



Look for the Stars Update ~ June 2009



We are well into Year 2 of the *Look for the Stars QIS*. Assessments are almost completed and results will be shared through individual appointments with directors and family home providers throughout July.

Assessment Schedule

Please note that we are aware that the scheduling of the assessments has been a source of frustration for many of you. However, this is the same process as last year – completing all the assessments within a specified time period and then releasing all the results at the same time. We know that everyone is anxious to receive the results, but the Coalition needs to ensure that all documentation has been accounted for and have time to examine and analyze the data. Remember that this is a 3 year pilot process and we need to be consistent in the timing of the assessments throughout that time period to be fair to all.

Contract with Children's Forum for Next Year

We do want to inform you that we will no longer be contracting with Devereux Florida for the assessments for 2010. Devereux Florida is a respected entity and continues to provide services in other areas of the state. However, the Coalition felt that the logistical issues that came up, along with the extension of the assessments into June beyond the time specified in the contract, was not acceptable, as it caused some sites to miss out on assessments due to summer camp and summer closings of programs.

Along with two other Coalitions, the Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County will be entering into a contract with the Children's Forum, which won the recent procurement bid for ERS assessment services. The Children's Forum is another entity in Florida that has expertise in doing assessments and is also actively involved with other aspects of early learning, including handling the TEACH and WAGES program and administering early childhood professional development credentials.

Debbie Conley is the Forum's assessment project team leader, and had been with Devereux Florida and managed the Coalition's assessments last year. Several of the Devereux assessors are also moving to the Forum. We feel that having the project leader and several assessors who are familiar with our local process will provide continuity as we enter into the third year.

Assessment Time Frame for Next Year

The Children's Forum has committed to completing all Sarasota County assessments in the specific time period of February 1st through April 30th 2010. As requested, there will be a 3 week window so providers can have an idea when the assessment will take place and will be able to inform the Coalition of field trips or other dates when assessments could not be conducted. The Forum has also developed a very user friendly report and a quality improvement plan that is more strength based.

The Coalition has heard the request from some providers to switch to a year round model for doing assessments. We are taking this under advisement and if feasible will consider starting that schedule in the fall of 2010. Providers will be kept informed as this decision is explored. We cannot promise to make that change at this point, but we are committed to exploring it.

Value and Purpose of ERS Assessments

Some of you have questioned the value of the assessment process and some of you are considering opting out of the Look for the Stars program this year. Please know that you can opt out of the program, it is voluntary, and we want providers to be totally comfortable with their decision. But whether a provider opts out or not, **formal assessments will continue to be done** on any site that receives state funds and serves scholarship children, as the Coalition is mandated by the state to monitor/assess, ensure that appropriate practices are in place and that legislative mandates are met. So assessments will continue.

Our former self assessment process ultimately did not work. Providers did not take the responsibility for objectively assessing their programs as seriously as we had hoped, with the result that many providers remained confused and out of compliance in critical areas such as curriculum, character development, appropriate practices, and program activities, despite repeated trainings, curriculum fairs throughout the years and targeted support. Let's face it, formal assessments are sometimes what it takes to get people's attention!

Possible Supplemental Evaluations

The environment rating scales continue to be the nationally and statewide accepted assessment tools, used by many Coalitions, as they are deemed to be reliable and based on solid research. While the Coalition may agree that the ERS tools are not perfect, they do provide valuable information on what areas may need improvement and also highlight areas of strength. To supplement the ERS and provide another evaluation dimension, the Coalition is looking at other tools that put greater emphasis on interaction and relationships, areas that are considered absolutely critical to a quality program and that the Coalition believes to be of paramount importance in creating the solid social and emotional foundation for children that is the basis for learning and future success.

Important Updates:

- The scholarship program is up and running with 32 teachers receiving scholarships at SCTI, MCC and USF and inquiries coming in each week. Please encourage your teachers to take advantage of this opportunity.
- To support continuing professional development and education we will offer individual meetings and consultations to assist teachers and directors as they set career and educational goals and make a plan to meet those goals.
- We are also working toward implementing a local WAGES program which would offer bonuses for teachers, tied to educational achievements and retention at the same location.
- Mini grants will again be offered, and will be available for 1, 2 and 3 star sites.
- There are funds for the supplemental payments for the 4 and 5 star sites, however some of you indicated that you may not be interested in this benefit and we would gladly work with you to determine a better alternative.
- The NCircle training on the specific domains of the ECERS will again be offered with an additional NCircle series on the ITERS. .
- A variety of incentives will be available for completion of training series with demonstrated implementation and might include training materials, classroom materials, or sets of books.
- The Directors Connection is being revamped for next year.
- The PAS training series will be repeated, starting this fall. A variety of activities and trainings will be offered, to accommodate requests to meet the needs of both experienced directors and those who need more hands on assistance and support
- Coaching will continue for sites that have an improvement plan.
- Beginning in August, short term coaching will be offered for sites that are 3, 4 or 5 stars to assist with a specific area or areas that the director identifies as needing improvement. There will be a form posted that the directors can use to request this short term consultation as needed.

Licensing Violation Question

Some providers have asked what impact licensing violations have on achieving a star level. The Coalition reviews licensing reports regularly and is aware that many sites have had a licensing violation at some point in the year. In most instances violations are corrected right away and the provider is back in compliance. If a serious violation occurred and remained on a provider's record, that would be taken into consideration when determining the upcoming star level. Please note that such licensing violations may have occurred after the initial star level was assigned. The Coalition would not go back and modify the star level unless a site had its license suspended or revoked. Any serious violations that occurred after the star level was awarded to a provider would be taken into consideration when awarding the upcoming star level.

Going Forward

On a final note, from the assessments coming in, we can see that many of you made tremendous strides in improving quality this year; and based on the survey we asked you to complete, many providers are pleased with the supports offered through the Look for the Stars program. However, along with the positive feedback in the survey there were also concerns expressed, which we are committed to addressing. Some of you contacted staff directly so we were able to take action right away to correct the issue or help clarify a misperception. Some of you chose to communicate anonymously and we respect your decision to do so. However, the more we can understand your specific concerns and what supports would be most helpful to you, the more we will be able to provide the assistance you need to succeed.

As always, we thank all of you for what you do for young children each and every day and we applaud your ongoing commitment to high quality early learning environments!

