

Better Beginnings
Arkansas Quality Rating Improvement System

Better Beginnings Guide



www.arbetterbeginnings.com

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The Better Beginnings Guide is designed to support your program as you move through the certification process. The Better Beginnings Guide and the Better Beginnings Toolkit can help you document requirements you are already meeting and also help you develop policies and procedures to meet other requirements. The resources and examples in the Toolkit may be adapted for use in your program. Access the Toolkit online at www.arbetterbeginnings.com.

Some sections in this Guide list related resources to support your program in implementing Better Beginnings requirements. The **Arkansas Child Care Resource Center** has many of these resources available in its lending library for licensed child care facilities. Contact the Resource Center at **501-683-0033** or **1-800-445-3316**.

Resources may also be available from your education service cooperative, your regional child care resource and referral agency, and/or a teacher center in your area.

Definitions

ADE - Arkansas Department of Education.

ADMINISTRATOR - The person **on-site** who is responsible for day-to-day operation of the program. This person's title may be director, site manager, principal, lead teacher, or other.

APPROVED TRAINING - Training that is either 1) registered with the TAPP Registry, or 2) approved by the Arkansas Department of Education, or 3) for college credit, with a grade of "C" or better from a regionally accredited institution in early childhood education or after-school care education.

BAS - The *Business Administration Scale* (BAS) is used in family child care programs to measure and improve the overall quality of business practices.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT - A program assessment using an approved environment rating tool.

ERS - Environment rating scales (ERS) are tools used to measure program quality: *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, Revised* (ITERS-R); *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised* (ECERS-R), *Revised*; *Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale, Revised* (FCCERS-R); and the *School-Age Environment Rating Scale* (SACERS).

PAS - The *Program Administration Scale* (PAS) is used in center-based and school-age programs to measure and improve the quality of overall administrative practices.

PRIMARY CAREGIVER - The person in charge of the family child care program. In Better Beginnings, this person may be referred to as administrator or director.

PROGRAM REVIEW - An on-site review of Better Beginnings requirements, including use of the *Program Administration Scale* or *Business Administration Scale*.

SECONDARY CAREGIVER - An employee in a family child care program who is supervised by the primary caregiver. In Better Beginnings, this person may be referred to as staff.

STAFF - Employees who work directly with children/youth and those involved in the planning or implementing of services for children/youth.

TAPP Map - Traveling Arkansas' Professional Pathways (TAPP) is the professional development system for early educators in Arkansas. The TAPP Map describes levels of professional development based on education and training. A copy of the current TAPP map is in the Better Beginnings Toolkit.

TEACHING STAFF - Employees (full-time and part-time) who are regularly scheduled to work directly with children/youth. This includes job titles such as lead teacher, teacher, assistant teacher, and paraprofessional. Floaters whose primary role is to work in the classrooms or provide breaks are included as part of the teaching staff. Cooks, bus drivers, and custodians are not included in this category unless they regularly spend time in the classrooms working with children/youth.

YPQA - The *Youth Program Quality Assessment* is an environment rating tool used to measure the quality of school-age/youth programs. This tool has two options: YPQA (generally suited for 4th – 12th grade children) and the Younger Youth Program Quality Assessment (generally more suited for kindergarten – 6th grade children).

The Better Beginnings Certification Process

Overview of the Certification Process

The certification process consists of eight steps. Each step will be explained in more detail on pages 4-9 of this Guide.

1. Complete the Better Beginnings Application Checklist to find out which requirements you already meet and how you can meet additional requirements. When you are ready to submit your Better Beginnings application, update the Application Checklist so that it reflects all requirements your facility has achieved.
2. Prepare for the environmental assessment and the program review. Review the environment rating scale(s) that applies to your facility and/or the YPQA (for some school-age programs). Review the Better Beginnings requirements and the *Program Administration Scale* (center-based and school-age facilities) or the *Business Administration Scale* (family child care programs).
3. Gather documentation for Better Beginnings requirements. This Guide provides information about documentation that you will need. Some documents will be attached to your application form. If your facility qualifies for level 2 or level 3, you will prepare a program portfolio that includes documentation of PAS/BAS requirements.
4. Submit your Better Beginnings application, along with the required supporting documents. If your facility qualifies for level 2 or level 3, you should be ready for the environmental assessment and your program portfolio should be ready for the program review when you submit your application.
5. Environmental assessment and program review.
 - If your facility qualifies for level 2 or level 3, a consultant will call to notify you of the time frame for your environmental assessment. A summary report will be e-mailed to you.
 - If your facility qualifies for level 2 or level 3, a PAS/BAS assessor will contact you to schedule an appointment for your program review. A summary report will be e-mailed to you.
6. Notification of Better Beginnings level assigned. When the program review and environmental assessment have been completed, you will receive notification of the Better Beginnings level for which your facility qualifies.
7. Submit an updated Annual Staff Record Form. This form must be submitted every 12 months. The form is available on the Better Beginnings web site, www.arbetterbeginnings.com.
8. Recertification. Your Better Beginnings level is valid for three years. Resubmit all application documents no later than 33 months after certification. See the Better Beginnings Rule Book, section 9.00, for complete information.

Explanation of the Certification Process

Step 1: Complete the Better Beginnings Application Checklist

The Application Checklist is available at www.arbetterbeginnings.com. You will check “yes” or “no” to indicate whether or not your program meets each Better Beginnings requirement. The Better Beginnings Toolkit contains resources to help you achieve requirements that were checked “no”.

Step 2: Prepare for the Environmental Assessment and Program Review (for Level 2 and Level 3)

Review the environment rating tool that applies to your program (ERS or YPOA). If your facility qualifies for level 2 or level 3, review the Better Beginnings requirements and the *Program Administration Scale* (center-based and school-age facilities) or the *Business Administration Scale* (family child care facilities).

