

MARYLAND EXCELS

CHECK FOR QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD
AND SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAMS



Guidebook for Family, Center-Based, and School-Age Child Care Programs

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Maryland EXCELS Overview

Maryland EXCELS is a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). A QRIS is a framework used to recognize, assess, improve and communicate the level of quality in early childhood and school-age care and education settings. Quality Rating and Improvement Systems are used to raise the quality of care and education and to support and improve children’s development and teacher competencies. A QRIS awards ratings to family and center-based child care, public school education programs, and school-age child care settings that meet increasingly higher standards of quality in key areas. EXCELS stands for **Ex**cellence **C**ounts in **E**arly **L**earning and **S**chool-Age Care. Maryland EXCELS is designed to increase family and professional awareness of the elements of high quality child care and education, to recognize and support professionals who are meeting those standards, and to educate families and communities about the importance of choosing high quality child care and early childhood programs for their children.

There are over 10,000 child care programs serving children every day in licensed settings across the state. Maryland has implemented a Quality Rating and Improvement System as a central component of the State’s commitment to its children. Quality Rating and Improvement Systems have emerged nationally as a systematic way to measure and promote high quality early childhood and school-age programs. Maryland EXCELS is a systematic way to distinguish the level of quality in these programs and to provide parents with the knowledge to make informed choices on behalf of their children. Higher quality care and education lead to greater cognitive, language, and social skills for children, which are key measures of school readiness. The goal is not to influence parents’ choice, but to inform it.

Maryland EXCELS has three main goals:

1. To *recognize programs* that provide quality care and education and to help professionals make targeted improvements to their programs by:
 - measuring and improving quality;
 - increasing the number of programs prepared to serve children with special needs;
 - improving the professional experiences of early childhood and school-age educators in Maryland; and
 - recognizing professionals who go beyond what is required in order to provide high quality programming for children.
2. To *strengthen families* through quality early childhood and school-age care and education by:
 - informing parents about the value, importance, and goals of quality early education and care;
 - producing positive outcomes for children; and
 - supporting parents as their child’s first and life-long teacher.
3. To *inform parent choice* by:
 - providing information to help families seek quality child care and early education programs;
 - educating parents about the components of quality child care and early childhood programs; and

- encouraging parents to request and expect high-quality care and education.

Programs participating in Maryland EXCELS use a web-based system to progress through a set of standards based on the type of program. The Standards are designed to help programs assess their strengths and needs and to create a pathway for improvement. Using the online system, programs provide evidence that demonstrates that each criterion is being met. Each set of standards is divided into five main content areas:

1. Licensing and Compliance
2. Staff Qualifications and Professional Development
3. Accreditation and Rating Scales
4. Developmentally Appropriate Learning and Practice
5. Administrative Policies and Practices

Maryland EXCELS is a block rating system; all standards within each check level must be completely met in order to qualify for that check level rating. As programs move up through the check levels, the expectations for each content area become more rigorous.

Definition List and Relevant Terminology

Accreditation – A process that validates that a program is employing quality processes and procedures in delivering care and education that conforms to national standards. Although many professional organizations accredit child care and education programs, Maryland recognizes accreditation by the following accrediting organizations:

- [Advanced Education, Inc](#) (AdvanceED)
- [American Montessori Internationale/USA](#) (AMI/USA)
- [American Montessori Society](#) (AMS)
- [Association of Independent Maryland Schools](#) (AIMS)
- [Association of Waldorf Schools of North America](#) (AWSNA)
- [Council on Accreditation – After-School Accreditation](#) (COA/ASA)
- [Maryland State Department of Education](#) (MSDE)
- [Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Elementary and Secondary Schools](#) (MSA-CES)
- [National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs](#) (NAC)
- [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (NAEYC)
- [National Association for Family Child Care](#) (NAFCC)
- [National Early Childhood Program Accreditation](#) (NECPA)

Accreditation Self-Study – The process of implementing a formal comprehensive program assessment, completed by an individual program, to prepare for an external program evaluation. MSDE Division of

Early Childhood Development Accreditation Project refers to this process as “self-appraisal” while NAEYC and NAFCC use the term “self-study.”

Activity Plan – See Lesson Plan.

Additional Achievements– A recognition of services and program improvement processes that are over and above the requirements outlined in the Maryland EXCELS standards.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – Enacted in 1990. Congress intended that the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with mental or physical disabilities, thereby removing societal and institutional barriers, and increasing a person’s right to fully participate in all aspects of society.

Assessment – Measurement or evaluation of children, classroom, or program.

- Child assessment – An instrument and related processes used to measure the child’s progress. Examples include Work Sampling, curriculum related assessments, developmental checklists, and observational notes demonstrating progression.
- Program administration assessment – An instrument and related processes used to measure the program’s business practices. Examples include Program Administration Scale (PAS) or Business Administration Scale (BAS).
- Comprehensive classroom and program assessment – An instrument and related processes used to measure classroom or overall program practices. Examples include state and national accreditation, Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS), School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS), and Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS). See also Environment Rating Scale.

Assessment Practices Statement – A written description of a program’s policies on when and how child assessments are conducted and who conducts them. A high quality statement of assessment practices includes:

- the purposes and uses of assessments;
- the type(s) of assessments used;
- how assessors are trained to conduct assessments;
- how and with whom assessments are shared;
- how and where child assessment information is stored; and
- how the results of child assessments are used by the teaching staff to guide and inform their instructional practices and to individualize learning activities.

Benefits – Contributions made by the program/center on behalf of its employees or to its employees as an incentive towards sustained employment. Benefits are provided in addition to salary and may or may not include financial contributions. Typical benefits include, but are not limited to: medical insurance,

dental insurance, vision plan, professional development reimbursement, emergency/inclement weather leave, reduced child care rates for children of staff, tuition reimbursement, paid training, mileage reimbursement for training and education, disability insurance, retirement plan, paid vacation, paid sick time, paid personal time, and/or paid holidays.

Breakthrough Center – Provides quality capacity building for programs participating in Maryland EXCELS and expands models of excellence to programs in the attendance areas of Title 1 schools. The Early Childhood Breakthrough Center provides two categories of support services:

- **Quality Improvement in and around Title 1 school** attendance areas, targeting early childhood programs with enrolled children who will transition into Title 1 schools (which are in school improvement); *and*
- **General Quality Capacity Building Services** (*available to all jurisdictions, with special focus on early learning and development programs serving children with high needs*).

Business Administration Scale (BAS) – A tool for measuring and improving the overall quality of business and professional practices in family child care settings.

Center Based Child Care (CBCC) – Refers to programs that are licensed as child care centers.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) – The [Child and Adult Care Food Program](#) provides funding for meals and snacks served in eligible child care centers, adult day care centers, family child care homes, and after-school programs. In order to be eligible for cash reimbursement, meals and snacks must meet specific nutrition requirements. In Maryland, the program is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and is administered by the Maryland State Department of Education's School and Community Nutrition Programs Branch.

Child Care Administrative Tracking System (CCATS) – Child Care Administrative Tracking System. Database maintained by MSDE.

Child Care Subsidy Program – Provides financial assistance with child care costs to eligible working families. See MSDE's [Child Care Subsidy](#) page for more information.

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) – An observational tool that provides a common lens and language focused on classroom interactions.

COMAR – Code of Maryland Regulations; subtitles and chapters of [Title 13A State Board of Education](#) govern early childhood programs in Maryland.

Community Resources – A collection of materials and information provided by the program that family members could access; resources may include parenting groups, workshops, local family-friendly events, and organizations to which a parent may be referred when a need arises.

Conditional Licensing Status – Licensing status that is issued for a period of up to 120 days when a professional who holds a Continuing License or Registration fails to remedy a violation as required.

Curriculum Planning Process – A statement shared with families and staff that describes and guides the manner in which a program plans for children’s learning. A high-quality statement includes:

- information regarding the program’s curriculum;
- how activities, materials, themes, and skills are selected;
- the frequency at which lesson plans are created;
- how materials are rotated;
- how individual children’s needs are met;
- when and how often staff meet to plan;
- how child assessment and observation informs the planning process; and
- how curriculum-related information is shared with families.

Daily Schedule – A written listing describing a predictable and consistent sequence of events. Consistent schedules and routines help children predict what will happen next and feel secure in their environment. According to COMAR, a developmentally appropriate schedule:

- promotes the sound emotional, social, intellectual, and physical growth of each child;
- is appropriate to the age, needs and capabilities of the individual child;
- includes opportunities for individual and group participation;
- includes a balance between self-selected and self-directed activities
- includes a balance between active and quiet periods
- includes period of rest appropriate to the age, needs, and activities of the child; and
- includes outdoor play in the morning and afternoon except that outdoor play need not be included
 - when the weather is inclement; or
 - in a before school program.
- considers that children attending before-school and after-school programs have attended an instructional program during regular school hours.

Developmental Checklist – A checklist, used by an educator, designed to monitor children’s cognitive, linguistic, social, and physical development over time. Developmental checklists are used to inform instruction, document progress, and alert an educator to potential delays.

Developmental Screening – A process that provides a general overview of a child’s abilities in order to identify those children who may require additional evaluation and assessment and to determine if there are developmental delays or other issues that need to be addressed. Depending upon the screening tool used, screening may be conducted by the child’s primary caregiver, teacher, pediatrician or family member.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) – Nationally recognized care and instructional practices that acknowledge the differing needs and developmental levels of children and are responsive to those needs and levels.

Discipline Policy – A policy that outlines the methods a program uses to appropriately manage and guide children’s behaviors.

Division of Early Childhood Development (DECD) – A division within the Maryland State Department of Education developed to assist, monitor, and develop policies, education, facilities, and general child care for infants and children birth to preschool as well as for school-age child care. The [Division of Early Childhood Development](#) at the Maryland State Department of Education is responsible for early care and education in Maryland. The main mission of the Division is to improve early education in Maryland so that young children are well prepared for school.

Domains of Learning /Domain Based Activities – Categories of learning processes such as motor skills, verbal information, intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, and attitudes. Research evidence on school learning suggests that generalizations about critical learning conditions and outcomes can be validly made within these categories, but not across them.

For [Healthy Beginnings](#) (Birth - Three Years) the domains are:

- a) Personal and Social Development
- b) Language Development
- c) Cognitive Development
- d) Physical Development

For the [Maryland Model for School Readiness](#) (Three - Five Years) the domains are:

- a) Social and Personal Development
- b) Language and Literacy
- c) Mathematical Thinking
- d) Scientific Thinking
- e) Social Studies
- f) The Arts
- g) Physical Development
- h) Health

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Revised (ECERS-R) – One of a series of standardized tools used to assess quality in early childhood group settings (ages 2 ½ - 5 years). Aspects assessed include space and furnishings, personal care routines, language reasoning, interactions, activities, program structure, parents and staff.

Early Learning Guidelines – A set of expectations and guidelines for what children know and can do at specified age ranges. *Healthy Beginnings* (Birth - Three Years) and *Maryland Model for School Readiness* (Three - Five Years) are examples of Maryland’s early learning guidelines.

English Language Learners – **ESL** (English as a second language), **ESOL** (English for speakers of other languages), and **EFL** (English as a foreign language) all refer to the use or study of English by speakers with a different native language. These terms are most commonly used in relation to teaching and learning English, but they may also be used in relation to demographic information.

Enforcement Action – An action taken by the Office of Child Care, Licensing Office that may result in Emergency Suspension, Suspension, or Revocation.

Environment Rating Scales (ERS) – A set of standardized tools used to assess quality in early care and education and school-age child care programs. The tool identifies a program’s areas of strength and areas needing improvement in the following categories: Physical Environment; Basic Care; Curriculum; Interaction; Schedule and Program Structure; and Parent and Staff Education.

- **ECERS-R** *The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised*: designed to assess group programs for preschool-kindergarten aged children, from 2 through 5 years of age.
- **ITERS-R** *The Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised*: designed to assess group programs for children from birth to 2 ½ years of age.
- **FCCERS-R** *The Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised*: designed to assess family child care programs conducted in a provider’s home.
- **SACERS** *The School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale*: Designed to assess before and after school group care programs for school-age children, 5 to 12 years of age.

Family Child Care (FCC) – Family Child Care is defined in Family Law Article, 5-501(e), annotated Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR), and means the care given to a child younger than 13 years old or to the person with developmental disabilities younger than 21 years old in place of parental care for less than 24 hours a day, in a residence other than the child’s residence, for which the professional is paid in cash or in kind. The Office of Child Care registers, inspects, and regulates Family Child Care in Maryland.

Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale - Revised (FCCERS-R) – One of a series of standardized tools used to assess quality in family child care programs conducted in a professional’s home. Aspects assessed include: space and furnishings for care and learning, basic care, language and reasoning, learning activities, social development, and adult needs.

