



Accelerate Quality

Overview:

Accelerate Quality is a pilot program of United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona and works with eligible preschools, childcare centers, and family childcare homes in Pima County to increase high quality early care and education in Pima County. In short, our goal is to increase the supply of high quality ECE.

Accelerate Quality provides coaching and technical assistance, small improvement grants, and assessments of learning environments and teacher-child interactions. These supports help prepare ECE providers attain a high-quality rating through Arizona's quality rating and improvement system and/or helps them achieve accreditation. Accelerate Quality also works with ECE programs that are already high quality add additional classrooms or spaces so they can serve more children.

United Way of Tucson is committed to the success of the Pima County scholarships (Pima Early Education Program, or PEEPs) and has been a key collaborating partner with the County to support the implementation of PEEPs. Accelerate Quality was specifically designed to help more early childhood programs in Pima County access PEEPs and amplifies the impact of the new County funding. For more information about the progress of PEEPs, please see the PEEPs First Quarter Report.

Thanks to generous donations from the Diamond Family Foundation, Southern Arizona Leadership Council, the Community Foundation For Southern Arizona, Tucson Medical Center, El Rio Health and numerous individuals, Accelerate Quality helps increase the supply of high-quality early care and education options for parents and ensure that children have access to high quality early care and learning settings.

Accelerate Quality's Goals:

The goals of Accelerate Quality are to:

- Increase the number of sites that are high quality, using the DES definition of high quality (3-5 Star or accredited)
- Increase the number of high-quality slots for children ages 3-5 years of age
- Increase the number of children enrolled high quality care and education
- Increase high quality childcare options for families, including options closer to their own neighborhoods or place of work

- Increase the number of DES-contracted sites and those that are contracted to enroll children with special needs
- Help parents enter the workforce or attend training/school, contributing to the local economy
- Help contribute to families' awareness of what high quality early learning programs look like

As of December 30, 2021, we have 11 sites actively participating in the project.

- Five are seeking quality rating. They have been notified by Quality First that they have been released from the waiting list, meaning that they are now scheduled for their initial assessment. Supports for these providers include conducting informal assessments to identify what they might improve prior to their first official Quality First assessment; purchase of learning materials and classroom furniture based on the results of the informal assessment; coaching and technical assistance; and other tools and resources such as materials checklists and playground design information. Two of these sites are already enrolled in Quality First and have requested additional support to reach the 3-Star rating on their next assessment.
- Three are already rated as high quality and are working to expand their current enrollment by adding a preschool classroom.
- One site is a school district contracted with the County to open a new classroom. The classroom is not yet licensed or operational and is receiving support in the form of coaching and technical assistance and funding for a fence to meet licensing requirements.
- In all, there are an estimated 669 of children benefitting from Accelerate Quality.

Successes:

Improvements to learning environments: One of the sites participating in Accelerate Quality is owned by a woman who has previously worked with Department of Child Safety finding foster placements for children and has had several foster children of her own.

She saw that there was a need in the early childhood community for childcare that addressed the unique needs of foster families and children who've experienced trauma. She started as a small group home, caring for 10 children. Her waiting list grew and she eventually leased space from a local church to expand and become a center-based program in 2019.

Due to the pandemic, she has struggled and had not been able to afford to set up her four classrooms as she'd hoped. Instead, she relied on donations and any items that she could pick up at thrift stores and garage sales. The site had very few high-quality learning materials, but not likely enough to be successful in reaching a 3-Star rating in Quality First.

Accelerate Quality purchased shelving units, equipment, and learning materials such as blocks, puzzles, and dolls. Reaching out into the community, we secured donations of additional shelving and about 50 books and assorted math and science toys donated by Treasures for Teachers. The director reported that the children "couldn't get enough of the doll babies" and when the coach visited, a group of children were excited to show her their new outside toys.

The center's "pre-rating" for environments would have been in the range of a 1 Star, but after the improvements, their first official Quality First environmental assessment was just shy of a 3 Star. This is an incredible amount of progress that was made in just a few weeks. Accelerate Quality staff will continue to support the center as needed and is transitioning the center to the Quality First coach for longer-term support.