Step 3: Gather Documentation

This Guide outlines documentation that you will need for each of the three Better Beginnings levels. Some documents will be attached to your Better Beginnings application, and others will be added to a program portfolio (see page 10).

Step 4: Application

Three forms must be completed to apply for Better Beginnings: the Application Form (Form A), the Application Checklist Form (Form B), and the Annual Staff Record Form (Form C). The Staff Record Form requires supporting documentation. In addition, be sure to attach all supporting documents listed on page 5 of this Guide. Optional forms (Forms D, E, F, and G) are available in the appendix of this Guide and on the Better Beginnings web site, www.arbetterbeginnings.com.

Electronic submissions are encouraged. If you choose to mail your application and required documentation, send it to:

Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education
Attn: Better Beginnings
PO Box 1437, Slot S150
Little Rock, AR 72203-1437

Attach the following documents to your Better Beginnings Application

Label each item with the corresponding letter, as listed below.

- A. Better Beginnings Application Form - (Form A)
- B. Better Beginnings Application Checklist - This document allows the facility to self-select the requirements for which documentation is being provided. Be sure to use the correct form for your facility type (Center-based, Family Child Care, or School-Age). (Form B)
- C. Annual Staff Record Form and any necessary additional documentation to verify that staff meet qualifications and professional development requirements. (Form C)
- D. Developmentally appropriate daily program schedule for each age group served. (See Optional Form D)
- E. Evidence that daily schedules are posted in each classroom/program space. (See Optional Form D)
- F. Sample of current written daily plans for each age group served. Plans must be for two consecutive weeks for each group. (See Optional Form D)
- G. Facility self-evaluation using an approved rating tool (ex. ITERS-R, ECERS-R, SACERS, FCCERS-R, YPQA) for each age group served. Self-evaluation documentation consists of completed score sheets from the approved tools, or other self-assessment checklists associated with and compiled from the approved tools. (See Optional Form E)
- H. Evidence that ARKids First information is distributed to families of uninsured children. (See Optional Form F)
- I. Evidence that child/youth development information has been shared with families. (See Optional Form F)
- J. Evidence that health information has been shared with families. (See Optional Form F)
- K. Program policy and procedures for obtaining and implementing children's medical and educational care plans. (See Optional Form G)

*Download and print a Better Beginnings application packet at www.arbetterbeginnings.com.
You will also find information about submitting an electronic application.*

Step 4a: Application Processing Notes

Before processing your application, the Better Beginnings staff will verify that your facility is in good standing with a regular or new provisional license or registration issued by the DHS Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education and that your program is in good standing with other DHS programs. *In good standing* means that your facility is not currently debarred, defunded, excluded, or under adverse licensing action.

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

If you have staff members who are not members of the TAPP Registry, refer to page 15 of this Guide for more information. For information about the Arkansas Education Service Cooperative Shoebox registry, go to http://www.escweb.net/ar_esc.

Refer to pages 12-28 of this Guide for suggestions on documentation of Better Beginnings requirements.

If you believe your facility meets the requirements for level 2 or level 3:

Before submitting your application, you should be ready for the program review and environmental assessment. Your program portfolio should be ready for review at the time you submit your application.

Does your center have national accreditation?

Child care facilities that are accredited through the organizations listed below will be considered certified for Better Beginnings. Facilities with such accreditations will submit a Better Beginnings Application Form and verification of the national accreditation. Additional documentation of Better Beginnings requirements or reviews may be required to determine level of Better Beginnings certification.

- National Association of Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- National Afterschool Association (NAA)
- Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities: Child and Youth Services Standards (CARF)
- National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)

Building Block System

Arkansas Better Beginnings is a building block system, with each level building on the previous level.

- Level 1 is achieved when all requirements for that level are documented.
- Level 2 is achieved when all requirements for Levels 1 and 2 are documented.
- Level 3 is achieved when all requirements for Levels 1, 2 and 3 are documented.

Step 5: Environmental Assessment and Program Review

Environmental assessment (ERS and/or YPQA)

- An ERS/YPQA consultant will contact you and give you a time frame for the environmental assessment (60-day window). You will not know in advance the exact date on which the consultant will visit your program. If you have dates that your program will be closed or you have special events scheduled, tell the consultant when he/she contacts you.
- Review the items and indicators in the environment rating scale(s) or YPQA that will be used for your program. This Guide provides more information on how to prepare for the environmental assessment (see page 23).
- For centers, the assessor(s) generally will review 1/3 of your classrooms at each age level (1/3 of infant/toddler rooms, 1/3 of preschool rooms, and 1/3 of school-age rooms). The observation usually takes about 3-5 hours.
- After the observation, the assessor will interview the teacher(s) to obtain additional information.
- About three weeks after your environmental assessment, you will receive a summary report via e-mail that lists your program's scores, areas of strength, and opportunities for growth.
- A copy of your ERS and/or YPQA scores will be sent to the Better Beginnings Coordinator at the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education.

Program Review (PAS/BAS assessment) for Level 2 and Level 3

Center-Based Better Beginnings: Your PAS assessor will score your facility on PAS items 1-21. Items 5 and 6 will be scored, but the scores will not be included when determining your average PAS score. Items 22-25 will not be scored.

Family Child Care Better Beginnings: Your BAS assessor will score your facility on items 2-10. Item 2 will be scored, but the score will not be included when determining your average BAS score. Item 10 will be scored only if your program has one or more employees (as defined on page 26 of the BAS).

School-Age Better Beginnings: Your PAS assessor will score your program on PAS items 1-9 and 12-21. Items 5 and 6 will be scored, but the scores will not be included when determining your average PAS score. Items 10-11 and 22-25 will not be scored.

For level 2, there is no minimum score required for the PAS/BAS. The information you receive in your summary report will help you prepare to meet the required score at level 3.

Program Review (PAS/BAS assessment) for Level 2 and Level 3 cont.