Family Engagement – Building relationships with families that support family well-being, strong parent-child relationships, and the ongoing learning and development of parents and children alike. Family engagement happens in the home, early childhood settings, school, and community. See [The Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework: Maryland’s Vision for Engaging Families with Young Children](#).

Family Conferences/Parent Conferences – Formal opportunities for family members and program staff to discuss and share information on children’s development, strengths, areas of concern and any other issues that parents/guardians or program staff wish to address.

Family Handbook/Parent Handbook – A written handbook designed to assist children and their families that includes program policies and procedures, teacher guidelines for children within the program, and general information about the program.

Fully Licensed/Registered – There are two stages through which a professional’s license or registration is processed. An applicant must first apply for an Initial License or Registration that is valid for two years. At the end of the two-year period, the professional must apply for a Continuing License or Registration. If the professional is not granted a Continuing License or Registration after the two-year period, (s)he may no longer operate.

Healthy Beginnings: Supporting Development and Learning from Birth through Three Years of Age – A set of guidelines developed by MSDE/Division of Early Childhood Development to ensure that the people who care for infants and young children have the knowledge and resources to support and encourage children to grow and learn. The [Healthy Beginnings](#) guidelines were developed to help those living or working with young children recognize appropriate behaviors and set realistic expectations for infant, toddler, and preschooler growth, development, and learning. Originally compiled in 2007 by a workgroup composed of early childhood professionals, the guidelines were revised in 2009-2010 to ensure the information continues to meet the goals of being family-friendly, accurate, and developmentally appropriate. An online [Activity Planner](#) provides families and educators with simple engaging and developmentally appropriate activities for children.

Incremental Salary Scale – A written salary scale of increasing rates of pay or pay ranges that, at a minimum, considers the employee’s position, education level, and related employment experience.

Independent Evaluation – Objective program feedback conducted by trained external professionals; the use of an approved rating scale by a trained/reliable assessor who is not an employee of the program.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) – A written plan developed in conjunction with parents, educators, service coordinators and other professionals (such as special educators, school district representatives, etc.) that describes actions and services needed to meet the individual special needs of a child, usually age 3 through 21. The plan is normally updated at least yearly.

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) – A written plan developed in conjunction with parents, educators, service coordinators and other professionals (such as special education service professionals, early childhood evaluators, etc.) that describes actions and services needed to meet the individual special needs of a child, usually from birth through age 2. The plan is normally updated at least every six months.

Infants and Toddlers – Children from birth through eighteen months (infants) and eighteen to twenty-four months (toddlers), as defined by Maryland State Department of Education, Office of Child Care for the purposes of licensing.

Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scale - Revised (ITERS - R) – One of a series of standardized tools used to assess quality in infant and toddler programs (birth through 30 months). Aspects assessed include: space and furnishings, personal care routines, listening-talking, activities, interactions, program structure, parents and staff.

Judy Center – Judith P. Hoyer Early Child Care and Family Education Centers or "[Judy Centers](#)," provide access to early childhood education and family support programs located at or near Title I schools. Judy Centers serve children birth through Kindergarten and their families in an effort to increase the number of children entering school ready to learn.

Lead Staff – The individual who has overall program or classroom responsibility for children enrolled in the setting, including child care provider and co-provider in the family child care setting.

Lesson Plan – A weekly or daily written instructional plan of activities designed to meet specific goals and objectives that are selected based on the needs of the group, as well as the needs of individual children; plan is based on observations, assessments, and milestones, which address a child's growth and development. Lessons should challenge children to use new competencies and focus on children's individual needs.

Literacy Opportunities – A variety of opportunities for children to engage in reading, writing, music and listening throughout the day. Examples include but are not limited to: story time, classroom library, listening area, music center, language charts, poems, story writing, story re-telling, puppet shows, felt board stories, etc.

Maryland Accreditation – Refers to the *MSDE Standards for Implementing Quality Early Childhood Programs* intended to define program standards across the various types of programs and transcend – but not replace – program specific licensing regulations. The accreditation process incorporates program standards, indicators, and descriptions of best practices for prekindergarten, kindergarten, center-based child care, Head Start, and school-age programs. The standards focus on the administration, operation, and family/community partnership of classroom-based programs. By pursuing and successfully completing MSDE Accreditation, child care, Head Start, and other non-public programs will receive Accreditation and public school early childhood programs receive Validation. The term Validation is used for public school programs that operate within public schools that are already state accredited.

Maryland Child Care Credential Program (or Maryland Credential Program) – The program recognizes child care professionals who go beyond the requirements of Maryland state licensing and registration regulations. There are six staff credential levels and four administrator levels. Each level recognizes a

child care professional's achievement of a specified number of training hours, years of experience and professional activities. All regulated family child care professionals and child care center staff members are eligible and encouraged to participate. The [Maryland Child Care Credential Program](#) is regulated under [COMAR 13A.14.09](#).

Maryland Child Care Resource Network (MCCRN) – Twelve regional child care resource and referral centers that serve every community in Maryland. The [Maryland Child Care Resource Network](#) provides leadership and services designed to improve the quality, availability, and affordability of child care across the state. The MCCRN is administered by Maryland Family Network under a contract with the Maryland State Department of Education.

Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program – A family-centered system of early intervention services for young children with developmental delays and disabilities and their families. Through local Infants and Toddlers Programs, services are offered throughout the state and may include: audiology, physical therapy, occupational therapy, transportation, speech-language pathology, family training, special instruction, assistive technology, health services, and home visits. For more information, see [Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program](#).

Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) – An assessment and instructional system designed to provide parents, teachers, and early childhood professionals with a common understanding of what children should know and should be able to do upon entering kindergarten. It incorporates professional development and research based practices in early childhood education in terms of instruction, assessment, family, community, and continuity of education from birth to grade twelve for promoting school readiness for all children.

Maryland Family Network (MFN) – The organization that spearheads the development of a statewide, comprehensive system of support for pregnant women, children ages birth to five, and their families and caregivers. [MFN](#) includes LOCATE Child Care to help parents find quality child care options, Family Support Centers, training and e-learning services for early childhood professionals, and technical assistance for programs and individuals seeking to develop high quality programs for children.

Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Development, Office of Child Care – The Office of Child Care (OCC), within the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Early Childhood Development is responsible for licensing and monitoring all child care centers and family child care homes in Maryland. The office administers Maryland's Child Care Subsidy program for working families, the state's Child Care Credentialing Program and Maryland EXCELS Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Mission Statement – A formal, brief, written statement of the purpose of a program or organization. It guides the action of the organization, articulates its overall goals, and provides a sense of direction. A mission statement reveals what a program wants to be and whom it wants to serve. It is that "enduring" statement of purpose that distinguishes one organization from other similar enterprises.

Nutrition Policy – A written policy that describes a program’s commitment to preventing childhood obesity by improving the nutrition and physical activity of all children. See [Let’s Move! Child Care](#).

Observation Documentation – A collection of observational and anecdotal notes, portfolios of individual children’s work, photographs and recordings of children’s activities and growth, done in an organized fashion in order to aid in curriculum and activity planning.

Online Profile – Compilation of documentation within the EXCELS web-based system that enables a program to achieve and display a check level rating.

Performance Evaluation Tool – A written annual performance appraisal conducted by the supervisor for all staff. Performance evaluations may include an opportunity for the employee to complete a self-evaluation to reflect upon his/her performance, career goals, and areas for growth. High quality performance evaluation tools should include the following as best practices:

- Evaluation criteria that are mostly objective and behavior-based;
- Evaluation criteria that are tied to specific responsibilities included in the employee’s job description;
- Evaluation ratings that are based upon review of multiple sources of evidence such as samples of work, parent feedback, co-worker feedback, quarterly teacher observations, and tasks performed outside of his/her job description;
- Setting skills and professional development goals for the next year;

Philosophy Statement – A statement that provides a clear, concise description of the program’s beliefs, principles, or self-definition.

Portfolio – A purposeful collection of children’s work that illustrate children’s efforts, progress and achievement; an organized collection of artifacts or work samples that presents an individual's developmental and educational progress.

Preschool for All – The Judith P. Hoyer Early Care and Education Enhancement Preschool Services Grant, which supports the [Preschool for All](#) initiative, was established to provide funding for the provision of prekindergarten services for three and four-year-olds attending early childhood programs in a non-public setting in collaboration with local school systems.

Professional Development Plan – A detailed outline articulating an individual’s intended progress toward completion and/or maintenance of a credential, degree and/or necessary certification(s) or for gaining/improving knowledge in a specified area of study. The [Professional Development Form](#) is created by MSDE and is completed by the individual owner/director or child care employee.

Program Administration Scale (PAS) – A tool for measuring the overall quality of business and professional practices in center-based child care settings.

Program Coordinator – An employee of Johns Hopkins University, Center for Technology in Education whose primary functions are to provide online and telephone support to EXCELS participants, provide and/or suggest targeted technical assistance and professional development, and to review and rate evidence uploaded by programs.

Program Goals – A specific set of defined objectives aligned with the children’s needs and the program’s mission that the program has set to achieve.

Program Improvement Plan – A system that identifies a program’s current level of performance and a concrete plan for increasing performance in specified areas, including school readiness goals and objectives. Program improvement is a continuous process that considers all aspects of the program.

Provisional Licensing Period – An applicant may be issued a license or registration on a provisional basis when the applicant needs additional time to meet all applicable requirements for the Initial License or Registration and after determining that the health and safety of the children in care are not in imminent danger. A provisional licensing or registration period may be granted for up to 120 days.

Public Prekindergarten – A state-funded program for four-year-old children who are from families that are economically disadvantaged or homeless. The overall goal of prekindergarten is to provide learning experiences to help children develop and maintain the basic skills necessary to be successful in school. The prekindergarten program provides appropriate experiences that nurture the literacy, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of young children.

Quality Assurance Specialist – An employee of the Maryland State Department of Education’s Office of Child Care whose primary functions are to provide regional support for Maryland EXCELS participants, conduct ratings verifications visits and random site visits, conduct final review of a program’s Maryland EXCELS check level, and assist programs in locating technical assistance and professional development. [Quality Assurance Specialists](#) are assigned to work with specific regional areas of the state. One specialist is the statewide Credentialing contact for Maryland EXCELS programs that need assistance with Credentialing issues related to EXCELS.

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) – A QRIS is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. QRIS award quality ratings to early and school-age care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards. By participating in their State’s QRIS, early and school-age care providers embark on a path of continuous quality improvement. More than 30 states have developed quality rating and improvement systems and most states are in some phase of development. Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

Recognized Curriculum – The Maryland State Department of Education recognizes several curricula as being of historic significance and merit. While these curricula are not identified as state-recommended curricula, programs using these approaches are eligible to receive the same funds as programs that have

selected to use state-recommended curricula. These three programs have also been identified because of the strength of their teacher certification and accreditation programs. See [Early Childhood Curricula of Historic Significance](#).

Recommended Curriculum – State recommended tools that are aligned with the State’s prekindergarten and kindergarten curricular frameworks, also known as the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR)/State Curriculum (SC). For infants, toddlers and three year old children, the recommended list of resources aligns with [Healthy Beginnings: Supporting Development and Learning from Birth through Three Years of Age](#). The [State-recommended curricular](#) resources also align with selected pedagogy standards of the guidelines of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards.

Redirection – A positive discipline technique where the adult changes the child’s direction or focus from a negative behavior/experience to a positive one. Additional resources on positive behavior are available via [Maryland’s Early Childhood Mental Health Project](#), [Maryland Family Network](#), and [Maryland Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning](#).

Reflection – A positive discipline technique where the adult encourages the child to recall and/or think about a behavior, feeling, or experience. Additional resources on positive behavior are available via [Maryland’s Early Childhood Mental Health Project](#), [Maryland Family Network](#), and [Maryland Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning](#).

Retirement Plan – A benefit offered to employees that provides financial support after a pre-determined length of service and/or upon reaching a pre-determined age.

School-Age Care (SAC) – Programs that operate as before- and after-school care programs including programs offering full-day child care for out-of-school days and summer months. These programs are licensed by the Maryland State Department of Education, Office of Child Care, Licensing Branch.

School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS) – One of a series of standardized tools used to assess quality in group care programs for children of school age (ages 5-16). Aspects assessed include: space and furnishings, health and safety, activities, interactions, program structure, and staff development. The evaluation process involves a visit to the setting by a trained observer.

School Readiness – The skills, behaviors, and dispositions that young children bring to their formal schooling in order to engage successfully in kindergarten. Maryland’s [School Readiness Report](#) is available on the MSDE website.

