



# STAFF/CHILD RATIO



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Lower staff-child ratios and smaller group sizes are important signs of quality in early care and education programs. When teachers care for fewer children, they can pay closer attention, keep everyone safer, and spend more time helping each child learn and grow. This allows them to build stronger relationships and give more personal support. Studies show that better staff-child ratios help children grow socially, emotionally, and mentally, while also lowering stress for both kids and teachers (Bowne, Magnuson, Schindler, Duncan, & Yoshikawa, 2017; Perlman et al., 2016).

One large study from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2000) found that children in classrooms with fewer kids per teacher showed better language skills, thinking skills, and social behavior. These close connections with teachers are especially important for infants and toddlers who learn best through caring, back-and-forth interactions (Burchinal et al., 2010).

For Step Up To Quality, lower staff-child ratios are only required at the Gold level and do not apply to Family Child Care providers. Programs at the Gold level must meet both the lower ratio and smaller group size rules, and these rules must be followed in at least 40 percent of the groups they serve. Requiring the ratios in only 40 percent of groups gives programs some flexibility while still raising the overall quality of the program.

*Note: As with all Step Up To Quality Standards, the information presented in this document does not replace licensing requirements or operating standards that may apply to a program.*

## KEY TERMS

- **Ratio:** The number of children per staff member in a group.
- **Group Size:** The maximum number of children allowed to be in the care of a staff member, provider, or team of staff members in a specific classroom or area.



## Gold

Meet the ratios in the table below in 40 percent of all groups served during all hours of operation, except nap time.

Standard

Age	Requirement for Gold Rating
Infants	Birth to 12 months 2:10 (Group Size Only) 12 to 18 months 1:5 or 2:10
Toddlers	18 to 30 months 1:6 or 2:12 and 30 to 36 months 1:7 or 2:14
Preschool	36 months to <48 months 1:11 or 2:22 and 48 months to <school age 1:13 or 2:26
School Age	Kindergarten to age 14 years 1:17 or 2:34

Verification Visit	Tips	FAQs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DCY specialists observe each group, counting the number of children and staff present and will document ratios during onsite visits. Attendance records may be reviewed if needed.</li> <li>• If the required ratios and group sizes are not observed, the DCY specialists will ask about the program’s system for maintaining ratios and staffing patterns and will review attendance documentation to ensure that the program has a system and adequate staff to meet the requirements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <b>Focused Review</b> will include an onsite visit to verify the ratio standard is being met.</li> <li>• Programs do not need to notify DCY if they change which rooms are meeting the lower ratios throughout the program year, as long as the program overall still meets the 40 percent standard of groups implementing the lower ratios.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Do reduced ratios need to always be followed in the same 40 percent of the groups?</b></p> <p>No, it is ok to designate different groups at different times, but please be aware that your program must have a system to maintain the lower ratio and group size requirements.</p>

Chart Showing How Many Classrooms Must Meet Higher Ratio

Number of Classrooms	Number of Classrooms Needing Lower Ratios
1	1
2	1
3	2
4	2
5	2
6	3
7	3
8	4
9	4
10	4
11	5
12	5
13	6

## Citations

Bowne, J. B., Magnuson, K., Schindler, H. S., Duncan, G. J., & Yoshikawa, H. (2017). A meta-analysis of class size and ratio research in early childhood education: Are thresholds of quality associated with greater impacts on cognitive, achievement, and socioemotional outcomes? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 39(3), 407–428. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373716689489>

Burchinal, M., Vandergrift, N., Pianta, R., & Mashburn, A. (2010). Threshold analysis of association between child care quality and child outcomes for low-income children in pre-kindergarten programs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25(2), 166–176. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2009.10.004>

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Perlman M, Falenchuk O, Fletcher B, McMullen E, Beyene J, et al. (2016). A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of a Measure of Staff/Child Interaction Quality (the Classroom Assessment Scoring System) in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings and Child Outcomes. *PLOS ONE* 11(12): e0167660. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0167660>