



LEARN & GROW

PROGRAM GUIDE

Licensed Child Care Center
Licensed Child Care Group Home
Licensed Child Care Home



Learn & Grow
Alaska's Commitment to Quality Early Care & Learning

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Welcome to Learn & Grow

Thank you for your interest in providing quality early care and learning services to young children and their families. Early educators such as yourself, and the environments in which children play and learn are critical to a child's readiness for school and success in life.

Learn & Grow, Alaska's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) is designed to provide Early Care and Learning (ECL) educators and programs with comprehensive resources and supports focused on high quality early care and learning. Learn & Grow also provides families, communities, and policy makers with a way to better understand quality and its effect on a child's success.

Learn & Grow is an early care and learning system framework designed to guide the advancement of ECL programs through five levels of quality. As your program advances through the levels of quality, you will have access to technical assistance, specialized training, and financial resources.

Learn & Grow is a statewide voluntary system, currently available to licensed child care centers, licensed child care group homes, and licensed child care homes throughout the state of Alaska. Welcome to Learn & Grow and congratulations on taking the first steps in participating in quality improvement.

Purpose of this Guide

This Program Guide is a resource to help you successfully participate in Learn & Grow. Its purpose is to:

- Help you and your ECL program understand the framework, requirements, support, and benefits associated with Learn & Grow;
- Provide an overview of the five recognition levels and the steps your program will take to maintain recognition levels;
- Serve as an ongoing reference tool for programs participating in Learn & Grow.

Acknowledgements

The State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services, Child Care Program Office provides funding for Learn & Grow. The State of Alaska, in partnership with **thread**, Alaska's Child Care Resource and Referral Network, is managing the administration of Learn & Grow.

Thank you to the individuals and organizations that have contributed time, dedication, and resources to the ongoing development, implementation, and evaluation of Learn & Grow.

Below is a list of organizations that have provided support in the planning and development of Learn & Grow.

Organizations Within the State of Alaska:

- **thread**, Alaska's Child Care Resource and Referral Network
- State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services
 - Child Care Program Office
 - Office of Children's Services, Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS)
 - Senior and Disabilities Services, Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program
- State of Alaska, Department of Education and Early Development
- Municipality of Anchorage, Child Care Licensing Program
- System for Early Education Development (SEED) Professional Development Committee
- University of Alaska System
- Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC)
- Alaska After School Network
- Best Beginnings
- Licensed Center, Group Home, and Home Administrators
- Alaska Child Care and Development Fund
- Tribal Organizations
- Alaska Head Start Association (AHSA)



National Organizations:

- Administration for Children & Families, Office of Child Care
- BUILD Initiative
- QRIS National Learning Network
- ICF

SECTION 1

WHAT IS A QRIS AND LEARN & GROW?

What is a Quality Recognition and Improvement System?

Nationally a QRIS is defined as a “method to assess, improve and communicate the level of quality in early care and learning settings” (Mitchell, 2005, p.4). A QRIS is a unique tool for early care and learning systems reform that has the potential to reach programs that serve a wide range of children and are financed by many public and private sources. Alaska now joins 43 other states and territories that have implemented a QRIS.

The goal of a Quality Recognition and Improvement System is to provide supports and resources to early care and learning (ECL) programs so they can stay actively engaged in continuous quality improvement and be recognized for their quality practices.

A QRIS has five common elements:

- Quality Standards
- Accountability
- Program and provider outreach and support
- Financial incentives linked to compliance with standards
- Consumer education

A QRIS:

- Empowers parents to become savvy consumers who choose high quality care for their children
- Gives policymakers effective tools and monitoring information to improve ECL quality
- Promotes accountability so donors, legislators and taxpayers feel confident investing in quality
- Gives ECL educators and programs a roadmap to quality improvement
- Provides ECL programs with fiscal resources and supports to stay actively engaged in continuous quality improvement
- Promotes the health, safety, and development of children in early care and learning

Alaska's QRIS: Learn & Grow

Learn & Grow uses a block system with five levels of quality. A block system requires an ECL program to meet all of the quality standard requirements of a level before receiving recognition for that level. The five levels of quality build on a foundation of the health and safety standards of the State of Alaska and Municipality of Anchorage Child Care Licensing programs.

Learn & Grow is located within and managed by **thread**. **thread**, in partnership with the State of Alaska, Child Care Program Office, supports the funding, development and implementation of Learn & Grow for all Licensed Child Care Centers, Group Homes, and Homes.

In 2013, the State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services Child Care Program Office allocated funds to **thread**, Alaska's Child Care Resource and Referral Network, to manage the development and implementation of Alaska's QRIS. In December 2013, a QRIS Director was hired to reassemble stakeholder groups, work on revisions to the original Alaska 2008 QRIS plan, and implement it.

Phase I of Learn & Grow

In July 2016, Phase I of Learn & Grow was launched and made available for State of Alaska or Municipality of Anchorage Licensed Child Care Centers, Group Homes and Homes. Phase I includes Level 1: Learning About Higher Quality and Level 2: Moving Into Higher Quality.

Phase II of Learn & Grow

The timeframe for Phase II of Learn & Grow will be determined based on available staff and financial resources. Phase II will include specific quality standards across all five Levels and will be available to early care and learning programs including State of Alaska and Municipality of Anchorage Licensed Child Care Centers, Group Homes and Homes, Head Start/Early Head Start, State Pre-K or School District Pre-K, Military Child Care, and Licensed School-Age programs. Participation in these levels will also be voluntary.



Early care and learning is a critical window of opportunity.

Learn & Grow Mission

To advance the quality of early care and learning to foster the success of young children.

Learn & Grow Values

- Quality
- Relationships
- Respect
- Community partnerships
- Commitment to continuous quality improvement in early care and learning

Learn & Grow Beliefs

- Healthy communities equal healthy families
- Alaska needs more quality early care and learning programs
- Early care and learning is a critical window of opportunity
- Alaska needs a strong workforce (now and in the future)
- Early care and learning professionals are a catalyst for change
- Relationships matter
- Quality early care and learning is diverse
- Children are precious
- Families are irreplaceable

Learn & Grow Guiding Principles

- Quality early care and learning is rooted in respect for diversity
- Use of best practices ensures strength-based approaches to create nurturing quality environments
- Creating a quality early care and learning system requires work in partnership with multiple stakeholders
- Families need information when considering early care and learning programs for their child
- Continuous quality improvement needs to be feasible and achievable for programs
- Quality early care and learning is an investment now and in the future: Economic Imperative
- Retention of a highly qualified early care and learning workforce is imperative to building and maintaining quality
- Early care and learning professionals earn a living wage and have access to the education to increase their knowledge and advance their profession
- Early care and learning administrators have resources to support continuous quality improvement activities for their programs and teachers
- Children have access to high quality early care and learning environments that foster social, emotional and developmental skills to prepare them for kindergarten and success in life.

