

Quality Improvement Program Provider Handbook

2026





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Introduction

Thank you for your dedication to supporting children and families in Jefferson, Gilpin and Clear Creek counties. We're excited to partner with you to strengthen quality childcare because we know how much it benefits our communities by connecting families to reliable resources, supporting childcare providers, and advancing the Bright Futures Roadmap.

We are Gateway Partnership for Early Childhood, your Early Childhood Council. Our work with you centers on helping your program secure funding from the Colorado Department of Early Childhood to advance your quality initiatives. This may include investing in coaching, identifying priorities within your Quality Improvement Plan, supporting progress in Colorado Shines, funding professional development, purchasing new curricula, purchasing classroom materials, and providing guidance with all of these processes.

We know transitioning to a new Early Childhood Council can seem confusing, disjointed, or frustrating. Our goal is to support you in this process so that you can best serve the children and families you work with every day.

We look forward to building strong partnerships with you, our Quality Improvement coaches, the Colorado Department of Early Childhood and, most importantly, our communities.

Together, we will create accessible, equitable early childhood experiences and systems across Jefferson, Gilpin, and Clear Creek counties

Thank you for your trust in us as we do this important work.

-The Gateway Partnership for Early Childhood Team



Vision, Mission, Values & Priorities



Our Vision

All families in Jefferson, Gilpin, and Clear Creek counties have the support they need to promote their child's health and well-being for sustained success in school and in life.

Our Mission

Our mission is to partner with families, providers, and community leaders to create accessible, equitable early childhood experiences and systems across Jefferson, Gilpin, and Clear Creek counties.

Our Values

- Strong families, strong communities
- Celebrate the dignity of all people
- Equitable, high-quality early childhood experiences
- Sustained commitment and coordinated services
- A supported network of adults for children Continuous improvement

"We collaborate with partners to ensure families with young children can access the support they need, when they need it, and in the way that makes sense for them."

Our Priorities

We have identified three key priorities to guide our efforts in best supporting the children, families, providers, and community partners we serve:

1. Connect Families to Resources

- We help families find child care and preschool, access family support programs, and connect to developmental, health, and mental health services.

2. Support Child Care Providers

- We help providers succeed through coaching, professional development, quality improvement supports, and connections to resources.

3. Advance the Bright Futures Roadmap

- We bring together a broad coalition of partners to strengthen coordination, align resources, and advance solutions that improve outcomes for young children, families, and the early childhood workforce.

Program Overview

What Is the CSQI Coaching Program?

The Colorado Shines Quality Improvement (CSQI) Coaching Program provides relationship-based, 6-to-8-week coaching cycles designed to strengthen educator practice, improve program quality, and support child development. Coaching includes observation, modeling, feedback, reflection, and collaborative goalsetting aligned with your program's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

What You Can Expect

- A strengths-based, collaborative partnership between educators and a Quality Improvement (QI) Coach.
- Evidence-informed strategies aligned with the Early Learning & Development Guidelines (ELDGs), Colorado Shines standards, and your program's QIP priorities.
- Regular visits that include observation, modeling, feedback, and resource-sharing.
- A focus on building sustainable and meaningful improvements in educator practice, not compliance or rating preparation.

What Coaching Does Not Include

- A guaranteed Colorado Shines rating.
- Conducting licensing inspections or representing regulatory agencies.
- Providing supervision or making personnel decisions.
- Replacing staff responsibilities or operating classrooms.
- Taking on program administrative tasks unless part of an approved coaching activity.
- Support with PDIS, Colorado Shines, etc. The GPEC Quality Support Specialist or Quality Improvement Lead will can assist with this.

Provider Participation Expectations

- To get the most out of coaching, providers are expected to:
- Participate actively in coaching sessions.
- Communicate needs, barriers, and scheduling changes.
- Collaborate on assessments and SMARTIE goals connected to the QIP.
- Implement strategies discussed with the Coach between sessions.



- Follow scheduling expectations in the Coaching Agreement.
- Engage in progress monitoring and reflection throughout the cycle.
- Protect confidentiality and share only relevant information.

Your active engagement in this process ensures coaching is meaningful, effective, and tailored to your program's needs and goals.

How Directors Support Successful Coaching

- You set the tone for a strong coaching partnership by:
- Encouraging staff to actively participate
- Ensuring staff availability and support for scheduled coaching sessions.
- Keeping communication clear and timely.
- Prioritizing coaching as part of your professional development culture.
- Engaging in reflective conversations with your Coach as needed.

