



# Opening a Child Care Facility in Pennsylvania





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This toolkit can provide information to those considering opening a child care facility, from start to certified completion. Use this toolkit to discover information about what makes a child care a high-quality early learning experience and a valuable resource in a community.

## Why Start a Child Care Facility

Research has shown that 90% of a child’s brain is developed by age five. The synapsis, or connections, formed within a child’s brain formed at a very young age can set the foundation for all learning as a child grows and becomes an adult. After age five, those synapsis or new brain connections are harder to make.<sup>1</sup> Quality early learning provides the environment needed to encourage the healthy brain development and help prepare a child for later school success.

Access to quality early learning means families can find and maintain gainful employment, while a lack of quality early learning acts as a barrier to moving into and remaining within the workforce. In Pennsylvania, 70 percent of children under six have parents in the workforce,<sup>2</sup> with 75 percent of mothers of young children participating in the labor force.<sup>3</sup> When families know their children are in reliable and safe child care facilities, they can focus while on the job and remain in jobs for longer periods of time. They can also remain in the workforce when their children are young and continue to gain job skills. This translates into long-term earnings with increases up to 30% even after their children leave early education.<sup>4</sup>

**Productivity problems cause Pennsylvania employers to lose \$600 million annually due to child care challenges faced by their workforce.**

*Growing Tomorrow’s Economy Means Investing in Child Care Today.* PA Early Learning Investment Commission, Ready Nation. April 2019

Quality early learning provides:

- A reliable, safe and secure environment for children when families are at school or work.
- Teachers who support and challenge children to explore and learn new things.
- An environment where children can learn skills needed for kindergarten and beyond.

### *The Need for High-Quality Child Care*

There are simply not enough child care providers within Pennsylvania to meet the demand for high-quality child care.

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<sup>1</sup> Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University. Brain Architecture. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>

<sup>2</sup> [Kids Count Data Center](#). The Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2017

<sup>3</sup> [America’s Child Care Deserts in 2018](#). Center for American Progress. December 2018

<sup>4</sup> Timothy J. Bartik, Ph.D., Senior Economist at the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, at the Early Learning Investment Commission Economic Summit, April 19, 2010, Harrisburg, PA, [www.pa-elic.org](http://www.pa-elic.org).

In Pennsylvania, there are more than 430,000 working parents with children under age three and more than 700,000 children under the age of five,<sup>5</sup> yet 57 percent of people in Pennsylvania<sup>6</sup> live in a census tract with more than 50 children under age five that contains either no child care providers or so few



options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed child care slots. This situation is also known as a child care desert.

Although these child care deserts exist in communities throughout Pennsylvania, 73 percent of rural families live in areas without enough certified child care providers<sup>7</sup>. Even those living within highest-income neighborhoods are not immune to experiencing child care deserts--49 percent of people living within the highest-income neighborhoods and

56 percent living within lowest-income neighborhoods experience the challenge of child care deserts<sup>8</sup>.

The child care needs for families who work outside traditional child care hours—those employed by hospitals, police and fire departments, warehouses and other businesses, for example—can be even greater. According to Research of Action's *Making It Work: Examining the Status of Non-Traditional Child Care (NTCC) in Pennsylvania*, one in three Pennsylvania families with young children (approximately 150,000 families) have a likely need for NTCC<sup>9</sup>. For these families, it can be challenging, if not impossible, to find reliable, high-quality child care.

The solution to meeting the child care needs of families throughout Pennsylvania can be a direct one—an increase in the number of high-quality certified child care providers.

### *The Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning*

Since its inception in 2007, Pennsylvania's Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) has focused on creating opportunities for the commonwealth's youngest children to develop and learn to their fullest potential. This goal is accomplished through a framework of supports and systems that help ensure children and their families have access to high quality services.

Jointly overseen by the Departments of Human Services and Education, OCDEL works with many partners. Families, schools, child care, early intervention, Head Start, libraries, community organizations and other stakeholders have joined with OCDEL to provide high-quality early childhood programs and effective prevention strategies to mitigate challenges faced by families that affect school readiness and academic success.

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<sup>5</sup> PA Early Learning Dashboard, March 2019

<sup>6</sup> [America's Child Care Deserts in 2018](#). Center for American Progress. December 2018

<sup>7</sup> [America's Child Care Deserts in 2018](#). Center for American Progress. December 2018

<sup>8</sup> [America's Child Care Deserts in 2018](#). Center for American Progress. December 2018

<sup>9</sup> [Making it Work: Examining the Status of Non-Traditional Child Care in Pennsylvania](#), Research for Action. June 2019

OCDEL strives to build a strong foundation for children through the establishment of a statewide standard for excellence in early care and education and the creation of financial and technical supports.

The programs overseen by OCDEL ensure Pennsylvania's children and families have access to quality child care and early learning programs and supports.

Through the Child Care Works partnership, eligible families make a co-payment to the child care facility in addition to the state subsidy that Child Care Works provides.

More than 200,000 children and their families receive Child Care Works subsidy each year. By accepting children receiving Child Care Works subsidy, child care facilities can provide quality early learning services to at-risk children in their communities.



### *Types of Child Care Facilities*

Child care providers operating a program for four or more unrelated children must be certified by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. Those interested in opening a licensed child care facility should review the regulations for each program to ensure compliance.