Learn & Grow Outcomes

- Parents have access to affordable, high quality care
- Parents can identify quality standards in early care and learning environments
- Parents are actively participating in their child's early care and learning program and have access to community supports and resources
- Children are safe and healthy
- Communities have a healthy and sustainable workforce



Early care and learning professionals are a catalyst for change.

Learn & Grow: Roles and Responsibilities

The following organizations and groups of individuals have unique roles and responsibilities to help support the successful implementation of Learn & Grow.

These organizations include: **thread**, which manages SEED and Learn & Grow; State of Alaska, Child Care Program Office; Municipality of Anchorage, Child Care Licensing Program; Early Care and Learning Programs; and families.

thread Child Care Resource and Referral Network

thread, Alaska's statewide Child Care Resource and Referral Network (CCR&R) is comprised of three regional offices that provide services to ECL programs and families throughout the state of Alaska. Offices are located in Anchorage, Juneau and Fairbanks. The Anchorage **thread** office provides services in the Southcentral region; AEYC-SEA in Juneau provides **thread** services in Southeast Alaska, and Thrivalaska in Fairbanks provides **thread** services in the Northern/Interior region of the state.

thread employs qualified professional development specialists (PDS) to provide the technical assistance for ECL programs and educators participating in Learn & Grow. **thread** PDS receive ongoing training in order to deliver training, technical assistance, and assessments for participating ECL programs.



SEED and Learn & Grow

The System for Early Education Development (SEED) and Learn & Grow are two systems under the management of **thread**. SEED supports individual early childhood professionals, while Learn & Grow supports early care and learning programs.

System for Early Education Development (SEED)

SEED is responsible for managing activities related to the Learn & Grow Quality Standard area Staff Qualifications and Professional Development.

Specific SEED responsibilities include:

- Maintaining new and renewed early childhood professionals in the SEED Registry;
- Ensuring the SEED Career Ladder, SEED Training Approval System, and Alaska Early Childhood Core Knowledge and Competencies (CKCS) align with and support Learn & Grow Quality Standards;
- Issuing the Early Childhood Administrator Credential 1 and 2 certificates.

Learn & Grow

Learn & Grow works to support ECL program quality, aligning resources, funding, data systems and professional development to provide a comprehensive and unified quality improvement system. To complete this work, Learn & Grow leverages staff and resources with **thread** and SEED.

Learn & Grow is responsible for issuing Level Recognition Certificates and Awards by verifying all ECL program quality standard documentation using the SEED Registry, **thread** database and State of Alaska Integrated Child Care Information System (ICCIS) including:

- SEED registration and levels of all program staff
- Completion of administrator credential
- ECL program licensing status and type
- Lead teacher training requirements
- Environmental Rating Score (ERS)

State of Alaska Child Care Program Office (CCPO)

The CCPO receives funding from the Federal Office of Child Care to administer the activities specified in the Child Care and Development Block Grant, otherwise known as CCDBG. The State of Alaska, Child Care Program Office provides oversight and monitoring of the Child Care Resource and Referral grant to support **thread** and Learn & Grow services. The State of Alaska, CCPO also manages Child Care Licensing and the Child Care Assistance Program for all licensed and approved child care programs throughout the state. The State CCPO subcontracts to the Municipality of Anchorage Child Care Licensing Program to provide licensing oversight of child care programs within the Municipality of Anchorage.

Municipality of Anchorage Child Care Licensing Program

The Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) Child Care Licensing Program is responsible for licensing and monitoring of MOA Child Care Programs.

Responsibilities

The State of Alaska or the MOA will notify Learn & Grow and **thread** of changes in a licensing status of participating Learn & Grow ECL programs on a monthly basis, or as soon as possible in the event of an enforcement action involving suspension or closure of a child care program.

Early Care and Learning Programs

Licensed Child Care Centers, Group Homes, and Homes participating in Learn & Grow are responsible for maintaining their child care license in good standing and notifying Learn & Grow and **thread** staff of any changes regarding their license. Participating ECL programs will work cooperatively with Learn & Grow and **thread** to support their continuous improvement goals.

Families

Families are encouraged to utilize consumer education and resources to better understand quality care and to help them select an eligible ECL program. **thread** is available to assist families in finding quality child care.

SECTION 2

LEARN & GROW LEVELS OF QUALITY AND QUALITY STANDARD AREAS

Learn & Grow Levels of Quality

Learn & Grow is a block system composed of five Levels of Quality. In order to receive recognition of a level, an ECL program must achieve all required Quality Standards identified at each level. To advance to the next level, a program must also have been recognized as completing all the requirements of any preceding level.

LEVELS OF QUALITY

LEVEL 5 THRIVING IN HIGHER QUALITY	
LEVEL 4 GROWING INTO HIGHER QUALITY	
LEVEL 3 COMMITTING TO HIGHER QUALITY	
LEVEL 2 MOVING INTO HIGHER QUALITY	
LEVEL 1 LEARNING ABOUT HIGHER QUALITY	

Learn & Grow Quality Standards Areas

The quality of an early care and learning program is rooted in the health and safety of the environments, practices, and interactions that your ECL program provides for children and families.

There are four Quality Standard Areas within each of the five Levels of Quality. As your program moves through the five levels of Learn & Grow, it will work toward and achieve progressive quality practices in these four Quality Standard Areas.

The four Learn & Grow Quality Standard Areas build on the foundation of health and safety standards that govern licensed child care facilities in the state of Alaska.

These Quality Standard Areas are:

- Administration and Leadership
- Staff Qualifications and Professional Development
- Relationships and Learning Environments
- Family Engagement.



