



# Learn & Grow

## PROGRAM GUIDE

State of Alaska and  
Municipality of Anchorage  
Licensed Child Care Centers,  
Group Homes, Homes,  
Early Head Start, Head Start,  
Licensed Tribal Child Care  
& Pre-Elementary Programs



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

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## Welcome to Learn & Grow

Welcome to Learn & Grow, the first step in participating in quality improvement! Early childhood educators—and the environments in which children play and learn—are critical to a child’s readiness for school and success in life.

Learn & Grow is Alaska’s Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) for early childhood education (ECE) programs. Learn & Grow works to support program quality by aligning resources, funding, data systems, and professional development to provide a comprehensive and unified quality improvement system. Learn & Grow also provides families, communities, and policy makers with a way to better understand quality and its effect on a child’s success.

Learn & Grow is a framework designed to guide participating programs through five levels of quality. As a program advances through the levels of quality, the program has access to technical assistance, specialized training, and financial resources.

Learn & Grow is a statewide voluntary system, available to State of Alaska and Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) licensed child care centers, group homes, homes, Early Head Start, Head Start, licensed tribal child care and pre-elementary programs throughout Alaska. The State of Alaska partners with **thread**, Alaska’s Child Care Resource & Referral Network, to manage the administration of Learn & Grow.

## Purpose of this Program Guide

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

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

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to the individuals and organizations that have contributed time, dedication, and resources to the ongoing development, implementation, and evaluation of Learn & Grow. Below is a list of organizations that have provided funding and support in the planning and development of Learn & Grow.

### FUNDERS:

- State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services, Child Care Program Office (CCPO)
- State of Alaska, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)

## STATEWIDE ORGANIZATIONS:

- **thread**, Alaska's Child Care Resource and Referral Network (CCR&R)
- State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services
  - Child Care Program Office (CCPO)
  - Office of Children's Services (OCS), Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS)
  - Senior and Disabilities Services, Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program (ILP)
- State of Alaska, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
  - Pre-Elementary
  - 619 Preschool Special Education
  - Head Start Collaboration Office
- Municipality of Anchorage (MOA), Child Care Licensing Program
- Alaska System for Early Education Development (SEED) Professional Development Committee
- University of Alaska System
- Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC)
- Alaska After School Network
- Best Beginnings
- Licensed center, group home, and home administrators
- Alaska Child Care and Development Fund Tribal Organizations
- Alaska Head Start Association (AHSA)



## NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

- U.S. Administration for Children & Families, Office of Child Care
- BUILD Initiative
- QRIS National Learning Network
- ICF International
- Child Trends

## SECTION 1

### WHAT IS A QRIS AND LEARN & GROW?

#### What is a Quality Recognition and Improvement System?

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

The goal of a QRIS is to provide supports and resources to programs so they can stay actively engaged in continuous quality improvement and be recognized for their quality practices.

#### A QRIS HAS FIVE COMMON ELEMENTS:

- Quality Standards & Activities
- Accountability
- Program and provider outreach and support
- Financial incentives to support continuous quality improvement efforts
- Consumer education

#### A QRIS:

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

## Overview of Alaska's QRIS: Learn & Grow

Learn & Grow is a statewide quality system that partners with other early childhood organizations and initiatives to collectively work toward a shared vision and outcomes for early childhood in Alaska.

Learn & Grow is a hybrid system with five levels of quality. A hybrid system requires a program at Level 1 and 2 to meet all of the quality activity requirements of each level before receiving recognition for that level. In order to receive recognition at Levels 3, 4, and 5 there is a combination of block or required activities and points for programs to choose from. The five levels of quality build on a foundation of the health and safety standards of the State of Alaska, MOA Child Care Licensing, licensed tribal child care, and DEED programs.

Learn & Grow is housed and managed by **thread**. In partnership with the State of Alaska CCPO and DEED, **thread** supports the funding, development, and implementation of Learn & Grow for all licensed child care centers, group homes, homes, Early Head Start, Head Start, licensed tribal child care, and pre-elementary programs.

### PHASE I OF LEARN & GROW: 2016

Phase I of Learn & Grow was launched and made available for State of Alaska or MOA licensed child care centers, group homes, and homes. Phase I included:

**Level 1: Learning About Higher Quality and  
Level 2: Moving Into Higher Quality**

### PHASE II OF LEARN & GROW: 2019

Revised Levels 1 and 2 were made available to State of Alaska or MOA licensed child care centers, group homes, homes, Early Head Start, Head Start, licensed tribal child care, and pre-elementary programs.

### PHASE III OF LEARN & GROW

Future implementation of Learn & Grow will include making Levels 3, 4, and 5 available to all program types, including licensed stand-alone school-age programs.



*"High quality education is important to everyone .... there's always room to push ourselves to help our children develop, and we want to give them the best opportunities that we can."*

*– Donna Reisinger, RurAL CAP*

### LEARN & GROW MISSION

To advance the quality of early childhood education to foster the success of young children birth through age 12.