- **Child Care Center:** A child care facility in which seven or more children who are not related to the operator receive child care. A child care center must have a certificate of compliance (“license”) from the Department of Human Services (DHS) in order to legally operate.
- **Group Child Care Home:** A child care facility in which seven through 12 children of various ages or in which seven through 15 children from 4th grade through 15 years of age who are not related to the operator receive child care. A group child care home must have a certificate of compliance (“license”) from DHS in order to legally operate.
- **Family Child Care Home:** A child care facility located in a residence in which four, five, or six children who are not related to the caregiver receive child care. A family child care home must have a certificate of compliance (“license”) from DHS in order to legally operate.

# Requirements and Regulations of Child Care Facilities

## *The Role of Pennsylvania's Departments of Education and Human Services*

The PA Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) is jointly overseen by the Department of Education (PDE) and the Department of Human Services (DHS).

PDE oversees 500 public school districts, more than 170 public charter schools, public cyber charter schools, Career and Technology Centers/Vocational Technical schools, public Intermediate Units, the education of youth in State Juvenile Correctional Institutions, community colleges and Head Starts and publicly funded preschools, like PA Pre-K Counts Head Start and Preschool Early Intervention, 3-5.

DHS administers services that provide care and support to Pennsylvania's most vulnerable individuals and families. In their role of serving families and children, DHS also licenses and regulates thousands of facilities that care for many Pennsylvanians, including child care centers and personal care homes. OCDEL programs funded through DHS include Keystone STARS, evidence-based home visiting, Early Intervention Birth-3, Child Care Works (subsidy) and community-based family centers.



## *The Role of the Bureau of Certification*

As a Bureau within OCDEL, the Bureau of Certification Services is responsible for the regulation of all child care centers, group child care homes and family child care homes in Pennsylvania. They oversee all aspects related to operating a licensed child care facility including:

- The requirements and process for opening a child care facility.
- The statutes and regulations for operating a child care facility.
- The status and compliance history of specific facilities.
- The complaints regarding child care facilities.

The Bureau of Certification ensures that every licensed child care provider is complying with the applicable Regulations, or Pennsylvania Codes, for operating a licensed child care facility. They do this through a variety of actions which include, but are not limited to, inspections of child care facilities. *(For more information about inspections, see the Inspections section of this document.)*

Child care providers operating a program for four or more unrelated children must be certified by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS). DHS regulates three types of child care facilities:

- **55 Pa. Code, Chapter 3270, Child Care Centers.** This regulation provides the rules regarding operation of a child care center. A child care center is a facility in which seven or more children

unrelated to the operator receive child care services. A child care center must have a certificate of compliance (license) from DHS in order to operate. [View the regulation.](#)

- **55 Pa. Code, Chapter 3280, Group Child Care Homes.** This regulation provides the rules regarding operation of a group child care home. A group care home is a facility in which seven to 12 children unrelated to the operator receive child care services. A group child care home must have a certificate of compliance (license) from DHS in order to operate. [View the regulation.](#)
- **55 Pa. Code, Chapter 3290, Family Child Care Homes.** This regulation provides the rules regarding operation of a family child care home. A family child care home is a facility in which four, five or six children unrelated to the operator receive child care services. A family child care home must be located in a residence and must have a certificate of compliance from DHS in order to operate. [View the regulation.](#)

**55 Pa. Code, Chapter 20, Licensure or Approval of Facilities and Agencies.** This regulation provides the rules regarding applying for a certificate of compliance (license), frequency and content of DHS inspections, preparing and issuing a certificate of compliance, conditions under which a certificate of compliance may be denied, not renewed, or revoked and the DHS licensure or approval decisions that may be appealed. Chapter 20 applies to child day care centers and group child care homes. [View the regulation.](#)



In Pennsylvania, single parents pay 43.9% of their income for center based infant child care. Married parents of two children living at the poverty line pay 84.1% of their household income for center-based child care.

[The US and the High Price of Child Care: 2019](#), Child Care Aware of America.

## Obtaining a Child Care Certification

### *Requirements of Certification Compliance for Pennsylvania Child Care Facilities*

All certified, or licensed, child care programs in Pennsylvania are required to comply to the specified regulations as they pertain to the type of child care facility. The child care facility regulations for [Child Care Centers](#), [Group Child Care Homes](#) and [Family Child Care Homes](#) became effective on Sept. 22, 2008.

Regulations for child care facilities address areas such as:

- Health and safety measures to help protect children and staff from injury and illness
- Ratio and group sizes
- Background checks of adults that work in the child care facility
- Physical environment of the program
- Education and ongoing required training
- Program management

## Applying for Child Care Certification

### *Registering Your Facility with the Department of State*

Prior to applying for a certificate of compliance, a child care facility must obtain a Certificate of Occupancy from their local municipality to ensure the facility is zoned appropriately and is allowed to operate within the local municipality. The certificate of occupancy must also be registered with the Department of State. The following are also required to be filed with the Pennsylvania Department of State (55 Pa. Code §20.12) if applicable:

- Articles of Incorporation – showing members
- Registration for Limited Liability Company (LLC), Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) or Limited Partnership (LP) – showing members.
- If the business was formed outside Pennsylvania, a copy of a Certificate of Authority or Certificate of Registration to do business in Pennsylvania as filed with the Pennsylvania Department of State.

Visit the [PA Business One-Stop Shop website](#) for additional information.

### *Local Requirements to Operate a Child Care Facility*

In addition to the regulations from the PA Department of Human Services, Bureau of Certification, individual cities, township or boroughs may have local or regional regulations for zoning, building, health and fire code compliance to operate a child care facility. Some local requirements may be different than the state requirements and there may be fees involved. Contact your local entity which regulates businesses within your geographical region. For additional information about the local requirement for your facility, contact your local municipality.