A PAS/BAS assessor will call you to schedule a date and time for the program review using the *Program Administration Scale* or the *Business Administration Scale*. The PAS program review requires about four to five hours. The BAS program review requires about two hours. The program review is outlined below.

- You provide a brief tour of your facility for your assessor, including indoor and outdoor space used by children and space designated for families and staff.
- Your assessor interviews you to obtain information about how your facility meets PAS/BAS indicators. You should arrange for a quiet area, free of interruptions for the interview. The PAS interview takes about two hours; the BAS interview requires about one hour.
- Your assessor reviews your Better Beginnings program portfolio to verify that you have documentation for PAS/BAS indicators and for Better Beginnings requirements.
- Your assessor will review children's portfolios.
- Your assessor will ask you to provide any additional information that may be needed.
- Your program review must be scheduled during a time period when classrooms/program spaces are set up for children/youth. This required because your PAS/BAS assessor will be observing your learning centers and other program features, and reviewing children's portfolios. For example, if your program closes during the summer, a program review could not be completed.

Documentation for the program review must be current. **Most items will document policies, procedures, and activities within the past 12 months.**

Following the program review, your scores will be forwarded to the Better Beginnings Coordinator at the DHS Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education. A summary report will be e-mailed to you, highlighting areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

Preparing for the Program Review

The purpose of the PAS/BAS is to help you consider strategies for enhancing the administrative practices in your facility. Rarely will facilities have documentation for every PAS/BAS indicator. You are not expected to meet every indicator in the PAS/BAS. The PAS/BAS can help you set goals for continued development.

Refer to pages 10-11 of this Guide for instructions on how to assemble documentation for review by your PAS/BAS assessor.

In addition to the PAS/BAS items, your assessor will verify that your program meets additional Better Beginnings requirements. Refer to pages 12-28 of this Guide for more information about the requirements listed below.

Level 2	2.A.2	2.E.1	2.E.2	
Level 3	3.A.2	3.A.3	3.C.3	3.E.1

Step 6: Notification of Better Beginnings Level

The Better Beginnings Unit at the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education will review all aspects of your application.

- Application and supporting documentation
- Summary Report from the program review
- Summary Report from the environmental assessment

The Better Beginnings Unit will verify the level for which your facility qualifies and will notify you of the level attained.

Step 7: Submit an Annual Staff Record Form

The Annual Staff Record Form (Better Beginnings Form C) lists information about each employee. This form must be submitted every 12 months. The form will be available on the Better Beginnings web site, www.arbetterbeginnings.com.

Step 8: Reports and Recertification

Your Better Beginnings level is valid for three years. Resubmit all application documents no later than 33 months after certification. See the Better Beginnings Rule Book, section 9.00, for complete information, www.arbetterbeginnings.com.

Questions?

For more information about Better Beginnings and the certification process:
Vicki Mathews, vicki.mathews@arkansas.gov, 501-682-4888

For more information about the program review, PAS, or BAS:
Nichole Parks, nparks@astate.edu
Diana Courson, dianacourson@sbcglobal.net

For more information about the environmental assessment or the environment rating scales:
Technical Assistance Coordinator, ta@astate.edu, 870-972-3055, 1-888-429-1585

Or

Your regional technical assistance coordinator
To obtain the name of and contact information for your regional coordinator,
call ASU Childhood Services, 1-888-429-1585

The Better Beginnings Program Portfolio For Level 2 and Level 3

Level 1 facilities: At level 1 a program review will not be conducted, and a program portfolio is not required. After attending "PAS Basics" or "BAS Basics" training, the administrator or primary caregiver of a level 1 facility should begin compiling documentation for the Better Beginnings Application. You may choose to continue gathering documentation in preparation for future review at level 2.

Your Better Beginnings program portfolio contains documentation of both the PAS/BAS indicators and the Better Beginnings requirements.

An optional PAS Documentation List is available from the following web site:

<http://cecl.nl.edu/evaluation/resources/docreview.pdf>.

You may find this helpful in thinking about how you might document the PAS indicators. The list suggests documents you might use for each item in the PAS.

A similar list for the BAS is on pages 30-31 of the *Business Administration Scale*.

For information on documenting Better Beginnings requirements, see pages 12-28 of this Guide. Also see "Documentation Required for Better Beginnings" in the Better Beginnings Toolkit.

Organization of the Program Portfolio

Please organize your program portfolio documentation in a **three-ring binder or a file box**.

Label each portfolio entry with the number of the PAS/BAS item and indicator or the Better Beginnings requirement it supports.

If the needed documentation is contained within a larger document, such as an employee manual or a policies and procedures notebook, **please highlight or underline relevant portions** and write the PAS/BAS item and indicator numbers or Better Beginnings requirement number in the margin. It is also helpful to tab the appropriate page.

When photographs are used as documentation, please date the photograph and attach an **explanation of how the photograph relates** to the Better Beginnings requirement or PAS/BAS indicator.

Be concise. If one item sufficiently documents a PAS/BAS indicator or Better Beginnings requirement, avoid the temptation to include three items. The PAS/BAS assessor will ask you for additional documentation if it is needed for any requirement.

Be thorough. Provide adequate documentation so that the PAS/BAS assessor can understand how your program's policies, procedures, and systems support the indicator. For many PAS/BAS items, you will need to include several documents.

Sequence of documents in your program portfolio

Larger documents, such as an employee manual or handbook for families, may be placed at the front of the program portfolio. If the document is too large to include in the program portfolio, provide the document for the PAS/BAS assessor along with the program portfolio. *Be sure that all requirements are highlighted, labeled, and tabbed within the larger document.*

Please organize documents in your program portfolio in the order listed below.