### LEARN & GROW VALUES

- Quality
- Improvement
- Relationships
- Resilient
- Diversity

### LEARN & GROW BELIEFS

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

## LEARN & GROW GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Quality ECE is rooted in respect for diversity.
- Use of best practices ensures strength-based approaches to create nurturing quality environments.
- Creating an ECE system requires work in partnership with multiple stakeholders.
- Families need information when considering programs for their child.
- Continuous quality improvement needs to be feasible and achievable for programs.
- Quality ECE is an investment now and in the future: Economic Imperative.
- Retention of a highly qualified ECE workforce is imperative to building and maintaining quality.

## LEARN & GROW SHORT TERM GOALS

- Learn & Grow will have sustainable, blended funding to support implementation of Learn & Grow for all ECE and licensed school-age programs.
- More programs participate in Learn & Grow and continue to advance through the levels of quality.
- More families choose a program based on quality indicators specified in the Learn & Grow framework.
- Programs develop a culture of continuous quality improvement and utilize the available supports and resources to assist them.

## LEARN & GROW OUTCOMES

Learn & Grow is a statewide quality system that partners with other early childhood organizations and initiatives to collectively work toward a shared vision and outcomes for early childhood in Alaska.



## LEARN & GROW LONG TERM GOALS

- All children have access to high-quality ECE environments that foster social emotional and developmental skills to prepare them for school and life.
- Programs use evidence-based, culturally responsive, and developmentally appropriate curriculum and child assessment tools. Programs practice in conjunction with trained coaches to support positive adult-child interactions and improve child outcomes.
- ECE leaders have access to resources to support their program's active engagement in continuous quality improvement (CQI) activities and increase teacher retention, resiliency, and leadership skills.
- Families are actively participating in their child's ECE and after-school experiences, have access to community supports and resources, and help to successfully transition children to kindergarten.
- Families and communities can identify and advocate for affordable and high quality ECE.

## LEARN & GROW PARTNERSHIPS

**In partnership with the Alaska System for Early Education Development (SEED), Learn & Grow helps to impact the following outcomes:**

- Alaska ECE workforce is resilient and can develop leadership skills through access to professional development, training, and educational supports.
- ECE teachers, working in high quality ECE programs, earn a wage compensatory to their professional achievements.

**Learn & Grow, in partnership with Alaska's early childhood and community partners, works to:**

- Assure communities are healthy and have a sustainable ECE workforce.
- Identify and provide necessary resources and support for children and families to be safe, healthy, and resilient.
- Increase the number of children who are more prepared to enter and succeed in the preschool-12 educational system.



*"Before Learn & Grow, I knew we all felt compassion for the children in our care. But the piece we were missing was the education."*

*– Robin O'Mara, Director,  
Joy Child Development Center*

## Learn & Grow: Roles and Responsibilities

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

These organizations include:

- **thread**, which houses and manages Alaska SEED and Learn & Grow
- CCPO
- DEED
- MOA Child Care Licensing Program
- ECE programs
- Families

### **thread**

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

Responsibilities:

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



## ALASKA SEED AND LEARN & GROW

Alaska's System for Early Education Development (SEED) and Learn & Grow are two systems under the management of **thread**. Alaska SEED supports individual early childhood educators while Learn & Grow supports programs.

### Alaska SEED

Alaska SEED is responsible for managing activities related to the Learn & Grow quality domain of Early Childhood Educator Qualifications & Professional Development.

#### Responsibilities:

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

### Learn & Grow

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

Responsibilities:

Learn & Grow is responsible for issuing level recognition certificates and awards by verifying all documentation using the Alaska SEED Registry, **thread** database, State of Alaska Integrated Child Care Information System (ICCIS), and DEED approval system.

Data from these organizations include:

- Alaska SEED registration and levels of all program staff
- Verification of Alaska Early Childhood Administrator Credential
- State, MOA, or tribal licensing, or DEED approval status
- Lead teacher training requirements

### STATE OF ALASKA CHILD CARE PROGRAM OFFICE (CCPO)

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

### MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE (MOA) CHILD CARE LICENSING PROGRAM

The MOA Child Care Licensing Program is responsible for licensing and monitoring of MOA Child Care Programs.

Responsibilities:

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

### STATE OF ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT (DEED)

DEED manages all Head Start and pre-elementary (special education and regular education) programs. The Head Start Collaboration Director is located at DEED and is responsible for assisting Region X Head Start programs with guidance and technical assistance to meet their Federal Head Start Performance Standards to Region X Head Start grantee applicants, and collaborate with State QRIS leadership to align Head Start Performance Standards with state QRIS standards and activities.

The Head Start Collaboration Director also manages the Alaska Early Childhood Child Assessment and Monitoring System (CLIMBS). The director of pre-elementary programs works to assure DEED preschool activities and QRIS quality standards and activities are in alignment and manages the state funding for pre-elementary and Head Start programs. DEED is responsible for assuring a certified Head Start, pre-elementary, or preschool special education program meets DEED's health and safety standards and certification requirements.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS

State of Alaska or MOA licensed child care centers, group homes, homes, Early Head Start, Head Start, licensed tribal child care, and pre-elementary programs participating in Learn & Grow are responsible for maintaining their child care license in good standing and notifying Learn & Grow and **thread** staff of any changes regarding their license. Participating programs will work cooperatively with Learn & Grow and **thread** to support their continuous improvement goals.