Locate your local municipality information on the [PA Business One-Stop Shop website](#).

## Regional OCDEL Offices

After registering the facility with the Department of State, contact the appropriate [Regional Office of Child Development and Early Learning](#). There are five Regional Offices located in Pennsylvania and each Regional Office is assigned responsibility for facilities located in specific counties. Staff in the Regional Office conduct orientation sessions for prospective child care providers for obtaining information related to opening and operating a child care facility. Staff in the Regional Office can also provide information regarding the laws and regulations relevant to child care facilities and can answer questions regarding the requirements for operating a child care facility.

## Orientation

All prospective providers wishing to start a child care facility, family child care providers, and current providers wanting to relocate their current facility or open a new location must attend an orientation tailored to the type of facility they wish to open. Child care center, group and family child care home providers must complete both [an online orientation](#) and contact their [Regional OCDEL Certification office](#) to register for a more in-depth face-to-face orientation.

**Prior to applying or attending an orientation session, an applicant should have a Certificate of Occupancy.**

These mandatory orientations cover topics such as how to fill out the application, important necessary documents, clearances, health and safety regulations, and information on child care subsidy, Keystone STARS, and Early Intervention. For more information, read [OCDEL's current steps for the orientation process](#). Upon completion of these orientations, providers will be given a certificate of completion that is valid for one year.

## Application

An individual or legal entity who wishes to operate a child care center, group child care home or family child care home in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania must obtain a certificate of compliance from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS).

A provider is issued a provisional license for their initial, as DHS is not able to establish full compliance with all regulations since there are not children in care at the time of the initial inspection. DHS therefore establishes that the provider is in substantial compliance and can operate with the provisional license.

To obtain a certificate of compliance, the submission of a complete application to the appropriate Regional Office of Child Development and Early Learning, initial inspection completed and passed is required. A facilities initial certificate of compliance is on a provisional basis for a period not greater than six months. Subsequent certificate of compliance effective dates are dependent on the outcome of the inspection, but cannot be for a period greater than twelve months. Providers cannot legal conduct business as a child care facility until the effective date listed on the certificate of compliance. See the document, [What Is A Complete Application?](#) for components of a completed application.

The total time frame to issue a provisional/full certificate of compliance from time of receipt of complete application to the mailing of the certificate is 100 days.

<p>The approximate time frame from the receipt of a complete initial application to the issuance of a provisional certificate of compliance when there are no regulatory violations or minor violations resulting from an initial inspection is <b>100 days</b>.</p>	<p>Takes up to 45 days.</p>	<p>Upon receipt of the application, the regional office supervisor has 45 days to review the application.</p>
		<p>If the application is <b>incomplete</b>, the application and any documents that were submitted are returned to the legal entity with a letter of explanation.</p>
	<p>Takes three to four weeks.</p>	<p>If the application is <b>complete</b>, the supervisor will assign it to a certification representative who will contact the legal entity to schedule an initial inspection. It may be several weeks until the initial inspection will be conducted.</p>
	<p>In effect for first six months.</p>	<p>If no violations are observed or violations are observed, and the provider provides an acceptable plan of correction and corrects all violations, a <b>provisional certificate of compliance</b> is issued for a period up to six months. A certification representative will conduct a full inspection during the <b>first six months of operation</b>.</p>
	<p>In effect for 12 months.</p>	<p>If no violations are observed or violations are observed and the provider provides an acceptable plan of correction and corrects all violations prior to the date of the expiration of the certificate of compliance, the legal entity is issued a <b>regular certificate of compliance</b> that will be in effect for <b>twelve months</b>.</p>

## Orientation Training

The Department of Human Services' regulations for child care centers, group child care homes and family child care homes state that a legal entity or a representative of the legal entity shall participate in an orientation training provided by DHS within 12 months prior to commencing operation of the child care facility. The individual who completes the online training must provide a Professional Development Certificate of Completion to be admitted to the face-to-face orientation.

Anyone who wants to operate a child care facility for the first time or any current provider who wants to open a new location must attend an orientation training session within 12 months prior to operating the new facility. A legal entity or the legal entity's representative may attend an orientation session provided by a Regional Office of Child Development and Early Learning at any location statewide.

There are two types of orientation training sessions – one for certified facilities i.e., child care centers and group child care homes, and one for certified facilities located in a residence i.e., family child care homes.

Available are [user-friendly Provider Self-Assessment checklists](#), designed to assist Child Care Center, Family, and Group Child Care Home Providers in performing initial and periodic reviews of their facility operations to achieve compliance with OCDEL certification regulations. The checklists can help identify the minimum level of compliance necessary to obtain DHS's certificate of compliance. They can also help to identify program strengths and gaps in the understanding of and compliance with OCDEL regulations.



## Facility and Staff Requirements

### *Differences Between Child Care Center, Group Child Care Homes and Family Child Care Homes*

In Pennsylvania, the Department of Human Services (DHS) regulates three types of child care facilities and each type of child care facility has regulations based on the type of facility.