Early educators have access to the education needed to increase their skills and knowledge, and advance their professional careers.

Administration and Leadership

Early Care and Learning Administrators have access to resources and supports designed to improve the quality of their program. These resources include:

- Specialized Training
- Financial Support
- Technical Assistance

Goal for ECL administrators:

- To have resources and supports so your ECL program and staff can stay actively engaged in continuous quality improvement activities.

Staff Qualifications and Professional Development

Early care and learning is a profession. While experience is valuable to any profession, formalized education and training also play a key role. Research demonstrates that teachers who have advanced their professional development and participate in coaching and on-site technical assistance are more likely to create quality learning environments that foster the social and emotional development of young children.

Goal for ECL Educators:

- Early educators earn a living wage and have access to the education needed to increase their knowledge and advance their professional careers.

Relationships and Learning Environments

Children learn through their relationships with family members, other children, and teachers. These relationships are critical to building quality. How early educators utilize their skills and knowledge to nurture these relationships is seen in the quality of the learning environment.

Goals for Relationships and Learning Environments:

- Children are in a safe and healthy environment.
- Children have access to high quality early care and learning environments that foster social, emotional, and developmental skills to prepare them for kindergarten and success in life.

Family Engagement

Your early care and learning program provides a place for families to connect with other families and to community resources. Learn & Grow has chosen to utilize Strengthening Families, a nationally recognized framework for increasing quality family engagement practices. The Strengthening Families framework guides the individualized strategies and practices to increase “protective factors”.

The five protective factors of Strengthening Families are characteristics that have been shown to make positive outcomes more likely for young children and their families, and to reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.

The five protective factors are listed below:
(Center for Study of Social Policy)

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Concrete Supports
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children

Goal for Family Engagement:

- Families are actively participating in their child’s early care and learning program and have access to community support and resources.

SECTION 3: SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES



Learn & Grow has several supports and resources to help your ECL program stay actively engaged in continuous quality improvement and advance through the five levels of quality. These include:

- technical assistance
- quality recognition awards
- training
- marketing and communication materials.

Level 1 Technical Assistance

Your ECL program has access to technical assistance from a **thread** professional development specialist (PDS). This technical assistance is available to assist your program in continuous quality improvement and is voluntary, not required. It includes assistance to help your program administrator meet Level 1 Quality Standards.

Level 1 Technical Assistance may include:

- Completion of the Level 1 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)
- SEED Registry participation
- Questions an ECL program may have about Level 2

Level 1 Quality Recognition Award

There is no Learn & Grow Quality Recognition Award available at Level 1.

Level 1 Training

Level 1 Training includes:

- Level 1 Training: Introduction to Learn & Grow.

It is required for administrators of a program, but all staff are welcome to complete this FREE training.

Level 1 Marketing and Communication Materials

When your ECL program has been successfully verified at Level 1, it will receive a Learn & Grow Level 1 Recognition Certificate, a Level 1 window decal, and a Learn & Grow Level 1 Marketing Tool Kit. The Tool Kit may include:

- Learn & Grow Level 1 window decal signifying the Learn & Grow Recognition Level your program has received
- Learn & Grow stickers
- Learn & Grow talking points your program could include in a newsletter, press release or other marketing materials.
- Suggestions on how to talk with families about your program participation in Learn & Grow
- Discounts to ECL vendors

Level 2 Technical Assistance

Technical assistance support is available to your ECL program once it is enrolled in Learn & Grow. The technical assistance is custom designed to support the needs of your program to meet the Level 2 Quality Standard Requirements. Technical assistance is voluntary and not required.

Level 2 Technical Assistance may include:

- Completion of the Level 2 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)
- Review of your program administrator's transcript to help advise regarding the Alaska Early Childhood Administrator Credential (ECAC) requirements.
- Technical assistance to individual ECL educators and their classrooms to assist with environmental arrangements and practices related to the Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) requirements of Level 2.
- Encouragement to complete self-assessments using the ERS and work with **thread's** PDS to help assure a high level of confidence of meeting the Level 2 quality standard of 2.5 ERS score.

Level 2 Training

All lead teachers must complete the Level 2 Moving Into Higher Quality training to meet the Quality Standards.

Level 2 Training Includes:

- Pyramid Foundations
- Strengthening Families
- Environmental Assessment Overview
- Introduction to Alaska Early Childhood Core Knowledge and Competencies

Go to www.threadalaska.org/index.cfm/calendar to locate the next available training and funding options.

Level 2 Quality Recognition Award

When your ECL program has successfully been verified at Level 2 you will receive a Learn & Grow Level 2 Recognition Certificate along with a Learn & Grow Quality Recognition Award. This Quality Recognition Award is awarded each year your program is verified as a Learn & Grow Level 2 program.

Quality Recognition Award:

- \$500 ECL programs with Licensed Capacity of 1-30 children
- \$1000 ECL programs with Licensed Capacity of 31 and more

Level 2 Marketing and Communication Materials

When your ECL program has been successfully verified at Level 2 it will also receive a Learn & Grow Level 2 Marketing Tool Kit. The tool kit may include:

- Learn & Grow Level 2 window decal signifying the Learn & Grow Recognition Level your program has received
- Learn & Grow stickers
- Learn & Grow talking points your program could include in a newsletter, press release or other marketing materials
- Suggestions on how to talk with families about your program's participation in Learn & Grow
- Discounts to ECL vendors

Professional Development Funding

Professional development funds are available to eligible ECL educators enrolled in the SEED Registry for professional development, training, and paying for a CDA. Go to www.seedalaska.org or www.threadalaska.org for information about the following:

- Professional Development Reimbursement
- Travel Reimbursement
- CDA fee support

SECTION 4: STEP BY STEP GUIDE

This section provides a step by step guide for how your ECL program can participate in Level 1 and Level 2 of Learn & Grow.

The guide is organized according to the steps your ECL program will go through in the Learn & Grow process: eligibility, enrollment, working on quality standard requirements, assessment, verification, and renewal.

The sections are also divided into Licensed Child Care Centers and Group Homes and Licensed Homes. In Level 1 the requirements are the same for all ECL program types. In Level 2, Licensed Centers and Group Homes have the same requirements. The description of the Licensed Home requirements is discussed separately.