Scheduling & Attendance

- Cancellations or reschedules must be communicated as early as possible to the Coach and GPEC staff.
- Cancellations/reschedules communicated less than 3 hours before the start of a coaching session will be billed to your program's grant for the full coaching time, except in rare circumstances.
- Three or more repeated no-shows or cancellations will also be billed.

Confidentiality & Safety

Providers must:

- Follow all confidentiality requirements, including protection of children's and families' personal information (Guidance from CDEC about [SB 25-276](#))
- Maintain safe environments during coaching visits.
- Know that Coaches are mandated reporters and must report suspected abuse or neglect immediately.

Questions Or Concerns

Directors should reach out to the Gateway Partnership Quality Improvement Lead or Quality Improvement Specialist with any questions or concerns.

Any of the following should prompt immediate communication:

- Safety concerns
- Repeated missed appointments by Coaches
- Staff participation challenges
- Ethical or confidentiality issues
- Significant program changes impacting coaching

How Coaching Works

Each coaching cycle is approximately 8 hours and includes:

- Initial Assessment & Goal Setting:
 - Complete Coaching Agreement, review your QIP and set SMARTIE-aligned coaching goals.
- Implementation Phase:
 - Observation, modeling, co-teaching, feedback, and shared resources (multiple visits).
- Reflection & Data Review:
 - Discussion of progress and next steps.
- Exit & Transition Planning:
 - Close the cycle and determine remaining QI fund use.

Timeline Overview

- First and final visits must be in-person.
- First Coaching Visit: The Coach and provider will complete the Coaching Agreement document and review the program's QIP.
- Third Coaching Visit: QIP reviewed (if not before) and SMARTIE coaching goals finalized.

Cycle Phase	Estimated Time
Initial Assessment, Goal Setting, & Coaching Plan	Initial Assessment, Goal Setting, & Coaching Plan
Implementation (Observation, Modeling, Co-Teaching, Feedback)	4 hours
Reflection & Data Review	1 hour
Exit & Transition Plan	1 hour

Virtual Coaching Sessions

Virtual visits are only allowed in exceptional circumstances (severe weather, safety concerns, emergencies, etc.), unless approved by the Quality Improvement Lead. The goal is for coaching sessions to be in-person to ensure quality, consistency and objectives are achieved.

Remaining Quality Improvement Funds

After at least 5-8 hours of coaching, programs may work with the Coach and QI Specialist to identify materials or resources they would like to purchase. All materials must be approved by GPEC staff and be aligned with the program's QIP goals, school readiness goals, and ELDG priorities.

Per CDEC guidelines, purchases may not include consumable materials or religious content. Beginning this year, programs must purchase materials only from approved vendors and reimbursements will no longer be issued.

Remaining funds and their desired use are discussed during the exit meeting with the Coach.



Funding Overview

What Is the Funding?

Colorado is offering grant funding for licensed early learning programs with the goal to support programs in improving their overall quality and care for children in early childhood.

The funds are for licensed childcare programs participating in Colorado Shines who want to improve their program's quality.

While CDEC is working on refreshing the Colorado Shines Rating System, provisional ratings are still being offered until CDEC announces the new system.

QI Funding Types

QI Funding Name	Colorado Shines Level	Has CCCAP Fiscal Agreement?	Serves Infants & Toddlers
Expanded Supports in Quality Improvement (ESQI)	Level 1 or higher	No	N/A
Targeted Supports in Quality Improvement (TSQI)	Level 2 or higher	Yes	N/A
Minor Improvement Grant*	Level 2 or higher	Yes	Yes

*Must currently be receiving TSQI funds and have an MOU.



Applying For Funds

How To Apply for Grant Funding

Log into your Provider Hub to apply for grant funding. Using the above chart, select the correct grant for your program and fill out all necessary details to apply.

Next Steps

After you apply, GPEC will receive and review your application. We will then notify you whether you are tentatively accepted or not. If tentatively accepted, GPEC staff will schedule a meeting with you to review program expectations and guidelines, as well as answer any questions you may have. If you choose to move forward, we will formally accept you and ask you to digitally sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Once both you and GPEC have signed the MOU, we will determine your coaching cycle based on your feedback and Coach availability.