- **55 Pa. Code, Chapter 3270, Child Care Centers.** This regulation provides the rules regarding operation of a child care center. A child care center is a facility in which seven or more children unrelated to the operator receive child care services. A child care center must have a certificate of compliance (license) from DHS in order to operate. [View the regulation.](#)
- **55 Pa. Code, Chapter 3280, Group Child Care Homes.** This regulation provides the rules regarding operation of a group child care home. A group child care home is a facility in which seven to 12 children unrelated to the operator receive child care services. A group child care home must have a certificate of compliance (license) from DHS in order to operate. [View the regulation.](#)
- **55 Pa. Code, Chapter 3290, Family Child Care Homes.** This regulation provides the rules regarding operation of a family child care home. A family child care home is a facility in which four, five or six children unrelated to the operator receive child care services. A family child care home must be located in a residence and must have a certificate of compliance from DHS in order to operate. [View the regulation.](#)

### *The Types of Clearances Needed for Staff*

The [Child Protective Services Law](#) (CPSL) signed into law in 1975 requires certain individuals to obtain clearances in order to be employed, be a resource parent (foster or adoptive), or be a volunteer with children. The purpose for requiring clearances is to provide employers and those selecting volunteers with information to use as a part of a larger decision-making process when determining whether to hire someone as an employee or select them as a volunteer.

Clearances are required for an employee or unpaid volunteer at a minimum of every 60 months from the date of the oldest clearance. This includes all staff working within a child care facility. Clearances may be required more frequently based on licensure or employer requirements.



Child care facilities must ensure that clearances are obtained in accordance with the CPSL.

Effective September 30, 2019 all new hires within a child care facility are required to have:

- A Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance

- Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) Criminal History Clearance
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) clearance required by PA Department of Human Services
- National Sex Offender Registry (NSOR) Verification Certificate
- Out of state clearances if they resided outside of Pennsylvania in the past five years.

As of July 1, 2020, all current facility persons, volunteers, household members, and Director/Operator must have obtained the NSOR verification.

For information on obtaining clearances, visit Keep Kids Safe at [www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov](http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov).

### *Child Care Staff's Role as a Mandated Reporter*

The PA Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) was enacted to protect children from abuse, allow the opportunity for healthy growth and development, and, whenever possible, preserve and stabilize the family.

Under the CPSL, certain groups of individuals are considered mandated reporters and are required to report suspected child abuse if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse. Employees of child care facilities who have direct contact with children in the course of employment are considered mandated reporters and are required to make a report of suspected child abuse if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse under any of the identified circumstances.

For more information, including required mandated reporter training and how to make a report, please see the document, [Mandated Reporters FAQ](#), on the [Keep Kids Safe website](#).

### *The Number of Staff are Required: Staff to Child Ratios*

The staff to child ratios are different, depending on the type of child care facility.

#### **Child Care Centers**

From the [Pennsylvania Code § 3270.51](#). Similar age level for Child Care Centers.

Similar Age Levels	Staff	Children	Maximum Group Size	Total Number of Staff Required for the Maximum Group Size
Infant	1	4	8	2
Young toddler	1	5	10	2
Older toddler	1	6	12	2
Preschool	1	10	20	2
Young school-age	1	12	24	2
Older school-age	1	15	30	2

From the [Pennsylvania Code § 3270.52](#). Ration requirements for Child Care Centers. Mixed age level, when children are grouped in mixed age levels, the age of the youngest child in the group determines the staff:child ratio and maximum group size in accordance with § 3270.51 (relating to similar age level).

### Group Child Care Homes

From the [Pennsylvania Code § 3280.52. Ratio requirements](#) for Group Child Care Homes, (a) the minimum number of facility persons is as follows:

(1) A primary staff person shall be present in a facility when six or fewer children are in care, unless the staff:child ratio specified in subsection (b) or (c) requires a second or third staff person.

(2) At least two facility persons shall accompany any number of children on an excursion away from a facility.

(b) When children are grouped in similar age levels, the following child group sizes and ratios of staff persons apply:

	Staff	Children	Maximum Group Size	Total Number of Staff Required for the Maximum Group Size
Infant	1	4	12	3
Young toddler	1	5	12	3
Older Toddler	1	6	12	2
Preschool	1	10	12	2
Young School-age	1	12	12	1
Older School-age	1	15	15	1

(c) When children are grouped in mixed age levels, the age of the youngest child in the group determines the staff:child ratio and maximum group size in accordance with the requirements in subsection (b).

### Family Child Child Care Homes

From the [Pennsylvania Code § 3290.51](#). Maximum number of children. The number of children in care may not exceed six children at any one time who are unrelated to the operator.

From the [Pennsylvania Code § 3290.52](#). Ratio requirements. The operator may provide care for no more than five related and unrelated infants and toddlers at any one time. No more than two related and unrelated infants may receive care at any one time. The following numbers of infants and toddlers are permitted in a family child care home:

- (1) If no infants are in care, five toddlers are permitted.
- (2) If one infant is in care, four toddlers are permitted.
- (3) If two infants are in care, three toddlers are permitted.

### *Health and Safety Requirements*

The Federal Reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) requires all staff in certified child care programs to participate in trainings on 10 critical health and safety topics. Free modules (covering 9 of 10 required topics) are available to earn annual training hours and meet most of the federal requirements. Access the online training for free at the [Better Kid Care website](#).

Find courses in the PA Keys to Quality Professional Development (PD) Registry, and search and register for first aid training sessions in specific geographical areas. The [PD Registry](#) offers child care professionals a wide variety of trainings on relevant topics offered at appropriate skill levels. There is no cost to sign up as a user of the PD Registry.

Act 31 of 2014 requires all child care facility applicants to complete child abuse training as pre-requisite to applying to operate a child care facility. The Department of Human Services and the Department of State has approved Mandated Reporter Training courses to meet mandated reporting (Act 31) licensing requirements. These courses can be found at the [Training for Mandated Reporters page on the Keep Kids Safe website](#). After completing the course, a *Certificate of Completion* is available to print. A copy of the certificate must be submitted to the regional office with the application packet. Applications will be considered incomplete without the certificate of training.