### FAMILIES

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



## SECTION 2

### LEARN & GROW FRAMEWORK

#### Levels of Quality

Learn & Grow is a hybrid system composed of five levels of quality. In order to receive a Level 1 or 2 recognition level, a program must achieve all required quality activities identified at Level 1 and 2. To advance to the next level, a program must also have been recognized as completing all the requirements of any preceding level. Level 3, 4, and 5 (coming soon!) will include a combination of required quality activities and menu of points from which programs can choose to meet the Level 3, 4, and 5 quality requirements.



Learn & Grow Levels of Quality

#### Quality Domains

The quality of a program is rooted in the health and safety of the environments, practices, and interactions that the program provides for children and families.

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

The four Learn & Grow quality domains build on the foundation of health and safety standards that govern State of Alaska, MOA or tribal licensed child care and/or DEED certified programs in Alaska.

The quality domains are:

- Administration & Leadership
- Early Childhood Educator Qualifications & Professional Development
- Learning Environment, Adult-Child Interactions & Child Outcomes
- Family & Community Engagement



*"I appreciate the many learning opportunities our program gets to achieve enrolled in Learn & Grow."*

*- Irma Coronado, Irma's Child Care*

## ADMINISTRATION & LEADERSHIP

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

- Specialized FREE training
- Financial awards
- Technical assistance/relationships based professional development (TA/RBPD)

### Goals for Administrators:

- Program is guided by an ECE philosophy statement.
- Program utilizes a continuous improvement process focused on supporting teachers to: create positive outcomes for children; create individualized and

culturally responsive learning environments; engage and partner with families; and cultivate leaders.

- Programs demonstrate supports for staff retention, wellness, and sustainable business practices.
- Programs demonstrate time and tools to assure ECE and school-age professionals and administration have access to ongoing professional development and technical assistance/relationship based professional development (TA/RBPD) supports to advance their skills and knowledge.
- Program leadership uses the Alaska Early Care & Learning Core Knowledge and Competencies (and Administrator Core Knowledge and Competencies) or approved equivalent to guide the development of annual professional development plans.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR QUALIFICATIONS & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

### Goals for Educators:

- ECE and school-age professionals are actively engaged in ongoing professional development to advance Alaska SEED career ladder placement.
- Staff continue to advance knowledge and understanding of best practices and developmentally appropriate practices of children in care: social emotional development; impacts of adversity; use of environment to support learning; inclusion and diversity practices; how to support children and families to be resilient; and how to use child observation & assessment and curriculum to guide interactions.
- Staff are actively engaged in ongoing TA/RBPD focused on positive adult-child interactions, fostering children's social emotional development, supporting resiliency of all children and specifically children who may experience adversity.

## LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, ADULT-CHILD INTERACTIONS, & CHILD OUTCOMES

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

### Goals for Learning Environment, Adult-Child Interactions, and Child Outcomes:

- Program uses a classroom assessment tool (environment and adult-child interaction) to advance the quality of the learning environment and relationships designed to support children's growth and development (ERS, CLASS, or YPQA).
- Program provides families access to developmental and social emotional screening services designed to monitor child's progress toward meeting developmental milestones.
- Program utilizes community resources such as special education, mental health consultation services, and/or **thread**, to assure all children (including those with identified special needs or who have experienced adversity) have access to resources and supports to successfully participate with their typical peers in everyday learning opportunities.
- Program uses research-based developmentally appropriate whole child curriculum(s) (social emotional, math, language, music, art, movement and technology), aligned



to the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines or equivalent for licensed school-age programs, to inform weekly planning.

- The program uses a research-based whole child observation & assessment, aligned to the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines to plan developmentally appropriate instructional strategies and monitor child outcomes.
- Program celebrates the cultural and linguistic diversity of all children and families enrolled in the program.

### FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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

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

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

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

### Goals for Family & Community Engagement:

- Program values and intentionally plans for consistent communication and active family involvement in child’s ECE and school-age experiences.
- Program provides access to supports and community resources to assist families in: meeting their child’s needs; increasing their knowledge of child development; making social connections; and helping successfully transition their child to school.

## Primary Focus of Level 1

- Introduce the program to Learn & Grow.
- Set some intentional quality improvement goals for the program (assure teacher schedules, communication, and roles and responsibilities are established).
- Enroll or renew Alaska SEED Registry profiles for program staff.

## Primary Focus of Level 2

- Increase leadership team and lead teachers' knowledge.
- Set some intentional quality improvement goals for each classroom around schedules, routines, transitions and the learning environment.



## SECTION 3: SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES



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

- Technical assistance/relationship based professional development (TA/RBPD)
- Quality recognition (fiscal) awards
- FREE training
- Marketing and communication materials

### Level I Technical Assistance/Relationship Based Professional Development (TA/RBPD)

- Programs have access to TA/RBPD from a **thread** professional development specialist (PDS). This TA/RBPD is available to assist programs in continuous quality improvement activities.