Before your coaching cycle begins, we will assign a Coach to your program. You will then move through the phases of coaching identified in the Coaching Cycle section.

If you are participating in a later Coaching Cycle, we will follow up with you at regular intervals before your Cycle begins.

What Can Funding Be Used For?

Part of funding must be used for the coaching you will receive while participating in the coaching cycle. Remaining funds, if you have any, will be used for other program needs. You will collaborate with your Coach to determine what the best use is. Funds can be used differently for individual classrooms--all participating classrooms do not have to use funds the same way.

Accepted funds usage includes:

- Professional development
- College courses
- Technical assistance, such as coaching and consultation
- Materials to support program quality
- Costs for an accreditation

Coaching Cycle Schedule

There are three coaching cycles:

- Cycle 1: September 21 to November 13
- Cycle 2: January 11 to March 5
- Cycle 3: March 15 to May 7
- Final closing sessions: May 2027



Buying Materials

If you and your Coach determine that you want to buy materials for a classroom, there are a few guidelines that must be followed.

- Purchases must be tied to a QIP goal.
- Purchases can only be made from approved vendors (See the Approved Vendors List in Appendix A).
- No reimbursements will be issued unless purchases were approved by GPEC staff. Approved reimbursements can be for approved curriculum, substitute teacher cost, PD, etc.
- Materials purchased may not be consumable or include religious content.
- The correct materials purchasing process must be followed.

How To Submit Requests To Use Funds

Please see the Addendum, Submitting Marketplace Vendor Requests, for directions from CDEC on how to submit requests.

Requirements To Submit Funds Requests

When you submit a request to use funds, you will also be required to submit documentation related to the request. The type of documentation needed differs depending on the request.

CDEC requires

- Completed Reimbursement Request in the QI Module
- An itemized receipt or registration
- Paid in full invoice
- Method of payment

If you use a credit card, you must include -

- A copy of the front of the credit card (all numbers except the last four blocked out).
- The last four digits of the card must match the last four digits of the card used for payment.

OR

- A credit card statement that includes the name of the person or program to whom the card belongs and the posted transaction showing the charge.

If you use a check, you must include

- A copy of the canceled check, document payment and payee OR
- A copy of the bank statement that includes the name of the person and program to whom the account belongs and the posted transaction that shows the payment

Orders Timeline

We will share additional details about the timeline for submitting funds usage requests—especially for materials orders—once we receive updated guidance from CDEC.

In the meantime, our commitment is to review and process all funds usage requests within one business week. When applicable, we will also place related orders within that same timeframe.





Review of Funding Process

1. **Apply To Grant**

- a. Submit application on Provider Hub

2. **Meet With GPEC**

- a. Review program and process

3. **Sign MOU**

- a. Indicate preferred coaching cycle.

4. **Assigned to Cycle & Coach**

- a. GPEC assigns coaching cycle and Coach

5. **Participate In Coaching**

- a. Begin your coaching

6. **End Of Cycle**

- a. Decide with your Coach how to use remaining funds

7. **Use Funds**

- a. Use remaining funds for approved materials and PD.





Izzy Denning, Quality Support Specialist

Izzy facilitates provider information meetings, reviews documentation, provides assessment/QIP technical assistance, approves material requests, and manages procurement and ordering with grant funds.

She can be contacted for general provider questions/support:
edenning@gatewayearlychildhood.org

Cecy Carballo, Quality Improvement Lead

Cecy offers direct coaching, assigns and monitors Coach caseloads, reviews documentation, supports coaching quality, and evaluates coaching effectiveness.

She can be contacted for Coach concerns and QIP-related questions: ccarballo@gatewayearlychildhood.org



Jennifer Anton, Early Childhood Supervisor

Jennifer manages the GPEC CSQI budget, oversees contracting with Coaches, monitors deliverables, and supports ethical decision-making.

She can be contacted for policy questions, safety concerns, and mandated reporting: janton@gatewayearlychildhood.org



Frequently Asked Questions

What makes GPEC's quality improvement coaching model different?

This model is centered on short, intensive 6–8-week coaching cycles rather than a longer, light touch approach. Coaching is not tied to preparing a program for a specific rating tool or meeting a fixed deadline. Instead, goals are aligned with each program's broader quality improvement priorities.

What outcomes for coaching does GPEC aim to achieve?

