

Texas Rising Star

Entry Level FAQ



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Child Care Services

What is Child Care Services (CCS)? Is this the same as Child Care Management Service (CCMS)?

CCS is the subsidized child care program. CCS provides financial aid (also known as subsidy) for child care to families that meet income requirements, thereby promoting long-term self-sufficiency by enabling parents to work or attend education activities. Some Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) and Workforce Solutions Offices may also refer to CCS as CCMS.

Why is TWC requiring child care programs that are interested in providing Child Care Services (CCS) to participate in the Texas Rising Star program?

TWC implemented this requirement because of [legislation](#) passed during the 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2021). [House Bill \(HB\) 2607](#) requires the following:

- All CCS child care programs must participate in the Texas Rising Star program and meet the requirements for the new Entry Level designation.
- TWC must establish a maximum length of time that a child care program may participate at Entry Level designation.

TWC updated its rules to define what it means to be designated as Entry Level and adopted the maximum length of time that a child care program may participate at Entry Level designation. Child care programs must attain at least a Two-Star Texas Rising Star certification by the end of the 24-month Entry Level period, as established by TWC. By becoming certified as Texas Rising Star, your program will be recognized for providing high-quality child care.

What happens if a child care program is not Entry Level–designated?

If a child care program is not Entry Level-designated, then it may not sign a CCS agreement until it complies with Entry Level requirements.

Does a child care program have to serve CCS families in order to participate?

No, the child care program does not have to serve CCS families to participate if current enrollment does not allow. However, it must be willing to serve at least one CCS child once enrollment allows.

If a child care program wants to participate in the CCS program, is it required to participate in Texas Rising Star?

Yes, the child care program must participate in Texas Rising Star as mandated by the legislature. Texas Rising Star mentors are available to support child care programs in attaining at least a Two-Star certification within 24 months.

When do child care scholarship amounts (provider payment rates) change?

Each summer, TWC evaluates provider payment rates based on the annual Child Care Market Rate Survey (MRS) and on a narrow cost analysis of child care provided at varying quality levels. Any rate changes typically become effective on October 1 of that year. TWC's most recent rate actions were approved on September 10, 2024, and became [effective](#) on October 1, 2025.

Entry Level Designation

What is the definition of "Entry Level designation"?

Entry Level designation is a component of the Texas Rising Star program and denotes that a child care program agrees to provide CCS and work toward Texas Rising Star certification. It is the first step to providing quality child care.

At what point may a new child care program be designated as Entry Level?

Once the child care program meets the [eligibility requirements](#) for Entry Level, a newly licensed or registered child care program may be designated as Entry Level.

Can a child care program that has been open and operating for numerous years advance beyond Entry Level designation?

Yes. If the child care program meets the initial eligibility requirements for Texas Rising Star, it may request that an assessment be conducted for Two-Star certification or higher.

What if a child care program is no longer interested in participating in Texas Rising Star while Entry Level designated?

If a child care program has a CCS agreement and is no longer interested in certification or is not certified as Texas Rising Star within the 24 months of the Entry Level designation timeline, its CCS agreement will be terminated, and any CCS children will be transferred out of that program. However, if a child care

program decides to end its CCS agreement prior to the end of its 24-month timeline, it may reenter CCS as Entry Level–designated as long as it still meets eligibility requirements and has the remaining length of time of the 24 months to become Texas Rising Star–certified.

Example: A program is designated as Entry Level from January 2025 through October 2025, which is 10 months out of the 24 months allowed; when it returns to CCS, it will have 14 months to achieve certification.

Will Entry Level–designated child care programs be assigned a mentor?

Mentors are Board staff members who are assigned to a child care program once that program is designated as Entry Level. Additionally, they are responsible for supporting and advising child care programs on how to attain Texas Rising Star certification.

Does a child care program have to wait 12 months after being registered or licensed by CCR before it may attain Entry Level designation?

