>action plan in the child nutrition module.</p> <p>2.D.5 The facility shall use a Division-approved tool to complete a second self-assessment in the child nutrition model to assess progress.</p>		<p>learning, OR screen time to assess progress.</p>	<p>breastfeeding & infant feeding, outdoor play & learning, OR screen time to assess progress.</p>	<p>feeding, outdoor play & learning, OR screen time to assess progress.</p>
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ARKANSAS BETTER BEGINNINGS – LICENSED AND REGISTERED HOME REQUIREMENTS

All facilities must be in good standing with the Department of Human Services.

COMPONENTS	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2 Must meet all requirements for Level 1	LEVEL 3 Must meet all requirements for Level 1 and Level 2	LEVEL 4 Must meet all requirements for Levels 1 - 3	LEVEL 5 Must meet all requirements for Levels 1 - 4	LEVEL 6 Must meet all requirements for Levels 1 - 5
A. Administration	<p>1.A.1 The facility has a license in New Provisional or Regular status.</p> <p>1.A.2 The facility may have a program review completed by a certified BAS assessor.</p>	<p>2.A.1 A program review shall be completed by a certified BAS assessor.</p> <p>2.A.2 The primary caregiver shall complete a Strengthening Families training listed on the PDR.</p>	<p>3.A.1 The facility shall score an average of 4.00 or higher on BAS items 2-10 (item 2 is scored but is not included in the average).</p> <p>3.A.2 The primary caregiver shall complete the Strengthening Families online self-assessment for three (3) or more strategies.</p> <p>3.A.3 The primary caregiver shall develop a Strengthening</p>	<p>4.A.1 The facility shall score an average of 4.00 or higher on BAS.</p> <p>4.A.2 The primary caregiver shall implement at least one (1) additional Strengthening Families action plan for a total of two (2).</p>	<p>5.A.1 The facility shall score an average of 5.00 or higher on BAS.</p>	<p>6.A.1 The facility shall score an average of 6.00 or higher on BAS.</p>

			Families action plan and implement at least one (1) action step.			
B. Staff Qualifications and Professional Development	1.B.1 The facility has a <u>license in New Provisional or Regular status.</u>	<p>2.B.1 The primary caregiver shall complete “Early Learning Standards Basics” training.</p> <p>2.B.2 The primary caregiver shall complete an ERS training.</p> <p>2.B.3 The primary caregiver shall participate in at least two (2) clock hours of training on nutrition for children, annually.</p> <p>2.B.4 The primary caregiver shall complete training on developmentally appropriate physical activities for children.</p>				
C. Learning Environment / Environment Assessment	<p>1.C.1 The facility has a <u>license in New Provisional or Regular status.</u></p> <p>1.C.2 The facility may have a FCCERS review.</p>	2.C.1 The facility shall score an average of 3.00 or higher on the FCCERS.	<p>3.C.1 The facility shall score an average of 4.00 or higher on the FCCERS.</p> <p>3.C.2 Caregivers shall maintain a portfolio for each child.</p>	4.C.1 The facility shall score an average of 5.00 or higher on the FCCERS.	5.C.1 The facility shall score an average of 5.50 or higher on the FCCERS.	6.C.1 The facility shall score an average of 6.00 or higher on the FCCERS.
D.	1.D.1 The facility has a <u>license in New</u>	2.D.1 The primary caregiver shall	3.D.1 The primary caregiver shall share	4.D.1 The primary caregiver shall use a	5.D.1 The primary caregiver shall use a	6.D.1 The primary caregiver shall use a

