

Department of Early Learning (DEL) Quality Improvement Plan

Goal – Build Organizational Excellence

The goal of the Department of Early Learning (DEL) quality improvement plan is to assist in building organizational excellence to give children world-class early learning opportunities so they realize their full potential. Building organizational excellence is one of four goals in DEL's strategic plan.

Objective – Build an integrated system to instill a culture of continuous quality improvement and accountability in child care licensing activities.

One of the objectives under DEL's Build Organizational Excellence goal is to develop an integrated system that will improve the safety of children within child care settings, and to help ensure that children are learning and having fun. The DEL quality improvement plan is the overarching strategy. The plan is intended to foster a culture of quality improvement and accountability that promotes consistency and excellence in all child care licensing activities. It is a plan that relies upon the collective capacity of DEL staff to develop and sustain an environment focused on continuous quality improvement.

Performance Measure – Specific performance measures will be established once baselines are set. Since many of the strategies in this plan are new, baseline data have not yet been established.

To meet the overarching strategy of establishing an internal continuous quality improvement plan, DEL will focus on the primary structure of a quality improvement framework: Licensing activities are constantly evaluated through team and case reviews, data collection and analysis; and the lessons learned are integrated into training and policy development. The quality improvement plan outlined in this document encompasses many of the strategies aimed at achieving this goal.

Strategy #1:

(References: DEL Strategic Plan 2.3; Loss Prevention Review Team recommendations 3, 8, 9, 11, 13, and 17)

DEL will hire and locate five (5) quality improvement staff around the state. Two (2) of the staff will be housed in the State Office, while the remaining three (3) will be located in the Service Area offices; one (1) in each. Responsibilities will include:

- Quality Division (at the state office)
 - Coordinate / implement statewide case / file reviews.
 - Collect and analyze key licensing data elements from around the state. Data elements are to be collected by Service Area quality improvement staff and funneled to the Quality Division.
 - Collect and analyze data sent by service area quality improvement staff, including data on:
 - Licensed Critical Incident Reports
 - Compliance agreements

- Waivers
 - Valid complaints
 - Probationary licenses
 - Summary suspensions
 - Revocations
 - Denials
 - Work with the Information Technology team to develop data gathering instruments that will ensure that critical data elements are regularly and accurately reported.
 - Work with the Quality Division policy development team to evaluate the adherence to, and effectiveness of, current policy, as well as recommend new and needed policy development.
 - Work with the training coordinator to develop statewide training that reflects the needs from the field (see Strategy #3), including, but not limited to, training on policies as well as implementation procedures.
 - Develop Service Area / licensing office improvement plans that are a result of statewide case / file reviews.
 - Monitor compliance with improvement plans.
 - Prepare quarterly reports demonstrating licensing strengths, progress and areas in need of improvement.
 - Serve as public disclosure officer.
 - Ensure the Licensed Child Care Information System (LCCIS) is fully operational and staffed (coordination of LCCIS).
- Service Area Offices
 - Track the following information by ensuring effective data collection tools are in place:
 - Licensed Critical Incident Reports
 - Compliance agreements
 - Waivers
 - Valid complaints
 - Probationary licenses
 - Summary suspensions
 - Revocations
 - Denials
 - Implement a peer review process (see Strategy #2).
 - Implement a targeted supervisory review process (see Strategy #2).
 - Assist in the planning and implementation of Quality Division file reviews.
 - Develop Service Area improvement plans in conjunction with quality improvement staff and Service Area Managers.
 - Measure policy and procedure usage and effectiveness through file reviews and data collection.
 - Participate in child care facility reviews by working with DEL licensing staff and supervisors.
 - Work with the training coordinator to identify training needs for the Service Area and ensure that necessary training takes place with staff in each office.
 - Work with the Quality Division policy development team to evaluate the usage and effectiveness of current policy for the purpose of recommending new policy or changes and improvement to existing policy and procedure.