When applying for an initial Certificate of Compliance, the applicant must provide clearances that are **less than 60 months old**.

Act 153, which took effect December 31, 2014, requires an operator of a Group Child Care Home and a Family Child Care Home located in a residence to provide clearances for household members 18 years of age and older who reside in the home 30 or more calendar days per year. The clearances must be less than 60 months old.



### *Staff Education and Degrees*

One indicator of high-quality programs is the employment of a teaching staff that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and to support families' diverse needs and interests. Children benefit most when their teachers have high levels of formal education and specialized early childhood professional preparation.

Teachers who have specific preparation, knowledge, and skills in child development and early childhood education are more likely to engage in warm, positive interactions with children, offer richer language experiences, and create more high-quality learning environments. Opportunities for teaching staff to receive supportive supervision and to participate in ongoing professional development ensure that their knowledge and skills reflect the profession's ever-changing knowledge base.

## Keeping Children and Staff Safe through Inspections of Child Care Facilities

The Bureau of Certification conducts inspections of child care facilities to assess compliance with applicable statutes and regulations. All certified child care providers in Pennsylvania are subject to an annual inspection of the facility. A certification representative with the Office of Child Development and

Early Learning will conduct an initial inspection prior to opening of the child care facility and a renewal inspection of the facility at least once every 12 months. All child care facilities are subject to announced and unannounced inspections.

The Certification Inspection Instrument (CII) standardizes how certification regulations are applied, measured, and enforced consistently across Pennsylvania and supports consistent documentation of inspection results and compliance. Visit the [PA Keys website](#) to download the CII and related worksheets and forms.

The [Self-Assessment Checklists](#) are user-friendly tools, designed to assist child care center, family, and group child care home providers in performing periodic reviews of their facility operations to achieve compliance with OCDEL certification regulations. When used regularly, these checklists can help to identify program strengths and gaps in the understanding of and compliance with OCDEL regulations.



There is also available a brief video, [Family Child Care: What to Expect in an Inspection](#), can help family child care homes meet regulatory standards for providing safe and healthy environments for children.

## Fire Safety

Health and safety measures are required by the Department of Labor and Industry and are referenced in the Department of Human Services (DHS) regulations in 55 Pa. Code §3270, §3280 and §3290. All child care facilities must have a certificate of occupancy which covers the fire detection system within a facility/home which includes a regular maintenance plan for operative smoke detectors and fire extinguishers Refer to the Uniform Construction Code, 34 Pa. Code §403.23 (Child Care Facilities).

Child care facilities must demonstrate they have an operable fire detection system, written emergency plan, fire drill log, posted evacuation routes and regional certification staff will complete a visual inspection to ensure facility is free of potential fire hazards. Fire safety violations will be referred to local municipalities.

For additional information about the fire safety requirements for your facility, contact your local municipality. Local municipality information is available on the [PA Department of Community and Economic Development website](#).

## The Pennsylvania Key

Pennsylvania Keys to Professional Development is a comprehensive, statewide career development system for practitioners serving children and families in early childhood and school age programs including: child care; Early Head Start and Head Start; Early Intervention; PA Pre-K Counts; public school; and private academic school.

This system provides a clearly articulated framework that defines pathways which are tied to certification (leading to qualifications and credentials) and addresses the needs of individuals and adult learners. Elements of the Pennsylvania Keys to Professional Development system include: core knowledge competencies, qualifications and credentials, quality assurances, access, and outreach and funding.

The goal for building a professional development system is to create a quality improvement system in which all early childhood programs and practitioners are supported and encouraged to improve child outcomes. The Pennsylvania professional development system aims to strengthen early childhood and school-age programs through the development of a well-qualified, skilled, and diverse workforce. For additional information, visit the [PA Key website](#).



## Career Pathways

All professions are defined by a set of competencies and shared knowledge and child care professionals included. Child care professionals may attain these competencies through various paths with the skills that are needed to care for and promote the learning of young children should be at the core of this knowledge, regardless. A career pathway is a tool to support the child care profession in entering the field prepared for success while growing the existing professional's capacity to move up in the field if they so desire.

Career pathways define entry level qualifications and steps one can take to ensure they have the skills, knowledge and competencies needed to fulfill their desired role. The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) aims to support the growth and development of the workforce already in the field, build upon the expertise of the child care profession and create a statewide framework to govern these efforts.

For more information about Career Pathways, visit the [PA Key website](#).

## Pennsylvania Core Knowledge Competencies for Early Childhood and School-Age Professionals

The *Pennsylvania Core Knowledge Competencies (CKC) for Early Childhood and School-Age Professionals* is an essential component of Pennsylvania’s professional development system. It identifies a set of content areas that help define the knowledge expectations for professionals in settings within the early childhood and school-age field. It supports students’ preparation for entry into the field of early childhood and school-age care as well as professionals’ commitment to lifelong learning through ongoing professional growth. The *Pennsylvania Core Knowledge Competencies for Early Childhood and School-Age Professionals* are designed to be inclusive of all group settings and reflect revised learning standards and current research on best practice.

The *Pennsylvania Big Ideas Framework and Individual Professional Development Plan for Early Childhood and School-Age Professionals* is a companion document to the CKCs. It is a summary of the core competencies presented as Big Ideas and Essential Questions and is the primary tool for consideration of long- and short-term professional development goals and the creation of professional development plans for individual early childhood and school-age educators.