Screen Time Policy – A program’s policy regarding the purpose, availability, and limitations related to the use of media, including but not limited to computers, television, videos, tablets, video games, etc.

Self-Assessment – A process for programs to evaluate their services and management systems and to refine practices toward program improvement and the provision of high quality care. Conducting a self-

assessment in Maryland EXCELS results in the program/provider creating a Program Improvement Plan based upon the results of the self-assessment that identifies areas of strength and areas for improvement. See also Accreditation Self-Study.

Self-Evaluation – See Self-Assessment.

Staff Handbook – A handbook that includes the policies, procedures, and guidelines for staff members employed within the program.

Staff Performance Evaluation – See Performance Evaluation Tool.

Substantial Compliance – No more than one inspection in the last 12 months with findings of non-compliance in Injurious Treatment; Child Protection; Supervision; or Capacity, Group Size and Staffing.

Tiered Reimbursement Program – The Maryland Tiered Reimbursement program was available from 2001 – 2013. The Tiered Reimbursement program paid quality differential payments to providers who met quality standards and who accepted Child Care Subsidy. As of July 1, 2013, Maryland EXCELS became the system for tiered reimbursement payments to providers who accept Child Care Subsidy and who meet quality standards. Programs that publish and maintain a check level rating of 3, 4 or 5 are automatically eligible to receive the tiered reimbursement differential payments for Child Care Subsidy.

Tiered Quality Rating Improvement System – Another term for Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Transition – A movement, either mentally or physically, from one state/place to the next. Transitions occur as children move between home and the child care program, between school and the school-age program, during the day from one activity to another, and year to year from classroom to classroom or from the program to a school setting.

Transition Plan – A written plan that includes processes and activities to facilitate transitions for children and families. These plans may be individualized to meet the specific transition needs of children and families and/or they may be developed to provide a consistent transition process for all children and families.

Women, Infants and Children (WIC) – A national health program that provides access to supplemental nutrition for low-income pregnant and nursing women and their children (prenatal to age 5) who are at nutritional risk. The program provides some foods, health care referrals, and information on healthy eating.

Written Daily Communication – Communication between the teacher/ program and family members that includes information about daily routines (eating, napping, toileting, etc.) and any additional pertinent information about the child's day or the program.

Registration and Application

Any licensed or registered center-based program, Head Start, family child care professional, public prekindergarten or school-age program that is open and operating is eligible to participate in Maryland EXCELS. Professionals participating in Maryland EXCELS are expected to be engaged in an ongoing process of self-evaluation and program improvement.

Before the process of uploading documents can begin, programs must first **register** with and then **apply** to Maryland EXCELS.



1. Visit <http://www.marylandexcels.org> and click on the “Programs” tab.



2. Click “How to Apply” to begin the registration and application process.

Basics

How to Apply

Benefits to Programs

Professional Development

Technical Assistance

Healthy Beginnings and MMSR

Accreditation

Standard Test

How to Apply

If you are a center-based program, Head Start, family child care provider, public preschool, or school-age program that is in compliance with licensing and has been in operation for at least 12 months, you are eligible to participate in Maryland EXCELS. To register and apply for Maryland EXCELS, click on the Register and Apply button below.

Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis, and applicants will be accepted into cohorts of providers based on the following criteria:

- Application completeness
- Geographic and demographic information
- Availability of Program Coordinators

You will be notified of the status of your application via email. Any program that submits a completed application and is not accepted into a cohort will be placed on a waiting list for admittance into the next available cohort.

REGISTER AND APPLY FOR MARYLAND EXCELS

Please Note: We are currently running a closed Pilot Program for Maryland EXCELS. Check back to find out when Maryland EXCELS is open for enrollment.

3. Click “Register and Apply for Maryland EXCELS.”

Registration

4. Complete the registration information.

First Name *

Last Name *

Program Name * If your program has multiple locations, please also include your address.

Program Type *

Center Based: Public or private child care programs that provide care, part of the day, which include Head Start, Early Head Start, and nursery school.

Family Provider: A registered child care provider that operates a residence in which care is provided for no more than 8 children.

School Age: A public or private program that provides care for children who are school age, typically before and after the school day.

Large Family Provider: A registered child care provider that operates a residence in which care is provided for at least 9, but not more than 12 children.

Public Pre-K: State-funded prekindergarten programs that are administered by local school systems.

Licence/Registration/LOC# *

Email *

Confirm Email *

Username *

Password *

Confirm Password *

Register

Registration Tips

- ✓ Select a **uniquely identifiable Program Name***. If your program has multiple locations, consider adding your location to the Program Name. This name will be listed on the Maryland EXCELS website when a program requests to make a rating visible to the public.
- ✓ For **family providers***, when entering your program name please either use your first and last name OR the business name you use to identify your program.
- ✓ **Head Start Programs operated by local school systems** enter their School ID.
- ✓ **DOD Military Programs** will register with an assigned program ID. Please contact your [Quality Assurance Specialist](#) for assistance.
- ✓ If your center-based program includes before or after care, please select Center-Based as the Program Type. **Select School-Age if your program provides care ONLY to school age children.**
- ✓ If your **license number** has two numbers before the dash (ex. 21-12345) only enter the numbers **after** the dash.
- ✓ **Keep your username and password handy. You will need them for step 5.**

***Note:** An upcoming update to the Maryland EXCELS system will automatically list the program’s name as it appears on the license or registration. Programs and providers will still have the ability to list the name by which their program is known.

Login

- You are registered for Maryland EXCELS. Please login to your account.

Username *

Password *

Login

I forgot my username and/or password.

Register for a Maryland EXCELS Account.

5. Log in with Username and Password created in the previous step.

Home

Dashboard

Messages

Profile

Users

Account

MD EXCELS

6. Click "Apply to Participate in Maryland EXCELS."

Maryland EXCELS awards ratings to providers and programs that meet increasingly higher standards of quality in key areas. Maryland EXCELS is a voluntary program designed to recognize early care and school age education programs that provide quality care, encourage providers to increase the level of quality provided in their programs, and to provide parents with information and choices about quality child care.

Apply to Participate in MD EXCELS

Apply to Participate in MD EXCELS

Program Type *

Center Based
 Family Provider
 School Age
 Large Family Provider
 Public Pre-K

Established Since *

2012

Lead Contact *

Tanya Wright

Add New Member

Street Address *

City *

State *

Maryland

Zip Code *

County *

MD

Phone *

Website

Photo

Choose

Business Hours

From: *

To: *

Does your program participate in licensed reimbursement? *

Yes No

Does your program receive childcare subsidies for your children currently enrolled? *

Yes No

Submit Application

Center Based

Enrollment/Staffing Information

Age Range	Number of Children	Number of Classrooms	Number of Staff Members
Birth to 18 months	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
18-24 months	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
24-36 months	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
3-4 years	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
4-5 years	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Totals	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Is your program currently accredited? *

Yes No

7. Complete the Application and Enrollment information. Click "Submit Application."

Please allow two to four weeks for a member of the Maryland EXCELS team to process your application.

When your application has been reviewed and accepted, you will be assigned to a Program Coordinator who will contact you and help guide you through the Maryland EXCELS online system.

If you require assistance completing the application, please contact your [Quality Assurance Specialist](#) or email the Support Team at support@marylandexcels.org.

Using the Maryland EXCELS System

Internet Browsers

Maryland EXCELS is an online system and requires access to the Internet. The following internet browsers are recommended for maintaining and accessing your Maryland EXCELS profile:

- Internet Explorer 8 or higher
- Mozilla Firefox (latest version)
- Google Chrome (latest version)
- Safari 5 or higher

Logging On and Uploading Files

After your application has been accepted, you will receive an email notification. You can then log onto Maryland EXCELS and begin uploading evidence. To upload means to transfer or share files. In this case, you are transferring files from your computer to your Maryland EXCELS online profile. You will be uploading specific files that show how your program meets Maryland EXCELS standards and criteria.

To access your profile go to www.MarylandEXCELS.org, click on **Programs** and then click on **Login to Your Maryland EXCELS Account**. If you forget your username or password, follow the prompts on the Log In page to reset/retrieve them. If you are still having difficulty logging in, please contact your program coordinator or email support@marylandexcels.org.



After logging in, you may begin to upload evidence; your evidence will be computer files that show how your program has met each criterion within the Maryland EXCELS standards. Computer files have two parts: a file name and a file type. In the example below, “ParentHandbook” is the file name and .doc is the file type.

Example: ParentHandbook.doc

It is important that you have saved your documents using clearly defined names such as *Parent Handbook* or *ERS Improvement Plan*. This will make it easier for you to locate the documents that you want to upload as well as link them to other criteria as necessary.

The Maryland EXCELS system allows you to upload many types of files. The following document types are compatible with the system and all documents to be uploaded should be in one of the file types listed below:

- **Microsoft Office Files:**
 - Excel (.xls, .xlsx)
 - Word (.doc, .docx)
 - PowerPoint(.ppt, .pptx)
- **Images/Photographs:**
 - JPG (.jpg) or (.jpeg)
 - GIF (.gif)
 - PNG (.png)
 - TIFF (.tiff)
- **Other File Types:**
 - TXT (.txt)
 - PDF (.pdf)

To begin uploading evidence follow the instructions below.

The screenshot shows the MD EXCELS web application interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with tabs for Home, Dashboard, MD EXCELS, Appointments, and Messages. Below the menu, the user's active cycle information is displayed, including Date Check Level Achieved, Licence #, Status, and Coordinator. The main content area is divided into several sections, each with a green checkmark indicating completion. The 'Rating Scale and Accreditation' section is highlighted with a red box and contains a table with columns for 'Criteria' and 'Evidence to Upload'. The table has two rows, each with a 'Check Level' and a description of the criteria. The first row has a 'Check Level' of '✓' and the text 'No Requirements for this check level'. The second row has a 'Check Level' of '✓✓' and the text 'A program must meet all of the standards in check levels 1 and 2 in order to satisfy check level 2'. Below the table, there is an 'Accreditation' section with a description and an 'Open' button. Three callout boxes provide instructions: 1. 'Navigate to the “MD EXCELS” tab to get to your active cycle.' (pointing to the MD EXCELS tab), 2. 'Select the tab for the content area where you want to begin uploading documents.' (pointing to the 'Rating Scale and Accreditation' section), and 3. 'Click “Open” to begin to upload documents.' (pointing to the 'Open' button).

4. Click **“Post a Comment or File.”**

5. Select **“Upload new file”** to upload a document into MARYLAND EXCELS for the first time. Select **“Choose from previous uploads”** to select a file that has already been uploaded into your MARYLAND EXCELS portfolio. Select **“None”** if there is no file to upload but you wish to leave a question or comment for your Coordinator.

6. If uploading a new file, click **“Browse”** to locate the file on your computer. Select the file you want to upload. **Tip:** If your file has multiple pages, list the page number where the evidence can be found in the comment box. This will make it easier for your Coordinator to locate the evidence and expedite the process for review.

7. **OPTIONAL:** You can write a message to your Program Coordinator here. Comments in this area are used to ask/answer questions or to clarify evidence. **A comment is NOT considered evidence.**

8. Click **“Save.”**

Submitting Evidence for Rating

When you are ready to have documents within each criterion reviewed by a Program Coordinator, they must be submitted for review.

< Back to all Criteria

Comments and Evidence

Rating Scale and Accreditation

Criteria Improvement plan created for any ERS subscale score below 4.0.	Evidence to Upload ERS improvement plan for any subscale score below 4.0	Criteria check level: ✓✓✓ 1 File(s) 1 Comment(s)
		Current Status: Not Met

Current cycle Bulk Download All Files

George Provider - 12/03/2012 03:39PM EST Delete

This is my improvement plan.

ERS improvement plan.docx View Download

[Post a Comment or File](#)

[Submit for Review](#)

▶ Past Cycles

When you have uploaded all of the necessary documents for the selected criterion and you are ready for your Program Coordinator to rate the evidence, click **“Submit for Review.”**

You can expect your Program Coordinator to review and rate your evidence within approximately 30 days. When your Program Coordinator has rated or provided a comment on your uploaded evidence, you will receive an automated message from the Maryland EXCELS system. You may then log into Maryland EXCELS to view the comments and/or ratings.