No. A child care program that is newly registered or licensed by CCR may be Entry Level–designated if it meets Entry Level eligibility requirements and the points threshold.

Which children will be transferred if a child care program does not comply with Entry Level designation or does not achieve Texas Rising Star certification by the specified deadlines?

If a child care program does not comply with Texas Rising Star requirements, children participating in the CCS program will be transferred. The child care program may continue to accept private-pay families.

What is the difference between Entry Level screening, initial Texas Rising Star certification screening, and ongoing screening?

During Entry Level screening, a child care program’s licensing history is reviewed (up to the most recent 6 months) for any high- or medium-high–weighted deficiencies. The program is assigned five points for each high-weighted deficiency and three points for each medium-high–weighted deficiency. To be eligible for Entry Level designation, a program may not exceed 40 total points.

During its initial Texas Rising Star certification screening, a child care program’s licensing history is reviewed (up to the most recent 6 months) for the specific deficiencies listed on the [Initial Screening Form](#). Once a program is certified, its licensing history will continue to be reviewed (up to the most recent 6 months) for specific deficiencies listed on the [Certified Screening Form](#).

How often is a child care program reviewed for continued Entry Level points threshold compliance?

The child care program is reviewed every April and October for continued points threshold compliance. If a program exceeds the 40-point threshold, it will be notified of noncompliance and given up to 30 calendar days before its CCS Provider Agreement is ended to allow CCS families time to transfer to another eligible program.

What happens when an Entry Level–designated child care program is placed on CCR corrective action?

If an Entry Level–designated child care program is placed on CCR corrective action, it may continue to provide CCS, as long as it meets the 40-point threshold. According to the [Child Care Services Guide](#), the program may not receive new CCS referrals while on corrective action, and all CCS families must be notified of the corrective action probationary status.

What happens when an Entry Level–designated child care program goes through a facility change, such as ownership change, a move, or name change?

If an Entry Level–designated child care program goes through a major change (ownership or facility type), the 24-month Entry Level designation restarts at the time of the change. If an Entry Level–designated child care program goes through a minor change (name, ownership type, address or ages served), the 24-month Entry Level designation remains. Facility changes while Entry Level-designated that result in an initial permit issued by CCR will always restart the 24-month Entry Level designation timeline.

Licensing and Screening for Entry Level Designation

What are the definitions of “medium-high-weighted” and “high-weighted” deficiencies?

CCR assigns a weight to each of the minimum standards for which a child care program may be cited. Only deficiencies that are given the weight of high or medium-high within the child care program’s most recent 6 months are counted for the Entry Level points threshold.

Are the outcomes of the cited deficiencies considered or are only the citations considered?

The only deficiencies allotted points are high- or medium-high–weighted deficiencies that are cited within the child care program’s most recent 6 months, even if the citations were corrected.

What if the child care program is placed on probation or a plan of action with CCR or a Board while Entry Level designated or has a history of being on probation or plan of action with CCR or the Board?

If the child care program is placed on probation or a plan of action with CCR or a Board, this may cause the program to be ineligible for Entry Level designation and Texas Rising Star certification. Previous history of probation or plan of action is not considered when determining eligibility; however, if the child care program received citations of deficiencies from CCR while on probation or a plan of action and CCR cited deficiencies in the most recent 6 months, the deficiencies may impact the program when it is screened for Entry Level designation or Texas Rising Star certification.

Are appealed citations counted when determining Entry Level designation?

The only deficiencies allotted points are high- or medium-high-weighted deficiencies that are cited within the child care program’s most recent 6 months. Appealed citations overturned by CCR are removed from the child care program’s history.

What is the process to become designated as Entry Level?

A child care program interested in participating in CCS will complete the [Interest Form](#) to notify their local Workforce Solutions office of their interest. TWC will review the program’s licensing history and assign a score based on the number of high- and medium-high-weighted deficiencies to determine Entry Level eligibility. TWC will only review the child care program’s most recent 6 months of licensing history.