Visit the PA Key website for additional information on [PA Core Knowledge Competencies for Early Childhood and School-Age Professionals](#).

## The Role of Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards in Child Care

[Pennsylvania’s Learning Standards for Early Childhood](#) are research-based resources, designed according to age and development, and form the foundation for curriculum, assessment, instruction and intervention within child care programs. They inform child care professionals about curriculum and assessment, guide the selection of instructional materials and the design of interactions/goal setting, inform families of appropriate expectations for children, and provide a common framework for community-based birth–grade 3 alignment work. *Pennsylvania’s Learning Standards for Early Childhood* are designed to support and enhance the learning environment; responsive relationships; age, cultural, and linguistically-appropriate curriculum; and practices being used to assess children, classrooms, and programs.

The Department of Education and OCDEL use a [Standards Aligned System](#). The Standards Aligned System is a collective body of research that identifies six elements which, when used together, provide a framework for program improvement and child success. The elements identified are standards, assessments, curriculum framework, instruction (including interventions), safe and supportive schools, and materials and resources.

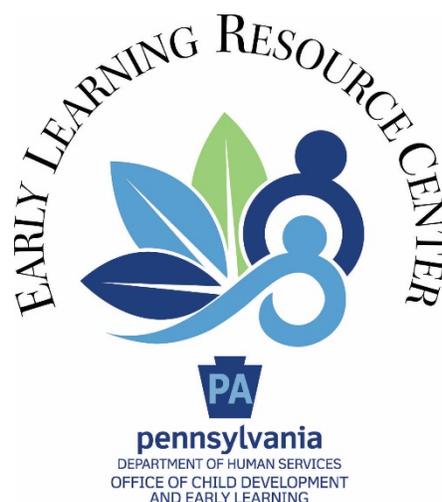
Learning standards provide the framework for learning. They provide the foundational information for what children should be able to know and do. *Pennsylvania's Learning Standards for Early Childhood* build on information learned previously, creating a continuum of learning that assures consistent and linked learning that begins in infancy, increasing in complexity as it extends through graduation.

Pennsylvania also uses program standards that assure children's experiences are being offered in high-quality settings. Pennsylvania's state-funded programs all offer similar sets of standards that provide guidance on program operation that exhibit best practices.

## Early Learning Resource Centers

Pennsylvania's Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRCs) provide a single point-of-contact for families, early learning service providers, and communities to gain information and access services that support high-quality child care and early learning programs. ELRCs administer over \$680 million in child care subsidy and supports. This state and federal investment in Pennsylvania's working families enables families to maintain employment while creating opportunities for the commonwealth's children to develop and learn to their fullest potential.

Through the ELRC, child care professionals can obtain support in building quality outcomes for children by working with quality coaches to achieve Keystone STAR 3 and 4 status, building connections with community partners, and supporting children and families in accessing additional services, such as PA Pre-K Counts, Head Start, home-visiting, and Early Intervention. For early learning programs to participate with Child Care Works, they must enter into a Provider Agreement. This can be done via the ELRC.



ELRCs also provide a variety of professional development opportunities for child care directors, teachers and aides in early learning and school-age care. In addition to workshops and technical assistance, child care professionals can access webinars to supplement their continuing education.

All ELRCs have a primary location in their designated region and most have satellite offices. ELRCs also partner with community organizations to meet families' needs where they naturally congregate. Visit [www.raiseyourstar.org](http://www.raiseyourstar.org) to find a local ELRC.

## The Role of Keystone STARS and How it Can Increase Quality

Keystone STARS is Pennsylvania's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). A QRIS is a continuous quality improvement systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. Keystone STARS is a responsive system to improve,

support, and recognize the continuous quality improvement efforts of early learning programs in Pennsylvania. It is guided by three core principles:

1. A whole child approach to education is essential to meeting the holistic and individual needs of each and every child and family.
2. Knowledgeable and responsive early care and education professionals are essential to the development of children and the support of families.
3. Building and sustaining ongoing positive relationships among children, families, early care and education professionals and community stakeholders is essential for the growth and development of every child.

Keystone STARS has four primary goals:

1. To improve the quality of early care and education;
2. To support early care and education providers in meeting their quality improvement goals;
3. To recognize programs for continuous quality improvement and meeting higher quality standards; and
4. To provide families a way to choose a quality early care and education program.

OCDEL's Keystone STARS Program supports all early care and education programs to improve program quality. Child care programs should think about the Keystone STARS Performance Standards as a tool to support continuous quality improvement (CQI) that impacts services to the children and families in their care.

## The Role of Child Care Subsidy

Pennsylvania's subsidized child care program, [Child Care Works](#), enables eligible families to make a co-payment to their child care program in addition to the state subsidy that Child Care Works provides. By accepting children receiving Child Care Works subsidy, child care programs can provide quality early learning services to at-risk children in their communities.

Pennsylvania families can use COMPASS to access many of Pennsylvania's health and human services benefits online, including applying for subsidy and searching for a child care facility. A child care facility's profile in COMPASS will market that a facility accepts families receiving Child Care Works subsidy. Child care facilities may also be included in the referral lists that Early Learning Resource Centers provide to prospective families.

Child care facilities that enroll children receiving Child Care Works subsidy may be eligible for [Keystone STARS subsidy add-on](#) and additional Keystone STARS grants and awards. The higher a child care facilities' STAR level, the greater a subsidy add-on. A STAR 4 program, for example, can earn an additional \$3,200 a year for each infant through the STARS subsidy add-on.