Eight Easy Steps to Participate in Learn & Grow

Step 1: Learn about Learn & Grow

Review Learn & Grow information at www.aklearnandgrow.org

Email or call Learn & Grow at info@aklearnandgrow.org, (907) 265-3105 or toll free at (844) 563-3230

Step 2: Complete Learn & Grow Level 1 Training

Complete the FREE Learn & Grow Level 1 Training offered by **thread**. Visit **thread's** calendar to see a list of training dates: www.threadalaska.org/index.cfm/calendar.

Step 3: Complete and Submit Letter of Interest

At the end of the Learn & Grow Level 1 Training you will be asked to complete a *Letter of Interest Form* asking you to check one of the following:

- Yes, I am interested in enrolling in Learn & Grow.
By checking yes you are choosing to enroll your program in Learn & Grow. Someone from Learn & Grow will be contacting you within five business days.
- I would like more information.
- No, I am not interested in enrolling in Learn & Grow at this time.

The *Letter of Interest Form* will be collected at the end of the Learn & Grow Level 1 Training.

Step 4: Enroll in Level 1

Someone from Learn & Grow will be in contact with you shortly after receiving the completed *Letter of Interest Form*.

During this phone conversation, if you choose to enroll in Level 1, Learn & Grow will arrange for a **thread** PDS to contact you and arrange a time to meet.

Step 5: Work on Level 1 Quality Standards

Work with a **thread** PDS to complete the following:

- *Level 1 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)*

Step 6: Level 1 Verification Process

Work with a **thread** PDS to learn how and when to submit the *Level 1 Verification Checklist*.

Within 10 business days you will receive a Level 1 Recognition Level or guidance on what requirements may not have been met and how to resubmit.

Step 7: Celebrate!

Market your early care and learning program's Learn & Grow Level 1 Recognition.

Engage staff and parents in talking about Quality!

Step 8: Work on Level 2 Quality Standards in Level 2

Enroll in Level 2 and continue with your program's quality improvement efforts.



Phase I of Learn & Grow: Level 1 and 2

In July 2016, Phase I of Learn & Grow was launched and made available for State of Alaska or Municipality of Anchorage Licensed Child Care Centers, Group Homes and Homes. Phase I includes:

- Level 1: Learning About Higher Quality
- Level 2: Moving Into Higher Quality.

LEVEL 1: LEARNING ABOUT HIGHER QUALITY

Licensed Child Care Centers, Group Homes and Homes

Level 1 Quality Standards

Administration and Leadership

- Biennial Licensed Child Care (State or Municipality of Anchorage)

Staff Qualifications and Professional Development

- Level 1 Training (administrator/person(s) indicated on license)
- System for Education Development (SEED) Registry: Leadership and all teaching staff who provide direct care and supervision of children.

There are four steps associated with Level 1:

- Enrollment
- Working on Quality Standards
- Verification
- Renewal

NOTE: If your ECL program has a provisional or approved license, it is not eligible for Learn & Grow. Your program may complete the Learn & Grow Level 1 Training in anticipation of obtaining a biennial license.

Level 1, Step 1: Enrollment

Learn & Grow Level 1 Training

Your ECL program can enroll in Learn & Grow following the administrator's attendance of the Learn & Grow Level 1 Training. Your program can invite other staff to participate in the training if desired (not required).

- Your program administrator has six months from the time they complete the Learn & Grow Level 1 Training to enroll in Level 1. If your program administrator completed the Learn & Grow Level 1 Training longer than six months prior to the month they enrolled in Level 1, he/she must retake the Learn & Grow Level 1 Training.
- Learn & Grow Level 1 Training will be offered regionally face-to-face and via webinar. See **thread's** statewide training calendar for the next available Learn & Grow Level 1 Training.
- The Learn & Grow Level 1 Training is approximately two hours and is available at no cost.
- The Learn & Grow Level 1 Training is aligned with the Alaska Early Childhood Core Knowledge and Competencies and will count for CDA credit in the area of Program Management. The Learn & Grow Level 1 Training will also count towards licensing hours.

Letter of Interest Form

At the end of the Learn & Grow Level 1 Training, your ECL program administrator will be asked to complete the Learn & Grow *Letter of Interest Form*. Your program administrator will indicate what their next step is:

- Yes, I'm interested in enrolling in Learn & Grow.
By checking yes you are choosing to enroll your program in Learn & Grow. Someone from Learn & Grow will be contacting you within five business days.
- I would like additional information.
- No, I'm not interested in enrolling in Learn & Grow at this time.

The completed *Letter of Interest Form* can be:

- Emailed directly to info@aklearnandgrow.org
- Mailed to 3350 Commercial Drive, Suite 203 Anchorage, Alaska 99501 Attn: Learn & Grow
- Faxed: 1 (907) 265-31912 or 1 (877) 563-1959
- Delivered in person to the local **thread** office

Within ten business days of receiving the *Letter of Interest Form* your program will be contacted by Learn & Grow to discuss next steps in the Learn & Grow enrollment and participation process.

Level 1, Step 2: Working on Quality Standards

Once your program administrator has completed the Learn & Grow Level 1 Training and the *Letter of Interest Form*, please begin to work with your program to ensure all program staff are in the SEED Registry. Go to www.seedalaska.org to access the online SEED Registry portal.

- All required documentation can be scanned and uploaded to the SEED Registry.
- Paper applications are also available to download from the website. Contact SEED Registry at info@seedalaska.org for additional assistance.

The SEED Registry has 30 days from the time of receiving a completed application to process an individual's information and assign them a SEED level.

- Individuals will receive a SEED certificate indicating their level. This certificate is also stored on the SEED online portal.

To maintain an active enrollment in the SEED Registry, an individual is required to update their SEED Registry information on an annual basis. SEED will send an email reminder of when the individual's renewal date is approaching. Please note:

- Pending status is not considered active enrollment.

Technical Assistance

Your ECL program has access to technical assistance to help achieve Level 1 Quality Standard Requirements. The technical assistance can be conducted on the phone, by email, or in the local **thread** office.

A **thread** PDS is available to work with your ECL program administrator to complete a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) to identify how it will meet Level 1 Quality Standard Requirements.

