

Why is Farm to Early Care and Education Important?

Early childhood, from the prenatal stage to grade 3, is a critical time for children's social, emotional and cognitive development. During this window, children are also developing taste preferences and eating habits. In Pennsylvania, more than 230,000 children spend time in licensed child care settings.¹ These early care and education (ECE) environments provide opportunities to engage young children in food, nutrition and agriculture activities, setting them up for a lifetime of good health.



Types of Early Care & Education Sites & Programs²

Family Child Care Home: A child care facility located in a caregiver's home in which 4–6 children who are not related to the operator receive care. A family child care home must have a certificate of compliance ("license") from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) in order to legally operate.

Group Child Care Home: A child care facility in which 7–12 children of various ages or in which 7–15 children from 4th grade through 15 years of age who are not related to the operator receive child care. A group child care home must have a certificate of compliance ("license") from DHS in order to legally operate.

Child Care Center: A child care facility that serves more than 7 children not related to the operator. A child care center must have a certificate of compliance ("license") from DHS in order to legally operate.

Private Academic Schools: Formerly known as nursery schools, this type of preschool site provides education to children ages 3-5. Private academic schools are licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE).

School District Pre-Kindergarten: Some public school districts offer district-based preschool programs for at-risk children ages 3-4. Programming is determined locally.

Head Start/Early Head Start: Head Start is a federally funded program that provides comprehensive early care and education services to low-income families. Early Head Start serves pregnant

women, and children at birth through age 3; while Head Start serves children ages 3–5.

Child Care Works: This program provides funding to eligible low-income families to cover childcare costs. Funds are provided by both the federal and state government.

PA Pre-K Counts: This state program provides funding for eligible at-risk children at least 3-4 years old to attend pre-kindergarten programs in schools, child care centers and preschools. PA Pre-K Counts and Child Care Works funds can be accessed together to provide wrap around services for low-income families.

Licensing & Standards

Licensing: In Pennsylvania, DHS is responsible for certifying family and group child care homes, as well as child care centers, while PDE is responsible for licensing and overseeing private academic schools and school district pre-kindergarten programs.

Early Learning Standards: Several agencies and partners in Pennsylvania came together to develop evidence-based Learning Standards for Early Childhood in 2004. Those standards have since been revised and can be accessed [here](#).

Keystone STARS: States across the country use Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) to assess and communicate the level of quality in ECE and school-age child care programs. In Pennsylvania, that system is called Keystone STARS (Standards, Training/Professional Development, Assistance, Resources, and Support). Designations range from STAR 1 through STAR 4. Keystone STARS supports sites in improving program quality.

Statewide Systems, Partnerships & Resources

Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL):

This state government [office](#) is a collaboration between DHS and PDE and focuses on improving Pennsylvania's early childhood education systems.

Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRCs): Overseen by OCDEL, ELRCs are local hubs for child care information and resources across Pennsylvania (see locations [here](#)). Among other things, ELRCs oversee Child Care Works subsidies and employ quality coaches to help ECE sites improve their Keystone STARS ratings.

The Pennsylvania Key: Created in 2007 by OCDEL, [The Pennsylvania Key](#) is a statewide source of information for ECE professionals and a helpful hub for a variety of stakeholders seeking information about ECE systems in Pennsylvania.

Keystone Kids Go: [This statewide collaboration](#) promotes the health and wellness of Pennsylvania's youngest children by offering information, resources and professional development opportunities to ECE providers.

GO NAP SACC: This nutrition and physical activity self-assessment and action planning [tool](#) for ECE settings is available to providers across Pennsylvania and includes a farm to ECE module.

FARM TO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION (FARM TO ECE)

Farm to Early Care and Education activities—which connect children to local agriculture through school gardens, educational activities and procurement—can be supported by statewide systems and policies. Building off recommendations from the statewide Ready Set Grow task force [report](#) published in 2018, the Pennsylvania Farm to School Network supports such integrations. For example:

- Incorporation of farm to ECE indicators into the Keystone STARS system and PA Early Learning Standards (currently included in both with room for expansion).
- Inclusion of ECE sites in state funding streams like the [Pennsylvania Farm to School Grant Program](#) (eligibility currently includes several types of ECE settings).
- Providing professional development opportunities to providers, educators and quality coaches through webinars, trainings and resources (such as the farm to ECE module in [Pennsylvania Professional Development Library](#) and the farm to ECE in Keystone STARS [tip sheet](#)).



Early care and education providers looking for more information about how to integrate farm to ECE into their operations can find helpful information and resources online through the following organizations' websites:

- National Farm to School Network (NFSN): NFSN's Farm to Early Care and Education [landing page](#) is a helpful starting point which includes fact sheets, webinar recordings, and opportunities to learn more and engage.
- The United States Department of Agriculture's Office of Community Food Systems: With a focus on the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) which is the federal Child Nutrition Program used in ECE settings, OCFS maintains a [list of resources](#) to support ECEs in increasing access to local foods. For more general information about CACFP, Child Nutrition Programs and farm to school, see the Pennsylvania Farm to School Network's Child Nutrition Programs [fact sheet](#).
- Keystone Kids Go (KKG): KKG maintains a [resource library](#) focused on improving young children's health and physical activity, which includes farm to ECE resources provided by The Food Trust.
- The Pennsylvania Farm to School Network: This [website](#) is a one-stop shop for farm to school and farm to ECE information and resources in Pennsylvania.
- SNAP-Ed provides nutrition education and policy, systems, and environmental change support across Pennsylvania. [Find a provider](#) near you.

1 http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/rsg-report-finalowres.original.pdf

2 <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/Compass.Web/ProviderSearch/ProgramDescription>

CONTACT INFORMATION

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