- 2.A.2 Documentation of completion of "Strengthening Families Webinar"
 - 3.A.2 Print-out of Strengthening Families action plan
 - 3.A.3 Print-out of Strengthening Families action plan and evidence of implementation of one or more action steps
 - 3.C.3 Written curriculum plan
 - 2.E.1 Evidence that information on medical homes for children is shared with families
 - 2.E.2 Samples (no more than 3) of information shared with families on stages of development/youth development and a statement of how the information was shared
 - 3.E.1 Samples (no more than 3) of information shared with families on nutrition and physical activities for children and a statement of how the information was shared
- Documentation for PAS items 1-21 or BAS items 2-9(10), in numerical order (School-age programs do not include PAS items 10 and 11.)

If there are Better Beginnings requirements or PAS/BAS indicators for which you do not have documentation, go to the next item/indicator.

Preparing for the Program Review (PAS/BAS Assessment)

Be sure that your Better Beginnings program portfolio is ready for your PAS/BAS assessor to review.

- Are all items labeled with the PAS/BAS item and indicator or Better Beginnings requirement?
- Are items in numbered sequence (see box above)?
- Are all items explained and/or highlighted, clearly showing how they relate to the requirement or indicator?
- Have you removed all non-essential materials from your program portfolio?
- Are children's portfolios ready for review?

A. Administration

Include in your program portfolio

- 2.A.2 Evidence of reviewing the Strengthening Families web site, or viewing the webinar, or attending training on Strengthening Families
- 3.A.2 Printout of Strengthening Families action plan that includes action steps for three or more strategies
- 3.A.3 Evidence of implementation of at least one Strengthening Families action step
- Documentation for PAS items 1-21 (Center-based facilities)
OR
- Documentation for BAS items 2-9(10) (Family child care)
OR
- Documentation for PAS items 1-9 and 12-21 (Facilities using School-Age Requirements)

"Program Administration Scale (PAS) Basics" or "Business Administration Scale (BAS) Basics" [1.A.1]

For Better Beginnings Level 1, the site administrator attends PAS Basics (center-based and school-age facilities). In a family child care program, the primary caregiver attends BAS Basics. This training is required the first time a facility applies for Better Beginnings certification. If there is a change in the facility's administrator or primary caregiver, the new person must attend PAS or BAS Basics.

PAS Basics is available as a workshop each year throughout the state. BAS Basics is available as a workshop at selected locations each year. Both PAS Basics and BAS Basics will be offered online beginning in fall 2010.

Go to the TAPP Registry Training Opportunities page to view the workshop schedule.
<http://professionalregistry.astate.edu>

An optional "PAS Documentation List" is available from the following web site.

<http://cecl.ni.edu/evaluation/resources/docreview.pdf>

You may find this helpful in thinking about how you might document the PAS indicators. The list suggests documents you might use for each item in the PAS.

A similar list for the BAS is on pages 30 – 31 of the *Business Administration Scale*.

Selected sample documents are available in the Better Beginnings Toolkit.

www.arbetterbeginnings.com

Strengthening Families [2.A.2, 3.A.2, 3.A.3]

Find out about the Strengthening Families Initiative by reviewing the Strengthening Families web site, or viewing the Strengthening Families Webinar, or participating in training on Strengthening Families. Documentation for this requirement might be a print-out from the web site or webinar, or a training certificate.

Complete the Strengthening Families online self-assessment for at least three strategies, including the action plan with action steps. Implement at least one action step.

To access the self-assessment, go to www.strengtheningfamilies.net.

B. Administrator/Staff Qualifications

Attach to the Better Beginnings application

- Annual Staff Record Form (Form C) and any necessary additional documentation

Include in the Better Beginnings program portfolio

No documents for this component will be included in the program portfolio.

How to access your TAPP Registry Transcript

Staff and administrator qualifications and professional development are documented through the TAPP Registry Training Transcript.

To print your Registry transcript, go to the Registry web site, <http://professionalregistry.astate.edu>.

- Click on Registry Members Personal Data.
- Login using your Registry ID number and password.
- Next click the gray Training Transcript tab.

If you need assistance, contact the Registry Office, 1-888-429-1585 or 870-972-3055.

To document future training for which you are registered, click the gray Upcoming Trainings tab. Print the Upcoming Training page if you have not completed all training required for Better Beginnings, and you are registered for an upcoming session.

New employees who do not meet the Better Beginnings administrator/staff qualifications requirements will be allowed 12 months from their date of hire to meet the required qualifications.

Access to TAPP Training Transcript

Staff members are encouraged to give permission for facility administrators and the Better Beginnings Office to view their Registry transcripts online. A release form is in the Better Beginnings Toolkit, www.arbetterbeginnings.com. Contact the Registry office for more information, 1-888-429-1585.

Facilities are encouraged to submit this form, which helps site administrators and the Better Beginnings Office in two ways.

- 1) Authorizes the facility administrator to view TAPP transcripts for staff members signing the form.
- 2) Combines all staff TAPP transcripts into a group file. This makes it easier to review transcripts for all staff within the facility.

Registry Membership [1.B.1, 2.B.1]

Membership in the TAPP Registry or the Arkansas Department of Education Registry is an element of professionalism. These two registries record members' professional development on an individual training transcript.

Each member of the TAPP Registry is assigned an ID number. Practitioner ID numbers are valid for one year, at which time they must be renewed. Trainer Registry membership is renewed every three years. Specialized trainers renew membership every year.

Renewal reminders are mailed to TAPP Registry members.

If employees are not members of the TAPP Registry, they may complete an online application or a paper application. Allow four to six weeks after submitting the application to receive your membership card. For assistance, contact the Registry office, 1-888-429-1585.

Quick Membership: If your membership card is needed immediately, complete the online practitioner application, <http://professionalregistry.astate.edu> and click on "Online Practitioner Application".

- Be sure to complete ALL items in Section 1 and Section 2; you may need to enter "NA" or "0" for some questions.
- Be sure that the electronic signature at the end of the application is complete.
- After submitting your online application, call the Registry office, 1-888-429-1585.
- If your application is complete, a Registry staff member will contact you with your new TAPP Registry ID within one working day, and will walk you through the process of logging in and printing your TAPP ID card.