Level I TA/RBPD may include:

- Completion of the Level I training for leadership team and lead teachers.
- Develop or update existing Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP) or equivalent program annual plan.
- Alaska SEED Registry participation for all staff actively working with children or supervising individuals who work with children.
- Answers to questions a program may have about Level 2.

### Level 1 Quality Recognition Award

There is no Learn & Grow quality recognition award available at Level I.

## Level 1 Training

Program administrators must complete the Level 1 Learning About Higher Quality training, and all staff are also welcome to complete it. The Level 1 training completed through **thread** is FREE.

## Level 1 Marketing and Communication Materials

When a program has successfully been verified at Level 1 it will receive a marketing tool kit including:

- Learn & Grow Level 1 recognition certificate
- Learn & Grow Level 1 window decal
- Learn & Grow stickers
- Learn & Grow talking points to include in a newsletter, press release, or other marketing materials
- Suggestions on how to talk with families about a program's participation in Learn & Grow
- Discounts to ECE vendors

## Level 2 Technical Assistance/Relationship Based Professional Development (TA/RBPD)

A program has access to TA/RBPD from a **thread** PDS. The TA/RBPD is custom designed to support the needs of the program to meet the Level 2 quality activities.

Level 2 TA/RBPD may include:

- Completion of the Level 2 Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP) or equivalent program plan.
- Review of program administrator's transcript to advise on completing requirements of the Alaska Early Childhood Administrator Credential (AK-ECAC).
- TA/RBPD to individual early childhood educators to assist with environmental arrangements and practices related to the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) or Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and development of Classroom Action Plans (CAP).

## Level 2 Training

All members of a leadership team and lead teachers must complete the Level 2 Moving Into Higher Quality training to meet the Level 2 Quality Activities. All Level 2 trainings completed through **thread** are FREE.

Level 2 Trainings Includes:

- Pyramid Foundations
- Strengthening Families
- Introduction to Environment Rating Scale (ERS) or CLASS training
- Introduction to Alaska Early Care & Learning Core Knowledge and Competencies
- Alaska Early Learning Guidelines

For trainings completed outside of **thread**, go to [www.threadalaska.org/thread/early-educators/training/training-resources](http://www.threadalaska.org/thread/early-educators/training/training-resources) to locate the next available training and funding options.

## Level 2 Quality Recognition Award

When the program has successfully been verified at Level 2 the program will receive a Learn & Grow Level 2 recognition certificate along with a Learn & Grow quality recognition award. This quality recognition award is given each year the program is verified as a Learn & Grow Level 2 program.

### Quality Recognition Award:

- \$500 - programs with licensed capacity of 1-30 children
- \$1000 - programs with licensed capacity of 31 and more

## Level 2 Marketing and Communication Materials

When the program has successfully been verified at Level 2 it will receive a marketing tool kit including:

- Learn & Grow Level 2 window decal
- Learn & Grow stickers
- Learn & Grow talking points to include in a newsletter, press release, or other marketing materials

## Professional Development Funding Through Alaska SEED

Professional development funds are available to eligible educators enrolled in the Alaska SEED Registry for professional development, training, and paying for a CDA.

Go to [www.threadalaska.org/seed/financial-support](http://www.threadalaska.org/seed/financial-support) for information about the following:

- Professional Development Reimbursement
- Travel Reimbursement
- CDA fee support

## SECTION 4: STEP BY STEP GUIDE



### PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

State of Alaska or MOA licensed child care centers, group homes, and homes, Early Head Start, Head Start, pre-elementary programs, and licensed tribal child care in good standing with oversight agency.

### LEVEL 1: LEARNING ABOUT HIGHER QUALITY

There are five steps associated with Level 1:

- Eligibility
- Enrollment
- Working on Quality Activities
- Verification
- Renewal

#### Level 1, Step 1: Eligibility

If a program is interested in participating in Learn & Grow go to [www.aklearnandgrow.org](http://www.aklearnandgrow.org) and/or contact Learn & Grow via phone at (907) 265-3104 or email at [info@aklearnandgrow.org](mailto:info@aklearnandgrow.org).

Programs must have one of the following:

- State of Alaska or MOA biennial child care license
- DEED pre-elementary certification
- Tribal child care license in good standing with oversight agency

## Level 1, Step 2: Enrollment

Once a program's eligibility status is verified, the program will receive a Welcome to Learn & Grow email. This serves as the official notification and enrollment date to Learn & Grow. The program will be assigned a **thread** professional development specialist (PDS), who will contact the program within 5 business days. The **thread** PDS will arrange a time to meet with the program and discuss next steps.