Because coaching in this model is not driven by a specific rating tool deadline, goals can focus more broadly on meaningful quality improvement priorities. The emphasis is on sustained, long-term growth rather than short-term compliance. Examples of potential coaching outcomes include:

- Strengthened child–adult interactions
- Increased social–emotional competence among children
- Improved systems supports for change (organizational climate, leadership practices, and competency supports)
- Higher staff retention
- Strong, effective leadership and well-supported staff
- Clear goal attainment (Did the program achieve what it expected from coaching?)
- Reduced educator burnout

What does a successful coaching cycle look like?

- Reduced staff absenteeism
- Fewer classroom issues/behavior/reports, etc.
- Staff better prepared to anticipate behavior and to use the environment as the “third teacher.”
- Children settled into routines and learning happens all the time.
- Teachers have an “ah ha” moment, and the awareness/desire for change or improvement ignites.

Will coaching be provided to individual classrooms or to the entire program?

This is determined by your program's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) after your needs and goals are assessed. For example, if you're applying for Level 3, you must meet a minimum number of Technical Assistance hours before you can submit a provisional Level 3 application.

Will the coach meet with the Director, individual classroom teams, or both?

The coach will meet with the director or program leadership first to review the QIP, determine which classrooms will receive coaching, and identify other needs, such as technical assistance, professional development, materials, etc. From there, work may extend to individual classroom teams as identified in the QIP. We will work with you on how best to support your program.

How often are coaching visits scheduled?

Coaching visits are planned around both your schedule and your Coach's availability. Ideally, your Coach will be on site at least once a week.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long are individual coaching sessions?

Session length depends on the number of coaching hours assigned to your program and how you choose to allocate them. For example, if you have two hours of coaching per week and prefer to split the time between two classrooms, each classroom would receive one hour.

Can coaching occur during naptime, staff breaks, or shortened days?

If active teaching needs to be observed, coaching cannot take place during naptime or staff breaks. Debriefing sessions may occur during times when children are not present, if that works for your program and staff. Coaches can visit on shortened days if you and your teachers prefer. Ratios and licensing rules must be followed at all times and cannot include the Coach as an adult in the room.

What happens if a Coach needs to cancel last minute?

Coaches are expected to notify you and GPEC staff as soon as possible if they are unable to attend a session. Their communication responsibilities mirror those expected of providers.

What is the process for requesting virtual sessions?

Please notify GPEC staff as soon as you are interested in virtual or hybrid coaching. This can be discussed during the provider intake meeting or anytime you become aware of the need.

Are we able to do hybrid coaching?

Yes. Hybrid coaching is available depending on Coach availability and your specific needs. Please let us know as early as possible if you would like to pursue this option.

Why do we need to have a QIP?

To apply for Level 2 or higher, CDEC requires that your program have a QIP.

If we don't have a QIP, can you help us create one?

Yes. If your program does not already have a QIP, GPEC staff will assist you in creating one.

What needs to be included in a QIP?

A QIP should include three program goals aligned with a SMART(I)E plan, along with the priority level for each goal and the anticipated completion date. GPEC staff can walk you through all required components.

If multiple classrooms participate, does each one need its own QIP?

No. Only one QIP is required for the program as a whole. Individual classrooms or teachers may set their own goals that align with the program-level QIP.

What are consumable materials?

Consumable materials are items intended for single or short-term use, such as food products or disposable supplies.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are typical funding amounts for each program type?

FCCH: 21 coaching hours

Small Center: 25 coaching hours

Large Center: 33 coaching hours

Can you help our program understand the current process for Colorado Shines ratings?

Yes. We're happy to walk you through the Colorado Shines rating process and explain what each level requires. Please reach out to Our Quality Support Specialist or Quality Improvement Lead.

As Colorado Shines moves through the QIS refresh, is there a transition away from ECERS and ITERS toward CLASS or another tool?

CLASS observations are available when needed, but CDEC has not yet finalized which rating or observation tool will be used moving forward. The current focus is on classroom supports aligned with the Early Learning and Development Guidelines (ELDGs) and the tools many programs already use, such as MTS or the Pyramid Model.

What if we want to participate in this program but prefer a different approach than the one outlined here?

Please reach out by phone or email to set up a time to talk. We'd love to learn more about your program's needs and explore how we can make the model work for you.