With Entry Level designation and certification requirements, will child care programs require any additional CCR visits?

Child care programs will not receive any additional CCR visits based on this designation, nor certification. Once a child care program is ready to be assessed for Texas Rising Star certification, an assessor will visit to observe all classrooms and review other quality indicators.

Texas Rising Star Eligibility

Which child care programs are eligible for Texas Rising Star certification?

The following types of child care programs serving any range of ages are eligible to become Texas Rising Star-certified:

- Licensed centers

- Licensed homes
- Registered homes
- Licensed before-and/or after-school programs
- Child care programs operated by the US military

Does Texas Rising Star apply to school-age (before-and after-school) programs?

Programs providing only before-and/or after-school care are eligible to participate in Texas Rising Star if they are licensed by CCR and meet the initial eligibility requirements. For more information about the Texas Rising Star measures specific for school-age-only programs, refer to the [Facility Assessment Record Form-School Age](#).

Does a child care program have to be open for a certain amount of time in order to start the Texas Rising Star certification process?

There is no minimum time frame in which the program must be open and operating in order to participate in Texas Rising Star. However, to be assessed for certification the program must be in operation for a minimum of 12 months.

How does becoming Texas Rising Star-certified change a child care program's daily operation and workflow?

Most child care programs will find that they already meet and implement many of the quality standards that Texas Rising Star reviews, so there is minimal impact to daily operations. A program's assigned mentor may support the child care program in creating systems and processes to help administration and staff improve areas in need of quality improvement. Goal setting and assistance are individualized for each program in order to provide sustainability and compliance.

Where can child care programs review the qualifications for Texas Rising Star certification?

Please visit the [Texas Rising Star website-Eligibility](#) for more information. Additionally, the [program brochure](#) provides a quick overview, and the [Texas Rising Star Certification Guidelines](#) provide more in-depth information.

Will child care programs receive a higher CCS payment rate once certified?

CCS payment rates are increased based on the certification level that the child care program achieves. Programs may see what their CCS payments would be at each level by using the [Texas Rising Star revenue calculator](#).

In addition to increased CCS payment funds, what are the benefits of participating in the Texas Rising Star program?

Texas Rising Star benefits include a higher child care program payment rate, professional development opportunities, and one-on-one mentoring. Additionally, participating programs may be eligible for other benefits, such as grants, stipends, materials and equipment, and free outreach materials to parents and the community.

How does a child care program access the Texas Rising Star online orientation?

The child care program's director must create a [CLI Engage account](#) to access the Texas Rising Star online orientation. This account is created when the Interest Form is submitted. Additionally, many Workforce Solutions Offices offer in-person and virtual Texas Rising Star orientations.

If a child care program wants to participate in Texas Rising Star, is it required to participate in the CCS program?

Yes. According to the initial eligibility requirements for Texas Rising Star, the child care program must participate in the CCS program. Entering into a CCS agreement means that a program is willing to serve at least one CCS child if enrollment allows.

Does Texas Rising Star conduct home visits?

Texas Rising Star assessors are required to visit child care programs in person regardless of facility type (center, home, or school-age-only). Therefore, yes, assessors will visit a home child care program. Texas Rising Star mentors will also provide support to child care programs, including in-home visits, at least monthly.

How does a child care program request an initial assessment?

Once a child care program meets the Texas Rising Star initial eligibility requirements, the program will work with its assigned mentor to request an assessment via the [online Assessment Request form](#) and

upload the required documents for initial assessment into the online assessment tool. This will indicate to the assessor that the program is ready for initial assessment.

What are the next steps for a child care program once they are certified?

The child care program will continue to receive mentoring services to help it maintain its certification through its continuous quality improvement plan. Additionally, some Boards provide financial supports for programs while certified to include working toward national accreditation.