<p>Child Health and Development</p>	<p><u>Provisional or Regular status.</u></p>	<p>document distribution of ARKids First information to families of uninsured children.</p> <p>2.D.2 The primary caregiver shall share information regarding child development, stages of development, and children’s health with families.</p> <p>2.D.3 All children birth to kindergarten shall have an annual developmental screening.</p> <p>2.D.4 The primary caregiver shall use a Division-approved tool to complete a child nutrition self-assessment and create and implement one (1) action plan in the child nutrition module.</p> <p>2.D.5 The primary caregiver shall use a Division-approved tool to complete a second self-assessment in the child nutrition module to assess progress.</p>	<p>information on nutrition and physical activity for children with families.</p> <p>3.D.2 The primary caregiver shall use a Division-approved tool to complete a physical activity self-assessment and create and implement one action plan in the physical activity module.</p> <p>3.D.3 The primary caregiver shall use the Division -approved tool to complete a second self-assessment in the physical activity module to assess progress.</p>	<p>Division-approved tool to complete a self-assessment in child nutrition, physical activity, farm to ECE, oral health, breastfeeding and infant feeding, outdoor play and learning, OR screen time and create and implement two action plans in that module.</p> <p>4.D.2 The primary caregiver shall use the Division-approved tool to complete a second self-assessment in child nutrition, physical activity, farm to ECE, oral health, breastfeeding and infant feeding, outdoor play and learning, OR screen time to assess progress.</p>	<p>Division-approved tool to complete a self-assessment in child nutrition, physical activity, farm to ECE, oral health, breastfeeding and infant feeding, outdoor play and learning, OR screen time and create and implement two (2) action plans in that module.</p> <p>5.D.2 The primary caregiver shall use the Division-approved tool to complete a second self-assessment in child nutrition, physical activity, farm to ECE, oral health, breastfeeding and infant feeding, outdoor play and learning, OR screen time to assess progress.</p>	<p>Division-approved tool to complete a self-assessment in child nutrition, physical activity, farm to ECE, oral health, breastfeeding and infant feeding, outdoor play and learning, OR screen time and create and implement two (2) action plans in that module.</p> <p>6.D.2 The primary caregiver shall use the Division-approved tool to complete a second self-assessment in child nutrition, physical activity, farm to ECE, oral health, breastfeeding and infant feeding, outdoor play and learning, OR screen time to assess progress.</p>
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ARKANSAS BETTER BEGINNINGS - OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME REQUIREMENTS

All facilities must be in good standing with the Department of Human Services.

COMPONENTS	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2 Must meet all requirements for Level 1	LEVEL 3 Must meet all requirements for Level 1 and Level 2	LEVEL 4 Must meet all requirements for Levels 1 - 3	LEVEL 5 Must meet all requirements for Levels 1 - 4	LEVEL 6 Must meet all requirements for Levels 1 - 5
A. Administration	<p>1.A.1 <u>The facility has a license in New Provisional or Regular status.</u></p> <p>1.A.2 <u>The facility may have a PAS review completed by a certified assessor or a PQA form B review completed by a reliable assessor.</u></p>	<p>2.A.1 The facility shall have a PAS review completed by a certified assessor. If using YPQI, PAS is not required; however, a PQA Form B review shall be completed by a reliable assessor.</p> <p>2.A.2 The director shall complete a Strengthening Families training, listed on the PDR.</p>	<p>3.A.1 The facility shall score an average of 4.00 or higher on PAS items 1-21 (items 5 and 6 are scored but are not included in the average.). If using YPQI, PAS is not required; however, a PQA Form B score of 3.75 or higher is required.</p> <p>3.A.2 The director shall complete the Strengthening Families online self-assessment for three (3) or more Strategies.</p> <p>3.A.3 The facility shall develop a Strengthening Families action plan and implement at least one (1) action step.</p>	<p>4.A.1 The facility shall score an average of 4.00 or higher on PAS. If using YPQI, PAS is not required; however, a PQA Form B score of 4.00 or higher is required.</p> <p>4.A.2 The director shall implement at least one (1) additional Strengthening Families action plan for a total of two (2).</p>	<p>5.A.1 The facility shall score an average of 5.00 or higher on PAS. If using YPQI, PAS is not required; however, a PQA Form B score of 4.25 or higher is required.</p>	<p>6.A.1 The facility shall score an average of 6.00 or higher on PAS. If using YPQI, PAS is not required; however, a PQA Form B score of 4.75 or higher is required.</p>
B. Staff Qualifications and Professional Development	<p>1.B.1 <u>The facility has a license in New Provisional or Regular status.</u></p>	<p>2.B.1 All directors and at least fifty percent (50%) of teaching staff shall complete "Intro</p>				