Shoebox Registry: For information about the Arkansas Education Service Cooperative Shoebox registry, go to http://www.escweb.net/ar_esc.

TAPP Levels

TAPP Registry members are assigned a level, based on their education and training. The levels are Foundation, Intermediate, and Advanced. The TAPP Map (in the Better Beginnings Toolkit) describes the requirements for each level.

Annual Professional Development [2.B.4, 3.B.3]

For Better Beginnings Level 2, the requirement is at least 20 clock hours per calendar year (2.B.3).

For Better Beginnings Level 3, the requirement is at least 25 clock hours per calendar year (3.B.3).

All annual professional development must be *approved training*, registered with the TAPP Registry or approved by the Arkansas Department of Education. CPR and first aid training can count for up to four hours of professional development annually, if it is approved training.

Framework Basics Training and Developmental Assets Basics Training [2.B.5]

Framework Basics—Preschool (90 minutes) - This training is designed for those working with children ages 3-5. Framework Basics—Preschool is available in workshops and will be offered online beginning in fall 2010. Completion of Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework Handbook training (30-45 clock hours) or Pre-K Framework Handbook (30 clock hours) meets this requirement.

Framework Basics—Infant/Toddler (90 minutes) - This training is designed for those working with children birth to three years old. Framework Basics—I/T is available in workshops. Completion of Infant/Toddler Framework training (16 clock hours) meets this requirement.

Developmental Assets Basics (2 hours) - This training is designed for those working with children/youth in grades K-12. Developmental Assets Basics is available online and in workshops.

Go to the TAPP Registry Training Opportunities page to view the workshop schedule. <http://professionalregistry.astate.edu>

ERS/YPOA Training [1.B.4 and 2.B.6 for Center-Based and School-Age facilities; 1.B.3 for Family Child Care programs]

The environment rating tools (ERS and YPOA) are used to assess program quality (see Better Beginnings requirements 1.D.1, 2.D.1, and 3.D.1.) The *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised* (ECERS-R) is used in classrooms serving children ages 2½ years through 5 years old. The *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, Revised* (ITERS-R) is used in classrooms serving children birth to 30 months old. The *Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale, Revised* (FCCERS-R) is used by family child care programs. The *School-Age Environment Rating Scale* (SACERS) is used by facilities serving school-age children. The *Youth Program Quality Assessment* is available for grades K-6 and for grades 4-12; facilities should use the YPOA that best matches the ages served. Facilities serving school-age children may choose either the SACERS or the YPOA.

Participation in ERS training prior to Better Beginnings enrollment meets this requirement. However, if it has been several years since you attended this workshop, you are encouraged to attend an ERS workshop to insure that you have current information.

Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPOA) training will also meet this requirement for facilities serving children kindergarten age and older. For more information on YPOA, contact the Better Beginnings Unit at the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, 1-800-445-3316, or the School Age Coordinator at ASU Childhood Services, 1-888-429-1585.

Administrator Qualifications and Professional Development [2.B.2, 3.B.1]

(Although these requirements do not apply to family child care programs, primary caregivers may choose to obtain training on the topics listed below.)

Effective administrators have knowledge and skills in both management and early childhood/youth development. Better Beginnings administrator qualifications require evidence of training in both areas.

Better Beginnings annual professional development for administrators includes training in program planning/management and/or leadership.

Examples of professional development topics that meet these requirements are listed below.

(Topics below have been identified as relevant for administrators by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.)

Program Planning/Management

Director's Orientation
Program operations and facilities management
Staff management and human relations
Family support
Educational programming
Legal and fiscal management
Risk management
Performance appraisal
Marketing and public relations
Leadership and advocacy

Early Childhood or Child/Youth Development

Historical and philosophical foundations
Child growth and development
Child observation and assessment
Curriculum and instructional methods
Children with special needs
Family and community relationships
Health, safety, and nutrition
Individual and group guidance
Learning environments

C. Learning Environment

Attach to the Better Beginnings application

1.C.1 Copy of a developmentally appropriate daily program schedule for each age group served: infants, toddlers, twos, preschool, school-age.

Variation for family child care: Submit one schedule for your program. If children are regularly divided into two or more groups according to ages, submit a schedule for each group.

1.C.1 Evidence that daily program schedules are posted in each classroom/program space.

1.C.2 Sample of written daily plans for each age group served. Plans must be for two consecutive weeks for one class/group. Submit one set of plans for each age group served. You may use the optional Better Beginnings Form D, "Written Daily Plans."

Variation for family child care: Submit one set of plans for your program. If children are regularly divided into two or more groups according to ages, submit a set of plans for each group.

Better Beginnings Level 2 requires that written daily plans include

- 1) all areas of development, and
- 2) developmentally appropriate daily physical activities for all children.

Better Beginnings Level 3 requires that written daily plans include learning goals for children.

Include in your Better Beginnings program portfolio

3.C.3 Current written curriculum plan (For suggestions, see page 22 of this Guide and the Better Beginnings Toolkit, www.arbetterbeginnings.com.)

Observed during your program review

2.C.1 and 3.C.1 Interest centers in each classroom

3.C.2 Portfolio for each child enrolled

Developmentally appropriate daily program schedule [1.C.1]

A predictable routine is essential to children's optimal growth and development. An age appropriate daily schedule is the foundation for a predictable routine.

Arkansas *Minimum Licensing Requirements for Child Care Centers* (section 400, #1) states that the daily schedule must meet the following criteria.

- List developmentally appropriate activities for children.
- Offer alternating periods of active play and quiet times throughout the day.
- Include an opportunity for a supervised rest period of at least one hour but not more than two hours.
- Include at least one hour of outdoor play in suitable weather.

Note: Refer to *Minimum Licensing Requirements* for part-time and other program variations.