Strategy #2:

(References: DEL Strategic Plan 2.3; Loss Prevention Review Team recommendations 3, 8, 9, and 17)

DEL will establish a case review system that encompasses the following elements:

- **Peer-to-peer case review system:** A peer-to-peer system of reviewing cases during each staff meeting of the local licensing office is being developed. The peer-to-peer case review system will ensure that in the course of a year, all licensing files within the local office will be reviewed by a peer. Licensing staff will use a checklist to monitor for compliance and overall quality of the licensing record while reviewing the file their peer is responsible for. The checklist will be used to offer additional feedback for licensing staff, and the data from the checklists will be rolled up for future use at DEL. Data from the peer-to-peer case reviews will be collected by the appropriate supervisor and forwarded to the Quality Division, where it will be evaluated and synthesized into quarterly quality improvement reports.
- **Targeted supervisory reviews:** DEL supervisors will be required to implement targeted case reviews with licensing staff at regularly scheduled one-on-one supervisory meetings. The targeted reviews will be documented on specific tracking documents that measure the frequency, usage, appropriateness and quality of:
 - Waivers
 - Renewals
 - Civil penalties
 - Compliance agreements
 - Criminal history background checks

Data from the targeted supervisory reviews will be forwarded to the Quality Division, where the information will be evaluated and synthesized into quarterly quality improvement reports and disseminated back to the Service Areas.

- **Quality Division reviews:** Quality improvement staff at the DEL State Office will implement periodic file reviews of a specific percentage of random files from each of the three Service Areas. The Quality Division will develop criteria from which to review the sample of case files it receives. Elements of these reviews will include, but will not be limited to:
 - Waivers
 - Renewals
 - Civil penalties
 - Compliance agreements
 - Compliant inspections
 - Criminal history background checks

Data from the case reviews will be evaluated and synthesized into quarterly quality improvement reports and disseminated back to the Service Areas.

Strategy #3

(References: DEL Strategic Plan 2.3; Loss Prevention Review Team recommendation 13 and 15)

DEL will provide all licensing staff with training on observation, documentation and interviewing. The curriculum also will include information for licensing staff on how best to conduct licensing investigations and how to create and monitor an effective compliance agreement. A contract has been awarded and work is currently under way to develop the curriculum.

DEL will plan and provide training for Administrative Law Judges (ALJ) on a regular basis. DEL will work in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General to develop curriculum and to examine prior ALJ decisions and DEL licensing actions.

Strategy #4

(References: DEL Strategic Plan 2.3)

DEL has developed an internal policy development process that incorporates data-driven decision making practices (research), best practices, staff input and training. DEL will be infusing data from the case review process (see Strategy 2) in future policy development work. The policy development and implementation system includes:

- **Policy Briefing:** The policy briefing is the document DEL uses to generate the creation or revision of a policy. The policy briefing informs the department on lessons learned from the licensing field. In other words, DEL quality improvement staff takes information gleaned from quality improvement initiatives and formulates a briefing document that demonstrates the need for new internal policy, or revision to existing policy.
- **Policy Research and Development:** Policy development staff members at DEL have the responsibility to research and develop new and revised policy and procedures for licensing field staff. Development of policy must include input from licensing field staff.
- **Licensing Policy and Review Team:** The Licensing Policy and Review Team (L-Part) is a representative group of licensing staff and supervisors, Assistant Service Area Managers, Service Area Managers, and Quality Division policy development staff. Once a policy and procedure has been developed, it comes before the L-Part for critical review and analysis. Practice implications are discussed and vetted. The L-Part is the forum for DEL field staff to have direct input into the internal policy and procedure process, ensuring usability for licensors and providers in the field while ensuring enforcement of and compliance with minimum health and safety standards.
- **Practice Calls (training):** The practice call is initiated once a policy and procedure has been finalized and approved. The intention of the practice call is to:
 - Train all DEL licensing supervisors about the policy and its implications to practice in the field; and
 - Discuss barriers to implementation, discuss additional and/or alternative methods to staff training (e.g., flyers), and reinforce the need for supervisors to individually train staff on the new policy and procedure and its implication to practice in the field.Practice calls occur monthly, or more frequently if needed. Practice calls include all DEL licensing supervisors, Assistant Service Area Managers, Service Area Managers, the Licensing Program Administrator, Quality Division policy development team, and the DEL Deputy Director.
- **Policy Verification Queue (training):** The policy verification queue is an electronic system whereby all new or revised policies and procedures are posted. All licensing staff are automatically alerted when a new or revised policy has been distributed. Staff are required to read the policy and electronically sign a statement of acknowledgement and understanding. These data are collected and are available to DEL supervisors and managers.

