

BrightStars Program Self-Assessment

A program self-assessment is a comprehensive evaluation of a program's strengths and weaknesses as observed by those working within or in partnership with the program.

A child care program self-assessment typically involves gathering information about different aspects of the program's environment and pedagogical practice. BrightStars requires programs to self-assess six different areas: indoor and outdoor space; health and safety practices; learning context; curriculum; family communication and involvement; cultural and linguistic competence and respect for diversity.

Child care programs may choose to complete a formal self-assessment, in which a standardized tool is used to evaluate the program, or an informal self-assessment, in which no standardized tool is used but program staff may observe and evaluate different aspects of their program and compile a brief summary of their observations.

BrightStars is a five level quality rating and improvement system for early care and education providers in Rhode Island. Our goal is to help child care providers learn about best practices in early learning and apply them to the care children receive. Programs applying for a BrightStars rating of 2 Stars or higher are required to submit a self-assessment summary. In this manner programs are able to independently gather information they need in order to consider possible improvements to their program. A comprehensive self-assessment is one of the first steps in program quality improvement.

Self-assessments are unique to each program. There is no single format or single method that programs must use. BrightStars understands that many programs will have questions about this requirement, and so has developed this document to assist providers in completing their self-assessment. In addition BrightStars has compiled a list of resources related to assessment and evaluation that providers may find helpful (see *BrightStars Quality Improvement Guide* for a list of these resources).

Guided Questions for Program Self-Assessment

Indoor and Outdoor Space

- Is space large enough to accommodate child care children, adults, and furnishings? Are any spaces crowded or inaccessible?
- Is there adequate lighting and ventilation? Are there any changes you would make to these amenities?
- Are any major repairs needed indoors, outdoors, to furniture or play equipment?
- Are there any safety hazards observed indoors or outdoors? Are there any improvements or changes you would make to these spaces?

Health and Safety Practices

- Does the program have any policies for promoting good health practices among children and staff?
- What provisions does the program have for handling emergencies?
- Are there any safety hazards observed indoors or outdoors?
- Any improvements or changes that should be made to protect children's health and safety?

Learning Context¹

- What types of play materials does the program make accessible to children? Are the materials used with children safe and developmentally appropriate?
- What types of activities are used in the program to promote learning and development?
- Is the learning context inclusive of children with disabilities and diverse language learners?
- Does the program have any goals for improving or changing the learning context?

¹ Learning context is the materials, routines, and activities that promote play and learning.

Curriculum

- Does the program use a written curriculum?
- Is the curriculum developmentally appropriate for each age group enrolled?
- Does the preschool curriculum include components of the RI Early Learning Standards?
- Does the program have any goals for improving, changing or adapting the curriculum?

Family Communication and Involvement

- Does the program do any activities to promote family involvement? What are they?
- What types of resources are available to parents of children in the program?
- What is the program's policy or practice in communicating with families?
- Are families involved in setting goals for their child's learning and development?

Cultural and Linguistic Competence and Respect for Diversity

- Do program materials and activities reflect and promote diversity in race, culture, gender, abilities and age?
- How does the program support children who are diverse language learners and children with special needs?
- Does the program welcome and support families from diverse backgrounds? How so?
- What improvements could be made to increase the program's cultural competence or promotion of diversity?

Program Self-Assessment Summary

SAMPLE

1. Date of Self-Assessment

The program self-assessment was conducted from August – October 2009.

2. Introduction

The program completes an informal self-assessment as part of our annual planning. The program used information from staff and parent observations, meetings and surveys for the majority of measurement. DCYF regulations, RI Early Standards and Environment Rating Scales were also consulted for the self-assessment.

3. Indoor and Outdoor Space

Staff observations, meetings, and parent evaluations were used to assess this area. Our indoor space requires more chairs for the children and staff to sit on during meals and activities. The diapering surface is ripped and needs to be replaced. Outdoors, the sandbox needs to be refilled and kept covered. Mulch should be added under the gross motor equipment. Program strengths include ample indoor space, convenient room for storage, and a variety of gross motor equipment.

4. Health and Safety Practices

DCYF regulations, Environment Rating Scales, and staff observations were used to assess this area. We found that our table washing and diapering procedures need to be corrected, and hand-washing needs to be more diligent. Also need to make sure cords and outlets are not accessible to the children. Program strengths include regular evacuation drills (practiced more than required by licensing) and all staff are certified in CPR.

5. Learning Context

Evaluations by completed by Behavioral Consultant, staff observations, and Environment Rating Scales were used to assess the learning context. We found that we need to increase the number and variety of books, math and science materials accessible to the children as well as extend free play rather than focusing on group activities. We also would like to further encourage the children to be more successful at conflict resolution. Program strengths include providing a variety of fine motor and art materials, and the program provides a language rich environment for early learners.

6. Curriculum

Resources from Zero to Three were used to assess the infant/toddler curriculum. The preschool curriculum was assessed using the RI Early Learning Standards. Staff observations contributed to both assessments. We found that we could increase infant/toddler access to appropriate books to encourage emergent literacy, and that staff could spend more time engaging in play and language activities with the babies. Additional staff could be added to the program to help with infant/toddler routine care. Our program should begin to work on developing our curriculum framework. Staff should also be more clear in communicating what RIELS domains and learning goals they are incorporating into their daily/weekly lesson plans. Program strengths include an emphasis on math, science, logical reasoning, and there are many opportunities for children to practice emerging language skills.

7. Family Communication and Involvement

Parent evaluations and staff observations were used to assess this area. We found that overall families are happy with the various opportunities for involvement offered at the program, but we can improve by offering parent-teacher conferences twice per year instead of once. While the program has an open-door policy, it has become clear that many families are more responsive when offered specific dates and times for such communication.

8. Cultural/Linguistic Competence and Respect for Diversity

Staff observations and Environment Rating Scales were used to assess this area. We found that we need to incorporate more activities that promote diversity into our curriculum, as well as increase materials that reflect diversity in race, culture, abilities, ages, and gender. Our program staff is bilingual, allowing many families to be able to communicate more effectively, and all of our program materials are translated. These are considered program strengths.