

PETITION FOR ADOPTION OR AMENDMENT OF RULE

Submitted to:

North Carolina Child Care Commission

Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE)

Petitioner Name & Title: Roberta Yates, Early Childhood Support Coordinator

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1. Proposed Amendment to Rule 10A NCAC 09 .3207

Amend Rule 10A NCAC 09 .3207 to add the following subsection: (c) In addition to nationally recognized accrediting bodies, the Commission shall also recognize local accreditation programs that meet or exceed equivalent quality standards, including but not limited to the 'Pathways to Accreditation Program' administered by the Children's Council of Watauga County. Programs accredited through Pathways to Accreditation shall be considered equivalent to nationally recognized accreditation for the purposes of meeting quality rating, financial enhancement, and program improvement requirements under the North Carolina Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).

2. Statutory Authority

This petition is submitted pursuant to G.S. 150B-20 and the Commission's authority under G.S. 110-85 through 110-106 to establish and amend rules regarding the licensing, quality, and operation of child care facilities in North Carolina.

3. Effect on Existing Rules

The proposed amendment expands the scope of recognized accreditation options to include a local program, Pathways to Accreditation, without removing or altering recognition of national accreditation bodies. This increases accessibility to high-quality accreditation for programs, especially in rural and underserved areas.

4. Supporting Data

The Pathways to Accreditation Program has demonstrated measurable outcomes:

- Quality Standards: Modeled after NAEYC's rigorous framework, with eight detailed standards covering education, physical environment, health and safety, relationships, staff development, curriculum, family partnership, and behavioral support.
- Retention and Morale: Participating programs report increased staff morale, higher

retention rates, and greater professional competency.

- Financial Sustainability: The program provides free training, mentoring, and classroom resources, along with monthly enhancement bonuses for qualifying programs, reducing financial barriers for participation.
- Impact on Children: Research supports that high-quality early education improves long-term outcomes in education, health, and career success.

5. Effect on Existing Practices and Costs

Recognizing Pathways to Accreditation will:

- Provide rural and small programs with an accessible alternative to national accreditation.
- Maintain cost neutrality for the state, as Pathways is locally funded through the Children's Council and external grants.
- Reduce financial burden on programs by offering free or subsidized resources.
- Increase the number of high-quality accredited programs in NC without increasing costs for families.

6. Those Most Likely to Be Affected

- Early Childhood Education Programs: Especially rural or small providers who face barriers to national accreditation.
- Educators: Will have expanded access to free professional development, mentoring, and quality improvement support.
- Families: Will benefit from an increased number of high-quality early learning options in their communities.

7. Reasons for the Proposal

- Pathways to Accreditation meets and often exceeds national accreditation standards.
- Expanding recognition to include vetted local programs aligns with the Commission's mission to promote access to quality early childhood education statewide.
- It provides a practical, cost-effective, and equitable path to quality improvement for programs that might otherwise be unable to pursue accreditation.

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August 13, 2025

Programs Accredited Through Pathways to Accreditation

1. Appalachian State University Child Development Center
2. Lucy Brock Child Development Lab School
3. Western TLC Head Start
4. All 8 NC Pre-K Sites in Watauga County
5. Small Blessings Family Child Care Home
6. Little Jewels Family Child Care Home

PATHWAYS TO ACCREDITATION PROGRAM



THE CHILDREN'S COUNCIL'S ACCREDITATION

A prestigious accomplishment that provides high-quality trainings, mentoring, evaluations, and professional development along with financial rewards to Watauga County early childhood education programs that meet the standards and criteria set forth by the Children's Council of Watauga County.



PURPOSE

TO GIVE ONGOING SUPPORT TO EARLY EDUCATORS TO ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF EARLY CHILD CARE SETTINGS BY INCREASING POSITIVE TEACHER CHILD INTERACTIONS, DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES AND PROFESSIONALISM OF THE EARLY CHILDCARE WORKFORCE.

