

# Continuous Quality Improvement and ExceleRate® Illinois



Preparing  
Children for  
Success

# Continuous Quality Improvement and ExceleRate Illinois

ExceleRate Illinois is a universal system of quality rating and improvement that covers all early childhood care and education programs in Illinois. It helps **parents** make good choices by listing each program's overall quality rating on one or more websites including [www.exceleRateillinois.com](http://www.exceleRateillinois.com) and [www.chicagoearlylearning.org](http://www.chicagoearlylearning.org), and it helps **programs** improve quality through a system of standards and supports that align with the major funding streams and accrediting bodies.

## Continuous Quality Improvement

The ultimate goal of ExceleRate Illinois is that young children will be ready for school and ready for life. Quality standards provide a framework based in research, but to achieve the goal, each program must apply the standards in its own way to meet the unique needs of each enrolled child and family. Each program takes responsibility for improving its own quality on a continuous basis – not just to achieve a rating, but to meet the needs of its children and families. ExceleRate Illinois defines continuous quality improvement (CQI) as follows:

“CQI is a leadership philosophy and an ongoing process that involves the Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle. It is proactive, not reactive. It is related to the internal “owning” of a process by the team in a program. It goes beyond meeting the externally applied regulations and standards – and moves the lever for change internally, using data to guide decisions and reflect upon the results of the improvement plan to increase program quality.”

The ExceleRate Illinois approach to CQI includes:

- Program quality standards for each Circle of Quality, and instruments to measure them
- The “Plan, Do, Study, Act”(PDSA) cycle
- Resources and funded supports for program leaders implementing CQI

# Program Quality Standards

ExceleRate standards are organized in four domains:

- Teaching and Learning
- Family and Community Engagement
- Leadership and Management
- Qualifications and Continuing Education

Programs achieve one of the Circles of Quality below based on meeting standards under each of the four domains.

- A. The Licensed Circle of Quality** is the foundational Circle of Quality, and recognizes compliance with the licensing standards of the State of Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.
- B. The Bronze Circle of Quality** recognizes staff qualifications and professional development, with completion of a robust series of trainings for teachers and program administrators. Bronze Circle trainings prepare programs or success as they progress through the Circles of Quality.
- C. The Silver Circle of Quality** recognizes completion of a rigorous self-assessment and implementation of a continuous quality improvement process, as verified by an independent assessor. Silver Circle programs meet or exceed specific quality benchmarks on learning environment and instructional quality, along with selected program administrative standards; staff qualifications; and professional development.
- D. The Gold Circle of Quality** recognizes programs which have demonstrated quality on all fifteen standards, as validated by an independent assessor. Gold Circle programs meet or exceed specific quality benchmarks on learning environment, instructional quality, and all program administrative standards; group size and staff/child ratios; staff qualifications; and professional development.



There are also Awards of Excellence in specific areas that can be achieved once the Gold Circle of Quality is reached. These include research-based criteria for preparing at-risk children for success in school and later life. Programs may seek awards in:

- Preschool Teaching and Learning
- Infant and Toddler Services
- Family and Community Engagement
- Inclusion of Children with Special Needs
- Linguistically and Culturally Appropriate Practice

## Program-Level Measures and Instruments Referenced in the Standards

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| – Day Care Licensing Standards (DCFS)         | – Program Administration Scale (PAS)              |
| – NAEYC or NAC accreditation                  | – Head Start Performance Standards                |
| – Environmental Rating Scales (ERS)           | – Illinois Preschool for All Compliance Checklist |
| – Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) |   |

To view or download the standards and related resources go to [www.excelerateillinoisproviders.com](http://www.excelerateillinoisproviders.com).

# Continuous Quality Improvement Cycle

## Set the Overarching Goal

Collaboratively define what the team wants the program to achieve.  
A shared picture of the future creates ownership and commitment rather than forced compliance.

### Act

**Incorporate changes and improvements into the process. Determine next steps.**

- Implement the change(s).
- Should an alternative idea for change be considered?
- Identify what more we need to learn.
- Will the cycle run again with improvements?



