

Steps To Excellence Project

Application Packet for Centers



Steps To Excellence Project
Promoting Quality Child Care

Steps To Excellence Project

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

GLORIA MOLINA
First District

MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
Second District

ZEV YAROSLAVSKY
Third District

DON KNABE
Fourth District

MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH
Fifth District

WILLIAM T FUJIOKA
Chief Executive Officer

KATHY HOUSE
Manager, Chief Executive Office

KATHLEEN MALASKE-SAMU
Director, Office of Child Care

HELEN E. CHAVEZ
Program Specialist III, Office of Child Care

222 South Hill Street, 5th Floor
Los Angeles, California 90012
Office: (213) 974-4103
Fax: (213) 217-5106
www.childcare.lacounty.gov

Revised: September 2009



Policy Roundtable for Child Care 2009-2010

The Policy Roundtable for Child Care developed the Steps To Excellence Project. The Roundtable is comprised of members appointed by the County of Los Angeles board of Supervisors. The group's mission is to serve as the official County body on all matters relating to child care, working in collaboration with the Child Care Planning Committee and the Children's Planning Council, to build and strengthen the child care system and infrastructure in the County by providing policy recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.

Terri Chew Nishimura, Chair
Fourth Supervisorial District

Ruth Yoon, Vice Chair
Fifth Supervisorial District

Celia C. Ayala
Los Angeles Universal Preschool

Jacquelyn McCroskey
Third Supervisorial District

Maria Calix
Second Supervisorial District

Holly Reynolds
Child Care Planning Committee

Nancy Carter
Second Supervisorial District

Matt Rezvani
Fourth Supervisorial District

Duane Dennis
Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles

Arlene Rhine
*Southern California Association for the
Education of Young Children*

Ann E. Franzen
Commission of Children and Families

Connie Russell
Fifth Supervisorial District

Whitcomb Hayslip
Los Angeles Unified School District

Esther A. Torrez
First Supervisorial District

Kathy House
*Los Angeles County
Chief Executive Office*

Robert A. Wiltse
Department of Children and Family Services

Carollee Howes, Ph.D
Third Supervisorial District

Mika Yamamoto
Department of Parks and Recreation

Charlotte Lee
Department of Public Social Services

Sarah Younglove
*Los Angeles County Office of Education
Head Start*

Acknowledgements

The County of Los Angeles Policy Roundtable for Child Care (Roundtable) is grateful to the many organizations and individuals who contributed their experience and expertise to realizing the Steps to Excellence Project (STEP) from a BIG idea to execution. While it would be impossible to mention all of those who have contributed to the development of STEP, special thanks are extended to the following:

Organizations

Board of Supervisors, County of Los Angeles

California Department of Education, Child Development Division

Child Care Planning Committee

Child Care Planning Committee Inclusion Work Group

Early Identification and Intervention Collaborative for Los Angeles

Family Child Care Associations of Los Angeles County Representatives

First 5 LA

Los Angeles Unified School District Infant and Preschool Special Education Programs

Los Angeles Universal Preschool

Individuals

Jan Brown, UCLA Center for Improving Child Care Quality

Loren Clapp, Chief Administrative Office Graphic and Arts

Monica Mathur, Pediatric Therapy Network

Table of Contents

Welcome to the Steps To Excellence Project!.....	6
How Will STEP Assess the Quality of Your Child Care Program?.....	6
An Overview of the STEP Participation Process.....	7
Enrolling Your Child Care Program in STEP.....	8
Obtaining a STEP Quality Improvement Grant.....	8
STEP Quality Improvement Trainings and Resources.....	9
STEP Quality Review Site Visits.....	9
STEP Quality Ratings.....	10
Contact Information.....	10
STEP Application Forms.....	11-13

The County of Los Angeles Steps To Excellence Project

Welcome to the Steps To Excellence Project!

The County of Los Angeles Policy Roundtable (Roundtable) for Child Care applauds your commitment to providing high quality child development services and welcomes you to the Steps to Excellence Project (STEP).

STEP is a new child care quality rating and support system that is designed to help parents make informed child care choices. It intends to help child care programs by:

- Identifying quality standards that have been shown by research or best practice to positively impact child outcomes;
- Distinguishing child care programs that are providing high quality services; and
- Coordinating support and technical assistance to help child care programs make incremental and substantial improvements to the quality of care provided.

The quality of care children receive during their early years has life long implications for their cognitive and social development. High quality child development services contribute to positive child outcomes, while mediocre or poor quality services do not. Licensed child care centers and family child care homes care for an estimated 226,000 children on a daily basis in Los Angeles County. This represents an incredible opportunity to support families and the healthy development of their children.