Licensing / Compliance ✓✓✓✓✓

Staffing and Professional Development ✓✓✓✓✓

Rating Scale and Accreditation ✓✓✓✓✓

Developmentally Appropriate Learning and Practice / Child Assessment ✓✓✓✓✓

Administrative Practices and Policies ✓✓✓✓✓

Rating Scale and Accreditation

Criteria Met Submitted for Review Under Review New Rationale

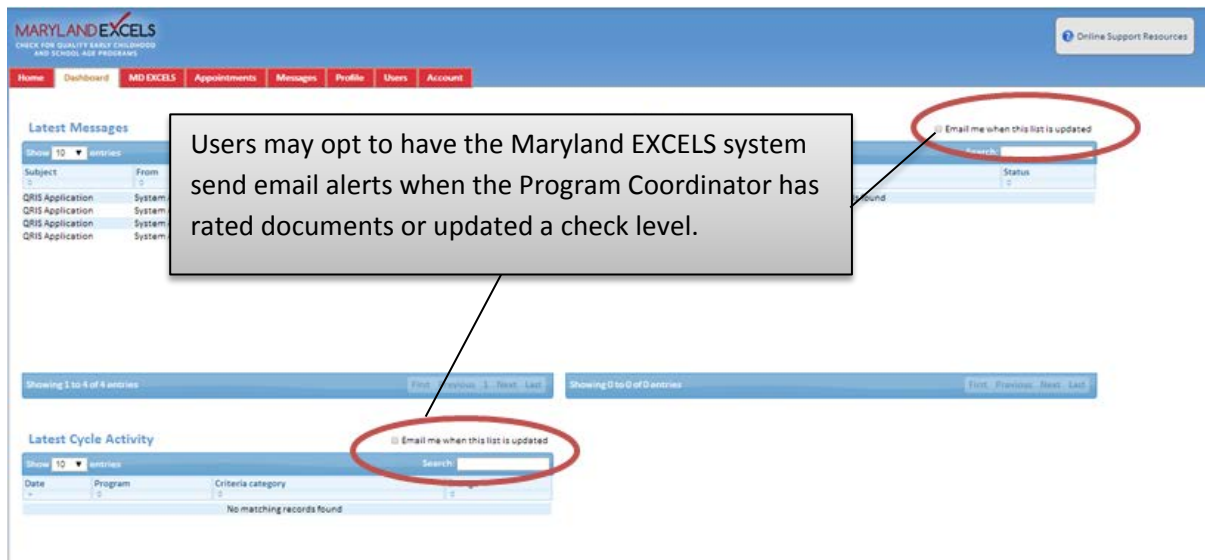
Criteria	Evidence to Upload	Evidence / Comments	Status
Check Level: ✓	Open This	File(s) Comment(s)	Criteria Met 01/29/2014 NAFCC
Check Level: ✓✓ A program must meet all of the standards in check levels 1 and 2 in order to satisfy check level 2	Open Visited or interviewed an accredited provider	Letter from Provider 0 File(s) 0 Comment(s)	Criteria Met 02/18/2014
Check Level: ✓✓✓ A program must me	Open Accreditation self study completed	Proof of accreditation self study 0 File(s) 0 Comment(s)	Criteria Met 01/29/2014 NAFCC
	Open conducted	FCCERS-R improvement plan 1 File(s) 1 Comment(s)	Submitted for Review 02/18/2014
			Criteria Not Met
			Under Review 02/18/2014

Green items have been met.

Yellow items are pending review from your Coordinator.

White items have not been met.

Orange items are under review.



The Maryland EXCELS Cycle

From the date of acceptance into Maryland EXCELS, you will have **one year** to upload your evidence, meet check level criteria, and receive an initial rating. Programs that have received a rating can continue to upload documents at any time to demonstrate progress towards or eligibility for a higher check level rating. A program is required to submit an annual update in order to maintain its current published rating.

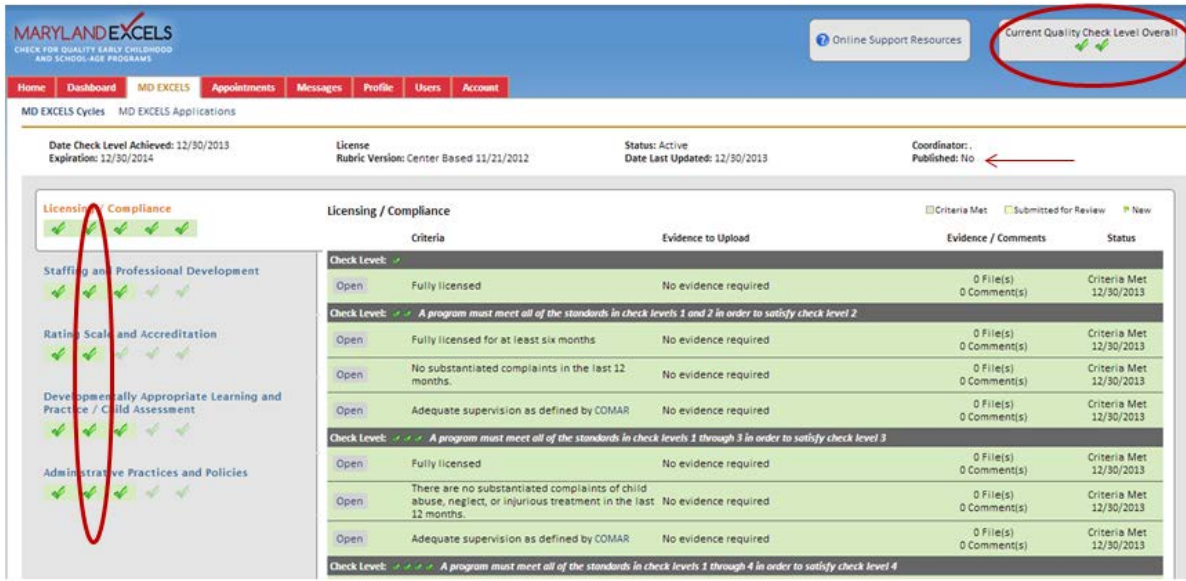
Maryland EXCELS operates in cycles. A cycle begins when a program’s application has been accepted. The cycle expiration is viewable from your MD EXCELS tab. A new cycle begins as soon as a program receives an overall check level rating.

Date Check Level Achieved: 12/04/2012	License #: 111111	Status: Active	Coordinator: Jane Coordinator
Expiration: 12/04/2013	Rubric: Center Based 12/04/2012	Date Last Updated: 12/04/2012	Published: No

Programs will always have the opportunity to move up a check level and can continue to work on meeting the criteria for higher check levels in each program area. You can continue to submit evidence to your online profile at any time.

Your Overall Check Level and Publishing Your Rating

Each time you meet all criteria for a check level, your Program Coordinator will calculate your rating. In a block rating system like Maryland EXCELS, your overall rating is based on the level at which all indicators are fully met.



Your level is valid until one of the following events occurs:

- You provide evidence that improves your rating;
- There is a change in the status of any of your program’s evidence (such as the loss of an accreditation);
- You fail to submit an annual update to Maryland EXCELS; or
- Your program is no longer in substantial compliance with COMAR regulations.

To ensure that your program’s profile remains current, you must notify your Program Coordinator via the Maryland EXCELS online system, of any changes affecting your license or registration status, including:

- Change of ownership;
- Change of location;
- Change in Program Type; and
- Any change resulting in the issuance of a new license or registration number.

Your Maryland EXCELS rating is not automatically visible to the public. Publishing your Maryland EXCELS rating means that your program’s name, overall check level, content area check levels, and additional achievements will be viewable on the Maryland EXCELS website on the [Find a Program](#) Page. Families and others will be allowed to search for programs by type, county, name, zip code, and/or check level. Families will also be able to use a Mobile Application to find Maryland EXCELS rated programs. By looking in the upper right corner of your Maryland EXCELS Profile, you will be able to see if your program is published or not (see image above). In the event that a check level rating should change, it is the program’s responsibility to inform parents of the change and to revise any publications used for

marketing that indicates the Maryland EXCELS check level rating. The new rating will be reflected on the Maryland EXCELS website for published programs.

If your program is ready to be published on the Maryland EXCELS website, select the Ready to Publish Button. The button is only visible when your program is eligible to be published.

The screenshot shows the Maryland EXCELS user interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Home', 'Dashboard', 'Maryland EXCELS', 'Messages', 'Profile', 'Users', and 'Account'. Below this, the current program is identified as 'ABC Childcare'. A summary section displays key information: 'Date Check Level Achieved: 01/29/2014', 'Expiration: 01/29/2015', 'License #: 20140128a', 'Rubric Version: Large Family Provider', 'Coordinator: Matthew Coordinator', 'Date Last Updated: 02/05/2014', 'Overall Cycle Level: 1', 'Cycle Status: Active', and 'Published: No'. A 'Ready to Publish' button is highlighted with a red circle. Below the summary, there are sections for 'Licensing / Compliance', 'Staffing and Professional Development', and 'Rating Scale and Accreditation'. The 'Rating Scale and Accreditation' section contains a table with columns for 'Criteria', 'Evidence to Upload', 'Evidence / Comments', and 'Status'.

Criteria	Evidence to Upload	Evidence / Comments	Status
Check Level: ✓			
Open	There is no criteria for Level 1.	No evidence required	Criteria Met 01/29/2014 NAFCC
Check Level: ✓✓	A program must meet all of the standards in check levels 1 and 2 in order to satisfy check level 2		
Open	Visited or interviewed an accredited provider	Letter from Provider	Not Met Not Reviewed 01/29/2014
Optional:	Programs may use the Accredited Center Visit/Conversation form.		

Your Maryland EXCELS profile will be reviewed by a MSDE Quality Assurance Specialist and once approved, your rating will be visible to the public. When your program’s overall check level is published, you will have access to many of the Maryland EXCELS benefits and bonuses. See [Benefits to Participating Programs](#) in this guide or on the Maryland EXCELS Website.

To view published programs select the **“Find a Program”** link on the Maryland EXCELS website.

Editing Profile Information

To edit any of the program information, go to the **“Profile”** tab. There are two pages in this section: **“Program Info”** and **“Program Details.”**

On the **“Program Info”** section, you can update your program’s name, phone number, and other identifying data.

If your program has more than one user, you can also change the designated Lead Contact on this screen.

The screenshot shows the 'Profile' page with the 'Program Info' section active. The navigation bar includes 'Home', 'Dashboard', 'MD EXCELS', 'Appointments', 'Messages', 'Profile', 'Users', and 'Account'. The 'Program Info' section contains the following fields:

- Program Name: Aladdin Center
- Established Since: 2008
- Lead Contact: George Provider
- Street Address: 6740 Alexander Bell Drive
- City: Columbia
- State: Maryland
- Zip Code: 21046
- County: Howard
- Phone: 410-516-9800
- Website: (empty)
- Photo: (Choose File) No file chosen
- Business Hours:
 - From: 07:00 AM
 - To: 06:00 PM

A 'Save Changes' button is located at the bottom of the form.

Program Details

Center Based

Enrollment/Staffing Information

Age Range	Number of Children	Number of Classrooms	Number of Staff Members
Birth to 18 months	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>
18-24 months	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>
24-36 months	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>
3-4 years	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>
5-6 years	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Totals	0	0	0

Is your program currently accredited? *
 Yes No

MSDE-Approved Accrediting Agencies:

- MSDE
- NAEYC
- NECPA
- American Montessori Society
- Middle States Commission

Date of Expiration

<input type="text" value="12/31/2016"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>

or

In the “Program Details” section, you can update your enrollment and staffing information as well as accreditation changes. Be sure to click on “Save Changes” at the bottom of the page when all changes have been made.

To change your password, go to the “Account” tab.

Account

Email *

New Password *

Confirm New Password *

To edit the user information, such as an email address or username or to add a new user, go to the “Users” tab.

Users

Show 50 entries Search:

First Name	Last Name	Status	Admin
George	Provider	Active	Yes

To add a new user, click on “Invite User.”

Click on the user’s row to update information such as name or email address.

Home Dashboard MD EXCELS Appointments Messages Profile **Users** Account

Users > Edit User

Edit User

First Name *

Last Name *

User's Email *

Confirm Email *

Username *

Title/Position

Mobile

Designate all admin features to this user

or Cancel

After editing user information, click “Save User.”

Home Dashboard MD EXCELS Appointments Messages Profile **Users** Account

Users > Invite

Invite User

First Name *

Last Name *

User's Email *

Confirm Email *

Username *

Title/Position

Mobile

Designate all admin features to this user

or Cancel

To **add an additional user** to your profile, go to the “Users” tab, click on “Invite User,” and fill out the requested information. If you would like this person to be able to make changes to your EXCELS profile, including uploading documents, check “Designate all admin features to this user.” Press “Send” to complete the invitation. **Before being able to log into EXCELS, the new user will receive an email asking him/her to confirm the invitation.**

Managing Multiple Programs

Users may manage multiple programs using one Maryland EXCELS log in. Select “**Add Another Program to this Account**” to add additional programs. Each program will operate independently by uploading and receiving check levels, but they can all be managed with the same Maryland EXCELS account.

