

# The Virginia Star Quality Initiative

*A system to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education settings that families consider for their children.*



## Why Does Quality Matter?

*The evidence is clear—quality early education is key.* With the majority of a child's brain developing during the first five years of life, the quality of care a child receives during this time is critical. Children with access to high quality early learning experiences are more likely to acquire the skills they need to enter kindergarten ready to succeed and adapt to new learning and social environments.



High quality care means that children are engaging in meaningful learning and play, guided by qualified caregivers in an enriched educational environment.

Virginia is fortunate to have many quality early childhood programs, including those served in public schools, private and faith-based centers, and home-based programs. Yet identifying and accessing high quality programs can be a challenge for parents.

The Virginia Star Quality Initiative was created to provide a consistent way to distinguish the level of quality in early education programs, allowing families to make more informed choices and allowing child care providers a way to improve the quality of their services.

This voluntary quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for early childhood settings awards programs who choose to participate one of five star levels of increasing quality. Rated providers are demonstrating their commitment to quality beyond expectation or requirement.

But the rating is only the first step of the QRIS process. After receiving a rating, programs are given tools to improve their quality through mentoring and other assistance.

So look for the Virginia Star Quality symbol, because a child's brain development can't wait.

## Key Quality Features

-  **Education, qualifications, and training of staff:** Effective early childhood professionals have a strong background in education and child development, building specialized early childhood competencies.
-  **Interactions:** Effective teachers have the warmth and sensitivity to engage children, fostering self-confidence and positive interactions, and encouraging questions and curiosity.
-  **Structure:** Small class sizes and low child to teacher ratios that allow for individual student attention are hallmarks of a high quality program.
-  **Environment and Instruction:** An age-appropriate curriculum recognizing the psychological development of children is important, but the way a teacher implements that curriculum is more significant. Learning environments should stimulate children's cognitive development, with classrooms divided into smaller activity-based centers.



The Star Quality Initiative is a partnership between the Office of Early Childhood Development and the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation. Visit [www.smartbeginnings.org/QRIS](http://www.smartbeginnings.org/QRIS)