

THE WHY, WHAT, WHEN, AND HOW OF THE
NEW BETTER BEGINNINGS LEVELS – 4, 5, & 6

*provided by the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education to the
University of Arkansas, Early Care and Education Projects*

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1. WHY are there New Better Beginnings Levels?

First, it is essential to recognize the importance of the three current levels. Levels 1, 2, and 3 serve as a great foundation and have been very effective in building the QRIS system in Arkansas. Early childhood providers must start where they are and move up or forward. The early childhood professionals who worked on and built the first three levels have always planned for higher levels. *ECEP Trainers/Coaches support providers and facilities by learning about and maintaining quality levels.*

The facilities that have achieved Level 3 status have been there for years and are not able to go further in the current system. It is time, and they are ready to attain even higher levels of quality.

2. WHAT are the levels and examples of the most dramatic changes?

Better Beginnings is a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) implemented in Arkansas to raise the quality of care in licensed early childhood facilities. It is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education programs. Program types include center-based care, family childcare, and school-age care programs (called “stand-alone” programs when they do not serve children under age 5).

Levels 1, 2, and 3 of Better Beginnings is a “building block” approach which means that programs must meet all requirements at one level before moving to the next. Licensing, or the *Minimum Licensing Requirements*, is the foundation of Better Beginnings. The requirements of Level 1 help the administrator or primary caregiver start the process for quality improvement. At Level 2, the staff becomes more involved in the process — and Level 3 sets even higher requirements in all component areas.

Levels 4, 5, and 6 expand and build upon the foundation of the previous three levels. With programs committing to pursuing additional higher levels in the quality rating scale, the benefits and outcomes predict an inclusive community of care and learning. Programs that have obtained Level 3 status can now work toward reaching an even higher level of quality. Unlike the previous three levels, Levels 4, 5, and 6 have a broad menu of options and a point system. The accumulation of points determines the new quality level.

The quality of care and education and the interactions for children, families, and communities will be increased in Better Beginnings accredited programs in each of the following components:

- Program Administration
- Child Development and Assessment
- Educational Learning Environment and Environmental Assessments
- Child Health and Safety
- Family and Community Engagement

3. WHEN will the anticipated rollout start and how will that look?

The center-based and family childcare home models are both ready to be piloted. The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education first plan to hold the pilots, then make necessary revisions afterwards, and, hopefully, take it for promulgation at the next session after completion of that work.

4. HOW is the information about the new levels communicated?

The marketing and media group, The Communications Group, Inc., will assist with the announcement plan. The Better Beginnings Guide and the rulebook for Better Beginnings are ready for both center-based and family childcare home models.

5. Any additional information regarding QRIS in Arkansas?

Arkansas and five other states are part of a Learning Table – a QRIS Think Tank through the BUILD Initiative.

NOTE

1. The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education furnished this information to the University of Arkansas Early Care and Education Projects in April 2019 for the purpose of providing an updated status to ECEP Trainers during their annual inservice meeting.
2. Everything regarding Levels 4, 5, and 6 is still in draft form at this point.
3. Any information provided in this document is subject to change.
4. For any information or to provide feedback on the new levels, please contact DCCECE at (800) 445-3316 or via the Better Beginnings website at arbetterbeginnings.com