		<p>to the 40 Developmental Assets” training.</p> <p>2.B.2 All directors and, and fifty percent (50%) of the teaching staff shall complete an ERS or YPQI training.</p> <p>2.B.3 The director and kitchen manager (if applicable) shall participate in training on nutrition for school age children/youth, annually.</p> <p>2.B.4 The director shall complete training on developmentally appropriate physical activities for children/youth.</p>				
C. Learning Environment / Environment Assessment	<p>1.C.1 The facility <u>has a license in New Provisional or Regular status.</u></p> <p>1.C.2 The facility may have a SACERS or a PQA review completed by a reliable assessor.</p>	2.C.1 The facility shall score an average of 3.00 or higher on the SACERS or 3.00 or higher on the PQA.	<p>3.C.1 Facility shall score an average of 4.00 or higher on the SACERS or 3.75 or higher on the PQA.</p> <p>3.C.2 Staff shall maintain a portfolio for each participant.</p>	4.C.1 The facility shall score an average of 5.00 or higher on the SACERS or 4.00 or higher on the PQA.	5.C.1 The facility shall score an average of 5.50 or higher on the SACERS or 4.25 or higher on the PQA.	<p>6.C.1 The staff/participant ratio shall be 1:15.</p> <p>6.C.2 The facility shall score an average of 6.00 or higher on the SACERS or 4.50 or higher on the PQA.</p>
D.	1.D.1 The facility <u>has a license in</u>	2.D.1 The facility shall document the	3.D.1 The facility shall share information on			

<p>Child/Youth Health and Development</p>	<p><u>New Provisional or Regular status.</u></p>	<p>distribution of ARKids First information to families of uninsured participants.</p> <p>2.D.2 The facility shall share with families information regarding child or youth development, stages of development, and children’s health.</p>	<p>nutrition and physical activity for school age children with families.</p>			
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7.00 APPLICATION

7.01 The application will consist of the following items:

- A. An application indicating the level of Better Beginnings that the individual is applying for. This can be submitted via the provider portal. If the provider portal is not operable, applications may be submitted electronically through email at BetterBeginnings@dhs.arkansas.gov.
- B. Supporting documentation for all items listed in Section 6, regarding the facility type and level for which the facility is applying.

7.02 Eligible programs that are accredited through state or national accreditation systems are eligible for full or partial reciprocity and given certification at levels that are determined by the Division. The following are some examples of approved accreditation systems:

- Arkansas Better Chance (ABC)
- Association Montessori International
- The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities: Child and Youth Services Standards (CARF)
- Early Head Start
- Head Start
- National Afterschool Association (NAA)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)

Other accreditation systems may be considered upon review and approval by the Better Beginnings Program Administrator.

Facilities with such accreditations shall apply for participation in Better Beginnings via the provider portal and submit verification of the accreditation. If the provider portal is not operable, applications may be submitted electronically through email at BetterBeginnings@dhs.arkansas.gov. Additional documentation of Better Beginnings requirements or reviews may be required to determine the level of Better Beginnings certification.

8.00 APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

8.01 Applications will be denied if they lack the required supporting documentation.

8.02 The Division will review the supporting documentation to determine if each item submitted meets the intent of the associated requirement.

8.03 When the documentation submitted does not meet the requirements, or evidence is not included, the facility may not be eligible for that level. Facilities will be considered for a lower level.

8.04 Applicants will be certified at the highest level for which all requirements are met as determined by review of all documentation and assessments.

8.05 Applicants who purchase an existing facility that is certified at level two (2) or above, and has active voucher participants enrolled, may be given a temporary Better Beginnings level to enable them to temporarily bill for the voucher participants that are enrolled. The new owner will have ninety (90) days to achieve their own Better Beginnings level. The new owner will be certified at the level for which they qualify. If they do not qualify within ninety (90) days, they will be removed from participation.

9.00 MAINTAINING CERTIFICATON

9.01 Certification for level two (2) and above is valid for thirty-six (36) months unless the facility becomes otherwise ineligible for certification according to section 5.00 Eligibility or 10.00 Adverse Action. Certification for level one (1) facilities will remain valid, as long as the license is in new provisional or regular status.