PATHWAYS TO ACCREDITATION PROGRAM BENEFITS:

- FREE TRAININGS
- FREE MENTORING AND COACHING
- FREE TEXTBOOK RENTALS
- FREE RESOURCES
- ELIGIBLE FOR GRANTS FOR CLASSROOM SUPPLIES AND MATERIALS
- PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES
- FREE EVALUATIONS OF TEACHERS AND PROGRAMS



TRAINING TOPICS INCLUDE:

- RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN
- LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT
- FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS
- CURRICULUM
- DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE TEACHING PRACTICES
- INDOOR AND OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENTS
- CHILD ASSESSMENT
- HEALTHY LIVING
- COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

WHY IS TRAINING NEEDED?

RESEARCH SHOWS A DIRECT CORRELATION BETWEEN HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDREN'S POSITIVE LONG TERM OUTCOMES IN LIFE, INCLUDING INCREASED EDUCATION, ATTAINMENT, HEALTHIER LIFESTYLES, AND MORE SUCCESSFUL CAREERS.



WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS?

- DIRECTORS AND TEACHERS WILL ATTEND 75% OF REQUIRED TRAININGS, MEETINGS, AND MENTORING SESSIONS
- TEACHERS WILL PARTICIPATE IN CLASS OBSERVATIONS AND MONITORING
- DIRECTORS WILL PARTICIPATE IN DIRECTOR'S LEADERSHIP ACADEMY AND ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
- PROGRAM WILL PARTICIPATE IN FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SERVICES OFFERED
- PROGRAM WILL PROVIDE TIME FOR TEACHERS TO MEET WITH THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION TEAM
- PROGRAM WILL IMPLEMENT ALL POLICIES NOTED IN ACCREDITATION PROGRAM
- PROGRAM WILL TURN IN ALL DOCUMENTATION NEEDED TO BE REIMBURSED FOR SUBSIDY ENHANCEMENTS

Programs that are enrolled in Pathways AND meet education and compensation requirements of lead teachers are eligible for enhancement bonuses each month





STEPS TO ACCREDITATION

- 1 - ATTEND INFORMATION SESSION AND SUBMIT COMPLETED APPLICATION
- 2 - PROGRAM EVALUATION CONDUCTED BY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION TEAM (CLASS, PAS, ETC.)
- 3 - MAINTAIN ENGAGEMENT IN TRAININGS AND MENTORING
- 4 - ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS FOR LEAD TEACHERS
- 5 - ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN COMPENSATION REQUIREMENTS FOR LEAD TEACHERS
- 6 - PROGRAM SCORES AND MAINTAINS "GOOD" OR HIGHER ON SELECTED AREAS OF THE PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION SCALE (PAS)
- 7 - LEAD TEACHERS SCORE AND MAINTAIN LEVELS "5" OR ABOVE ON ALL AREAS OF THE CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT SCORING SYSTEMS (CLASS)
- 8 - PROGRAM MAINTAINS A 4 OR 5 STAR LICENSE RATING
- 9 - PROGRAM SCORES AND MAINTAINS DETERMINED LEVELS ON ANY OTHER QUALITY MEASUREMENT TOOL ADOPTED BY THE ACCREDITATION PROGRAM
- 10 - PROGRAM REACHES FULL ACCREDITATION STATUS!

INFANCY
THROUGH
FIVE YEARS

THE SINGLE MOST
VULNERABLE, TEACHABLE,
DEFINABLE POINT IN A
PERSON'S LIFE

WHY IS THE CHILDREN'S COUNCIL ACCREDITATION RIGHT FOR YOUR PROGRAM?

The Children's Council's Accreditation Program, modeled after the highly esteemed NAEYC Accreditation Program, offers a consistent and shared understanding of a high-quality early learning environment. These environments not only serve to provide children with the immediate benefits of educated teachers and nurturing experiences, but have a direct impact on long-term positive outcomes as well. Research now shows us that these early, quality experiences directly lead to individuals seeking higher education, healthy lifestyles, and successful careers. At the Children's Council, we work with licensed child care centers and family child care homes in Watauga County to offer this program for the benefit of our children, early childhood educators, families, and our greater community.



TEACHING

The Children's Council's Accreditation offers teachers and directors high-quality mentoring and coaching, professional development, peer support, special topic workshops, materials, and assistance with educational goals all based on the latest research on best practices in the field. Teachers are paid a living wage for the important work they do. Teachers and directors report an increase in staff morale and confidence, along with greater staff retention.