## Level 1, Step 3: Working on Quality Activities

The program will begin work on Level 1 quality activities by domain:

### Administration & Leadership

- Completion of a Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP) or equivalent annual program plan
- Leadership team completes Learn & Grow Level 1 Training

### Early Childhood Educator Qualifications & Professional Development

- Lead teachers complete Learn & Grow Level 1 Training
- All teaching staff who provide direct care and supervision of children are active in Alaska System for Early Education Development (SEED)

*NOTE: Staff hired within two months of a program submitting their Level 1 verification are exempt from Level 1 Alaska SEED Registry and Level 1 training requirements.*

### HOW TO JOIN THE ALASKA SEED REGISTRY

1. Go to [www.seedalaska.org](http://www.seedalaska.org) to access the Alaska SEED Registry online portal.
2. Create an online account to begin the application. Paper applications are also available to download from the website.
3. Upload all required documentation such as training certificates, degrees, transcripts, or credentials.
4. Submit the application and receive a certificate indicating assigned level on the Alaska SEED Career Ladder within 30 days.
5. Maintain active enrollment by updating annually.

Contact Alaska SEED at (907) 265-3118, or toll free at (855) 265-7333, for additional assistance.

## TRAINING

The **thread** PDS will help identify the best way and when to administer the Level 1 training for the leadership team and lead teachers. Level 1 training most often is conducted by **thread** at a program but it can also be completed by a **thread** webinar or at a local ECE state conference.

## CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (CQIP)

The **thread** PDS will work with the program to complete the Learn & Grow Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP).

If the program has another annual plan such as one required by Federal Office of Head Start, DEED, or national accreditation, these can be used instead of the Learn & Grow CQIP.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE/RELATIONSHIP BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (TA/RBPD)

**thread** TA/RBPD is available to support the completion of Level 1 quality activities. The TA/RBPD can be conducted on the phone, by email, or in the local **thread** office.

The **thread** PDS will work with the program administrator to complete a Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP) to identify how it will meet Level 1 quality activities.

The primary focus of Level 1 TA/RBPD is to:

- Introduce a program to Learn & Grow.
- Set some intentional quality improvement goals for the program (assure teacher schedules, communication, and roles and responsibilities are established).
- Enroll or renew Alaska SEED registry profiles for program staff.

## Level 1, Step 4: Verification

When the program determines it is ready to be verified, it must complete the Level 1 Verification Checklist and submit it to the **thread** PDS. The **thread** PDS will review and submit it to Learn & Grow for verification. Learn & Grow may inquire with the program administrator if there are further questions.

Within ten business days of receipt of a Level 1 Verification Checklist, the program will receive notification of its verification at Level 1 or reasons for not receiving Level 1 recognition.



## Level 1, Step 5: Renewal

Learn & Grow renewal occurs annually from the date of the latest recognition level received. The program will receive an email notification and copy of the Level 1 Renewal Verification Checklist 90 days prior to the program's expiration date.

The program must submit a Level 1 Renewal Verification Checklist to its **thread** PDS prior to its expiration date to renew its Level 2 recognition.

## Level 1: Withdrawal

If a program does not complete Level 1 activities and submit its Level 1 verification paperwork within 120 business days of its enrollment date, the program will receive an email notification explaining the 120 business day requirement to complete Level 1 quality activities has passed. If the program submits all necessary paperwork within the next 5 business days, the program will continue its participation in Learn & Grow. If the program does not submit the necessary paperwork within the 5 business days the program will be withdrawn from Learn & Grow.

The program is eligible to re-enroll after 3 months from the withdrawal date.



## LEVEL 2: MOVING INTO HIGHER QUALITY

*NOTE: A program must maintain Level 1 recognition status in addition to the following Level 2 quality activities.*

There are four steps associated with Level 2:

- Enrollment
- Working on quality activities
- Verification
- Renewal

### Level 2, Step 1: Enrollment

If the program chooses to enroll and begin working on Level 2 quality activities, the program's **thread** PDS will set up a time to meet with the program to review Level 2 requirements and supports and have the program sign the Letter of Commitment.

The Letter of Commitment date serves as the official enrollment date to begin work on Learn & Grow Level 2 activities.

If the program does not choose to work on Level 2 following the Level 2 introductory conversation, the program will remain on the Learn & Grow list of participating programs



and must maintain their Level 1 recognition status to maintain enrollment in Learn & Grow.

## Level 2, Step 2: Working on Quality Activities

Quality Activities	Licensed Homes	Licensed Group Homes	Licensed Centers, Early Head Start, Head Start, Tribal Child Care Centers & Pre-Elementary
<b>Administration &amp; Leadership</b>			
Administrator & leadership team members are Alaska SEED Level: *	5	5	7
Alaska Early Childhood Educator Administrator Credential (AK-ECAC)	No	No	Yes
Program has a written philosophy statement	Yes	Yes	Yes
Administrator signs the Learn & Grow Letter of Commitment	Yes	Yes	Yes
Administrator reviews/revises CQIP (or equivalent) within last six months of program verification submission	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individuals who completed Level 2 training complete Level 2 Survey	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>*Programs with dedicated fiscal &amp; human resource positions are exempt from obtaining credential but must complete all 5 Level 2 Trainings.</i>			