Appendix A: Approved Vendors List

Marketplace Vendors

If you order from these vendors, when you submit the funding request, you'll select the vendor in a drop down list. Make sure you select them as a Marketplace vendor. Then click on the External Vendor button. This will take you to the Marketplace vendor's website where you will place your order. After you complete your order, make sure to click the Return to QIP Page button and enter the required information. You must finish these items and then click on the Submit button for your order to be placed.

Orders with Marketplace vendors are sent to the vendor automatically.

Vendors

- Becker's School Supplies
- Discount School Supply
- Kaplan Early Learning Company
- Lakeshore Learning Materials
- School Specialty/Childcraft

Please reach out to GPEC staff or see the Approved Vendors List in the Provider Hub for more information, including contact information for vendor representatives and discounts offered.

See Appendix B for step-by-step instructions to place Marketplace Vendor orders.

Preferred Vendors

If you order from these vendors, when you submit the funding request, you'll the option to order from a Preferred Vendor in the Payable To section of the form. You will then select the vendor from the Select Vendors drop-down box. Make sure to use the Preferred Vendor option.

Orders with Preferred vendors must be sent to the QI Specialist for the order to be placed. Please make sure to send the itemized Purchase Order to the QI Specialist for the order to be placed correctly.

Vendors

- Autism Community Store
- Bookies Bookstore Community Playthings
- Constructive Playthings
- Kodo Kids
- Teaching Strategies, LLC
- The Discovery Store

Please reach out to GPEC staff or see the Approved Vendors List in the Provider Hub for more information, including contact information for vendor representatives and discounts offered.





Appendix B:

How to Submit a Marketplace Vendor Spending Request

Use the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) to submit a Marketplace Vendor spending request. Before you begin: QRIS works best on a computer. If you use a mobile device, turn it sideways to landscape orientation so you can see all menu options.

How to Submit Your Request

Step 1: Access QI Funds

1. Sign in to QRIS.
2. Go to the QRIS Home page.
3. Find the Check your QIP Funds Status section.
4. Select Access QI Funds.

Step 2: Select the QIP Goal Category and Payment Type

On the Quality Improvement Request Form:

1. Select the appropriate category from the QIP Goal Category dropdown menu.
2. From the Payable to dropdown menu, select Direct to Approved Vendor.

Important: Use Direct to Approved Vendor only for Marketplace Vendors.

Step 3: Select a Marketplace Vendor

1. Open the Select Vendors dropdown menu.
2. Select the Marketplace Vendor you want to use.

You can submit only one vendor on each spending request.

Step 4: Go to the Marketplace Vendor's Website

Select Go to External Vendor. QRIS will take you to the selected Marketplace Vendor's website.

Important: Selecting Go to External Vendor may open a confirmation message. According to the source instructions, if you select OK, all existing spending details will be deleted.

Step 5: Select Your Items

On the Marketplace Vendor's website:

1. Add the materials you want to purchase to your shopping cart.
2. When you finish shopping, proceed to checkout.
3. Look for the option to return to the QIP page.
4. Select Return to QIP Page.

Do not complete a separate purchase with the vendor unless the vendor process specifically requires it. The source images only instruct applicants to proceed to checkout and then return to the QIP page.





Appendix B:

How to Submit a Marketplace Vendor Spending Request

Step 6: Complete the Required Information for Each Item

After you return to the QIP page, review your materials and complete the required information for each line item.

Select the appropriate:

- QIP Goals
- Scope
- Age Appropriate Level

Complete these fields for each item included in your request.

Step 7: Complete the Request

Before submitting:

1. Enter a short description explaining how the items or activities will improve the quality of your program and the services you provide to children.
2. Select the signature acknowledgment checkbox.
3. Type your name in the signature field.
4. Review your request for accuracy.

Step 8: Submit the Spending Request

Select Submit to send your completed spending request.

The source also shows a Save and Exit option, but it does not explain what happens to a saved request or how to return to it. I recommend adding those instructions before telling external partners to use that option.

Important Information

- Submit only one Marketplace Vendor per spending request.
- Select Direct to Approved Vendor as the payment type for Marketplace Vendors.
- Be careful when selecting Go to External Vendor. The source states that selecting OK in the resulting pop-up deletes all spending details.
- Complete the required QIP Goals, Scope and Age Appropriate Level information for every line item before submitting.
- Review the request before selecting Submit.





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