CHILDREN

All children deserve the highest quality learning environment in the most formative years of their lives. According to the Starting Smart publication by the Zero to Three Foundation, "Research shows, like protein, fat, and vitamins, interactions with other people and objects are vital nutrients for the growing and developing brain, and different experiences can cause the brain to develop in different ways." We know that high-quality early learning experiences can have a direct correlation to both the short-term and long-term well-being of a child. This includes the child's future health, academic achievements, and career success.



FAMILIES

While the CC Accreditation Program is modeled after the NAEYC Accreditation Program, one main difference is that our local accreditation program is free! The Children's Council is able to offer financial enhancements to early care and education programs and family child care homes who are able to meet and maintain standards set by the Children's Council while in the Pathways to Accreditation Program and once full Accreditation status is achieved. The enhancements provide financial support to meet the higher quality standards without passing the cost to families.



FINANCIAL

CC Accreditation helps families recognize high-quality early learning programs in Watauga County and gives them confidence that rigorous standards have been met. They feel confident in knowing their child is in an early care and education program or family child care home that is willing to go the extra mile to create the best possible environment for young children to thrive. Family engagement is an integral part of the program and parents know they are partners in the education and care of their children.

THE 8 STANDARDS



PROGRAMS ARE
REQUIRED TO
PARTICIPATE IN
THE FOLLOWING:

THE 8 STANDARDS:

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

HEALTH AND SAFETY

RELATIONSHIPS

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT

1 - EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STANDARD:

THE PROGRAM EMPLOYS, SUPPORTS AND COMPENSATES A TEACHING STAFF THAT HAS THE EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS, KNOWLEDGE, AND PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT NECESSARY TO PROMOTE CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT AND TO SUPPORT FAMILIES' DIVERSE NEEDS AND INTERESTS.

REQUIREMENT:

The Early Childhood Support Specialist will review all staff degree levels and professional development plans. Professional development plans for all staff are completed within three months of joining the program. Staff with an AA degree or higher in ECE (Early Care and Education) are monitored by the Early Childhood Support Specialist at least once. Staff who are working on a degree are regularly monitored by the Early Childhood Support Specialist. 100% of lead teachers have an Early Childhood Education (ECE) associate's degree or higher, or enrolled in course work, for accreditation. All lead teachers will be paid a minimum of \$12 per hour.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASUREMENT:

- The Early Childhood Support Specialist will review all staff degree levels and professional development plans.
- Lead teacher compensation will be verified by the Early Care & Education Specialist monthly through documentation provided by each program.

THE 8 STANDARDS

2 - PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT STANDARD:

THE PROGRAM HAS A SAFE AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT THAT PROVIDES APPROPRIATE AND WELL-MAINTAINED INDOOR AND OUTDOOR PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS. THE ENVIRONMENT INCLUDES FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, AND MATERIALS TO FACILITATE CHILD AND STAFF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT.

REQUIREMENT:

A center with a 3 star or lower rating beginning the Pathways to Accreditation Program must rise to a 4 or 5 for accreditation. Programs will participate in ITERS/ECERS/FCCERS star rating system regardless of center licensure.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASUREMENT:

- The Early Care & Education team will collaborate with programs to maintain star rating standards.
- Mock ECERS/ITERS/FCCERS assessments can be conducted at random by the Early Care & Education team.
- Centers will work with the Early Care & Education team to improve their physical environment.

3 - HEALTH AND SAFETY STANDARD:

THE PROGRAM PROMOTES THE NUTRITION, HEALTH OF CHILDREN, AND PROTECTS CHILDREN AND STAFF FROM ILLNESS AND INJURY.

REQUIREMENT:

Verified through DCDEE and Health Department reports, staff have attended Recognizing and Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect training, Shaken Baby training, and is current on CPR and Pediatric First Aid. Staff working with infants will have completed ITS SIDS. Programs must maintain a 94 sanitation score or higher. All licensing violations will be reviewed and should be corrected. If not corrected, the center will be reviewed by the Early Care & Education team. For any reports of maltreatment, the Children's Council should be notified within 24 hours.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASUREMENT:

- Programs must provide Licensing Visit Summaries each time they are completed to the Early Childhood Support Specialist.
- The Early Childhood Support Specialist will follow up on any violations. Support will be given and the situation will be reviewed by the ECE team and, if applicable, the Board of Directors.