What requirements are there for child care programs after becoming Texas Rising Star–certified, and where can a child care program find them?

Once a child care program is certified as Texas Rising Star, it must comply with the [Texas Rising Star Guidelines](#). The program’s mentor helps the child care program understand the guidelines, which include ongoing licensing screening reviews, annual monitoring visits, and a commitment to continuous quality improvement.

What happens if a child care program loses a star level?

Certified Texas Rising Star child care programs at the Three- or Four-Star level may lose a star level and remain certified. If a Two-Star–certified child care program loses a star level, it will be placed on suspension for a minimum of six months and will have up to 15 months to regain certification. If a Two-Star program’s certification has been suspended and the program is unable to be recertified by the end of the suspension, the program’s CCS agreement will be terminated, and any CCS children receiving care will be transferred to an eligible child care program.

If a certified child care program undergoes changes (for example ownership, director, facility type, move) does the program have to start the Texas Rising Star certification process again or will the program stay at the same level after the change?

If a certified child care program undergoes a facility change, the program will retain its certification and be reassessed within 3 months of the change. See the Facility Change Rubric in the [Texas Rising Star Guidelines](#) for more information.

What happens if a certified child care program plans on opening a second location? Does the first location's Texas Rising Star certification transfer to the second location?

If a certified child care program splits or expands to a second location within the same city, ZIP code, or county, the second location will retain the star level of the first location during the move or change. Per the Facility Change Rubric in the [Texas Rising Star Guidelines](#), the second child care program will undergo a Texas Rising Star reassessment within the initial three-month period from the date that the new CCR permit associated with the change is issued.

Categories and Assessments

What are the four categories that Texas Rising Star quality indicators fall under?

The Texas Rising Star program organizes measures into the following categories:

- Category 1: Director and Staff Qualifications and Training (20 percent of a program's total score)
- Category 2: Teacher-Child Interactions (40 percent of a program's total score)
- Category 3: Program Administration (20 percent of a program's total score)
- Category 4: Indoor/Outdoor Learning Environments (20 percent of a program's total score)

Learn more about each of these categories at [Texas Rising Star Categories](#).

How often are child care programs observed to ensure that they are following Texas Rising Star guidelines?

Upon initial certification, a child care program will receive an on-site assessment visit. On-site annual monitoring visits will then occur. Texas Rising Star certification is valid for three years. At the end of a program's third year of certification, the program will receive an on-site reassessment visit, and the cycle of yearly visits repeats. For more information about assessments and monitoring visits, refer to the [Texas Rising Star Program Assessments](#).

Do child care programs receive points for employing staff members that have earned at least a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential?

Yes, a child care program may receive points for staff qualifications (Category 1) if a certain percentage of its staff has met one of the education criteria, which include the following:

- Working toward a degree or Child Development Associate (CDA)
- Having obtained a CDA, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree
- Having earned more than 150 total professional development hours within the most recent five years

For more information about the staff education and training, refer to the [Category 1](#) information document.

Is it possible for a child care program to be certified as Three-Star or Four-Star initially or does it have to attain Two-Star level first and build up to the higher levels?

Yes, it is possible to be initially assessed at a higher star level. At its first assessment, a child care program is observed and evaluated according to the applicable facility and classroom age group measures in the assessment record forms. These include structural measures that must be met as well as points-based measures that are calculated in order to determine the child care program's overall star level. After the initial evaluation, programs may be certified at any of the three levels—Two-, Three-, or Four-Star.

Mentoring and Supports

How can a child care program contact local Texas Rising Star staff to request an orientation or other information about Texas Rising Star?

Child care programs may contact their local Workforce Solutions Office staff directly or use the [Texas Rising Star Contact Us](#) web page to inquire about available trainings and orientation overviews.

What support services are available to child care programs that participate in Texas Rising Star?

