

# ExceleRate Illinois Quality Recognition and Improvement System

Licensed Child Care Center Path and Licensed Family Child Care Path

Preparing for On-Site Assessment- 2025

This document is meant to help directors, teachers and family child care providers prepare for their ExceleRate Illinois on-site assessment. Please review this document, as well as applicable Scale tip sheets and other guides available at <https://www.exceleRateillinois.com/licensed-child-care-centers/resources/preparing-for-assessments> so that your program is well prepared for successful on-site assessment.

As you prepare for the assessment visit, all program staff should read the ExceleRate Standards and Evidence Requirements very carefully, as well as use the Getting Ready for Silver or Gold checklist to make sure you have everything needed:

- Quality Standards Overview for Child Care Centers:  
<https://www.exceleRateillinois.com/docman-default-item/licensed-child-care-centers/circles-of-quality/1-exceleRate-quality-standards-overview-chart/file>
  - Getting Ready for the Silver Circle of Quality checklist:  
<https://www.exceleRateillinois.com/docman-default-item/licensed-child-care-centers/circles-of-quality/6-getting-ready-silver-circle-of-quality-checklist/file>
  - Getting Ready for the Gold Circle of Quality checklist:  
<https://www.exceleRateillinois.com/docman-default-item/licensed-child-care-centers/circles-of-quality/8-getting-ready-gold-circle-of-quality-checklist/file>
- Quality Standards Overview for Licensed Family Child Care:  
<https://www.exceleRateillinois.com/docman-default-item/standard-and-evidence-requirements/20-exceleRate-fcc-overview-chart/file>
  - Getting Ready for the Silver Circle of Quality checklist:  
<https://www.exceleRateillinois.com/docman-default-item/licensed-family-child-care/80-lfcc-get-ready-silver-assessment/file>
  - Getting Ready for the Gold Circle of Quality checklist:  
<https://www.exceleRateillinois.com/docman-default-item/licensed-family-child-care/78-lfcc-get-ready-gold-assessment/file>

## 1. What are assessors doing during on-site assessment?

Assessors are on-site to look at three pieces for ExceleRate (detail is described in the following questions/answers):

1. Classroom environment (using ITERS-3, ECERS-3, SACERS-U or FCCERS-R for family child care) for the ExceleRate Standards that note a verified score requirement.
2. Administrative practices (using PAS - 2nd Edition for centers and BAS - 2nd Edition for family child care).
3. Verification of other ExceleRate Standards as noted within the Standards Chart (link to Standards provided above).

## 2. Will I be given a specific date/time that assessment will occur?

Once your program has met the preliminary criteria, INCCRRA will inform National Louis University (NLU) that the program is ready for on-site assessment. The NLU Scheduling coordinator will contact the program with a three-week assessment window within two weeks of receiving application from INCCRRA. The assessment visits will be unannounced; however, the program will be asked for three blackout dates for any atypical days such as field trips, picture day, or vision/hearing screening etc.

## 3. During the three-week assessment window, will all assessments occur on the same day?

Every effort will be made to have all assessments completed on one day; however, depending on size of the program and assessor availability, the assessment may occur on more than one day within the three-week window.

## 4. What time will assessor(s) arrive to the program?

The NLU scheduler will ask you what time your program opens and when most of the children arrive. The assessor(s) will arrive between 8:00 and 8:30 AM, unless the program has indicated an earlier or later start time when most children have arrived. In addition, programs may have indicated a later start time for the PAS and a later start time for the SACERS-U.

For family child care providers, the assessors will arrive between 8:00 and 8:30 or as scheduled by the NLU scheduler and provider. While the assessors will arrive on-site early, the assessment will begin promptly at the start time indicated by the Provider.

## 5. What will happen when the assessor(s) arrive at the program?

The assessor(s) will check in at the office upon arrival and will follow all program-required sign-in and identification procedures. The lead assessor will introduce the team; however, *please keep in mind that the assessors will not engage in casual conversation with the program staff.* When there are PAS and SACERS-U assessments scheduled, these assessors will check in at the office on arrival.

For family child care, the assessors will arrive at the start time agreed on with the program. Assessors will follow any sign-in and identification procedures. Introductions will be made and assessment will begin. For a Gold program only receiving a BAS assessment, the NLU scheduler will ask the provider for the best time to conduct the assessment to make sure they are free to answer questions and find documentation as needed. Just like in centers, the assessor(s) will not engage in casual conversation with the provider, any assistants or the children.

All environment rating scales are reliable and valid assessment instruments. Scale policies require that assessors do not interfere with program activities or interact with program staff, teachers, or children, but remain neutral observers.

## 6. How many assessors will come to the program?

The number of assessors will depend on the number of classrooms in your program. For instance, for one toddler classroom, one preschool classroom, and an after-school program, four assessors will observe in your program, including one ITERS-3, one ECERS-3, one SACERS-U, and one PAS assessor. Assessors will arrive to your program at the same time, unless the program has requested a later start time for the PAS and/or if there is an afternoon SACERS-U assessment.

For family child care, two assessors will arrive at the same time on the same day at the program start time, and will not interfere with daily activities.