Strategy #5

(References: DEL Strategic Plan 2.3; Loss Prevention Review Team recommendations 5 and 11)

DEL has made significant changes to its Licensed Child Care Information System (LCCIS). Quality improvement staff members at the DEL State Office are responsible for overseeing the coordination of LCCIS and ensuring that parents continue to receive the information they need to make informed decisions while selecting child care. Some of the changes on LCCIS include:

- **Web site redesign:** The DEL Web site has recently been updated to give it a new look and feel. The page that hosts LCCIS also has been updated. Changes to the LCCIS page include clarifying the definition and example section of valid licensing complaints about providers and moving this to a separate pop-up window. This change will add clarity to the site and reduce confusion for readers of the page.
- **Compliance agreements:** A compliance agreement is developed when a DEL licensor determines that a plan is needed to assist a licensed child care provider in meeting minimum licensing requirements. It is a plan of action that records:
 - Basic information about the licensed child care and the purpose of the licensing visit.
 - What minimum licensing requirement or Washington Administrative Code needs to be met and a plan to make those changes to be in compliance.
 - A date by when the provider will correct the issue.
 - The date by when the provider corrected the issue.

By August 1, 2008, DEL will have posted all compliance agreements from July 1, 2006, forward on the LCCIS page. Compliance agreements that stem from valid complaint findings only will be posted. Parents will be able to read actual compliance agreements that were developed between the provider and DEL licensing staff. All future compliance agreements that are the result of a valid complaint also will be posted on the DEL Web site as they are created.

- **Customer service:** DEL is committed to improving customer service within the LCCIS system:
 - On March 15, 2008, DEL hosted a statewide LCCIS provider forum. More than 130 providers participated in this event. The purpose of the forum was to collect information from providers on the best use of examples currently on the Web site. Much of the time at the forum was spent crafting language that was representative of licensing complaints. This language is now found on the revised Web site. Another overwhelming theme coming out of the forum was the provider desire to see actual compliance agreements posted on the Web site.
 - Currently, parents who access LCCIS and want to speak to a “live” person must leave a message with a call back number. Within 48 hours, staff from DEL will call the parent back and answer specific questions about the provider in question. As part of our quality improvement plan, DEL is committed to staffing the LCCIS line with DEL State Office staff so that when parents call they will be connected to a “live” person who can answer their questions. DEL will ensure that this line is covered during normal business hours (8:00am – 5:00pm Monday through Friday). During off-hours or weekends, parents may still leave a message and the call will be returned within 48 hours of message receipt.

Strategy #6

(References: DEL Strategic Plan 2.3)

DEL will create a provider handbook that specifically lays out child care provider rights and responsibilities. The handbook will include topics such as:

- Types of licensed child care programs
- Types of licenses
- How to become licensed
- The background check process
- Training
- The Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)
- The rule making process
- The role of the DEL licensor
- Technical assistance
- Compliance agreements
- Supervisory review process
- Compliant inspections
- Negative licensing actions
- Due process rights
- Public records requests

Strategy #7

(References: DEL Strategic Plan 2.3; Loss Prevention Review Team recommendation 14)

DEL will adopt a licensing action matrix that explains the approval and review process for all adverse licensing actions. The following licensing actions will be tracked by quality improvement staff:

- Child care staff disqualifications
- Civil penalties
- Summary suspensions
- Denials
- Revocations

DEL currently uses a revocation recommendation form to document decision-making around revocations. The revocation recommendation form is a quality improvement case review instrument focused on the proposed licensing action. It assists DEL to better understand the conditions under which revocations are recommended, as well as evaluate consistency and accountability around the state. Information contained in these forms is critical as quality improvement staff gathers and analyzes data from around the state. DEL will develop and implement similar instruments to the revocation recommendation form in order to gather data on the other licensing actions described above.