In addition to having an assigned mentor, child care programs have access to numerous free resources and services, including professional development support, business resources, grants for materials and equipment, and scholarships. Access to these and other quality initiatives is available statewide as well as locally through the local Workforce Solution offices.

How does a child care program get assigned a mentor?

Once a child care program completes the [Texas Rising Star Interest Form](#), a notification is sent to the local Workforce Solution office, which will assign a mentor to the program.

Is there support available to child care employees wishing to obtain CDA credentials?

Many Boards offer financial support or CDA classes for eligible child care staff members. Additionally, TWC funds the Early Childhood Professional Development Scholarship program, which helps child care employees with achieving their CDA.

If a child care program chooses not to participate in Texas Rising Star, does the program lose the ability to access additional support services such as funding and training?

Many of the local and statewide quality initiatives offered to child care programs are prioritized for programs that are working toward or have obtained Texas Rising Star certification. Therefore, if a child care program is not participating in Texas Rising Star, it is not eligible to receive such support.

How can a child care program find out which local Workforce Solutions office they might work with?

To find contact information for their local Workforce Solutions Office staff, refer to the [Workforce Solutions Office Locator](#).

May a child care program work toward Texas Rising Star certification or maintain certification without working with a mentor?

Yes, a child care program is not required to work with a mentor in order to achieve or maintain certification. However, the program must meet the specified requirements of Texas Rising Star, such as creation and implementation of a Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP), specified trainings and account creations, updating the CQIP based on screening impacts and assessment results, and uploading documentation into the online assessment platform. More information can be found in the [Self-Developed CQIP Desk Aid](#).

Suspension Status

If a child care program is on suspension, may it continue to provide services to children currently in CCS?

Yes, if a child care program is on suspension status—a minimum of six months and not to exceed 15 months—it may continue to provide services to currently enrolled CCS children, however it does not qualify for Entry Level designation. If the child care program remains on suspension after nine months, it may not receive any new CCS family referrals during the remaining six months of the 15-month period, unless the program is located in a child care desert or serves an underserved population and is approved by TWC to accept new family referrals.

How will Texas Rising Star suspension status affect CCS provider payments?

If a child care program is placed on suspension status—for a minimum of six months and no longer than 15 months—it is no longer eligible to receive enhanced CCS payments for the CCS children it serves. Once the child care program has achieved Two-, Three-, or Four-Star certification, its CCS payments will be granted commensurate with its certification level. To find out more about revenues earned at the various star levels, use the [Texas Rising Star Revenue Calculator](#).

If a child care program on suspension remains noncompliant, how long must it wait to reapply for Texas Rising Star certification?

Child care programs that fail to become certified by the end of the 15-month suspension period do not qualify for Entry Level designation. Once it meets Texas Rising Star initial eligibility requirements, a program may request an initial assessment. For more information about initial eligibility, refer to the [Texas Rising Star Eligibility](#).

Other Questions

Are Texas Rising Star, TWC, and CCR the same entity?

No. TWC is a state agency, and Texas Rising Star is a TWC program, which is administered locally through the Boards and a contracted assessment entity. CCR operates under the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

Are child care programs governed by CCR minimum standards or Texas Rising Star guidelines?

All child care programs in Texas must comply with CCR minimum standards. If a child care program wants to serve children through the state’s CCS program, it is required to participate in Texas Rising Star. To be Texas Rising Star–certified, a program must adhere to [Texas Rising Star Guidelines](#).

Are there resources or other supports offered in other languages?

Yes, TWC has provided additional materials and resources about Entry Level and Texas Rising Star in Spanish and Vietnamese. They can be accessed via the [TWC CCEL Texas Rising Star webpage](#).

Who may child care programs contact to email questions to or provide feedback about CCS or other quality initiatives?

Child care programs may send questions to their local Workforce Solutions Office staff by completing the [Contact Us form](#). To provide feedback to TWC regarding CCS or other quality initiatives, such as Texas Rising Star, email CCEL@twc.texas.gov.