However, California Department of Social Services Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) regulations, which are applied universally to licensed child care, focus specifically and are limited to health and safety standards. While health and safety standards are important, they are not the exclusive benchmark of high quality care. By contrast, accreditation standards, as implemented by the NAEYC and the NAFCC,

are comprehensive. However, participation in these accreditation programs is voluntary and fewer than seven percent of centers and two percent of family child care homes in Los Angeles County are currently accredited.

How Will STEP Assess the Quality of Your Child Care Program?

STEP uses quality standards which research and best practice have shown to impact child outcomes. The STEP rating system also defines incremental improvements which bridge the gap between basic compliance with CCLD regulations to the significantly more comprehensive standards associated with accreditation. It is our intent that STEP will engage child care programs across the spectrum, offering support and recognition for efforts that result in program quality improvements.

STEP will assess the following six components of your child care program:

1. Regulatory Compliance
2. Teacher/Child Relationships
3. Learning Environment
4. Identification and Inclusion of Children with Special Needs
5. Qualifications and Working Conditions
6. Family and Community Connections

With the exception of Regulatory Compliance, each component includes five quality levels:

STEP Rating	Quality Level
STEP 1:	Beginning
STEP 2:	Intermediate
STEP 3:	Good
STEP 4:	Advanced
STEP 5:	Excellent

The first STEP quality level (STEP 1) is largely aligned with CCLD licensing regulations and represents a beginning level of quality. STEP quality standards at STEP 3 are largely aligned with Title 5 standards for child care programs funded by the California Department of Education/Child Development

Division. STEP quality standards at STEP 5 are largely aligned with NAEYC accreditation standards. And lastly, STEP levels three, four and five are all aligned with the Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) standards for the Learning Environment and Staff Qualifications components.

To view a detailed list of STEP standards and quality rating elements, we strongly recommend that you review the **STEP Scoring Matrix for Child Care Centers**. The matrix is attached to this application packet and is also available online at www.childcare.lacounty.gov.

An Overview of the STEP Participation Process

To fully participate in the STEP project, take time to complete the following steps:



1). Read this STEP application packet entirely. Please take time to carefully review the STEP quality assessment process, supports and resources available prior to enrolling your child care center in STEP.



2). Review the STEP Scoring Matrix. We recommend that you carefully review the matrix attached to this application. The matrix lists the STEP quality criteria that will be used to assess and rate each of the six components of your child care program.



3). Complete and submit a STEP Application Form. Once you have decided to enroll your child care program in STEP, complete the three-page STEP application included in pages 11-13 of this packet and mail or fax it to our office.



4). Participate in a STEP Orientation Session. After your child care program is enrolled in STEP, we invite you to attend a STEP orientation. You will leave the meeting feeling informed and confident about how to prepare your program for a STEP quality review. You will also receive a STEP

grant application and guidance to help you complete it.



5). Apply for a STEP Quality Improvement Grant. STEP will offer your child care program an opportunity to apply for a quality improvement grant (up to **\$5,000**). Applying for a grant is optional. Interested applicants must complete and send a grant application to our office. (See page 8 for more details).



6). Participate in a STEP Portfolio Workshop. You will receive instructions and guidance on how to develop a STEP Portfolio for your child care program. Your STEP Portfolio will clearly document how your program meets STEP's quality criteria and will be reviewed by a Quality Reviewer during a site visit.



7). Attend STEP Quality Improvement Trainings. STEP offers a variety of workshops and trainings to help improve child care quality. Although none are mandatory, we do hope that you will take advantage of these **free** trainings designed to strengthen your child care program. (Refer to page 9 for more information).



8). Participate in a STEP Quality Review Site Visit. All child care programs enrolled in STEP must agree to have an external quality assessment conducted on site. Site visits are scheduled in advance and conducted during normal business hours by a trained Quality Reviewer. (See page 9 for more information).



9). Obtain your STEP Rating. A STEP Results Report will be sent to your child care program by mail. It will contain your STEP rating and additional quality improvement recommendations. (Refer to page 10 for more information).

From start to finish, participation in STEP is about a year long commitment. We hope that you find the STEP participation process an enriching experience and a valuable service for your child care program.

Enrolling Your Child Care Program in STEP

To enroll in STEP, your child care program must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- 1). Have been licensed for at least one-year;
- 2). Care for children ages 0-5; and
- 3). Be located in one following STEP pilot communities:
 - Altadena
 - Florence/Firestone (zip code 90001)
 - Inglewood
 - Long Beach
 - Pacoima/Arleta
 - Palmdale
 - Pasadena
 - Pomona
 - San Pedro
 - Santa Monica
 - Wilmington

Private for-profit, non-profit, publicly subsidized programs, faith-based, school districts and any other licensed child care and early education programs are all eligible to participate in STEP.

If your program is eligible, complete pages 11-13 of this application packet and mail or fax them to:

Los Angeles County Office of Child Care
Attention: STEP Project
222 South Hill Street, 5th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Fax: (213) 687-1152

Make sure to **include a copy of your current child care license** along with your application.