Level 1, Step 3: Verification

Your program determines when you are ready to be verified at Level 1. Your program will complete the *Level 1 Verification Checklist* and submit it via email, mail, or in person to the Learn & Grow Coordinator at:

- info@aklearnandgrow.org or
- 3350 Commercial Drive Suite 203
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

A paper copy of the *Level 1 Verification Checklist* can also be submitted in person or by mail to the local **thread** office.

The *Level 1 Verification Checklist* can be obtained from your program's assigned **thread** PDS.

The *Level 1 Verification Checklist* includes:

- First and last names of all employees
- Date of birth
- Last 5 digits of their social security number
- Employee start date
- Position/title of each employee
- Current biennial State or MOA child care license
- Completion of Learn & Grow Level 1 Training (Your program does not need to submit a copy, but rather the verifier will confirm completion of Level 1 Training in the **thread** data system (NDS)).

Within 10 business days of receipt of a *Level 1 Verification Checklist*, your program will receive notification of Level 1 recognition or notification of reasons for not receiving Level 1 recognition.

Level 1, Step 4: Renewal

Your ECL program Learn & Grow Renewal occurs one year from the month of the last recognition level received. Your program will receive notification of their Level renewal 90 days prior to the month of their expiration date.

Your program will submit a renewal checklist to initiate renewal of its Learn & Grow recognition level. If you would like assistance with Level 1 renewal activities, a **thread** PDS is available to assist, at no cost to your program.

LEVEL 2: MOVING INTO HIGHER QUALITY

Licensed Child Care Centers and Group Homes

Level 2 Quality Standards

Administration and Leadership

- Administrator (person(s) indicated on child care license): SEED Level 7 or above
- Early Childhood Administrator Credential (ECAC) I

Staff Qualifications and Professional Development

- 100% of Lead Teachers have completed Moving Into Higher Quality Training

Relationships and Learning Environment

- Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS-3 &/or ITERS) 2.5 minimum (minimum of 1 classroom in each age group or 1/3 of total classrooms)

Family Engagement

- Strengthening Families training



There are 5 steps associated with Level 2 for Licensed Child Care Centers and Group Homes:

- Enrollment
- Working on Quality Standards
- Environmental Assessment
- Verification
- Renewal

Level 2, Step 1: Enrollment

If your ECL program chooses to enroll in Level 2, a **thread** PDS will set up a time to meet with your program and review Level 2 requirements and supports, which include:

- Administrator credential content
- Pathways to complete credential
- Level 2 Lead Teacher training requirements
- Financial supports
- Technical assistance

If your program chooses to continue after reviewing Level 2 quality standard requirements, your administrator will sign a *Letter of Commitment*. The signed *Letter of Commitment* is the official enrollment date of your program working on Level 2.

- The *Letter of Commitment* outlines your program's responsibilities, potential time it may need; **thread's** time commitment, resources, and supports that will be made available to your program to assist in meeting the Learn & Grow Level 2 Quality Standard requirements.

Your program will also be asked to identify a projected completion date of Level 2 activities. Your program is not bound by this date, but rather the goal is to work toward the requirements by this date. This date also helps Learn

& Grow assess and monitor its availability of supports, resources, and ability to serve more ECL programs that choose to enroll in Learn & Grow.

If your program does not choose to work on Level 2 following the Level 2 introductory conversation, it will remain on the Learn & Grow list of participating ECL programs and will be placed on a monitoring status for Level 1.

- Monitoring status means your program will receive a phone call from Learn & Grow once or twice a year to check in on how things are progressing and offer any support or resources that may be helpful for your program to stay actively engaged in continuous quality improvement activities. Your program will also continue with the renewal process for Level 1.

Technical Assistance

Your ECL program may receive technical assistance from a **thread** PDS, which may include an onsite visit. Technical assistance is customized to your program's individual needs to achieve Level 2 Learn & Grow Quality Standard Requirements.

- Your program can decide on how it would like to use its technical assistance. The minimum requirement is that consultation should be focused on meeting Level 2 Requirements.

Level 2, Step 2: Working on Quality Standards

Administration and Leadership

Early Childhood Administrator Credential I (ECAC I)

The ECAC I is intended to provide your program's administrators with the resources and supports needed to help your program stay actively engaged in continuous quality improvement activities and to progress through the Learn & Grow Levels of quality.

Administrator Credential Topics include:

- Business and Fiscal Management
- Family Engagement (Minimum Strengthening Families)
- Pyramid Model Foundations Training
- Environmental Rating Scale Overview and Self-Assessment
- Human Resources (Center and Group Home administrators only)
- Introduction to Alaska Early Childhood Core Knowledge and Competencies

There are multiple pathways for your program administrator to complete the ECAC I. Many program administrators may have already completed training or course work as part of previous university, **thread** or other online training.

- Consult with a **thread** PDS for a list of approved courses and locations of upcoming trainings.
- All trainings eligible for the ECAC I are SEED approved. The current approved list is not exhaustive and will continue to grow as courses are approved by the SEED Trainer Approval system. For a current list go to www.seedalaska.org.
- Additionally, the administrator of your program must be SEED level 7 or above on the SEED Career Ladder.

Staff Qualifications and Professional Development

Within the Level 2 Staff Qualifications and Professional Development Standard Quality Area there are three training topic requirements for lead teachers of your program.

Strengthening Families

There are three ways for your ECL program to complete a Learn & Grow approved Strengthening Families training:

1. University of Alaska Fairbanks Family Course
2. **thread** Strengthening Families training
3. The Center for Study of Social Policy online course: www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies/about/overview-of-the-strengthening-families-website
 - This training is free, self-paced, and available online. It is approximately 14 hours long.

- To be considered an eligible training for Learn & Grow, the participant must complete the entire course and receive a training completion certificate from the Center for Study of Social Policy.

If a lead teacher or administrator has already completed Strengthening Families training from **thread** or online from the Center for Study of Social Policy, there is no expiration on the training. However, it must be documented in the SEED Registry.

Pyramid Foundations Training

There are a few approved Pyramid related trainings titles that your program may have already completed that would meet the Level 2 Learn & Grow training requirements.

The following trainings are SEED approved trainings and offered through **thread**. See the **thread** training calendar for offerings.