Developmentally appropriate activities

- allow children to explore a variety of materials through first-hand, meaningful experiences.
- include all areas of development: physical, cognitive, language and literacy, and social and emotional.
- allow children to make choices and pursue their interests. Activity plans are based on children's ages, developmental needs, and interests.
- balance child-initiated activities and adult guidance and support.

Related Resources: Developmentally Appropriate Daily Schedule

Refer to the sample daily schedules in the Better Beginnings Toolkit.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Eight, 3rd Ed. <http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/daptoc.asp>

All About the ECERS-R, chapter 34

All About the ITERS-R, chapter 29

Written daily activity plans for each group [1.C.2, 2.C.2, 2.C.3, 3.C.3]

Written daily plans should take into consideration the children's interests and developmental needs. By following written plans each day, staff are able to provide materials and equipment that will support optimal growth and learning for each child. Basic written plans don't have to be lengthy or complicated. Examples of learning experiences and activities are found in the *Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework Handbook* and in the *Arkansas Framework for Infant and Toddler Care*. Information on activities for school-age children/youth is in the Better Beginnings Toolkit.

Refer to the Better Beginnings Toolkit (Learning Environments section) for sample daily plans.

Better Beginnings Level 2: Daily plans must include 1) all areas of development (social and emotional, cognitive, physical, language and literacy), and 2) developmentally appropriate daily physical activities for all children. For school-age programs, plans must include Developmental Assets concepts. (See page 28 of this Guide for resources on physical activities.)

Better Beginnings Level 3: Daily plans must include learning goals for children. These may be benchmarks, indicators, or outcomes. If a program is implementing a curriculum that is listed as approved for ABC programs, the learning goals within that curriculum may be used.

For *school-age programs*, plans must link to Arkansas Department of Education K-12 frameworks. The following Web site may be helpful for school-age programs.

http://arkansased.org/parents/refrigerator_curriculum.html

Clearly defined interest centers [2.C.1, 3.C.1]

Interest centers may be called learning centers or interest areas. An interest center contains materials for certain types of play and an appropriate space for such play. Organizing play materials into interest centers supports children's play and helps children more easily find what they need.

Clearly defined interest centers can easily be identified by observation. Furniture and equipment are often used as boundaries to separate an interest center from the rest of the classroom/program space. Defining the space for each interest center can prevent lost materials and overcrowding and can help children focus on their activities.

The list below gives examples of typical interest centers. Your program may organize some areas differently and may have different names for the centers.

Examples of interest centers in an early childhood setting

Art
Blocks
Dramatic play
Books
Sand
Water
Manipulatives (may be called table games or discovery area)
Science and math (may be called discovery area)
Gross motor

Examples of interest centers for school-age settings

Art
Construction
Drama
Books
Puzzles and Games
Science and Nature

For examples of interest centers and how they may be defined, refer to the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised*, item 4; the *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, Revised*, item 4; and the *School-Age Environment Rating Scale*, item 4. The *Youth Program Quality Assessment* describes an appropriate environment for youth development.

Related Early Childhood Resources: Interest Centers

All About the ECERS-R, chapter 4; *All About the ITERS-R*, chapter 4

The Creative Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers, by Dombro, Colker, and Dodge (Teaching Strategies, Inc.)

The Creative Curriculum for Preschool, by Dodge, Colker, and Heroman (Teaching Strategies, Inc.)

The Creative Curriculum for Family Child Care, by Dodge, Rudick, and Colker (Teaching Strategies, Inc.)

The Complete Learning Center Book: An Illustrated Guide to 32 Different Early Childhood Learning Centers, by Isbell (Gryphon House)

Designs for Living and Learning: Transforming Early Childhood Environments, by Curtis and Carter (Redleaf Press)

Related School-age Resources: Interest Centers

Caring for Children in School-Age Programs: A Competency Based Training – Volume One, by Derry G. Koralek, Roberta L. Newman and Laura J. Colker (Teaching Strategies, Inc.)

Classroom Spaces that Work by Marlynn K. Clayton with Mary Beth Forton (Northeast Foundation for Children)

Building By Design: Creating Democratic Communities in Programs for 10-15 Year-Olds. Distributed by Work/Family Directions, Inc.

Integrated Development Enhancement Activities (I.D.E.A.S): Creating Successful Out-of-School Experiences in Programs for Older School-Age Children and Youth, by Roberta Newman

Portfolios for each child [3.C.2]

A portfolio is organized documentation of a child's developmental progress and learning. The purpose of a portfolio is to capture moments that demonstrate a child's growth over time. Staff observe what children are doing and record their observations. Samples of children's work and photographs of children's activities are usually included in portfolios, along with staff observations and notes. In a good portfolio, each item should be linked with one or more learning goal or developmental milestone.

Items for each child's portfolio might be kept in a file folder, a pizza box, or a large envelope. Some facilities scan items and store portfolios in their computer, on a disk, or through a Web-based service. The container you choose for portfolios must fit into the available storage space and be easy for staff to access.

A good portfolio contains multiple sources and types of documentation. Refer to the Better Beginnings Toolkit (Learning Environment section) for suggestions of types of documentation.

Related Resources: Child Portfolios

"Common Types of Portfolio Documentation" in the Better Beginnings Toolkit (Learning Environment section)

The Portfolio and Its Use, by MacDonald (Southern Early Childhood Association)

Basics of Assessment, by McAfee (National Association for the Education of Young Children)

"Look What I Did! Why Portfolio Assessment Works"

http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=495

"The Portfolio and Its Use: Developmentally Appropriate Assessment of Young Children"

<http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/eearchive/digests/1992/grace92.html>

"Assessing the Development of Preschoolers"

<http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/eearchive/digests/1994/lk-ass94.html>

Written curriculum plan [3.C.3]

Suggested elements of a Better Beginnings curriculum plan are listed below. These are not required elements.