**In 2018, the price of center-based care for two children exceeded the amount of money spent on food and transportation combined in all regions across the country.**

*The US and the High Price of Child Care: 2019.*  
Child Care Aware of America.

Child care facilities must be certified by the PA Department of Human Services. Relative caregivers must have completed CareCheck and federal criminal history clearance. CareCheck is the Department of Human Services' program that requires background clearances for all Relative/Neighbor providers. Child care programs and relative caregivers must sign and comply with an agreement with their Early Learning Resource Center to receive Child Care Works subsidy.

For additional information about the benefits of Child Care Works to a child care facility, see the section, [Financial Considerations](#).

Programs may contact their local Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) or apply online through PELICAN Provider Self-Service. Find your ELRC at [www.raiseyourstar.org](http://www.raiseyourstar.org).

## Financial Considerations and Supports for Operating a Child Care Facility

When considering opening a child care facility, a business person must ask, "Who will pay for the services and how much do I need to charge?" For child care facilities, there are a variety of income streams which can help the facility meet the needs of the families and children within their community.

### *Private Pay*

A family paying a child care facility directly, without financial assistance or subsidy from another source is what is known as *private pay*. Private pay rates are established by the provider and may factor different considerations such as meals, field trips, or materials provided by the child care facility (like diapers, wipes, etc.).

### *Child Care Works*

Pennsylvania's subsidized child care program, Child Care Works, helps low-income families pay their child care fees. If a family meets the guidelines, DHS, through the ELRC, pays a part of their child care cost, called a subsidy payment. The family also pays part of the cost, called the family co-pay. The subsidy payment and the family co-pay go directly to the child care facility.

If the child care subsidy does not pay the full amount that a child care facility charges, the provider may ask the family to pay the difference between the subsidy payment and their private charges.

The *Maximum Child Care Allowance* is the payment ceilings set by DHS for child care services provided to families eligible for subsidized child care, regardless of what the child care facility charges. Child care subsidy rates are set by DHS by county, provider type, the amount of time in care (full-time or part-time), and the age of the child. Contact your [ELRC](#) for information about *Maximum Child Care Allowance* and for more information about policy on payment of child care, see [Pa. Code 55, Chapter 168. Child Care](#).



## *Keystone STARS Quality Add-Ons*

As part of OCDEL’s commitment to continuous quality improvement in early learning, child care programs participating in Keystone STARS at the STAR 2 level or above receive a subsidy add-on for every child they serve who is enrolled in Child Care Works.

This subsidy add-on, or *tiered reimbursement*, is applicable to centers at the STAR 2 level or higher and increases with each STAR level. The add-on is automatically applied to the daily subsidized child care rate for the program by the ELRC. The additional daily amount may, in some circumstances, increase provider rates to an amount that exceeds the *Maximum Child Care Allowance*, which is the payment ceilings set by DHS for child care services provided to families eligible for subsidized child care.

Although all certified child care facilities participate in Keystone STARS, tiered reimbursement does not apply to STAR 1 level providers or those receiving only private pay.

For more information about subsidized child care eligibility, see the [Pa. Code 55, Chapter 3041, Subsidized Child Care Eligibility](#).

## *Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts*

The Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts pre-kindergarten program, established by PDE, administered through OCDEL, makes quality pre-kindergarten opportunities available to children and families across the commonwealth. Child Care centers and groups participating in Keystone STARS at a STAR 3 or 4 are eligible to apply for funding. Blending or braiding other program funds is a way for child care providers to become more financially diverse.

The PA Pre-K Counts program:

- is based on the quality components adopted for pre-kindergarten by the State Board of Education;
- provides families in participating communities with a choice of quality pre-kindergarten options in a school, child care center, Head Start, or nursery school;
- increases access to quality pre-kindergarten to children and families throughout the commonwealth with a priority in at-risk communities.

Pennsylvania continues to be committed to a mixed delivery system. As such, eligible applicants include existing PA Pre-K Counts grantees and new applicants from these five eligible entity categories:

- School districts;
- PDE Licensed nursery schools;
- Head Start grantees;
- Child care centers and group child care homes designated at Keystone STAR 3 or STAR 4; and
- A third-party entity applying for PA Pre-K Counts funding to administer the lead agency responsibilities for entities that are eligible to provide the classroom services under the categories listed above.



PA Pre-K Counts serves children who are at least three years of age and younger than the entry age for kindergarten and is provided free of charge. Grants are awarded through a competitive grant process to school districts, Head Start programs, licensed nursery schools, child care centers and group child care homes that are at least a Keystone STAR 3 and third-party entities that carry out the administrative and fiduciary provisions of the Program but not operate a classroom funded by the grant.

PA Pre-K Counts target enrollment to children who are most at risk of school failure, which is defined as living in households below 300 percent of the federal poverty rate, are English language learners or are at risk due to community factors, academic difficulties or economic disadvantage. Grant recipients verify income and family size before enrolling students. Children with identifiable disabilities or developmental delays may be included in PA Pre-K Counts and served in inclusive environments in which they constitute no more than 20 percent of the initial enrollment at the start of the Program year.

Approved providers use PA Pre-K grant funds to supplement, not to supplant, public funds from any other source that are used to serve otherwise eligible students, including, but not limited to, Accountability Block Grant funds, local funds, or federal or state Head Start funds for PA Pre-K Counts provided in the same geographic area.

PA Pre-K Counts funding is awarded on a competitive basis every five years (or when any additional funding is included in the state budget). Announcements of the competitive Request for Applications will be communicated through [PENN\\*Link](#), and through the [PA Early Ed News](#). For more information about the application process for PA Pre-K Counts, visit the [PA Key website](#).