MARYLAND EXCELS
CHILD CARE QUALITY RATES DEVELOPMENT
AND SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAMS

Home **Account** Online Support Resources

Welcome to Maryland EXCELS

Select a Program:

Erin Childcare

Callista Childcare

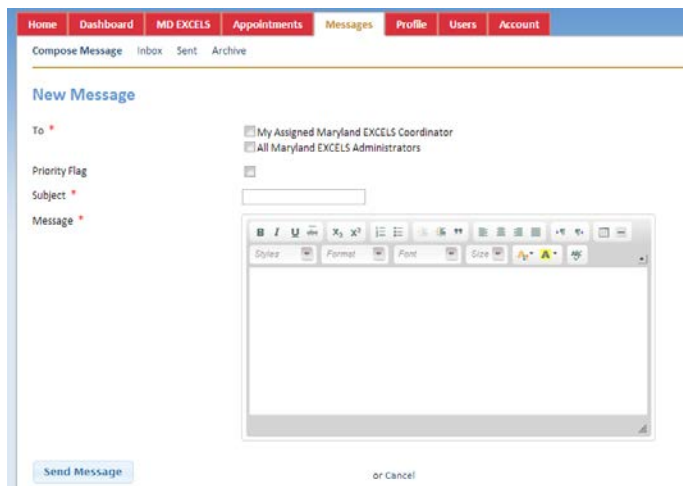
ABC Childcare

Maryland EXCELS © 2013. www.marylandexcels.org | Need Support? support@marylandexcels.org

Receiving and Sending Messages

To view your messages, go to the Messages tab and you will be able to view messages in your Inbox, Sent Folder, and Archive folder.

To send a message to your Program Coordinator, go to the “Messages” tab and click on “Compose a Message.” In the “To” field, select “My Assigned Maryland EXCELS Coordinator.” Check the “Priority Flag” box if your message is urgent. Compose your message and, when finished, click “Send Message.”



Maryland EXCELS Onsite Visits

There are several types of onsite visits as part of Maryland EXCELS. **In addition to the visits described below, all programs participating in Maryland EXCELS are subject to random monitoring visits conducted by a member of the Maryland EXCELS team.**

Rating Scale Assessments: Beginning at Check Level 4 when a program is eligible, an MSDE-approved assessor will conduct a formal onsite assessment using the Environment Rating Scale (ERS). These formal observations will be conducted on a random sample of classrooms or groups, including at least one classroom or group of every age range, and 50% of all classrooms, using the appropriate Scale. Programs ready for an ERS visit should communicate directly with the Program Coordinator. Once the program’s online profile has been reviewed, you will be able to complete an online request for an ERS visit. Please see Standard 3: Rating Scale and Accreditation for more information.

Head Start Programs will use their approved-agency Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) scores provided that the assessment was conducted within the past twelve months.

Programs that have a Preschool for All (PFA) grant from MSDE will request the CLASS for the PFA classroom and will request the ERS assessment for the other age groups in their program. Requests may be made through your Maryland EXCELS Program Coordinator.

Technical Assistance: Technical Assistance visits are conducted by trained specialists from the local Resource and Referral Agencies or MSDE Quality Assurance Specialists and can be requested through the Maryland EXCELS website or directly with your Resource and Referral Agency or Quality

Assurance Specialist. The purpose of Technical Assistance is to aid a program in making quality improvements to the care, environment, services, or education provided to children and families. These visits are either by program request or based on a recommendation by the Program Coordinator or Quality Assurance Specialist. To request Technical Assistance select the “Request Technical Assistance Button” next to the specific criterion with which the program needs help. Assistance may be provided onsite, by phone or email, or may be in the form of a group session with other local professionals. For assistance with the computer technology (such as log in difficulty, computer error messages, etc) please email support@marylandexcels.org.

The screenshot shows the Maryland EXCELS web application interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with tabs for Dashboard, Cases, Maryland EXCELS Cycles, Messages, and Account. Below this, a dropdown menu shows 'Selected Case: ABC Childcare - Current Cycle'. A summary section displays key information: Date Check Level Achieved (01/29/2014), License # (20140128a), Coordinator (Matthew), Overall Cycle Level (1), and Cycle Status (Ready for Publishing). Below the summary, there is a section titled 'Comments and Evidence' for 'Administrative Practices and Policies'. A button labeled 'Request Technical Assistance' is circled in red. The interface also shows criteria details, evidence upload options, and a rating section with radio buttons for 'Not Reviewed', 'Under Review', 'Criteria Met', 'Criteria Not Met', and 'Not Applicable'.

Quality Assurance Visit: A Quality Assurance Specialist may visit to provide additional technical assistance or to verify the accuracy of a Maryland EXCELS rating.

Accreditation Validation Visit: In order to achieve Check Level 5, programs must achieve accreditation through one of the [agencies recognized by Maryland](#). These visits are coordinated directly by the program and they require an evaluator from an approved accrediting agency to visit your program to observe, evaluate, and assess that your program meets the accreditation standards. These visits are not scheduled through Maryland EXCELS. For more information on accreditation view [An Introduction to Program Accreditation](#) or refer to the following sections in this Guidebook:

- Definition List and Relevant Terminology
- Standard 3 Accreditation and Rating Scale
- Alternative Pathways

Demonstrating Achievement of the Standards

Licensing and Compliance (LIC)

Rationale: *The state of Maryland has established rigorous standards for licensure. Licensing requirements ensure that all child care programs operating in the state of Maryland provide care to infants and children with consideration for their health and safety. These regulations cover staff/child ratios and group size, staff qualifications including training and professional development, supervision and treatment of children, preventing the transmission of communicable diseases, and criminal background checks for people working with or sharing space with children. Licensing regulations clearly define the minimum practices that must take place in a child care program in order to maintain licensure.*

All programs in Maryland EXCELS must be licensed or registered, open, and operating in order to meet Check Level 1. All programs participating at Check Level 2 or higher must have no pending enforcement actions and be in substantial compliance with Maryland’s Child Care Regulations. Substantial compliance means having no more than one inspection in the last 12 months with findings of non-compliance in Injurious Treatment; Child Protection; Supervision; or Capacity, Group Size and Staffing. At Check Levels 3 through 5, programs must also be out of provisional and/or conditional licensing status. For additional information about Licensing Requirements, see the [COMAR regulations](#).

Maryland EXCELS Participants with questions about an EXCELS rating in the area of Licensing and Compliance should review the licensing inspection report received from the program’s licensing specialist during or after a licensing visit. If questions persist, the program should contact their Quality Assurance Specialist.

Evidence to Gather for Licensing and Compliance

Most Maryland EXCELS Participants will not need to upload any documents for this content area. Inspection reports and licensing information will be reviewed via the Child Care Administrative Tracking System (CCATS) and the Electronic Licensing Inspection System (ELIS).

Programs operated by the Department of Defense will upload:

- Valid certificate to operate; and
- Serious Incident Reports and Corrective Action Plans.

Staff Qualifications and Professional Development (STF)

Rationale: *Early childhood and school-age professionals have a special responsibility for the health, well-being, and learning opportunities for children. Infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children all have unique needs and abilities. Child care and early education professionals provide loving, compassionate care and educational experiences, while maintaining the health, safety, and happiness of*

children. Ongoing training in the areas of child development, inclusive practices, learning environments, curriculum, health and safety, and assessment practices help staff members continue to provide research-based care that meets best practices in all areas of programming. Increasing staff members' knowledge and skills can improve the quality of the program, promote smoother transitions for children, reduce staff turnover, and improve a program's ability to move through the Maryland EXCELS system. Program managers, owners, and operators are encouraged to obtain proper training in the area of program administration and business practices.

Staff members working in child care programs or family child care homes are required to meet minimum standards for training and professional development as outlined in [COMAR](#) regulations in order to meet Check Level 1.

As a participating program in Maryland EXCELS, staff members are expected and encouraged to seek



continued professional development opportunities and to participate in [Maryland's Child Care Credential Program](#). To achieve Check Levels 2 and 3, participants must meet minimum credential levels or meet the equivalent [training requirements](#). The minimum training requirement for Check Level 2 is 45 clock hours of Core of Knowledge Training that includes a minimum of 20 clock hours in child development. The minimum training requirement for Check Level 3 is 90 clock hours of Core of Knowledge

training that includes a minimum of 20 clock hours in child development and 20 clock hours in curriculum methods.

To demonstrate proof of equivalent training for Check Levels 2 and 3 providers may upload one of the following:

- 45 Hour Child Care Certificate (for Check Level 2 only)
- 90 Hour Child Care Certificate
- AA degree or higher in early childhood education (ECE)
- College transcripts (if degree is not complete or in a field other than ECE)
- Child Development Associate (CDA) Certification
- Department of Defense Training Certificates
- Certificates from MSDE-approved workshops and training dated within 5 years

To achieve Check Levels 4 and 5, participation in Maryland's Child Care Credential Program is required.

Programs at all check levels will be asked to enter required information into the Staffing and Professional Development content area of their Maryland EXCELS account for each lead staff member, including family provider and co-provider. Click on “**Add a Staff Member**” and input the requested information for each lead staff. Family Providers should enter their information in addition to the co-providers information, if applicable.

The screenshot shows the 'Add a Staff Member' form overlaid on the 'Comments and Evidence' page. The form has the following fields: First Name, Middle Initial, Last Name, DOB, Start Date, End Date, Credentialed (radio buttons for Yes/No), and Lead Staff (radio buttons for Yes/No). There are 'Save' and 'Cancel' buttons at the bottom of the form. In the background, the 'Staff List' section has a red circle around the '+ Add a Staff Member' button. To the right, there is a summary table:

Credentialed Lead Staff	0% (0)
Non-Credentialed Lead Staff	100% (0)
Total Lead Staff	0

Please note: The End Date column is to be used only if a staff member leaves a program. The end date is the last day the staff member was employed.

Evidence to Gather for Staffing Qualifications and Professional Development

For specific requirements at each check level, refer to the Maryland EXCELS standards. This list is provided as a **general guideline** and your specific evidence may vary depending on the check level the program is attempting to achieve:

- Information on each lead staff, director, family provider, family co-provider (name, date of birth, start date)
- Current credential certificates and Credential ID for each lead staff, director, family provider/co-provider
- If necessary, equivalent training for each lead staff member, director, family provider, or co-provider (for Check Levels 2 and 3 only)

Programs operated by the Department of Defense will upload:

- Information on each lead staff, director, family provider, family co-provider (name, date of birth, start date)
- Current credential certificates and Credential ID for each lead staff, director, family provider/co-provider
- If necessary, equivalent training for each lead staff member, director, family provider, or co-provider (for Check Levels 2 and 3 only)

- Certificate of completion CDC Orientation Training
- CDC Entry Level and Skill Level Training
- College transcripts

Accreditation and Rating Scales (ACR)

Rationale: *The child care environment is a critical component of the quality of care provided in a program. The Environment Rating Scales provide a consistent, reliable, and comprehensive measure of classroom environment, program practices, and teacher/child interactions. The rating scales can be used as a self-assessment or an outside assessment and they measure the program's status and provide the groundwork for improvement plans. In addition to rating scales, accreditation by an outside source is another critical component of high-quality programming. Accreditation offers validation and recognition of a program's practices, and demonstrates a commitment to continued progress toward increasing levels of quality. The process of self-appraisal helps programs identify strengths and weaknesses and can be used as a "roadmap" to guide program improvement. For programs, external validation is also a valuable marketing and awareness tool, as it is a visible sign of quality for parents and community members.*

Accreditation

Maryland EXCELS is designed to support programs as they work to achieve success in all areas, and to recognize these significant milestones in a program's progress toward accreditation. For specific accreditation information, refer to the MSDE [Early Childhood Accreditation](#) page.

MSDE and Maryland EXCELS recognize the following accrediting organizations:

- [Advanced Education, Inc](#) (AdvanceED)
- [American Montessori Internationale/USA](#) (AMI/USA)
- [American Montessori Society](#) (AMS)
- [Association of Independent Maryland Schools](#) (AIMS)
- [Association of Waldorf Schools of North America](#) (AWSNA)
- [Council on Accreditation – After-School Accreditation](#) (COA/ASA)
- [Maryland State Department of Education](#) (MSDE)
- [Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Elementary and Secondary Schools](#) (MSA-CESS)
- [National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs](#) (NAC)
- [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (NAEYC)
- [National Association for Family Child Care](#) (NAFCC)
- [National Early Childhood Program Accreditation](#) (NECPA)

Programs currently accredited by MSDE and/or a recognized national accrediting organization will use the Maryland EXCELS Alternative Pathways. The Alternative Pathways give programs credit for components that have already been satisfied by the accreditation award. See the Alternative Pathways section in this guide.