- **thread**, Planting the Seeds of Success: Supporting Social Emotional Development
- **thread**, Alaska Pyramid Partnership Training

Please consult with SEED to determine if a Pyramid training you may have completed would be eligible for Level 2 Learn & Grow training.

Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) Overview & Self-Assessment Training

This is a new course and currently in development. Please check the **thread** website and training calendar for available training.

Relationships and Learning Environment

Level 2 requires that each assessed classroom in your ECL program receive a minimum of 2.5 on the applicable ERS tool for at least one classroom in each age group that a program offers. For example:

- If your program has 2 infant classrooms, 2 toddler classrooms and 2 preschool classrooms, the Learn & Grow requirement is that one classroom from each of the three age groups will be assessed.
- Assessment of the classrooms will be randomly selected on the day of the assessment.

See the assessment section for specific requirements related to the assessment (time, dates, etc.)

Introduction to Alaska Early Childhood Core Knowledge and Competencies

This training will provide an introduction to the Alaska Early Childhood Core Knowledge and Competencies and how they can be used to support the professional development of ECL educators.

Family Engagement

Strengthening Families training meets this Quality Standard Requirement. See above for details on qualifying Strengthening Families training.

There are several ways your program staff can meet the Strengthening Families training requirement:

- **thread** training (see thread training calendar for available times and locations) www.threadalaska.org
- UAF Family Course ECE 206W
- Online at: www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies

If your lead teachers or administrator have already completed Strengthening Families training from **thread** or online from the Center for Study of Social Policy, there is no expiration on the training. Submit certificate of completion of this online training to the SEED Registry and update your Registry profile.

- This can be done using the online portal, mailing or faxing documentation to SEED registry.

The Strengthening Families training includes a self- assessment. The Strengthening Families Self-Assessment is part of the Level 2: Moving into Higher Quality training.

Level 2 Training Survey

Finally, there is a Level 2 Training Survey to be completed by all lead teachers and administrators no less than 3 months from your ECL program's Level 2 Verification submission.

The Level 2 Training Survey is designed to gather information about the skills and knowledge of teaching staff related to family engagement practices, use of social emotional curriculum and intervention strategies, and use of an environmental rating scale tool and its impact on guiding the development of a high quality learning environment.

See *Level 2 Verification Checklist*.

Level 2, Step 3: Environment Assessment

When your ECL program is ready for an official ERS assessment to be conducted, it will submit the *Level 2 Request for ERS Assessment Form* to your **thread** PDS.

The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS-3) and the Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS) will be used in Licensed Child Care Centers and Group Homes to assess the environment.

The *Level 2 Request for ERS Assessment Form* must be submitted a minimum of 30 business days prior to the available assessment times provided.

The *Level 2 Request for ERS Assessment Form* will contain information about the following:

- Your program will provide Learn & Grow with two consecutive weeks which it would be available for an ERS assessment. Your program may have outings, scheduled closures or other activities they have pre-planned and the assessment process will aim to accommodate these schedules.
- The ERS assessments are unannounced and classrooms will be randomly chosen on the day of the assessments within a two-week period of time provided by the ECL program.
- If your program does not achieve the minimum Level 2 Quality Standard Requirement of an ERS score of 2.5 in all of the assessed classrooms, you can request a reassessment (free of charge). An ECL program can receive a reassessment no sooner than 30 days from last assessment and no later than 90 days.
- If the assessment does not meet a minimum ERS score and would like additional technical assistance, it can submit a special request for additional technical
- assistance hours. Your program will receive written reports within 20 business days of the last classroom assessed.

If your program would like assistance with Level 2 renewal activities, **thread** PDS are available to assist, free of charge.

Level 2, Step 4: Verification

When your ECL program is ready to be verified, you will complete the *Level 2 Verification Checklist* and other required documentation and submit it to the Statewide Systems Coordinator at **thread**, who will facilitate the Level 2 verification process. Email to: info@aklearnandgrow.org.

The *Level 2 Verification Checklist* includes:

- First and last names of all employees
- DOB for each employee
- Employee start date
- Position/title of each employee
- Early Childhood Administrator Credential I
- Moving into Higher Quality Training for all lead teachers
- ERS Scores for at least 1 of each age classroom of 2.5
- Completed Level 2 Training Survey for ALL lead teachers and administrator

Within ten business days of receipt of a *Level 2 Verification Checklist*, your program will be notified if you have been validated Level 2 or not.

Level 2, Step 5: Renewal

Your ECL program's Learn & Grow renewal occurs annually from the date of the latest recognition level received. You will receive notification to renew your level 90 days prior to your renewal date.

Your program will submit a *Level 2 Renewal Form* to be reassessed and verified at Level 2.

If your program would like assistance with Level 2 renewal activities, **thread** PDS are available to assist, at no cost to your program.

LEVEL 2: MOVING INTO HIGHER QUALITY

Licensed Child Care Homes

Level 2 Quality Standards

Administration, Leadership and Professional Development

- Licensed Home Administrator (person(s) indicated on license): SEED Level 6 or above
- Early Childhood Administrator Credential (ECAC) I

Relationships and Learning Environment

- Environmental Rating Scale (FCCERS) 2.5 minimum

Family Engagement

- Strengthening Families training (included in ECAC I)

Because Licensed Child Care Homes typically only employ one person (the owner of the program) two of the quality standards have been combined (Administration and Leadership and Staff Qualifications and Professional Development).

There are 5 steps associated with Level 2 for Licensed Child Care Homes:

- Enrollment
- Working on Quality Standards
- Environmental Assessment
- Verification
- Renewal



Level 2, Step 1: Enrollment

If your program chooses to enroll in Level 2, a **thread** PDS will set up a time to meet with you and review Level 2 requirements and supports:

- Administrator Credential content
- Pathways to complete credential
- Level 2 Lead Teacher training requirements
- Financial supports
- Technical assistance

If you choose to continue after reviewing Level 2 quality standard requirements, you will sign a *Letter of Commitment*. The signed *Letter of Commitment* is the official enrollment date of your program working on Level 2.

- The *Letter of Commitment* outlines your responsibilities, potential time you may need; **thread's** time commitment, resources, and supports that will be made available to your ECL program to assist in meeting the Learn & Grow Level 2 Quality Standard requirements.
- Your program will also be asked to identify a projected completion date of Level 2 activities. You are not bound by this date, but rather the goal is to work toward the requirements by this date. This date also help Learn & Grow assess and monitor its availability of supports,

resources and ability to serve more ECL programs that choose to enroll in Learn & Grow.