9.02 Facilities, certified as Better Beginnings level two (2) and above programs, must re-submit all application documents, as outlined in section 7.00, thirty-five (35) months after the date of the last certification. Level one (1) facilities are not required to reapply. Failure to submit required documentation may result in loss of certification status. Certification will be granted upon completion of all requirements (see section 8.00).

9.03 Facilities who do not meet requirements for their current level or higher at recertification will be given the option of accepting the highest level for which they qualify or being placed on a 90-day corrective action agreement. All requirements must be met for the current or higher level by the end of the corrective action agreement. If the requirements are not met, the facility will be certified at the highest level for which they qualify.

9.04 A certified facility which becomes the subject of an investigation may retain current certification until the investigation is concluded. The outcome of the investigation may be considered in determining continuation of certification or a corrective action agreement at any level.

9.05 Facilities requesting to be reviewed for a higher level of certification must submit a new application for the higher level. A full application must be submitted according to section 7.00 and will be processed according to section 8.00. Facilities meeting higher level requirements will be newly certified at the appropriate level. Facilities not meeting higher level requirements will be assigned the level of certification achieved.

9.06 Certified facilities that change location must submit a new application for Better Beginnings certification according to section 7.00 and will be processed according to section 8.00. The facility may

retain the current certification level, until the application review process is completed. This process shall be completed within ninety (90) days of the relocation. If the facility does not qualify within ninety (90) days, they will be removed from participation.

9.07 Unannounced visits, reviews, or random checks may be conducted at any time to verify continued compliance with certification requirements. An unfavorable review may result in a full-scale reassessment, which could change the Better Beginnings status.

9.08 It is recommended that each facility implements a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process with a self-assessment to assist them in maintaining quality practices during the growth years when ERS and PAS reviews are not done. Technical assistance is available upon request.

10.00 ADVERSE ACTION

10.01 Adverse actions include denial, suspension, reduction in level, or removal of certified status. Adverse actions may include but are not limited to:

- A. Ineligibility to participate according to section 5.00 Eligibility;
- B. Application documentation which is incomplete or does not meet the intent of requirements according to sections 6.00, 7.00, 8.00, and 9.00;
- C. Failure to continue to meet the requirements for the component areas for the level which the facility is assigned;
- D. Numerous or serious deficiencies cited by licensing;
- E. Substantiation of complaints received by the Division;
- F. Being placed on Adverse Action by any program in DCCECE;
- G. Changes in the license status of the facility; or
- H. Falsification of any document or submission of false information to any DHS Division.

10.02 Facilities that have their Better Beginnings certification denied, suspended, or removed are eligible to re-apply after twelve (12) months unless otherwise authorized by the Division Director.

11.00 APPEAL PROCEDURE

11.01 Facilities that are denied certification status, are found to be ineligible for a particular level or have had their certification status reduced or removed; may request an appeal. A written request for appeal shall be submitted to the Better Beginnings Program Administrator within ten (10) days of the notice of action, asking that certification status decision be reviewed.

11.02 Upon receipt of the request for appeal, the Better Beginnings Program Administrator will conduct an internal review to ensure that the appropriate processes were followed and to determine the validity of the decision. The Better Beginnings Program Administrator will review the findings with the Division Director and will transmit the findings of the internal review to the facility within thirty (30) days of the receipt of the request to appeal.

11.03 If the outcome of the internal review is unsatisfactory to the facility, the facility has ten (10) days in which to ask for further review by the Better Beginnings Appeal Review Committee. The committee will schedule a hearing and notify the facility in writing of the date and time of the hearing. The committee members are appointed by the chair of the Early Childhood Commission. A decision of the Better Beginnings Appeal Review Committee is the final DHS administrative decision.

11.04 In the event that there are appeals made to multiple units in DCCECE, regarding the action that resulted in the Better Beginnings action being appealed, the Better Beginnings appeal will not be heard until the outcome of the other appeals has been determined. If the action is overturned, then the Better Beginnings appeal will be scheduled. If the action is upheld, the decision is final and there will be no Better Beginnings appeal hearing.