Quality Activities	Licensed Homes	Licensed Group Homes	Licensed Centers, Early Head Start, Head Start, Tribal Child Care Centers & Pre-Elementary
<b>Early Childhood Educator Qualifications &amp; Professional Development</b>			
Administrator, leadership team, and Lead teachers (where applicable) complete Level 2: Moving Into Higher Quality Trainings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pyramid Model Foundations</li> <li>• Introduction to ERS or CLASS <i>Center, Head Start, &amp; Pre-Elementary only</i></li> <li>• Strengthening Families</li> <li>• Introduction to Alaska Early Learning Guidelines</li> <li>• Introduction to the Alaska Early Learning Core Knowledge and Competencies</li> </ul>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Learning Environment, Adult-Child Interactions and Child Outcomes</b>			
Classroom Environment Assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete the Environment Rating Scale (applicable to program type) or CLASS Self-Reflection and identify goals (on Classroom Action Plan (CAP) or program CQIP) after conversation with <b>thread</b> PDS.</li> <li>• A program may choose to have an external ERS or CLASS assessment from an external inter-rater reliable assessor in 1/3 of total classrooms with a Classroom Action Plan (CAP).</li> </ul>	FCCERS-3	FCCERS-3	ITERS-3, ECERS-3, SACERS-U OR CLASS
<p><i>NOTE: Newly hired or new to position lead teachers or leadership team staff (excluding site administrator) hired within six months of program submitting Level 2 verification are exempt from completing Level 2 training requirements until the program's new renewal date.</i></p>			

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE/RELATIONSHIP BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (TA/RBPD)

**thread** TA/RBPD is available to support the completion of Level 2 quality activities. The program will receive TA/RBPD from a **thread** PDS, which could be conducted through one or a combination of phone conversations, email exchanges, on-site visits, or via participation in a Peer-Learning-Network. TA/RBPD is customized to the program's individual needs to achieve Level 2 Learn & Grow quality activities.

Each program will vary in the amount and intensity of TA/RBPD to successfully complete Level 2 quality activities. The Level 2 quality activities are designed to provide foundational knowledge and skills to educators and administrators. Foundational content knowledge includes the following subject areas: social emotional development, family engagement, professionalism, and child development.

### The primary focus of Level 2 TA/RBPD is:

- Increase leadership team and lead teachers' knowledge
- Set some intentional quality improvement goals for each classroom around schedules, routines, transitions, and the learning environment.

## The Alaska Early Childhood Administrator Credential

The Alaska Early Childhood Administrator Credential (AK-ECAC) is intended to provide a center administrator with the resources and supports needed. Group home and home programs are not required to complete the AK-ECAC.

Administrator Credential Trainings include:

- Business or Fiscal Management
- Strengthening Families
- Pyramid Model Foundations Training
- Introduction to Environmental Rating Scale or CLASS
- Human Resources
- Introduction to Alaska Early Care & Learning Core Knowledge and Competencies
- Alaska Early Learning Guidelines

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

Consult with a **thread** PDS for a list of approved courses and locations of upcoming trainings.

All trainings eligible for the AK-ECAC are Alaska SEED-approved. The current approved list is not exhaustive and will

continue to grow as courses are approved by the Alaska SEED Trainer Approval system. For a current list go to [www.seedalaska.org](http://www.seedalaska.org).

Additionally, the administrator of a program must be Alaska SEED level 7 or above on the Alaska SEED Career Ladder.

Programs that have dedicated fiscal and human resource positions do not need to apply for the credential, but the administrator must complete the Level 2 trainings.

### CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (CQIP)

A program's leadership team (if applicable) and **thread** PDS will work to review the program's previous Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP) and discuss next goals and activities the program would like to accomplish. CQIP goals are not necessarily related to the Level 2 quality activities but are the goals the program would like to achieve.

The CQIP must be reviewed no later than 6 months from a program submitting it Level 2 Verification Checklist. The CQIP contains signature and date lines for the program administrator and **thread** PDS to document when reviews and updates have taken place.

A copy of the CQIP will be stored in the program's electronic file at **thread**.

### PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

The program may already have a written program philosophy. The program may work with its **thread** PDS to determine if revisions are necessary. The program philosophy may address:

- How the individual program philosophy guides or aligns with various decisions and activities of the program.
- How the program might be marketing to families.
- What type of curriculum choices and learning environment the program creates.
- What types of professional development or other teacher supports are in place.

The **thread** PDS will store the completed program philosophy in the program's electronic file at **thread**.

### SURVEY

When the program is ready to submit its Level 2 Verification Checklist, the **thread** PDS can send a link to the electronic survey. All leadership team members and lead teachers are required to complete the Level 2 Survey.