### *Early Head Start Partnership*

The Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP) initiative brings together the best of Early Head Start and child care through layering of funding to provide comprehensive and continuous services to low-income infants, toddlers, and their families. EHS-CCP enhances developmental services and supports for low-income infants and toddlers, and their families, by providing strong relationship-based experiences and preparing them for the transition into Head Start and preschool.

DHS' Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership is administrated by OCDEL, which contracts with existing Head Start/Early Head Start (EHS) centers and child care facilities that serve as regional hubs. Hubs may provide direct services or partner with other child care facilities to support the delivery of comprehensive services.

OCDEL manages the state's Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) subsidy program, Child Care Works. Subsidy reimbursement constitutes the funding base for the EHS-CCP, layered with federal EHS funds. For this grant, OCDEL also set requirements that participating children must receive Child Care Works funding, meet a poverty eligibility threshold of 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), meet a categorical eligibility status, or be eligible for Early Intervention Part C.

OCDEL is one of several federally funded Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP) grantees funded in Pennsylvania. As the lead agency for 368 funded slots, OCDEL partners with the provider programs in several communities to implement the program. More information about Head Start and Early Head Start agencies across the commonwealth can be found at [Pennsylvania Head Start website](#). Many HS/EHS agencies partner with child care providers.



### *Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC)*

Pennsylvania's Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program is a way for businesses to enrich educational opportunities for students and earn tax credits by donating to an Educational Improvement Organization.

Tax credits may be awarded to business firms that make contributions to Scholarship Organizations and/or Educational Improvement Organizations and/or Pre-Kindergarten Scholarship Organizations contained on a list published by DHS. For contributions to Pre-Kindergarten Scholarship Organizations, a business may receive a tax credit equal to 100 percent of the first \$10,000 contributed and up to 90 percent of the remaining amount contributed up to a maximum credit of \$200,000 annually.

An organization that desires to be included on the list of Pre-Kindergarten Scholarship Organizations must meet the following criteria:

1. The organization must be a nonprofit entity.
2. The organization must be exempt from payment of federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.
3. The organization must contribute at least 80% of its annual EITC receipts to a Pre-Kindergarten Scholarship Program that meets the requirements of the Act and these guidelines.
4. If the organization serves as both a Scholarship Organization and a Pre-Kindergarten Scholarship Organization, it must maintain separate segregated funds for contributions to each type of program.

Applicants interested in applying as a Pre-K Organization should review the information provided on the [PA Department of Community and Economic Development, EITA website](#).

### *Local Funding Streams*

While there are funding opportunities available statewide, counties or local communities may have available funding to help meet the child care needs of at-risk families. Although a few of these opportunities are featured below, check with your local Early Learning Resource Center, or county/state child care advocacy group for possible local supports.

## PHLpreK

PHLpreK is Philadelphia's no-cost, quality pre-K program and which provides locally funded quality pre-K programs for 3 and 4-year-olds. With the passage of the Philadelphia Beverage Tax in June 2016, Philadelphia City Council approved Mayor Kenney's plan to create 6,500 locally-funded, quality pre-K seats in Philadelphia over the next five years. For more information, call 844-PHL-PREK (844-745-7735) or visit the [PHLpreK website](#).

## Pittsburgh Public Schools Early Childhood Education Department

The Pittsburgh Public Schools Early Childhood Education Department provides children, birth to five, with a comprehensive, flexible program designed to reinforce and respond to the unique strengths and needs of each individual child and family. Programming for birth to 5 services is funded through State, federal and local funding sources. Grant awards are cost allocated to economize funding streams without negatively impacting the quality of services and ensuring the financial sustainability of the program. Funding from multiple sources allows the Early Childhood Program to operate 83 preschool classrooms and 6 early head start classrooms in 35 locations scattered throughout the city, as well as collaborate with 20 local childcare agencies to provide comprehensive services for children and families. For more information, visit the [Pittsburgh Public Schools website](#).

### *Early Intervention*

While all children grow and develop in unique ways, some children experience delays in their development. Children with developmental delays and disabilities benefit from Pennsylvania's Early Intervention (EI) program, a state supported network of families, service practitioners and others which build upon the natural learning opportunities that occur within the daily routines of a child and their family.

Early Intervention provides support and services to families with children birth to age five, who have developmental delays and disabilities. These supports services and resources for children enhance daily opportunities for learning provided in settings where a child would be if he/she did not have a developmental delay and disability. EI also provides families' independence and competencies, and respects families' strengths, values and diversity.

Early Intervention supports and services are designed to meet the developmental needs of children with a disability as well as the needs of the family related to enhancing the child's development in one or more of the following areas:

- Physical development, including vision and hearing
- Cognitive development
- Communication development
- Social or emotional development
- Adaptive development



## Technical Assistance and Supports for Child Care Facilities

- [Early Learning Resource Centers](#)
- [Keystone STARS Technical Assistance](#)
- [Infant-Toddler Specialist Network](#)
- [Child Care Health Consultant Services](#)
- [Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Services](#)

## Additional Resources

- [How to start a Quality Child Care Business](#) (U.S Small Business Administration)
- [How to Determine an Area's Child Care Market Need](#) (Pennsylvania Child Care Association)
- [PA Early Ed News](#) (PA Key)
- [Find Child Care in Pennsylvania](#) (COMPASS)
- [PA's Promise for Children](#) (PA's Promise for Children)
- [Early Childhood Education Linkages System](#) (ECELS)