- Statement of your program's overall goals for children
- Name and description of curriculum used (may be more than one or may be self-developed)
- Examples of topics of study and/or projects that you have planned in the past year and some that you expect to plan for the coming year
- How your curriculum incorporates investigation, play, child-initiated activities, and adult-guided activities
- How your curriculum builds on children's prior learning and experiences

Refer to the sample curriculum plan in the in the Better Beginnings Toolkit (Learning Environments section).

Your curriculum plan will be unique to your program, reflecting your program's goals, philosophy, mission, and approach to children's learning and development. The following samples are provided to illustrate the individuality of curriculum plans.

- Lindgren Child Care Center
<http://www.stcloudstate.edu/childcare/programs>
- Hilltop Children's Center
<http://www.hilltopcc.com/about/overview-learning-at-hilltop>
[Click on Hilltop's Approach and on Emergent Curriculum]
- Riverfield Country Day School
Infant/toddler -- <http://www.riverfield.org/i23.php>
Preschool -- <http://www.riverfield.org/325.php>

D. Environmental Assessment

Attach to your Better Beginnings application

- 1.D.1 Evidence of self-evaluation using an approved rating tool (ex. ITERS-R, ECERS-R, SACERS, FCCERS-R, YPQA) for each age group served
You may choose to use the optional Better Beginnings Form E, "Program Self-Evaluation."

Environmental Assessment

- 2.D.1, 3.D.1 Environmental assessment is completed by an ERS/YPQA assessor.

Environment Rating Tools

Better Beginnings uses environment rating tools designed for different types of facilities.

- *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised* (ages 2 ½ through 5 years)
- *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, Revised* (ages birth through 30 months)
- *School-Age Environment Rating Scale*, (ages 5 through 12 years)
- *Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale, Revised* (all ages in family child care)
- *Youth Program Quality Assessment* (scales for Grades K-6 and for Grades 4-12)

The environment rating scales define environment in a broad sense and guide the observer to assess the arrangement of space both indoors and outdoors, the materials and activities offered to the children, the supervision and interactions (including language) that occur in the classroom, and the schedule of the day (including routines and activities). The support offered to parents and staff is also included. The scales are suitable for use in inclusive and culturally diverse programs.

Sample strategies for self-evaluation [1.D.1]

- If your facility has had an environmental assessment in the past six months, you may use the cover sheet from the report as evidence of a self-assessment.
- Request technical assistance. A consultant will review the environment rating scales with you. Contact ASU Childhood Services, 1-888-429-1585 or 870-972-3055. [This is a good option. You get lots of practical information, and it's free!]
- Review the instructions for using the environment rating scale (found at the beginning of each scale). Be sure each staff member understands the format of the scale. Each classroom or group then uses the appropriate scale for a self-evaluation. Meet with staff to discuss self-evaluations. Set one or two goals for each classroom/group and one or two goals for the facility. Meet weekly with staff, discussing one item or subscale in each meeting. Share ideas that are working, discuss challenges and brainstorm solutions. You might choose to use the subscale self-evaluation form in the Better Beginnings Toolkit.

Use *All About the ECERS-R* and/or *All About the ITERS-R* for more ideas on how to meet indicators. These books may be checked out from the Arkansas Child Care Resource Center.

Call 1-800-445-3316, or 501-683-0033, or order online,

<http://www.arkansas.gov/childcare/programsupport/resource.html>

ERS/YPQA average scores [2.D.1, 3.D.1]

An ERS/YPQA assessor will contact you to provide a time frame for your environmental assessment. The environmental assessment usually occurs within 60 days of the assessor's contact, but you will not know the exact date.

The ERS/YPQA assessor(s) generally will review 1/3 of your classrooms at each age level (1/3 of infant/toddler rooms, 1/3 of preschool rooms, and 1/3 of school-age rooms). Approximately three weeks after the environmental assessment, you will receive a Summary Report via e-mail.

The Additional Notes for the ITERS-R, ECERS-R, FCCERS-R, and SACERS can be downloaded at <http://fpg.unc.edu/~ecers>. Click on the desired scale.

For the ITERS-R and ECERS-R, select Additional Notes for Updated ITERS-R or ECERS-R.

For the FCCERS-R and SACERS, select Additional Notes.

The Additional Notes provide clarification and explanation of rating scale indicators and are included as part of the rating scale when scoring.

Related Resources: Environmental Assessment

All About the ECERS-R and/or *All About the ITERS-R* provide examples of each rating scale indicator. (These books may be checked out from the Arkansas Child Care Resource Center. Call 1-800-445-3316 or 501-683-0033, or order online, <http://www.arkansas.gov/childcare/programsupport/resource.html>.)

Arkansas State University Childhood Services provides free technical assistance to help your program implement the environment rating scale indicators. Contact the Technical Assistance office at Childhood Services, 1-888-429-1585. Download a Technical Assistance Request Form, <http://chs.astate.edu/downloads>.

Staff training on ERS indicators is offered around the state. To find workshops in your area, go to the Training Opportunities page of the TAPP Registry web site, <http://professionalregistry.astate.edu>.

Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA): YPQA is designed to evaluate the quality of youth programs and identify staff training needs. For information, contact the School Age Coordinator at ASU Childhood Services, 1-888-429-1585.

E. Child Health and Development

Attach to your Better Beginnings application

- 1.E.1 Evidence that ARKids First information is distributed to families of uninsured children
You may use the optional Better Beginnings Form F, "ARKids First, Child Health, and Child Development."
- 1.E.2 Evidence that child/youth development information has been shared with families
You may use the optional Better Beginnings Form F, "ARKids First, Child Health, and Child Development."
- 1.E.2 Evidence that health information has been shared with families
You may use the optional Better Beginnings Form F, "ARKids First, Child Health, and Child Development."
- 1.E.3 Program policy and procedures for obtaining and implementing children's medical and educational care plans
You may use the optional Better Beginnings Form G, "Medical and Educational Care Plans."