**At Level 2 Renewal:** Only new leadership team members or lead teachers need to complete the Level 2 Survey.

## TRAINING

The five Level 2: Moving Into Higher Quality trainings include:

- Strengthening Families
- Pyramid Model Foundations
- Introduction to Environment Rating Scale (ERS) or CLASS
- Introduction to the Alaska Early Care & Learning Core Knowledge and Competencies
- Alaska Early Learning Guidelines

A detailed description of these trainings and information on how and where to access trainings can be found by visiting: [threadalaska.org/learn-and-grow/for-educators/for-my-program/forms](http://threadalaska.org/learn-and-grow/for-educators/for-my-program/forms)

All Learn & Grow Level 2 trainings offered by **thread** are FREE. Trainings offered by a university or other training organizations listed on the Level 2 training description document may be reimbursable through Alaska SEED funding. Please click the financial support tab on the Alaska SEED website: [threadalaska.org/seed/financial-support](http://threadalaska.org/seed/financial-support)

The **thread** PDS can answer any other questions a program may have about Level 2 trainings.

## Environment Rating Scale (ERS) or CLASS tools & Classroom Action Plans

Each classroom will be required to complete the ERS or CLASS Self-Reflection tool and complete a Classroom Action Plan (CAP). CAPs are similar to the program CQIP but focused on the specific goals of each individual classroom.

The **thread** PDS will meet with each classroom staff to review results of the Self-Reflection and to inquire about classroom schedules and routines. Information from the Self-Reflection and teacher responses and observation of schedules and routines will help identify what the individual classroom goals are and strategies for achieving them.

Completed CAPs will be uploaded to a program's electronic file at **thread**.

The program does have the option to have an external ERS or CLASS assessment. This is not required, but if the program does want an external assessment please request an Assessment Request Form from the **thread** PDS.

- The Assessment Request Form must be submitted a minimum of 30 business days prior to the available assessment times provided.
- The program will be contacted by the assessment coordinator within ten business days from when the request was received to set up a two-week window for the

assessment. Assessments will be scheduled on a first-come-first-serve basis. Assessments are unannounced within the two-week window of time. The two-week window should include dates where the program does not have field trips or special activities scheduled so the assessor can view a typical day at a program. The program may choose one day during this period as an unavailable date.

- The program will receive a summary of the assessment results within 15 business days of the day the assessment was conducted.
- **Assessment Cancellation Policy:** Once a program agrees upon the assigned two-week assessment window, they must be available and prepared for an assessor's visit every day during the window unless they have selected a black-out day. A program cannot cancel their assessment window unless they notify the Quality Services Director at least two weeks before the first day of their assessment window. Programs that cancel with less than a two-week notice will be subject to pay travel cancellation cost before another assessment window will be scheduled.

## LEVEL 2 VERIFICATION DOCUMENTATION

Programs may have copies of annual program improvement or classroom plans where goals for the year are listed. These can be submitted in place of the program CQIP. However, there are a few minimum content pieces that will need to be included:

### **Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP)/ Annual Plan/Strategic Plan**

- Program annual goals
- Strategies including resources for achieving the goals
- Some type of process/indicator of how goal is being met
- Must be reviewed at least six months prior to Level 2 verification submission with any updates reflected by the administrator's signature

### **Classroom Action Plans**

- Identification of classroom goals
- Strategies including resources for achieving the goals
- Some type of process/indicator of how goal is being met
- A classroom action plan should be informed by the CLASS or ERS Self-Reflection or official assessment (conducted no more than six months from date of classroom action plan)

### **Education Level of Leadership Team**

- There is no alternative to identifying the leadership team education level other than through an up-to-date Alaska SEED Registry profile.



- CLASS or ERS assessments conducted by an inter-rater reliable assessor within six months of a program submitting for Level 2 verification can be used for Level 2 Verification. The program classrooms must have a Classroom Action Plan or equivalent to accompany them.

### Level 2: Moving Into Higher Quality Training

- Only the trainings listed in the Level 2 Training Description document ([threadalaska.org/learn-and-grow/for-educators/for-my-program/forms](http://threadalaska.org/learn-and-grow/for-educators/for-my-program/forms)) are eligible for Level 2 Verification. Documentation of these trainings can be uploaded into the individuals' Alaska SEED Registry profile where Learn & Grow will view for verification. If trainings are conducted by **thread** or a **thread** contractor, training certificates will be uploaded by **thread**. A program does not have to submit copies of completed training certificates when it submits its Level 2 Verification Checklist.

### Alaska Early Childhood Administrator Credential

- If an administrator has submitted the one-page application for the administrator credential and received the credential certificate, there is no need to submit any documentation at Level 2 verification. Learn & Grow will use the Alaska SEED database for verification.
- Programs who have dedicated positions to fiscal and human resources do not need to obtain the credential but do need to complete the five Level 2: Moving Into Higher Quality Trainings (Pyramid, Strengthening Families,

Introduction to ERS or CLASS, Introduction to Alaska Learning Guidelines, and Alaska Early Care & Learning Core Knowledge and Competencies).

## Level 2, Step 3: Verification

When the program determines it is ready to be verified, it must complete the Level 2 Verification Checklist and submit it to the **thread** PDS. The **thread** PDS will review and submit it to Learn & Grow for verification.

Within 10 business days of receipt of a Level 2 Verification Checklist, the program will receive notification of its verification at Level 2 or reasons for not receiving Level 2 recognition.