If you do not choose to work on Level 2 following the Level 2 introductory conversation, you will remain on the Learn & Grow list of participating programs and will be placed on a monitoring status.

- This means you will receive a phone call from Learn & Grow once or twice a year to check in on how things are progressing and offer any support or resources that may be helpful for the program to stay actively engaged in continuous quality improvement activities. Your program will also continue the renewal process for Level 1.

Technical Assistance

You may receive technical assistance from a **thread** PDS, which may include an onsite visit. Technical assistance is customized to your program to meet its individual needs in order to achieve Level 2 Learn & Grow Quality Standard Requirements.

- You can decide how you would like to spend your technical assistance. The minimum requirement is that consultation should be focused on meeting Level 2 Requirements.

Level 2, Step 2: Working on Quality Standards

Administration, Leadership and Staff Qualifications

SEED Career Ladder

Your program administrator must be a SEED Level 6 or above on the SEED Career ladder.

Early Childhood Administrator Credential I (ECAC I)

This credential is intended to provide your ECL program administrator with the resources and supports needed to help you stay actively engaged in continuous quality improvement activities that help you progress through the Learn & Grow Levels of quality.

Administrator Credential Topics include:

- Business and Fiscal Management
- Family Engagement (Minimum Strengthening Families)
- Pyramid Model Foundation Training
- Environment Rating Scale Overview and Self-Assessment (FCCERS)
- Strengthening Families Training
- Introduction to Alaska Early Childhood Core Knowledge and Competencies

There are multiple pathways for you to complete the ECAC I. You may have already completed training or course work as part of previous university classes, **thread** or other online training.

A **thread** PDS can also answer specific questions regarding past trainings and availability of financial supports to help pay for training.

Business and Fiscal Management

See Early Childhood Administrator Credential I requirements for approved trainings for Business and Fiscal Management.

Strengthening Families Training

There are three ways for you to complete a Learn & Grow approved Strengthening Families training.

1. University of Alaska Fairbanks Family Course
2. **thread** Strengthening Families training
3. The Center for Study of Social Policy online course: www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies/about/overview-of-the-strengthening-families-website
 - This training is free, self-paced, and available online. It is approximately 14 hours long.
 - To be considered an eligible training for Learn & Grow the participant must complete the entire course and receive a training completion certificate from the Center for Study of Social Policy.

If you have already completed Strengthening Families training from **thread** or online from the Center for Study of Social Policy, there is no expiration on the training. Please submit a certificate of completion to the SEED Registry and update your Registry profile. This can be done using the online portal, mailing or faxing documentation to SEED registry.

Pyramid Model Foundations Training

The following trainings are SEED approved trainings and offered through **thread**. See the **thread** training calendar for offerings.

- **thread**, Planting the Seeds of Success: Supporting Social Emotional Development
- **thread**, Alaska Pyramid Partnership Training

Additionally, other Pyramid approved trainings may have been offered in conjunction with other ECL programs such as Head Start or school districts. Please consult with SEED to determine if a Pyramid training you may have completed would be eligible for Level 2 Learn & Grow training.

Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) Overview & Self-Assessment Training

This is a new course currently in development. Please check the **thread** website and training calendar for available training.

Relationships and Learning Environment

Level 2 requires that your program receive a minimum of 2.5 in the Environmental Rating Scale tool: Family Child Care Environmental Rating Scale (FCCERS).

Introduction to Alaska Early Childhood Core Knowledge and Competencies

This training will provide an introduction to the new Alaska Early Childhood Core Knowledge and Competencies and how they can be used to support the professional development of ECL educators.

Family Engagement

Strengthening families training (as outlined above) meets the requirements for this quality standard requirement.

Level 2 Training Survey

The Level 2 Training Survey is designed to gather information about the skills and knowledge of teaching staff related to family engagement practices, use of social emotional curriculum and intervention strategies, and use of an environmental rating scale tool and its impact on guiding the development of a high quality learning environment.

See *Level 2 Verification Checklist*.



Level 2, Step 3: Environmental Assessment

When your ECL program is ready for an official ERS assessment to be conducted, you will submit the *Level 2 Request for ERS Assessment Form* to your **thread** PDS. The Family Child Care Environmental Rating Scale or FCCERS is the ERS tool that will be used to assess the environment of your program.

The *Level 2 Request for ERS Assessment Form* must be submitted a minimum of 30 business days prior to the dates you submit to be assessed.

The *Level 2 Request for ERS Assessment Form* will contain information about the following:

- Your program will provide Learn & Grow with a three consecutive week period of time in which you would be available for an ERS assessment. The ERS assessment is unannounced within the three week period of time provided by your program. Your program may have outings, scheduled closures, or other activities you have pre-planned and Learn & Grow will aim to accommodate these schedules.
- If your program does not achieve the minimum Level 2 Quality Standard requirement of an ERS score of 2.5, your program can request a reassessment (free of charge). Your program must submit a formal request for reassessment within 10 business days after receiving the first ERS report.
- You can submit a special request for additional technical assistance hours.

Assessment of your ECL program will be randomly selected during one of the two weeks provided by your program on the *Level 2 Request for ERS Assessment Form*.

Level 2, Step 4: Verification

You determine when your program is ready to be verified at Level 2.

You will complete the *Level 2 Verification Checklist* and submit it to the Statewide Systems Coordinator at **thread** who will facilitate the Level 2 verification process. Email to: info@aklearnandgrow.org

The *Level 2 Verification Checklist* includes:

- First and last names of each employee
- Date of Birth of each employee
- Employee start date
- Position/ title
- Early Childhood Administrator Credential I Certificate
- ERS Scores of 2.5 in each selected classroom
- Level 2 Training Survey

Within 10 business days of receipt of a *Level 2 Verification Checklist*, you will receive Validation of Level 2 Recognition Level or notification of reasons for not receiving Level 2 recognition.

Level 2, Step 5: Renewal

Your ECL program's Learn & Grow renewal occurs annually from the date of the latest recognition level received. Early Care and Learning programs will receive notification of their Level renewal 90 days prior to the date of their renewal.