THE 8 STANDARDS



4 - RELATIONSHIP STANDARD:

THE PROGRAM ENCOURAGES HIGH-QUALITY INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION TEACHERS AND CHILDREN. THROUGH POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS, THE PROGRAM HELPS CHILDREN TO DEVELOP IN A NURTURING AND SUPPORTIVE ATMOSPHERE, INCREASING THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN, GAIN CONFIDENCE, AND TO ENHANCE ALL AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT.

REQUIREMENT:

CLASS evaluation conducted of newly hired lead teachers prior to engaging in Professional Development Training Services. Follow-up CLASS observations will be conducted, utilizing the same CLASS Observer and CLASS Tool. Programs who have all lead teachers reach and maintain a score of "5" or higher on the CLASS will be eligible to be accredited. All new lead teachers will have one year to obtain a score of "5" or higher within a year of hire to maintain accreditation.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASUREMENT:

- Teachers who receive lower than a score of "5" will collaborate with a member of the ECE team to improve scores.
- The Early Care & Education Specialist will file and keep track of CLASS Scores. Additionally, the ECE Specialist will manage and create reports on CLASS Scores.

5 - STAFF DEVELOPMENT STANDARD:

ALL DIRECTORS AND LEAD TEACHERS IN THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM ARE ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN MEANINGFUL TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES. THE PROGRAM'S LEAD TEACHERS WILL ENGAGE IN A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING SERIES EACH YEAR THAT IS DESIGNED TO PROMOTE AND MAINTAIN QUALITY WITHIN THEIR EARLY EDUCATION SETTING. THE PROGRAM'S DIRECTOR WILL ENGAGE IN THE DIRECTORS' LEADERSHIP ACADEMY WHICH IS DESIGNED TO PROMOTE AND MAINTAIN QUALITY WITHIN THEIR EARLY EDUCATION SETTING. ALL NEW TEACHERS WILL RECEIVE AND COMPLETE NEW STAFF ORIENTATION THROUGH WORKING WITH THE EARLY CARE & EDUCATION TEAM.

REQUIREMENT:

Lead teachers must attend 75% of professional development trainings and directors must attend 75% of all Director's Leadership meetings. All Professional Development Training and Director's Leadership Academy meetings are free of charge. Directors and lead teachers will receive training hours for each training they attend which will be distributed and maintained by the Early Childhood Support Specialist. All new teachers will receive and complete New Staff Orientation.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASUREMENT:

- Directors and lead teachers will receive training hours for each training they attend which will be distributed and maintained by the Early Childhood Support Specialist.
- New Staff Orientation will be supported and monitored by the Early Care & Education team.

THE 8 STANDARDS

6 - FAMILY PARTNERSHIP STANDARD:

THE PROGRAM ESTABLISHES AND MAINTAINS COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH CHILD'S FAMILY TO FOSTER CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT IN ALL SETTINGS. THESE RELATIONSHIPS ARE SENSITIVE TO FAMILY COMPOSITION, LANGUAGE, AND CULTURE.

REQUIREMENT:

Programs have established policies regarding family relationships/partnerships. All of the program's families are asked to complete a "Family Partnership Survey" after the program enters into the Pathways to Accreditation Program and annually each May. The Early Childhood Support Specialist partners with each program to create and implement a Family Partnership Plan based on the needs of the program. Programs will include this in the documentation required in the Program Administration Scale (PAS) that will be monitored annually. Must score a "Good" or higher annually on the PAS subscale for "Family Partnerships" for accreditation. Results from the Family Partnership Survey confirm PAS documentation.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASUREMENT:

- This will include working with the Early Childhood Support Specialist to create a Family Partnership Plan based on results from the Family Partnership Survey.
- The Early Childhood Support Specialist is able to see evidence of family relationships through file reviews, center visits, and family reporting. Program staff work with the Early Childhood Support Specialist to find relevant trainings and supports.