ERS and CLASS

The Environment Rating Scales (ERS) and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) are program assessment tools designed for evaluating program performance and guiding program improvement. Programs holding current accreditation from an MSDE recognized organization are not required to have an ERS or CLASS assessment to meet Check Level 5 criteria for the Accreditation standard. For Level 5 published programs, the ERS assessment will be scheduled and conducted by an MSDE-approved assessor within the program's 3-year cycle, which begins on the date the program was first published as a Level 5.

ERS Self-Assessment

Beginning at Check Level 3, the program must conduct a self-assessment using the [Environment Rating Scales](#) (ERS). Programs must conduct a self-assessment for *one sampling of each age group using the appropriate scale*. For example, a center that consists of one infant room, one toddler room, and three preschool rooms would need to do self-assessments for: 1) one infant/toddler room using the ITERS-R and 2) one preschool room using the ECERS-R. Information on ordering scales is on the [ERS website](#); scales may also be purchased from most book retailers. ISBN numbers have been included below:

- *ITERS-R: The Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised* ISBN: 0807746401
- *ECERS-R: The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised* ISBN: 0807745499
- *FCCERS-R: Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised* ISBN: 0807747254
- *SACERS: School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale* ISBN: 0807735078

Onsite ERS Assessment

Programs may submit a request through the Maryland EXCELS website for an onsite ERS assessment to be conducted by an MSDE approved assessor, to meet requirements for check level 4. Requests may be made only by programs who have successfully achieved all of the criteria for check level 3. MSDE will schedule an onsite ERS assessment visit within two months of receiving the request. Providers will be asked to submit any dates that the program will not be in session (field trips, holidays, scheduled closings, etc.) Programs will be notified of the visit date and the name of the assessor in advance of the onsite ERS assessment. An assessment, using the appropriate rating scale, will be conducted for *at least* one classroom of all age groups. After programs receive their assessment results, they must develop program improvement plans as follows:

- Level 4: for any subscale below 4.5
- Level 5: for any subscale below 5.0

When does a program need an onsite ERS assessment?

Level 4: The ERS or CLASS assessment completed by an approved MSDE assessor is required to achieve a Check Level 4. Programs must have met all criteria for Check Level 3 before requesting an ERS or CLASS visit.

Level 5: Programs **published** at Check Level 5 are required to have an ERS assessment completed by an approved MSDE assessor, once every 3 years, dating from their first Level 5 published date. The MSDE approved assessor will contact the program to schedule the assessment in advance, within the program's established 3-year cycle.

For specific ERS information and requirements reference the Maryland EXCELS Standards. Professionals may also visit the [Environment Rating Scales Institute](#) for more information, including printable score sheets.

CLASS Self-Assessment and Onsite Assessment

Maryland EXCELS recognizes that Head Start programs are currently using the CLASS assessment tool to monitor and improve program performance. At check level 3, Head Start programs submit a CLASS self-assessment (ACR 2.3) and Program Improvement Plan (ACR 3.3). Head Start programs may submit their approved-agency CLASS assessment to meet ACR 1.4 provided that the assessment has been conducted within the past twelve months.

For Level 5 published Head Start programs, the CLASS assessment will be scheduled and conducted by an MSDE-approved assessor within the program's 3 year cycle, which begins on the date the program, was first published as a Level 5.

Program Improvement Plan

It is important to dedicate effort towards continuous quality improvement to ensure that educational opportunities and trusting relationships are provided to children and their families. Program improvement is a process, and each program will assess their strengths and opportunities for growth, and set achievable goals to improve; seeking feedback from the families who use their services and the staff employed by their program, when appropriate. Programs are encouraged to use the Program Improvement Plan as a resource to guide them as they achieve or maintain Maryland EXCELS ratings and to consider quality improvement as an ongoing opportunity for continuous growth.

After completing the ERS or CLASS self-assessment or having an onsite visit, programs must develop program improvement plans for any subscale score below a 4, 4.5, or 5 for Check Levels 3, 4, and 5, respectively using the *Program Improvement Plan* form on the Maryland EXCELS Website.

Program Improvement Plans must also include school readiness goals and objectives and program-specific goals; and for accredited programs, goals related to accreditation standards. The Maryland School Readiness Report details readiness data for the state of Maryland and its local school systems. Programs must consider their strategies for ensuring that each and every child reaches certain levels of social-emotional, cognitive, literary, and motor development. For example, the report shows that in Charles County 48% of English Language Learners are fully school-ready. A program in Charles County may include methods to increase school readiness for English Language Learners as one of its program improvement goals.

Using the results of the assessments, program priorities, and the school readiness report, programs should prioritize areas requiring improvement. For example, any health and safety issues identified during the assessment should be addressed as soon as possible.

Participants in need of assistance downloading or completing the Program Improvement Plan should contact their Program Coordinator or email support@marylandexcels.org.

Evidence to Gather for Accreditation and Rating Scale

For specific requirements at each check level, refer to the Maryland EXCELS standards. *This list is provided as a **general guideline** and specific evidence may vary depending on the check level the program is striving to achieve:*

- Accreditation Reflection and Planning Form
- Accreditation Visit Verification Form
- Verification that accreditation visit has been requested
- Letter or Certificate of Accreditation with any required renewal stickers, as needed
- Proof that Annual Report has been received by accrediting agency
- ERS or CLASS self-assessment
- ERS or CLASS score sheet completed by MSDE-approved assessors
- Program Improvement Plan

Developmentally Appropriate Learning and Practice (DAP)

Rationale: *Developmentally appropriate practices are those in which staff members evaluate children's needs and set expectations and goals that are reasonable for each individual child. Optimum learning takes place when children are provided with instruction, guidance, and support to meet challenges and gain new knowledge. High quality child care and early education programs aim to identify each individual child's needs, interests, and abilities, and to create learning experiences to support their growth and development. High quality programs serve each and every child, including children with disabilities or special health care needs. Inclusive programs implement practices and policies that optimize the learning experiences for all children in the program.*

Environment and Learning Materials

Quality early childhood and school-age programs are places where children learn, grow, and thrive; these programs provide children with a positive climate, proper learning materials, respectful interactions, and curricular resources that support school readiness. Children need time to experience teacher-prepared activities as well as time and opportunities to make choices about how they interact with the learning environment. The environment must be interesting, engaging, and cater to the various ways children learn.

The early childhood and school-age environment must be one in which children feel welcomed and respected. Bringing children’s culture, home language(s), and abilities into the setting helps create a culturally proficient environment for children and their families. Examples include but are not limited to:

- providing print and auditory materials in the children’s home language;
- inviting family or community members to share information and resources relevant to the child’s culture, background, diagnosis, or disability;
- displaying photographs of children’s families;
- ensuring that books, dolls, toys, and displays reflect the culture and ability of the children enrolled in the program;
- avoiding materials that depict bias and stereotypes;
- providing equipment that is accessible and appropriate for children of all abilities; and
- creating program policies that are flexible enough to meet the needs of children and families.

Positive Guidance

Social-emotional health is one of the most critical factors in a child’s healthy development and school readiness. Responsive relationships and positive discipline techniques create supportive environments where children can grow and thrive. Some examples of positive discipline techniques include:

- providing choices;
- using redirection;
- having clear rules and expectations;
- using reflection;
- using problem solving; and
- developing rules with input from older toddlers and preschoolers.

Providers needing assistance and support with positive guidance techniques may find the following resources useful:

- [Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project](#): The Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Consultation Project improves the ability of staff, programs and families to prevent, identify, treat and reduce the impact of social, emotional and other mental health problems among children birth through 5 years of age.
- [Maryland Family Network](#): Any provider in the state may contact their local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency and request assistance or consultation.
- [Maryland’s Online Training on the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning \(SEFEL\)](#): SEFEL training is designed to be used by center staff, family child care providers and home visitors. The focus is to support young children’s social and emotional development through a culturally sensitive approach that is responsive to the unique needs of programs, families, professionals, and communities.
- [Using Positive Discipline: A Guide for Child Care Providers](#) (brochure)

Curriculum, Planning, and Implementation

Creating an environment in which children learn and grow requires planning. Programs must create and implement lesson plans and activities that are engaging, appropriate, and meaningful. Selecting a developmentally and age appropriate curriculum is one of the important steps in providing a quality learning environment for children. Programs participating in Maryland EXCELS at Check Levels 2 and 3 are expected to use Healthy Beginnings, the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) or [a state recommended/recognized curriculum](#) as curriculum and lesson planning resources. At level 4, programs may use a curriculum that is *aligned with* a recommended/recognized curriculum or the MMSR. This alignment, which may be completed by the curriculum’s publisher, must show how the curriculum covers the goals and objectives of the MMSR or a recommended/recognized curriculum. At level 5, a program must use one of the curricula that is recommended or recognized by MSDE.

While school-age programs participating in Maryland EXCELS are not expected to utilize a specific curriculum, these programs are required to provide lessons and/or activity plans that are based on children’s ages, interests, skills, and developmental needs; such plans take into consideration that school-age children spend a substantial part of their day in a learning environment.

Screen Time

Early childhood experts agree that it is imperative to monitor young children’s exposure to screen time. In addition to concern over childhood obesity, there are studies that support that too much exposure to passive media may affect children’s development.

Programs participating in Maryland EXCELS are required to carefully consider how media is used in the program. When developing a screen time policy, a program must not just consider the amount of time spent with screens, but the content as well. A complete screen time policy includes:

- types of screens available to children (television, tablets, computers, etc.);
- purpose, availability, and limitations related to screen use;
- age(s) of children exposed to screens;
- how screen time usage is directly related to children’s learning;
- how staff facilitate learning and engage with children when screens are in use; and
- what other options are available to children when screens are in use.

Providers may find the following resources helpful when developing a screen time policy:

- [American Academy of Pediatrics: Media and Children](#)
- [Let’s Move! Screen Time](#)
- [MSDE Physical Activity Guidelines](#)
- [Preventing Obesity in Early Care and Education Programs](#) (page 58)
- [Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8](#)

Developmental Screening and Monitoring Developmental Progress

The purpose of Developmental Screening is to identify children who may require additional evaluation and assessment in order to determine if there are developmental delays. Currently, Developmental Screening is not required. When the use of Developmental Screeners becomes mandatory, the Maryland State Department of Education will make all programs aware of the requirements, including timelines and recommended screening tools.

Monitoring developmental progress happens daily and continuously in quality programs. Using informal and formal assessment tools such as anecdotal notes, observations, portfolios, and developmental checklists assists educators in documenting a child's achievement of developmental milestones. Monitoring developmental programs also informs instruction; educators use the knowledge gained from these assessment tools to:

- document children's growth and development;
- create lesson plans based on children's current knowledge, skills, and interests;
- identify goals for children's learning and plan activities to assist children in meeting these goals; and
- recognize any potential areas of developmental concern.

Evidence to Gather for Developmentally Appropriate Practice

For specific requirements at each check level, refer to the Maryland EXCELS standards. *This list is provided as a general guideline and specific evidence may vary depending on the check level the program is striving to achieve:*

- Daily Schedule for each group
- Philosophy Statement
- Statement describing selection and use of learning materials
- Written policy for positive behavioral practices (Discipline policy)
- Statement describing curriculum and lesson planning processes
- Recent lesson plan(s)
- Statement regarding the program's use of screen time
- Statement describing observation and assessment practices
- Developmental Checklist and other sample child assessment tools

Administrative Policies and Practices (ADM)

Rationale: *Sound business policies and practices help programs run smoothly and deliver the services families expect and deserve. Families and professionals commit to and understand the practices and policies that govern the program. Child care programs are responsible for providing care, support, and learning experiences for children in their program. A quality program recognizes the need to function as a sustainable business. Administrative policies and practices tie together licensing regulations, teaching, behavior management, inclusive practices, parent communication, health and safety issues, fiscal responsibilities, staffing, and overall leadership.*

Information and Polices

Informing families of the program’s rules, practices, and policies is essential to the operation of the program. Providing written documentation such as contracts and family handbooks ensures that everyone is aware of and agrees to policies that are put into place to benefit the children, staff, families, and overall program.

Nutritious Meals and Snacks

While the predisposition for obesity may begin before birth, the roots of obesity are often established between the ages of two and five years. Because children often eat at least half of their meals and snacks in a child care or school setting, careful planning of nutritious meals and snacks is essential to healthy growth and development.

Providers making a commitment to serve healthy food choices create menus that limit fat, sugar, and salt and include fresh fruits and vegetables. Providers also help families understand the importance of healthy food choices and are prepared to supplement meals from home as necessary.

