

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 4, 2009

Contact: Brian Harter
Phone: (614) 466-6650
E-mail: Brian.Harter@jfs.ohio.gov

**Ohio's 'Step Up to Quality'
Voluntary Child Care Rating System Surpasses Participation Goal**

Two months ahead of schedule, Ohio's "Step Up to Quality" voluntary child care rating system has exceeded its state fiscal year 2009 goal of 800 "star-rated" programs. As of May 1, 800 child care programs had achieved a star rating, serving approximately 78,000 children in 78 of Ohio's 88 counties. Another 108 programs have applications pending.

"It's exciting, particularly because it's a voluntary system," said Jamie Gottesman, assistant chief of Statewide Initiatives for the ODJFS Bureau of Child Care and Development. "For families, it's another assurance. There are more options than ever for Ohio's families to enroll their children in places that support their children's optimal development and learning."

Step Up to Quality recognizes early care and education programs that exceed quality benchmarks over and above minimum health and safety licensing standards. The program is based on national research identifying the key benchmarks that lead to improved outcomes for children. These benchmarks include low child-to-staff ratios, group size, accreditation, staff education, specialized training, improved workplace characteristics and early learning standards. Programs can earn one, two or three stars. All star-rated programs receive monetary awards.

Ohio was the 13th state to implement a child care rating system, and it was recently recognized in a major study by the RAND Corporation as a pioneer in this field. (To view the report, go to http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG795.pdf.) Ohio's program has been nationally recognized for three primary reasons:

- It was the first program to have an early learning benchmark.
- It has a very stringent assessment verification process, with reviewers observing every single teacher in every single classroom.
- It is the only state program with an "emerging stars" designation, which allows centers working toward star ratings to receive technical assistance for up to 12 months. About 60 percent of those "emerging stars" are ultimately able to get star ratings.

For more information about Step Up to Quality, visit <http://www.jfs.ohio.gov/cdc/stepUpQuality.stm>. Parents can search for star-rated and other child care centers in their area by going to <http://www.jfs.ohio.gov/cdc/stepUpQuality.stm> and clicking on "Click here to search for Child Care."