You will submit a *Level 2 Renewal Form* applicable to the level it would like to renew or be reassessed at to determine if it has met the requirements of a new Learn & Grow level of quality.

If you would like assistance with Level 2 renewal activities, **thread** PDS are available to assist, at no cost to your program.



Phase II: Levels 3, 4 & 5

The timeframe for Phase II of Learn & Grow will be determined based on available staff and financial resources. Phase II will include specific quality standards across all five Levels and will be available to early care and learning programs including State of Alaska and Municipality of Anchorage Licensed Child Care Centers, Group Homes and Homes, Head Start/Early Head Start, State Pre-K or School District Pre-K, Military Child Care, and Licensed School-Age programs. Participation in these levels will also be voluntary.

SECTION 5: LEARN & GROW APPEALS AND GRIEVANCE PROCESS



Appeals Process

If your ECL program receives its Learn & Grow Recognition Certificate and believes its program was placed at an inaccurate level, you may request an appeal. (The program taking part in the appeal process will have their Learn & Grow Recognition Certificate placed on hold until a final recognition level appeal decision is made).

Your program may pursue a Learn & Grow Recognition level appeal for the following reasons:

- Your program suspects errors in calculation of Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) scores
- Your program claims it has met the quality standard requirements associated with the level being appealed.



Learn & Grow seeks to advance the quality of early care and learning to foster the success of young children.

The Learn & Grow appeals process does not address the following scenarios, but they could be addressed in the grievance process:

- To provide new evidence or documentation;
 - ECL program has concerns about on-site environmental assessment visits such as inappropriate or unprofessional behavior by on-site assessors or perceived conflict of interest between environmental assessor or PDS and program through **thread**;
 - Additional information gathered by your program after on-site evaluation visits/verification;
 - Self-Assessment scores were higher than official assessment scores;
- ERS scores from past assessments were higher than Learn & Grow evaluation scores;
 - Date/time of on-site visits if visits occurred during an approved time frame provided by program on their *Request for ERS Environmental Assessment Form*
 - Selection of classrooms for observations;
 - Variability of time spent in classrooms;
 - Typical staff not present during visit;
 - Classroom or home child care had new children, sick children, or an otherwise “non-typical” day, including disruptions to regular schedule;
 - Information was not ready for review by environmental assessor at time of assessment visits; and
 - Concerns about staff education verification must be appealed using existing SEED processes.

Appeal Submission Process

The *Learn & Grow Appeal Form* and supporting documentation must be received by Learn & Grow no later than 5:00 pm Alaska Standard Time (AKST) 30 calendar days from the recognition notification date. Learn & Grow assumes no responsibilities for delays caused by any mail delivery service. Materials received after 5:00 pm AKST on the 30th calendar day will not be considered.

Your ECL program must submit the *Learn & Grow Appeals Form* to the Learn & Grow Director, 3350 Commercial Dr. Suite 203, Anchorage, AK 99501 or email to info@aklearnandgrow.org explaining the reason for the appeal. Documentation related to Learn & Grow quality standards associated with the Level being appealed should be included. A copy of the letter along with all appeal documents will be placed in the program's file.

Process For Reviewing an Appeal

The Learn & Grow Director will review the applicant's file, and if needed, the applicant will be notified if further documentation, such as transcripts, licensing information, etc. is needed in order to review and assign an accurate level. The Learn & Grow Director will convene the Appeal Committee that may consist of representatives from the SOA CCPO and/or MOA Child Care Licensing Program (other than the assigned ECL program's Child Care Licensing Specialist); Learn & Grow Director;

SEED Director; the program administrator (center or home); and the **thread** PDS supervisor to review the applicant's file. Written notification of decision will be sent to the program within 20 business days of receiving the appeal.

Appeal Granted

If the appeal is granted, all Learn & Grow verification documentation (ERS report, **thread** data system (NDS) or SEED Registry, and your program's electronic file stored on **thread** servers, along with a new Learn & Grow Level Recognition Certificate) will be updated within five business days of the appeal being granted. The appeal applicants will be notified by letter of their current standing within the Learn & Grow Levels of Quality.

Denial of Appeal

If the appeal is denied, your program will be notified in writing of the Learn & Grow Appeal Committee's decision, including information about why the appeal was denied. If you disagree with the decision it is eligible to submit for re-verification no sooner than 90 calendar days from the denial date. Your program must submit a new QIP describing plans for how it will meet the specific quality standards associated with the level they are seeking re-verification for. A **thread** PDS may be available to assist your program with the QIP revisions. If an ECL program does not receive the Level recognition for a second time,

it must wait one full year from the issue date of the last Learn & Grow Level received to reapply.

Grievance Process

If your program and/or staff think they have been treated unfairly, too harshly or inappropriately you may pursue a grievance through the Learn & Grow formal grievance procedure, as follows:

Step 1 (Verbal Notification)

- The action or interpretation believed to be unfair or improper should be reported by your program administrator and the Learn & Grow Director and/or **thread** Chief Executive Officer verbally within five working days after the grievance arises.
- The report should include the specific facts which lead your program to believe that the action or interpretation was unfair or improper and the resolution that the program seeks.
- The Learn & Grow Director will document the issue raised by the program and the resolution decided upon by the Learn & Grow Director, **thread** Chief Executive Officer and the program administrator. A letter stating the grievance and resolution will be signed by your ECL program administrator, Learn & Grow Director, and **thread** Chief Executive Officer.

Step 2 (Written Notification)

- If the grievance is not resolved, your program administrator must present the grievance, in writing, to the Learn & Grow Director within five (5) business days following the last verbal discussion regarding the grievance discussed in Step 1.
- The grievance must include a concise statement of the facts upon which the grievance is based and the resolution that your program seeks.
- The Learn & Grow Director will provide a copy of the written grievance to **thread's** Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer will meet with the parties regarding the grievance within five business days of receiving the written grievance from the Learn & Grow Director to discuss the complaint and take any further action necessary to investigate and review the grievance.
- **thread's** Chief Executive Officer will issue a written decision within 30 business days from the date **thread's** Chief Executive Officer received the written grievance. A copy of the written decision will be placed in the program's electronic file located at **thread** and a hard copy will be mailed to your program.



Learn & Grow

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