Include in your Better Beginnings program portfolio

- 2.E.1 Evidence that information on medical homes for children has been shared with families in the past 12 months
- 2.E.2 Information regarding stages of development for children/youth that has been shared with families in the past 12 months and evidence of how it was shared
- 3.E.1 Samples of information provided to families in the past 12 months on nutrition and physical activity for children/youth

ARKids First [1.E.1]

ARKids First health insurance provides coverage for more than 70,000 Arkansas children who otherwise might have been insured. The information that families provide on the simple application form determines the level of coverage for which their children are eligible.

ARKids First information is available by calling toll-free, 1-888-474-8275 and from the ARKids First web site, <http://www.arkidsfirst.com>.

Information could be given to families during the enrollment process; it could be included in your family handbook; or it could be distributed with a newsletter or handouts on children's health.

To document distribution of ARKids First information, you will need a written policy or procedure describing the method(s) your facility uses to distribute the information to families.

Information on child/youth development and child health [1.E.2]

Many families look to you to provide information on a variety of topics related to children. Children's programs are in a unique position to help families learn about child/youth development and about issues related to children's health.

Look for opportunities to share with families what you have learned. When more of us know more about children, we all benefit. See the Better Beginnings Toolkit (Child Health and Development section) for examples of information you might share with families.

Related Resources

The Family Connection, by Dot Brown and Beverly Wright. Available from the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, 501-682-9699, or online, <http://www.arkansas.gov/childcare/services/printedmats.html>

Infant and Toddler Family Connection, by Dot Brown, Beverly Wright, and Dianne Finzer. Available from the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, 501-682-9699, or online, <http://www.arkansas.gov/childcare/services/printedmats.html>

Picture This: A Framework for Quality Care for Infants and Toddlers, by Dot Brown and Beverly Wright. Available from the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, 501-682-9699, or online, <http://www.arkansas.gov/childcare/services/printedmats.html>

Picture This: A Framework for Quality Care and Education of Children from Three to Five, by Dot Brown and Beverly Wright. Available from the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, 501-682-9699, or online, <http://www.arkansas.gov/childcare/services/printedmats.html>

Family-Friendly Communication for Early Childhood Programs, by Deborah Diffily and Kathy Morrision (National Association for the Education of Young Children)

Medical and educational care plans [1.E.3]

Medical and/or educational care plans for children are most effective when families and professionals work together.

Your program should have procedures for obtaining copies of medical and educational care plans and for carrying out your responsibilities within the plans. As you develop policies and procedures, be sure to build in safeguards that will maintain confidentiality of all information about children and families.

A medical home for children [2.E.1]

It may sound like a building, but a medical home isn't an actual place. It's a doctor you or your child go to for check-ups or when you get sick. This doctor is called a "primary care physician," or PCP. It may seem easier to see any doctor you can when you or your child is sick. But having a medical home — one doctor or clinic you call every time — means you are more likely to get the best care possible. If you see the same doctor every time, that doctor will know what sicknesses and health care you have had. You and the doctor will also get to know each other.

Why are medical homes important? Children who do not have a medical home may lack basic preventive health services. These children are more likely to receive care in an emergency room, and they are less likely to receive needed follow-up care and wrap around services.

What can your facility do to support medical homes?

- Provide information to families. Ask about the last well-child visit. Talk with families about the importance of a medical home and well-child visits. Share prevention strategies with families.
- Screen and coordinate care. Document concerns about a child's health and development and contact families about these concerns. If the child participates in ARKids First, refer the family to ConnectCare (1-800-275-1131) for help with locating a primary care physician. Provide families with information to take to the physician. Insure that any medical care plans are kept on file and are followed.

The brochure in the Child Health and Development section of the Better Beginnings Toolkit defines a medical home and explains the benefits of a medical home for children. You may choose to use the brochure to share with families the importance of having a medical home.

Information on stages of child development/youth development [2.E.2]

One aspect of our partnership with families is sharing our knowledge about children's development. The more we understand about how children grow and develop, the better able we are to support that development. The expectation for this requirement is that you will share information regarding the continuum of development—stages their children have passed through, where they are now, and developmental stages that lie ahead. Refer to the Better Beginnings Toolkit (Child Health and Development section) for sample handouts you might share with families.

Strategies for sharing information with families

- Bulletin board or other display
- Information included in handbook for families
- Information included in monthly newsletters
- Handouts sent home with children
- System for families to check-out books and articles on specific topics
- Information shared during meetings and conferences

Information on nutrition and physical activity [3.E.1]

Today's children spend many hours "plugged in." They watch television, play video games, and log many hours of computer time. As a result, our children are spending less time engaged in physical activities such as bike riding, running, and playing catch.

In addition, many children are living on fast food diets. Convenience foods tend to be higher in fat, salt, and sugar and lower in important nutrients. Poor diet affects the child's health and ability to learn.

We know that the child's early experiences set the stage for lifelong habits and behaviors. The combination of inadequate nutrition with limited physical activity has serious long-term consequences for our children and our society.

The solution is simple. Children need appropriate physical activities every day, and they need appropriate servings of nutritious meals and snacks. You are in a unique position to help children and their families develop healthier lifestyles.

The Better Beginnings Toolkit (Child Health and Development section) contains samples of information that can be shared with families.

Related Resources

From the Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, www.arkansas.gov/childcare/services.html

- "Arkansas Fit Kids Activity Cards", by Courson and Franks (2007)
- *B.A.M.! Body and Mind*, by Sanders and Courson (2004)
- "BAMMM: Books and Movement—a Magical Mix", by Brown and Wright (2005)
- *Healthy Choices for Better Beginning*, by White (2010)

Ideas for physical activities: <http://pecentral.org>, click on "Lessons" and select a grade level

"Healthy School Snacks", http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/healthy_school_snacks.pdf

Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC), <http://www.napsacc.org>



better beginnings
EVERY CHILD DESERVES OUR BEST

Appendix

Center-Based Requirements

Family Child Care Requirements

School-Age Requirements

Better Beginnings Application and Forms