7 - CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT STANDARD:

THE CURRICULUM USED BY THE PROGRAM IS INTENTIONAL, CHILD-CENTERED, GOAL ORIENTED, AND DEVELOPED BY OBSERVATION. THE FOCUS IS MULTI-FACETED AND INCLUDES LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS: COGNITIVE, SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL AND LANGUAGE. THE PROGRAM IS INFORMED BY ONGOING SYSTEMATIC, DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT APPROACHES TO MONITOR CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT. THESE ASSESSMENTS OCCUR WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF RECIPROCAL COMMUNICATIONS WITH FAMILIES AND WITH SENSITIVITY TO THE CULTURAL CONTEXTS IN WHICH CHILDREN DEVELOP. ASSESSMENTS SHOULD BE EMBEDDED IN THE CURRICULUM (E.G., PORTFOLIO, DOCUMENTATION, TEACHING STRATEGIES GOLD.)

REQUIREMENT:

All administration and lead teachers will have NCFELD training. A curriculum log for each classroom must be up to date, organized, and detailed including but not limited to observation notes and curriculum plans. 90% of curriculum logs are complete per classroom and are monitored by the ECE Specialist. Appropriate assessments include: Teaching Strategies GOLD and/or play-based assessments. Other criterion-referenced assessments will need to be approved by the Early Care and Education Director. Every child will have an updated appropriate assessment every year, which will be monitored by the Early Care & Education Specialist.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASUREMENT:

- NCFELD Training Documentation and Teaching Strategies will be submitted to the Early Childhood Support Specialist.
- The Early Care & Education Specialist will review curriculum logs and on-going assessment for teachers.

THE 8 STANDARDS

8 - BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT STANDARD:

THE PROGRAM IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CREATING POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS THAT FOCUS ON PREVENTING EXPULSIONS AND SUSPENSIONS, ENCOURAGING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN PROGRAMS AND FAMILIES TO SUPPORT HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT, AND ENSURING FAIRNESS, EQUITY AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH.



REQUIREMENT:

The program will focus on fostering social emotional development and respond to challenging behaviors by incorporating positive discipline practices and policies before ever considering expulsion or suspension from early childhood programs.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASUREMENT:

- Programs will work with the Early Care and Education team when experiencing challenging behavior to complete the "Suspension and Expulsion Prevention Documentation."
- In an effort to prevent expulsion and suspension of children, each program shall adopt the following, in policy and practice, and in a consistent and non-discriminatory manner:
 - Use developmentally appropriate practices that provide for stimulating and interactive learning environments, diversity, age appropriate expectations, small group activities, teachable moments and knowledge of research based evidence and best practices in child development, early learning and education
 - Invest in professional development, training and education to ensure educators have the competencies to support children's social and emotional health
 - Develop and implement classroom schedules that meet the needs of the children
 - Adapt learning environments to promote healthy social interactions with others
 - Develop healthy and nurturing relationships with children
 - Develop strong partnerships and relationships with families
 - Develop and implement classroom expectations that are developmentally appropriate, clear, and consistent
 - Provide family engagement opportunities
 - Provide continuity of care in the classroom
 - Ensure fairness and equity
- Prior to the expulsion of any child from the early learning programs participating in Pathways to Accreditation, the staff and director will complete the "Suspension and Expulsion Prevention Documentation":
 - Document observations they see when a child is exhibiting challenging behaviors. This will include: 1- When does the behavior occur, 2- What happens right before the behavior occurs, 3- What happens after the behavior occurs, 4- How often the behavior occurs, 5- How long does the behavior last
 - Consultation with family to determine if the child is experiencing distress outside of the learning environment
 - Designated Early Care and Education observer(s) will conduct an assessment of current classroom practices in preventing challenging behaviors and promoting social-emotional development and will identify new strategies to implement
 - Strategies are implemented for at least 6 weeks
 - Communication with family about child's behavioral concerns. This can include face to face, phone calls, emails, texts etc. that are not routine and are specifically conducted to address topic of child's behavioral concerns
 - Documented collaboration with specialists due to child's challenging behaviors (e.g. Children's Council Early Care and Education Staff, CDSA, local school system's Preschool Exceptional Children's Program)
 - Documented teacher's professional development to support classroom practices (eg. completed NCFELD training, PECE Program, Social-Emotional training, visited other classrooms, mentored by others, etc.)
 - Outcomes of attempts made to maintain child's participation in Early Care Education Program (provision of additional staff, implemented Behavior Improvement Plan, referral to CDSA/Watauga County's EC Pre-K Services, transferred to another appropriate setting, etc.)