## Level 2, Step 4: Renewal

Learn & Grow renewal occurs annually from the date of the latest recognition level received. The program will receive an email notification and copy of the Level 2 Renewal Verification Checklist 90 days prior to the program's expiration date.

The program must submit a Level 2 Renewal Verification Checklist to its **thread** PDS prior to its expiration date to renew its Level 2 recognition.

## Level 2: Withdrawal

A program may be withdrawn from Learn & Grow for one of the following reasons.

### No Follow Up or Call Back

A program that does not respond to a **thread** PDS after the PDS has attempted to call, email, and send a letter within one month will be withdrawn from Learn & Grow.

### Post Verification Expiration Date

A program that does not renew its level designation by its expiration date but has been in contact with the **thread** PDS can receive a two-week extension post expiration date to submit all necessary renewal paperwork for Level 2. The program will be given the option to apply for Level 1 verification so it can remain in Learn & Grow. Failure to submit the necessary paperwork by the end of the two-week extension will result in the program being withdrawn from Learn & Grow.

## Appeals Process

For a full description of procedures related to the Learn & Grow appeals and grievance process, go to the Learn & Grow Policies and Procedures document located at [threadalaska.org/learn-and-grow/for-educators/for-my-program/forms](https://threadalaska.org/learn-and-grow/for-educators/for-my-program/forms).



## SECTION 5: DEFINITION OF TERMS



### DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Classroom Action Plan (CAP):** A plan that helps the classroom teachers and **thread** PDS identify goals and strategies to accomplish goals. A CAP provides timelines, roles and responsibilities, and monitors progress of goals. A CAP should be reviewed at least every 6 months, but quarterly is recommended in order to stay actively engaged in a continuous quality improvement process. CAPs are specific to each classroom. Home and group home programs can include classroom-based goals on their CQIP and are not required to complete a CAP.

**Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP):** CQIPs are designed to help a program identify its programmatic goals. A CQIP is not specific to classroom goals but may have administrative goals that align and support goals identified in a CAP. Some programs have program plans that are called Annual Plans or Strategic Plans. If a program has one of these plans it is not required to complete the Learn & Grow CQIP. However, it must follow the same monitoring process of reviewing at least once every 6 months if not more frequently.



*"Learn & Grow has helped our program by coming to our center and helping us identify our needs. We have an action plan that we are putting into place, with the first step getting on the Alaska SEED Registry."*

*– Tracy Breimo, RurAL CAP*

**Lead Teacher:** An early childhood educator designated as the individual primarily responsible for the learning environment of the classroom. Some programs may have more than one lead teacher in a classroom or they may not distinguish between a lead teacher and an Assistant Teacher.

To support the barriers associated with staff turnover, Learn & Grow only requires a specific number of teachers at each level of quality to complete the Level 2 quality activities. Programs are welcome to have all teachers complete Level 2 trainings, but at minimum one lead teacher per classroom must be identified and complete Level 2 Trainings.

**Leadership Team:** Each program can define for themselves who is part of their leadership team. Something for programs to consider when creating/identifying a leadership team is: who has authority to make decisions about the day-to-day operations, funding, curriculum, development of policies/procedures, and/or staffing of a program. These individuals most likely could be part of a leadership team. At minimum the leadership team should include the administrator of the program who is indicated on the child care license.

**Pre-elementary:** DEED certified program serving children 3-5. This includes Title I, migrant education, and preschool special education (619) classrooms.

**Program:** A program is defined as an early childhood education program and a single site. For instance, a child care program may have several sites, but each site is considered a separate program with a separate child care license. A Head Start grantee may have multiple sites, but similar to child care, each location is a separate program. Finally, the same logic applies to school districts. Some districts have several schools. Each school is considered a program regardless of the number of pre-elementary programs at the school.

**Relationship Based Professional Development (RBPd):**

A broad term used to refer to three types of professional assistance that use relationships as a foundation. RBPd is made up of differing relationship-based learning such as mentoring, coaching or consultation. Unlike other modes of professional development, RBPd emphasizes learning through interactions and relationships. The goal of RBPd is to improve the quality of early childhood education programs, increase the knowledge, skills & abilities of teachers and caregivers, and improve the outcomes of children.

A key element differentiating RBPd from other modes of professional development is the emphasis on learning through interactions, relationships and partnerships. This approach implements a reflective cycle of inquiry and uses an evidence-based adult-learning process of goal setting, observation, assessment, action planning, reflection and feedback.

*(Abrams & Chu, 2016, p. 3) Abrams, A., & Chu, M. (2016). Relationship-based professional development competencies. Retrieved from: [del.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/ProfessionalDevelopment/RBPd\\_Competencies.pdf](http://del.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/ProfessionalDevelopment/RBPd_Competencies.pdf)*



## Learn & Grow

3350 Commercial Dr. Suite 203, Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
(907) 265-3105 or toll free (844) 563-3230 | [info@aklearnandgrow.org](mailto:info@aklearnandgrow.org) | [www.aklearnandgrow.org](http://www.aklearnandgrow.org)

Revised: March 2020