The Child and Adult Food Program (CACFP) provides funding for meals and snacks served in eligible child care centers, family child care homes, and after-school programs. Participating programs are eligible for cash reimbursement for meals served, menu planning, and nutrition education. For nutrition resources and information on how to participate in CACFP, visit [Eat Smart Maryland](#). In addition to the CACFP, other resources are available to providers, such as:

- [Choose My Plate](#)
- [Eat Smart Maryland](#)
- [Let’s Move! Healthy Eating](#)
- [Let’s Move! Child Care Checklist Quiz](#)
- [Preventing Childhood Obesity in Early Care and Education Programs](#)

Family Engagement and Family Conferences

Family engagement is an essential component of high quality early care and education. Family engagement is about building relationships that support family well-being and strong parent-child relationships.

Although daily communication is one way to build relationships with families, setting aside time for conferences is equally as important. Doing so provides formal opportunities for educators and families to discuss children’s growth and development, share information, and set goals for the future. Family conferences strengthen the relationship between families and educators as partners in children’s education.

Programs participating in Maryland EXCELS at Check Level 2 or higher are required to demonstrate multiple types of family engagement. For example, inviting parents on two different field trips is ONE type of family engagement. Other examples of family engagement may include but are not limited to:

- inviting families to volunteer for events, trips, and classroom/center-wide activities;
- creating a committee for family members to assist with decision making, program improvement, fundraising, and other tasks;
- having parent bulletin boards or information tables with up-to-date and timely information on a variety of topics and opportunities for engaging in the program or community;
- providing information and resources on topics related to education, early intervention services, family networks, and community resources;
- allowing families to prepare classroom materials at home (cutting, sewing, computer projects, etc.);
- providing an open door policy for family members to visit the program unannounced;
- asking for family input on program improvement through the use of surveys, suggestion boxes and/or committees;
- conducting family conferences and parent workshops;
- holding events that bring the program, the community, and the families together;
- providing family communication through the use of newsletters, online resources (such as blogs or websites) and other methods;
- conducting home-visits;
- working with other professional organizations (colleges, universities, libraries, local schools, early intervention specialists, etc.) to offer joint parent-teacher workshops and trainings; and
- creating a family lending-library of parenting books and educational resources.

For more information on family engagement, see [The Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework: Maryland's Vision for Engaging Families with Young Children](#).

IFSP/IEP

Individual Family Service Program (IFSP) and Individual Education Program (IEP) are formal and legal documents that provide guidelines for the services and individual needs of children with disabilities. In order to meet the Maryland EXCELS criteria, parents are not required to share IFSPs/IEPs and providers are not expected to upload these documents. As partners in a child's education, early childhood and school-age programs participating in Maryland EXCELS should *request* that parents share these documents to help ensure that the child's needs are being met. Programs may request the specific information from the child's IFSP/IEP that relates to how staff can work with the child in partnership with the family and other service providers to assist in the child's overall development. Because the IFSP/IEP may contain information that parents feel is private, the parents may wish to have some portions of the IFSP/IEP remain confidential.

Providers needing additional information or resources on IFSP and IEP may visit or contact:

- [Maryland Family Network](#)
- [Maryland Learning Links: Early Learning Channel](#)
- [MSDE: Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education](#)

Staff

Staff handbooks, regular staff meetings, and performance evaluations help ensure that staff members are informed and prepared to work in the early childhood and school-age environments.

In a family child care program, family child care staff includes:

- the additional adult (a person required to be present when registered for more than 2 children under the age of two years); and
- an aide or an assistant employed by the provider to assist.

Family child care staff are limited to people who are paid employees. Staff for family child care does not include volunteers or substitutes (whether paid or not).

Community Resources

Sharing and accessing resources helps connect families, children, and educators to the community. Keeping a current list of agencies that provide support, education, or information is beneficial to children, families, and staff. Resources may include but are not limited to:

- special education/early intervention services;
- mental health services;
- social service agencies;
- child advocacy agencies;
- local library branches;
- local museums and cultural centers;
- educational resources for children or their parents;
- community colleges;
- job training opportunities for parents;
- pediatric services, other medical offices; and
- local parent support organizations.

Transitions

Children make many transitions through the day. They move from home to the child care program; from one activity to another; from one classroom to another; and from school to school-age program. Older preschoolers also make a transition from child care programs to school. High quality early childhood and school-age programs have plans in place to prepare children and families for transitions. Examples include but are not limited to:

- adding time in the daily schedule for transitions;
- adding transition activities in the daily lesson plan;
- creating adequate time and comfortable space for children to separate from parents;
- communicating with programs to and from which children transition;
- sharing developmental information when children transition to school; and
- creating a personal transition plan for newly enrolled children.

Evidence to Gather for Administrative Policies and Practices

For specific requirements at each check level, refer to the Maryland EXCELS standards. *This list is provided as a **general guideline** and your specific evidence may vary depending on the check level the program is attempting to achieve:*

- Family handbook, written agreement/contract
- Nutrition policy
- Recent menu
- Examples of family involvement
- Conference schedule and sign-up sheet
- Enrollment/intake forms documenting that program requests IEP/IFSP
- Schedule of special education services, if applicable
- Staff meeting schedule and sign-in sheet
- Performance evaluation schedule
- Performance evaluation tool
- Staff handbook
- Current salary scale
- Description of staff benefits
- Statement describing how program identifies, updates, and uses community resources
- Statement of transition plans

Recognition of Additional Achievements

Maryland EXCELS recognizes child care and public prekindergarten programs that provide services *over and above* those outlined in the standards. Programs that select and complete these additional recognitions will be acknowledged on the Maryland EXCELS “**Find a Program**” page and Maryland EXCELS Mobile App. For more information on how to achieve these recognitions, please see the contact information below.

Asthma Friendly Child Care: Asthma is one of the most common chronic diseases of childhood. This program is designed to address environmental controls and asthma management and education. Becoming an Asthma Friendly Child Care site can be used as Professional Activity Units (PAUs) for child care center staff (1 unit), director (2 units), and family child care providers (2 units) when applying for a Maryland Child Care Credential.



Contact Rachel Hess-Mutinda, Asthma Program Coordinator at rachel.hess-mutinda@maryland.gov or call 410-767-2196 for more information.

Health and Wellness: The early years set the stage for healthy life-long habits. Making a commitment to serve healthy foods and promoting physical activity have a positive impact on child development. Programs can achieve the Health and Wellness Achievement by participating in at least one of the initiatives below:



- Let's Move! Child Care Quiz and Action Plan: <http://www.healthykidshealthyfuture.org/>
- Nutrition & Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC) <http://www.napsacc.org/>
- Healthy Howard (for child care centers, family providers, and nursery schools in Howard County): <http://www.healthyhowardmd.org/healthy-howard/healthy-childcare>

Program Administration Scale (PAS) for Center Based Programs/Business Administration Scale (BAS) for Family Providers: In addition to providing quality child care, successful programs have sound



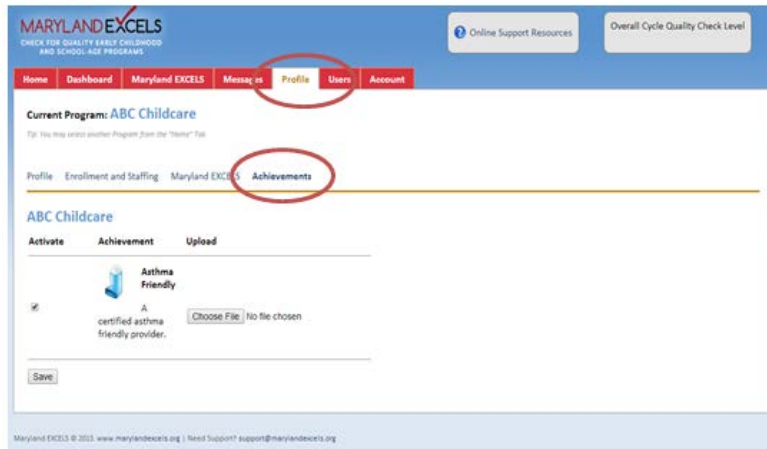
business practices and strong organizational structures. The PAS and BAS assess quality in ten areas: human resources development, personnel cost and allocation, center operations, child assessment, fiscal management, program planning and evaluation, family partnerships, marketing and public relations, technology and staff qualifications.

Program Administrators who complete the PAS or BAS trainings are eligible for two Professional Activity Units (PAUs) for the participating director, staff, or family child care provider when applying for the Maryland Child Care Credential. For information on PAS/BAS, visit:

http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/mdexcels.htm

To upload documentation showing participation in these Additional Achievements, select the "Profile" tab and then click "Achievements." To upload a document, click "Choose a file." After selecting the proper file, click "Save." Use the messaging system to alert your Program Coordinator if you are participating in any of these programs. Your Program Coordinator will review any documentation uploaded by your program.

When the program has been awarded an Additional Achievement, consideration should be given to making program improvements related to the specific achievement. For example, in the Let's Move Child Care tool, a program may not meet 100% of the criteria in the checklist, but the program can select which of those criteria that are not met will be added to the Program Improvement Plan as a goal for the coming year.



Completing the Annual Update

After a program completes one year at a published Maryland EXCELS check level, an annual update is due. The annual update, required to maintain your current check level rating, asks you to verify the accuracy of all program information such as contact information, numbers of classrooms, enrollment, numbers of staff, accreditation status, and other program information. It also asks you to review uploaded documents and verify that they have not changed significantly. You will be asked to either confirm that no data or documentation previously entered has changed significantly or to upload their replacements. If all criteria required for a higher check level are met, your rating will be re-calculated based on the documentation submitted by your program.

Accreditation Pathways

Programs that have demonstrated a commitment to quality by pursuing accreditation from a recognized state or federal organization need not duplicate work to fulfill certain requirements that have already been met through the accreditation process. Accreditation from any of the following organizations enables EXCELS participants to automatically meet certain criteria:

- [Advanced Education, Inc](#) (AdvanceED)
- [American Montessori Internationale/USA](#) (AMI/USA)
- [American Montessori Society](#) (AMS)
- [Association of Independent Maryland Schools](#) (AIMS)
- [Association of Waldorf Schools of North America](#) (AWSNA)
- [Council on Accreditation – After-School Accreditation](#) (COA/ASA)
- [Maryland State Department of Education](#) (MSDE)

- [Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Elementary and Secondary Schools](#) (MSA-CES)
- [National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs](#) (NAC)
- [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (NAEYC)
- [National Association for Family Child Care](#) (NAFCC)
- [National Early Childhood Program Accreditation](#) (NECPA)

During the application process, programs will be asked to indicate whether or not they are accredited and, if so, by whom and the accreditation expiration date. After application acceptance, programs can log on and look into the far right column of the current Maryland EXCELS cycle to see the criteria for which the Maryland EXCELS system automatically gives credit.

CURRICULUM CHECK LEVELS 2 - 3.				
Open	Curriculum planning is based on children's interests/skills	Curriculum planning process	0 File(s)	Criteria Met 05/21/2013 NAFCC
		This criterion was automatically met because of NAFCC accreditation.		
Open	Curriculum is guided by Healthy Beginnings, MMSR or approved curriculum *This requirement fulfills check levels 2 and 3.	Curriculum planning process	0 File(s)	Not Met
		This criterion has not yet been met.		
Open	Children are observed for developmental progress	Assessment Practices	0 File(s)	Criteria Met 05/28/2013
		This criterion was met through documentation.		

Benefits to Participating Programs

Programs participating in Maryland EXCELS will have access to a variety of resources, both face-to-face and online, including professional development, information about available funding, and a vast professional learning community of other professionals to share thoughts, practices, ideas, challenges, and encouragement.

Professional Activity Units

There are several opportunities for participating programs to earn Professional Activity Units (PAUs). PAUs are required for participation in the [Maryland Credential Program](#). Documentation of PAUs are submitted with Credential applications and do not need to be uploaded into the Maryland EXCELS system. For more information on ways to earn PAUs, visit the Maryland EXCELS [Benefits](#) page.

Program Bonuses

Program Bonuses are awarded to programs based on the overall check level rating. Bonuses for Check Levels 1, 2 and 3 are one time only upon attainment of a program’s check level. The frequency and on-going amount for Check Levels 4 and 5 bonuses is to be determined based upon available funding.