Upon receiving your application, the Office of Child Care will verify that your child care program has maintained a licensing history compliant with the regulations of **the California Department of Social Services Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD)**. We will send your child care license number to CCLD and will ask them to report

if, in the past three years, your program has either:

- Held a probationary license;
- Been required to participate in a compliance plan; or
- Been issued civil penalties.

If your program has encountered any of these licensing issues, it is not eligible to be enrolled in STEP. It will instead be placed on a waiting list until it has established a **three year** track record clear of any of these regulatory issues.

If your program does pass this regulatory compliance review, it will be automatically enrolled in STEP. Our office will send you a congratulatory letter to notify you of your enrollment and will also invite you to attend a STEP Orientation.

Obtaining a STEP Quality Improvement Grant

Once your program has enrolled in STEP, our office will provide you with a Grant Application Form during a STEP Orientation (if funds are available). Your program will then have the option of applying for a one-time grant to support quality improvements.

STEP Quality Improvement Grants are limited to **\$5,000** per each child care center enrolled in STEP. They are optional, meaning your program is not required to apply for a grant.

Grant funds may only be used to purchase items or services relevant to the six quality components rated by STEP (refer to page 6).

After submitting a grant application, your program will need to provide proof of liability insurance (before receiving funds) and copies of receipts (after using funds) to verify monies were spent appropriately and as planned.

If you have additional questions about STEP Quality Improvement Grants, please contact the Office of Child Care at (213) 974-4103.

STEP Quality Improvement Trainings and Resources

The Office of Child Care offers a variety of quality improvement trainings and resources to help child care programs meet STEP's quality standards.

A **STEP Resource Guide** is distributed to every STEP child care program upon enrollment. The Guide contains useful information to help programs improve their quality and prepare for their STEP quality review site visit. It is also posted on the Office of Child Care Web site (www.childcare.lacounty.gov).

A **STEP Training Catalogue** that describes current trainings is also available on the Office of Child Care Web site and is emailed (or mailed) to STEP participants on a quarterly basis. Please visit the website regularly to obtain the most up to date information regarding scheduled trainings.

The following is a list of core STEP quality improvement trainings offered during FY 2009-10.

Building Positive Relationships with Children: Training focuses on the importance of adults' active and responsive interactions with young children and relevant best practices. Participants will benefit from learning strategies to increase their overall quality of adult-child relationships.

Developmental Screening Tools: Introduces participants to high quality developmental screening tools and how to use them. The use of development screening tools helps child care professionals do the following: 1) Assess whether children are developing and learning as expected; 2) Spot children at risk of learning disabilities and needing additional support to develop, learn, and prevent future learning difficulties; 3) Help determine interventions and curriculum modifications for targeted children to fully participate in classroom activities and routines; and 4) Identify children needing referrals to their local Regional Center and/or school district for formal assessments of learning disabilities or other special needs.

Environment Rating Scale (ECERS or ITERS): Provides an overview of the rating scale used by the Quality Reviewer to evaluate the child care center's learning environment. The scale focuses on seven subscales: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Listening and Talking, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure, and Parents and Provider.

Inclusion of Children with Special Needs: Provides an overview of teaching strategies used to help early childhood programs make practical accommodations and modifications to the curriculum and environment to include children with special needs.

STEP Portfolio Preparation Workshops: Offers hands-on assistance to help STEP participants complete required Portfolio documentation and prepare for their site visit.

Important Notice: You must submit a separate registration form to enroll in STEP quality improvement trainings. Registration forms are included as the last page of the STEP Training Catalogue (available online). If you have any questions about STEP trainings, contact Doris Monterroso, STEP Training Coordinator, at (213) 974-9526.

STEP Quality Review Site Visits

Your child care program will be contacted by a coordinator to schedule a STEP Quality Review Site Visit approximately 8 months after enrolling in STEP. All site visits are scheduled in advance and will be conducted during normal business hours by a trained Quality Reviewer.

STEP site visits are typically a day-long event and consist of two main activities: an observation and a review of documentation from your center's STEP Portfolio. During the observation portion, the Quality Reviewer will observe and record your staff-to-child ratios and group sizes. The Quality Reviewer will also administer the Adult Involvement Scale (AIS) and an Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS or ITERS) in at least 50% of your center's classrooms to assess the quality of Teacher-Child Relationships and the Learning

Environment, respectively. You can obtain more information about the AIS and ECERS/ITERS by attending relevant STEP Quality Improvement Trainings and/or reviewing the STEP Resource Guide available online at www.childcare.lacounty.gov.

The Quality Reviewer will also review your child care program's STEP Portfolio, which is a collection of documents and evidence that corroborates to what extent your child care program meets the quality criteria listed in the STEP Scoring Matrix (attached). You will receive a STEP Portfolio binder and materials when you attend a STEP Portfolio Preparation Workshop.