## 7. How are classrooms picked for assessment? Will the program know in advance?

After the assessors arrive at the center (typically between 8:00 and 8:30 AM), the classrooms will be randomly drawn in the presence of the program director (or assigned supervisory program staff). 1/3 of classrooms for each environment rating scale (ie. age group) will be selected. For 1-3 classrooms in an age group, one classroom is randomly selected. For 4-6 classrooms in an age group, two classrooms are randomly selected. For 7-9 classrooms in an age group, three classrooms are randomly selected. The assessor(s) will then immediately proceed to the chosen room(s) for assessment.

While assessor(s) will arrive on-site early, the assessment start time within each classroom will begin as agreed upon during scheduling with the Director.

For example, the assessor(s) arrives at 8:30 and checks in with the Director. Preschool classroom(s) are randomly chosen and the Director escorts the assessor to the selected classroom. The assessor will greet the teacher and inform her that she will quietly sit in an area of the room and begin assessment promptly at 9:00 AM, as the Director indicated.

## 8. What if my licensed child care center has a Head Start or Preschool For All funded classroom(s)- will these rooms be assessed?

For licensed child care centers that have child care classrooms with Preschool For All or Head Start services provided within them (collaboration classrooms), these classrooms will be included in the random selection of classrooms for assessment. Examples of classrooms could include:

- A classroom with Head Start funding between the hours of 7:00 AM-3:00 PM; CCAP/parent tuition funding between the hours of 3:00 PM -6:00 PM.
- A classroom with Preschool For All funding between the hours of 9:00 AM -3:00 PM; CCAP funding between the hours of 7:00 AM-9:00 AM; tuition/CCAP funding between the hours of 3:00 PM-6:00 PM.

For licensed child care centers that have Preschool For All or Head Start stand-alone classrooms (Preschool for All or Head Start services only, for the full day), these classrooms will not be included in the random selection of classrooms.

*\*Head Start/Preschool For All stand-alone classrooms should reach out to their funding entity for any training &/or technical assistance needed. CCR&R Specialists do not provide technical assistance here as these classrooms are not included in the random selection of classrooms and are monitored by either ISBE or Head Start.*

## 9. Is there a minimum number of children that must be present (for assessment to occur)?

For family child care, at least 3 children must be present for a minimum of 3 consecutive hours. In addition, at least 2 children that are not the provider's own must be present during that timeframe.

If you will not meet this requirement (and are in your 3 week assessment window), please notify the NLU scheduler immediately.

## 10. How long will classroom assessment be?

All environment rating scale assessments are three hours in duration each. School-age programs will be observed for up to three hours of the duration of operation or for the time the program is open.

## 11. Where will assessor(s) work while in the classroom/provider's home?

During the three-hour classroom observation, assessors will do their best to avoid traffic areas and do their work without interrupting the flow of activities. They will not interact with children and will work quietly without making conversation with teachers/provider.

Assessors will observe any areas of the home that children use (i.e., spaces where they have access), along with any area used by the provider for management (i.e., office or work space used for the program).

## 12. Are any adjustments or compensations being given for COVID?

No. All requirements are in place for the environment rating scales, and no compensation will be given for changes due to COVID. It is expected that programs will follow the requirements as stated in the environment rating scales, as well as the ExceleRate Illinois Standards.

## 13. Will classroom teachers and family child care providers be interviewed?

It depends on each scale as noted below:

- ITERS-3 No interview
- ECERS-3 No interview
- SACERS-U Teacher interview before or after observation, 30-45 minutes
- FCCERS-R Provider interview after observation, 20-30 minutes

## 14. How long does typical documentation review take? (PAS/BAS review, as well as review of other documentation as required by specific Standards)

Typical timeframe is around five hours for Silver, and between six and seven hours for Gold to review all documentation. For programs well-prepared with available documentation organized, this time may be shorter.

*\*Please note: The assessor will be verifying documentation for the PAS subscales/BAS items you chose on your ExceleRate application. Your selection was confirmed when scheduling your assessment window. If you wish to change your selection(s), please contact the INCCRRA ExceleRate team prior to your assessment window beginning. Once the assessor arrives on-site, there will be no changes accepted.*

## 15. What occurs with the PAS/BAS assessment?

Both PAS and BAS assessment involve administrator interview:

- PAS Facility tour and director interview before documentation review, 1-2 hours
- BAS Provider interview before documentation review, 20-30 minutes

The expectation is that the program has all documentation available for review in an organized portfolio. During documentation review, the director or family child care provider may be given up to 30 minutes to provide information not found in the documentation portfolio. The director or provider will be asked to sign the Documentation Verification Form indicating whether documentation for each standard was provided. No documentation is accepted after the assessment is complete.

*It would be helpful for the administrator/family child care provider to review: "How to Organize PAS and BAS documentation" prior to assessment and to help organize materials.*

## 16. What happens after all classroom assessments, PAS/BAS assessments, and documentation review are complete?

Once all pieces are complete, reports are reviewed thoroughly by a trained report and certification specialist. All justification notes are checked to substantiate scores and all documentation and feedback notes are reviewed for accuracy. Once the reports are finalized, they are sent to INCCRRA. The program should receive results of the assessment visit and a final ExceleRate Illinois eligibility letter from INCCRRA within 90 business days after the date of the final assessment visit.



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