PLAN

### Plan

**Define and analyze the current process. Develop a Continuous Quality Improvement Program Plan (CQIP).**

- What is the problem or challenge? What do the data tell us?
- How will we make improvements?
- How do we measure success?
- Who needs to be involved? What is our timeline?



ACT



DO

### Study

**Analyze the impact and track the results.**

- How is the process working? Are mid-course adjustments required?
- Were objectives met? How do we know?
- What still needs improvement?
- What new opportunities have surfaced?



STUDY

### Do

**Implement the plan in everyday practices.**

- How is the process working?
- Are we on target with the timeline?
- Are we seeing evidence of change?



# Preparing to Use Plan-Do-Study-Act

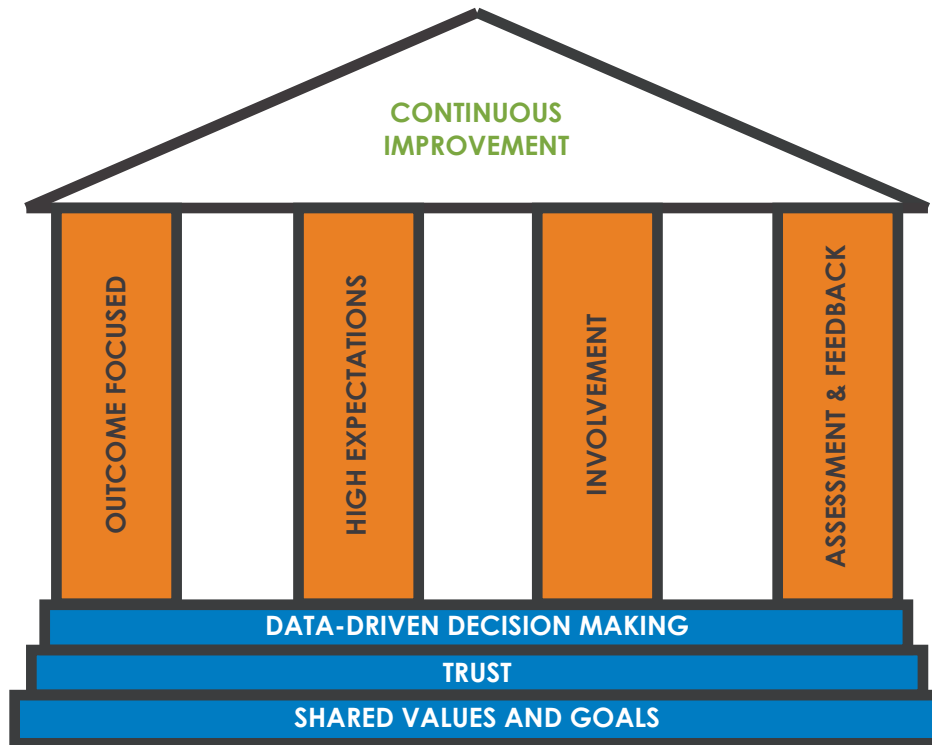
## CQI Steps to Program Self-Assessment and Improvement

1. Program leaders become familiar with ExceleRate system and standards
2. Determine route – Accreditation or Assessment
3. Program leaders prepare to lead CQI process.
  - a. Collect documents and tools for chosen route (If NAEYC accreditation, enroll in Self-Study and receive materials from NAEYC. If Assessment route, attend orientation, study standards and CQIP document.)
  - b. Learn about data sources, assessment instruments (CLASS, ERS) and compliance checklists. Review available data about your own program. Attend the training “Understanding and Planning for Continuous Quality Improvement” available through the CCR&R and listed in Gateways Statewide Online Training Calendar ([www.ilgateways.com](http://www.ilgateways.com)). (This training is recommended but not mandatory for Silver and Gold Circles.)
  - c. Consider joining a Community of Practice (peer support group) or a guided cohort for program leaders
  - d. Examine leadership roles and consider new distribution or sharing of leadership responsibilities
  - e. Learn how to facilitate a Professional Learning Community within your program (reflective practice group/peer learning team)
  - f. Learn how to use work plans and developmental supervision to assign and track responsibilities
4. Establish reflective practice groups/peer learning teams. Determine how often they will meet – times and meeting location.
5. Establish initial work plan that involves the entire staff in the process, including a timeline and milestones
6. Institute and oversee CQI process:

Program-level CQI	
<b>PLAN</b>	Collect data as indicated in ExceleRate standards. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CLASS, ERS, PAS, licensing standards, accreditation standards, Preschool for All Compliance Checklist</li> </ul>
	Analyze data & make an improvement plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work through internal Professional Learning Community (reflective practice groups, data dialogues, team meetings, etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>DO</b>	Test changes to program or professional practice as planned. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide reflective/ developmental supervision</li> <li>• Use timelines &amp; check-ins</li> </ul>
<b>STUDY</b> (Check In)	Follow-up by analyzing selected data. Discuss, reflect & plan adjustments.
<b>ACT</b> (Adjust)	Integrate new practices and policies into everyday work. Prepare team to pose new questions.

# Tools for Program Leaders Implementing Continuous Quality Improvement

Continuous Quality Improvement (using the Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle) is built on a foundation of shared values, trust and a commitment to improvement planning based on data. It depends upon a supportive organizational culture and productive routines or ways of working together. Leaders can build a learning organization as shown in the house below.



The following tools can help leaders build a learning organization. They are available, along with other tools and resources, at the ExceleRate Illinois Providers website, under "Resources by Standard" and "3c. Continuous Quality Improvement" (<http://www.excelebrateillinoisproviders.com/resources/resources-by-standard?id=57>).

## Activities that create shared values and goals

- Values and Concepts Influencing My Work
- Your Center's Core Values
- CQI House Activity

## Activities that build trust

- Who Has Influenced You?
- Work Orientation

## Resources for data-driven decision making

(Note: Sources of data might include Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) scores, CLASS scores, PAS scores, child assessment information such as Teaching Strategies GOLD reports, program compliance checklists, etc.)

- Getting to Know the Assessment Tool
- CQI Planning Worksheet
- Ladder of Feedback protocol (summary and guide for discussing an idea or a plan)

## Other Resources

- Self-assessment, reflective practice and quality improvement processes: (3 Part Video with real examples embedded. Each clip is 10-13 minutes long.)

## Funded Supports for Programs

*Gateways to Opportunity*® training and credentialing systems, and professional development registry (Gateways Registry) ([www.ilgateways.com](http://www.ilgateways.com))

Child Care Resource & Referral System (for child care programs): Quality Specialists and various consultants; training sessions in-person and on-line ([www.ilqualitycounts.org](http://www.ilqualitycounts.org))

Illinois State Board of Education ([www.isbe.net/earlychi](http://www.isbe.net/earlychi)) and Chicago Public Schools (for state-funded early learning programs in schools and centers): Consultants and training sessions. ISBE-supported training is also available through The Center: Resources for Teaching and Learning ([ec.thecenterweb.org](http://ec.thecenterweb.org)) and StarNet (<http://www.wiu.edu/starnet/about/statewide.php>).

Head Start and Early Head Start: Consultants, training sessions and web-based resources (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ohs-tta>)

*Lead.Learn.Excel*: Supports instructional excellence in schools and centers through training, technical assistance and peer learning for program leaders. Operated by the Ounce of Prevention Fund in conjunction with the McCormick Center at National-Louis University. (<http://www.theounce.org/what-we-do/professional-development-LLE>)

McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University: Leadership & management training cohort to empower program leaders to embrace the change process. Designed to strengthen leadership style, promote peak performance, implement a quality improvement plan, and build a strong organizational climate. (<http://mccormickcenter.nl.edu/professional-development/>)

Other resources are listed on the ExceleRate Illinois Providers website: (<http://www.excelebrateillinoisproviders.com>)

### Illinois BUILD CQI Team

Community Coordinated Child Care: Pam Wicking

Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development: Gail Nelson, Donna Nylander

Illinois Action for Children: Tom Layman

Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies: Tiffany Kerr, Beth Knight

Illinois State Board of Education: Donna Emmons, Jennifer Metcalf

McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National-Louis University: Ann Hentschel

Office of Head Start Training & Technical Assistance Center, Region V: Linda Langosch

Ounce of Prevention Fund: Marsha Hawley