



The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education would like to share important information and reminders regarding Quality Start applications and deadlines related to School Readiness Tax Credits (SRTC) for the 2009 tax year to assist you in submitting applications and submitting them timely.

The Louisiana Department of Revenue has set a deadline of December 1, 2009 for centers who have received their first star award during 2009. These centers must complete the process by November 30, 2009 in order to receive a higher star rating by December 1, 2009. (The Louisiana Department of Revenue's deadline for centers who received their first stars in 2007 or 2008 was July 1.)

Please be aware of the following:

- If this is your center's first year of participation in Quality Start, your center has until November 30, 2009 to have all requirements met in time to be awarded a higher star for tax year 2009 in order to meet the deadline for the SRTCs.
- Applications for higher star awards by the December 1, 2009 deadline should be received by the Quality Improvement Unit during the month of September 2009. This will allow 12 weeks from the time the Quality Improvement Unit receives your application for two to five stars to the time of the effective date of the star award.
- Incomplete applications (lacking information such as your Tax ID number or not completed correctly) will slow down the process for your center and may prevent your center from meeting the SRTC deadline.

Environment Rating Scale (ERS) Assessments

- Please keep in mind that a center seeking a three to five star rating must have at least one random and unannounced ERS assessment even if the center has had multiple practice assessments.
- Official ERS assessment(s) are not scheduled until your center has passed the LA Pathways Staff Qualifications Audit. In addition, the full two week ERS assessment "window" can end no later than November 30, 2009.
- You are **encouraged to take advantage of practice ERS assessments**. Practice ERS assessments help centers determine if they are ready to apply for a higher star. Since practice assessments may be used under certain conditions, fewer classrooms may need to be assessed at your official visit if your center has taken advantage of this opportunity.

Staff Qualifications Audit

- It is **important that your staff has sent all documentation and information to LA Pathways prior to sending an application for stars**. Documentation and information sent to LA Pathways at the same time you submit your application for stars will delay the process related to determining your center's staff qualifications and delay the star award.
- A **Pre-Application Staff Qualifications Review is available** before a center submits an application for two to five stars. You should take advantage of this opportunity to determine if your center has completed the required training and has submitted all necessary

documentation about their staff qualifications. Your center has the option to use the results of this pre-application review as the official staff qualifications audit if you choose.

- You should **encourage all of your teachers, assistant teachers, directors, and assistant directors to enroll in LA Pathways** as soon as they begin working at your center. Remember, even staff working in a one star center may be eligible for the SRTC if they meet the requirements and file a tax return. Your staff should be encouraged to work with LA Pathways personally and send all updated information as it occurs. Professional organization memberships expire and training and education certificates and transcripts should be submitted to LA Pathways on a regular basis. The SRTC for staff members is an individual tax credit and staff must take responsibility for ensuring that they qualify for the highest level possible based on their training and education. Documentation should be submitted to LA Pathways no later than December 31 each year.

A check of licensing deficiencies is the last step to stars

- **Concentrate on keeping your center free of Licensing deficiencies.** To participate in Quality Start, a center must be free of Licensing deficiencies.

Considering these timeframes, your application should be received by the Quality Improvement Unit as soon as possible (no later than the month of September) in order to meet the November 30, 2009 deadline.

Remember that the Quarterly Tiered Bonus is another benefit for centers with two or more stars participating in the Child Care Assistance Program separate from the SRTC.

Help is Available through Technical Assistance

- Your **center should take advantage of technical assistance** offered by your local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency, Child Care Quality Start Specialist, and the Quality Start website at www.qrslouisiana.com for help in completing the application for stars. **Centers that have taken advantage of the available supports have been shown to be successful in earning higher stars.** Be sure the technical assistance specialist signs your application where indicated.

For more information, visit www.qrslouisiana.com or call the Quality Improvement Unit at (225) 342-0694 or the DSS regional Child Care Quality Start Specialist at 1-800-680-9098.