Family Child Care:

Check Level	Bonus Amount
1*	\$ 50
2*	\$ 150
3*	\$ 300
4*	\$ 500
5*	\$ 800

Large Family Child Care:

Check Level	Bonus Amount
1*	\$50
2*	\$200
3*	\$400
4*	\$800
5*	\$1,000

Center Based Programs and School-Age Only Programs

Check Level	Capacity 1-50	Capacity 51-100	Capacity 101+
1*	\$50	\$100	\$150
2*	\$250	\$500	\$750
3*	\$400	\$800	\$1,200
4*	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$3,000
5*	\$1,500	\$3,000	\$4,500

Grants and Supports

Programs participating in Maryland EXCELS at all check levels will have access to the following quality improvement grants:

- [Accreditation Support Fund](#)
- Curriculum Fund (Reopening soon!)
- [Child Care Quality Incentive Grants](#)
- [Credential Bonuses and Support](#)
- [Child Care Career and Professional Development Fund](#)
- [Training Vouchers and Reimbursement](#)

Targeted Technical Assistance

Participating programs will have access to targeted technical assistance from Maryland EXCELS Program Coordinators and [Quality Assurance Specialists](#) as well as from [The Maryland Family Network Resource and Referral Centers](#).

Tiered Reimbursement/Subsidy Differential Payments

Maryland EXCELS participants are eligible to receive differential Child Care Subsidy Payments. Differential payments range from 10 percent (10%) to 44 percent (44%), depending upon the age of the child, the type of care, and the check level rating of the program. To be eligible for tiered reimbursement/subsidy differential payments, a program must have a **published** Maryland EXCELS rating at level 3, 4 or 5. Please see the chart below for the percentage of tier payments to programs.

Subsidy Differentials/Tier Payments	Maryland EXCELS Check Level		
	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
FAMILY CHILD CARE			
Under 2 years of age	11%	22%	29%
2 years of age and over	10%	21%	28%
CHILD CARE CENTER			
Under 2 years of age	22%	37%	44%
2 years of age and over	10%	19%	26%

Purpose of Tiered Payment:

The purpose of the tiered payment is to provide recognition and incentive to the program for participating and achieving a Maryland EXCELS rating at the highest levels. Programs and providers have choices regarding the use of the tier payment. For example, tier payments may be utilized to:

1. Offset the cost of child care for families receiving Child Care Subsidy;
2. Provide salary and benefits enhancements for staff;
3. Make quality improvements to the program.

As part of the continuous quality improvement process, providers and programs are encouraged to reflect on and assess the needs of their program with input from staff and families, when making decisions regarding the use of the tier payment

Coming in 2014-2015: Additional State Family Payment to Check Levels 3, 4 and 5

The State will pay an additional amount to programs that have a published Maryland EXCELS rating at Check Level 3, 4 or 5 and are accepting Child Care Subsidy. This payment is in addition to the tier payment described above. The purpose of the Additional State Family Payment is to benefit the family as a cost reduction if the program charges the difference between the amount of the voucher, the State-assigned co-pay and the program's typical market rate. Note that child care programs have the option to waive any additional charges for families receiving Child Care Subsidy, but are required to charge the family the State-assigned co-pay. The Additional Payment will be based upon a percentage of the

Subsidy amount for the child and the check level rating of the program. The purpose of the additional family payment is to provide an incentive for families to choose high-quality child care for their children.

Marketing

Participation in Maryland EXCELS is an excellent opportunity to share information about quality initiatives with families and community partners. Maryland EXCELS supports programs and provides information to families and community members regarding high-quality care. Advertising a Maryland EXCELS rating of Check Level 1 or higher demonstrates to parents and the community that a program is committed to excellence and is continually working toward greater achievements. Programs are encouraged to display their check level rating prominently. Rather than simply letting families know whether a program is accredited or not accredited, Maryland EXCELS will outline the levels of quality that exist at each check level. Information about Maryland EXCELS participating professionals will be available on the website. Parents and families will be able to use the map and a mobile phone application to locate programs with a published Maryland EXCELS rating.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the connection between Licensing and Maryland EXCELS?

The Maryland State Department of Education's Office of Child Care is responsible for issuing licenses, regulating child care, monitoring caregiver compliance with licensing requirements, conducting licensing visits, investigating complaints, and taking enforcement actions against programs found to be in violation of child care regulations. A license to operate an early care and education or school-age child care facility is required by the state for programs participating in Maryland EXCELS. Maryland licensing requirements are written into Maryland legislation and compliance is required for all child care professionals to operate legally in the state. Licensing requirements focus on health and safety regulations and are primarily designed to ensure that child care programs are in compliance with rules and regulations that will keep children safe and healthy while in a child care facility. Licensing regulations set the minimum standards to ensure that the basic health, safety, and developmental needs of children are being met.

Maryland EXCELS includes licensing history as one component of the Maryland EXCELS standards. As a participating professional in Maryland EXCELS, maintaining basic health and safety requirements is essential. Maryland EXCELS takes programs to the next level by requiring programs to take ownership of the self-assessment, improvement, and demonstration of the quality of care they provide. Through Maryland EXCELS, providers determine strengths and weaknesses, identify quality improvement goals, and develop clear plans to achieve those goals. Maryland EXCELS provides the platform to share progress with parents and gives families and community members the knowledge to make informed decisions about child care arrangements.

How does Maryland EXCELS address inclusion in child care settings?

Inclusion means inviting all children to participate in a child care program and intentionally planning for ways to help each and every child be successful, regardless of his or her ability levels. Maryland EXCELS standards encourage participating programs to: understand the individual needs of all children; value and appreciate individual differences; assist in providing experiences that build skills and confidence; understand, utilize, and share community resources; provide equal opportunities and rights for all; and build partnerships through collaboration.

My program is already accredited. Why should I participate in Maryland EXCELS?

Participation in Maryland EXCELS has many benefits including access to program bonuses, quality improvement grants and funding, full credential bonuses, and training and technical assistance support. A Maryland EXCELS rating is also a great marketing tool and will help communicate to your families that you are committed to continuing quality improvement. Families and community stakeholders will be able to access information to locate programs with published Maryland EXCELS ratings on the website and through a mobile phone application.

Who do I call for help?

Providers may call their Maryland EXCELS Program Coordinator or Quality Assurance Specialist with questions. Providers may also email support@marylandEXCELS.org.

What if I forget my username or password?

On the log in screen, click on the link “I forgot my username and/or password” and follow the prompts. You can also email support@marylandEXCELS.org.

What is the connection between the Center for Technology in Education (CTE) at Johns Hopkins University, MSDE, and Maryland EXCELS?

The Center for Technology in Education (JHU) is a part of the Johns Hopkins University School of Education. CTE has partnered with MSDE on several projects, including Maryland EXCELS. Within this partnership, CTE provides teaching and technology resources, policy support, and conducts research on Maryland EXCELS and other MSDE projects. CTE provides operational management of the Maryland EXCELS website under MSDE’s leadership.

What if I do not agree with my Maryland EXCELS Rating?

Programs may request a review by emailing support@marylandEXCELS.org with the subject line “Request for Review.” You will be asked to identify the issues related to your request. Requests are submitted to the Maryland EXCELS Advisory Committee, made up of child care providers and other professionals who will conduct a review of your concerns and will communicate their decision within 45 days of receipt of the request.

Links and Resources

Links

COMAR Regulations	http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/regulat.htm
Child and Adult Care Food Program	http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/schoolnutrition/nutr_prog/day_care.htm
Child and Adult Care Food Program Eligibility Calculator	https://marswebprod.msde.state.md.us/MARS2P/EligibilityCalculator.aspx
Early Childhood Mental Health Project	http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/program/ECMH.htm
Environment Rating Scales	http://www.ersi.info/index.html
Maryland EXCELS Resource Page	http://marylandMaryland EXCELS.org/81419
Maryland Family Network	http://www.marylandfamilynetwork.org/
Maryland Healthy Beginnings	http://www.marylandhealthybeginnings.org/
Maryland Infant/Toddler Specialists	http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/earlyinterv/infant_toddlers/directories/local_program.htm
Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR)	http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/early_learning/MMSR.htm
Maryland State Department of Education, Recommended Curricula	http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/preschool_curriculum/
National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Early Childhood Education	http://www.nrckids.org/
Program Administration Scale (PAS) / Business Administration Scale (BAS)	PAS: http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/C2B72206-CBB3-4859-8CB6-293AAC3A1BD3/32783/PASbookletJul12.pdf BAS: http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/C2B72206-CBB3-4859-8CB6-293AAC3A1BD3/32784/BAStrifold_Jul12.pdf

Accrediting Organizations Recognized by MSDE

Agency	Website	Phone Number
Advanced Education, Inc (AdvanceED)	http://www.advanc-ed.org/	888-413-3669
American Montessori Internationale/USA (AMI/USA)	http://amiusa.org/	585-461-5920
American Montessori Society (AMS)	http://www.amshq.org/	212-358-1250
Association of Independent Maryland Schools(AIMS)	http://www.aimsmddc.org/	410- 761-3700
Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA)	http://www.whywaldorfworks.org/	919-667-7993
Council on Accreditation - After-School Accreditation (COA/ASA)	Coanet.org	212-797-3000
Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)	http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/credentials/Accred.html	877-605-1539
Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Elementary and Secondary Schools (MSA-CES)	http://www.msa-cess.org/RelId/33637/ISvars/default/Home.htm	267-284-5000
National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs (NAC)	http://www.naccp.org	800-537-1118
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)	http://www.naeyc.org/accreditation/	800-424-2460
National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)	http://nafcc.org	801-886-2322
National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA)	http://www.necpa.net/AboutOurAccreditation.html	800-505-9878

Resource and Referral Contacts – Maryland Family Network

Arundel Child Care Connections (Anne Arundel County)

Arundel Center, 4th Floor
44 Calvert Street
PO Box 2700
Annapolis, Maryland 21404
Main: 410-222-1712
Web: <http://arundelccc.org>
Email: welcome@arundelccc.org

Baltimore City Child Care Resource Center

1001 Eastern Avenue, 2nd Floor
Baltimore, Maryland 21202
Main: 410-685-5150
Web: <http://www.bccrc.org>
Email: child_care@bccrc.org

Child Care Links (Baltimore County)

1101 North Point Boulevard, Suite 112
Baltimore, Maryland 21224
Main: 410-288-4900
Web: http://www.child_carelinks.net
Email: info@child_carelinksinc.org

Child Care Links of Harford and Cecil Counties

2105 Laurel Bush Road, 105
Bel Air, Maryland 21015
Main: 443-512-0461
Web: http://www.hcchild_carelinksinc.org
Email: info@hcchild_carelinksinc.org

Child Care Choices (Carroll County)

255 Clifton Blvd., Suite 319
Westminster, Maryland 21157
Main: 410-751-2917
Web: http://www.fcmha.org/child_carechoices/
Email: child_carechoices@fcmha.org

Child Care Choices (Frederick County)

226 South Jefferson Street
Frederick, Maryland 21701
Main: 301-662-4549
Web: http://www.fcmha.org/child_carechoices/
Email: child_carechoices@fcmha.org

Howard County Child Care Resource Center

3300 North Ridge Road, Suite 380
Ellicott City, Maryland 21043
Main: 410-313-1940
Web: <http://www.co.ho.md.us/DisplayPrimary.aspx?id=4294967456>
Email: child_care@howardcountymd.gov

Montgomery County Child Care Resource Center

332 West Edmonston Drive
Rockville, Maryland 20852
Main: 240-777-3110
Web: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Program.aspx?id=CYF/CYFChildCareResourceRef-p212.html>
Email: earlychildhoodservices@montgomerycountymd.gov

Prince George's Child Resource Center

9475 Lottsford Road, Suite 202
Largo, Maryland 20774
Main: 301-772-8420
Web: <http://www.childresource.org>
Email: pgcrc@childresource.org

The Promise Center (Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties)

29958 Killpeck Creek Court
Charlotte Hall, Maryland 20622
Main: 301-290-0040 or toll-free 1-866-290-0040
Web: <http://www.thepromisecenter.org>
Email: info@smccrc.org

Apples For Children (Allegany, Garrett and Washington Counties)

6 West Washington Street
Suite 210
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740
Main: 301-733-0000
Web: <http://www.applesforchildren.org>
Email: apples@applesforchildren.org

Lower Shore Child Care Resource Center (Wicomico, Somerset, and Worcester Counties)

Suite 500

East Campus Complex

Salisbury University

Power and Wayne Streets

Salisbury, Maryland 21801

Main: 410-543-6650

Web: <http://www.lowershoreccrc.org>

Email: kjkarten@salisbury.edu and lscrc@salisbury.edu

Chesapeake Child Care Resource Center (Caroline, Kent, Dorchester, Queen Anne's and Talbot Counties)

Chesapeake College

1000 College Circle

P.O. Box 8

Wye Mills, Maryland 21679

Main: 410-822-5400 (follow operators directions) ext. 2358#

Web: <http://www.cccrc.org>

Email: crc@chesapeake.edu