Special Note for LAUP-funded Child Care Centers: Centers that have been awarded a quality star-rating by Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) will still be required to undergo a full STEP Quality Review Site Visit.

STEP Quality Ratings

Once your child care program has completed a STEP Quality Review Site Visit, it will be notified of its STEP quality rating by mail. A customized **STEP Quality Rating and Improvement Report** will be sent to your center within 2 months of your site visit. This report will explain your center's STEP rating for each of the six quality components evaluated by STEP, and an overall STEP rating for your child care program.

Because STEP was designed to offer parents clear, concise information about child care quality, your center's STEP quality rating will be posted on the Office of Child Care website (www.childcare.lacounty.gov) and made available to the public. STEP will also provide your center with promotional materials to help you use your STEP rating as a marketing tool that distinguishes your program from non-rated child care programs.

If your program would like an opportunity to improve its STEP rating, our office will offer a second STEP Quality Review Site Visit (if funding is available). This second site visit would take place approximately one-year after your initial review and would replicate the prior quality review process.

Center Application Updated: September 2009

Contact Information

If you have any additional questions about STEP, please contact any of the following staff members for assistance:

Helen E. Chavez
STEP Project Manager
hchavez@ceo.lacounty.gov
(213) 974-4103

Doris Monterroso
STEP Training Coordinator
dmonterroso@ceo.lacounty.gov
(213) 974-9526

Jodie Chin
STEP Clerk
jchin@ceo.lacounty.gov
(213) 974-4103

STEP Application Form: 1

Statement of Intent to Participate in STEP

Date: _____

To: Los Angeles County Office of Child Care
Attention: STEP Project
222 South Hill Street, 5th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Fax: (213) 687-1152

From: _____
Name of Authorized Representative

Re: Intent to Participate in Steps To Excellence Project

By completing and submitting this STEP application form, representatives of:

Name of Child Care Center

are stating our intent to participate in STEP. We have read this application packet in its entirety, understand and agree to fully comply with STEP participation requirements described therein.

Upon STEP's verification of the aforementioned center's licensing history, we intend to (please check only one):

- Request a STEP Quality Review Site Visit only. **Our center is not interested in receiving a Quality Improvement Grant.**

-OR-

- Request a STEP Quality Review Site Visit and a STEP Quality Improvement Grant** (if funding is available*).

Signature of Authorized Representative

Date

**Note: You may verify whether STEP Quality Improvement Grant funding is available by calling the Office of Child Care at (213) 974-4103.*

STEP Application Form 2

Center Program Description

Contact Information

1. Center Name: _____

2. Address: _____
Street City Zip Code

3. Number of classrooms per age group: Infants ____ Toddlers ____ Preschool ____

4. Primary Contact Person: _____ Title: _____

5. Email: _____ Phone: (____) ____ - _____

6. Alternate Contact: _____ Title: _____

7. Email: _____ Phone: (____) ____ - _____

Program Information

8. Days and hours of operation: _____

9. Funding Sources (*check all that apply*):

- Contract with California Department of Education/Child Development Division
- Head Start
- Los Angeles Universal Preschool
- Parent fees
- Other: _____

10. Is the program accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)?

- Yes
- No

11. Please indicate the languages spoken in the program on a daily basis:

- English
- Spanish
- Mandarin
- Armenian
- Korean
- Other: _____

12. Please indicate if your center currently has children served by any of the following programs:

- Foster Care
- TANF/Welfare

13. Organizational Structure: Private nonprofit Private proprietary Public agency

Center's Regulatory Compliance History

1. Center Name: _____

2. Agency Name (if applicable): _____

3. Agency Address (if applicable): _____
Street City Zip Code

4. Agency Contact Person: _____

Phone: (_____) _____ Email: _____

5. Licensing number(s) issued by the California Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD):

a. Infant Program: _____ Capacity: _____

b. Preschool Program: _____ Capacity: _____

i. Does the program operate with a Toddler Option? ___Yes (go to Item ii) ___No (go to item 5c)

ii. If yes, what is the capacity of the toddler program? _____

c. Licensing Analyst Name: _____ Phone: (_____) _____

d. Attach copies of current child care license(s)

6. Is this site required, per contract with the California Department of Education (CDE), to comply with Title 5 regulations?

Yes (complete items 6a and 6b) No (go to Item 7)

a. CDE Consultant: _____ Phone: (_____) _____

b. Attach a copy of your California Department of Education contract face sheet

7. Is this site funded by Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP)?

Yes (attach copy of LAUP funding notification) No (go to Item 8)

8. Is this site accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children?

Yes (attach copy of NAEYC accreditation certificate) No (go to Item 9)

9. Attach the most recent copies of the following documents:

Fire inspection - if deficiencies were noted, provide documentation that they have been corrected.