

Primary Project National Certification

Certification General Information

1) What is the Primary Project National Certification system?

A multi-step process developed by Children's Institute, by which a Primary Mental Health Project (Primary Project) can be recognized for implementing the program with fidelity. The process is:

- Standards based
- Supported with technical assistance
- Open and transparent
- Fair, with due process
- User friendly
- Nationally reviewed by experts in Primary Project implementation

2) What are the benefits of National Certification?

- Receiving National Certification gives recognition to the school.
- Feedback from the Primary Project endorser can help identify program strengths and areas for continuous program improvement.
- Ensures program is implemented with fidelity to the evidenced based model, whereby young children are identified early for school adjustment difficulties. Many funders will only fund evidenced based programs that are adhering to the program standards.
- As a nationally certified school, there may be opportunities to participate in research studies.
- Certification adds credibility to reports to parents, administrators, school boards etc.
- As a nationally certified school, we may encourage new sites to visit or call you in an effort to help bring the program to more children.

3) What are the categories of Certification?

There are three categories of certification: Full, pending, withheld.

- **Full Certification:** A school that receives full certification meets the National Standards for Primary Project. Children's Institute awards full certification for three years, which commences on the date when the endorser does the certification visit.
- **Pending:** A school may receive a Pending certification when the school does not meet the criteria for full certification, and it is determined that the school is able and willing to commit to take corrective actions to meet the criteria for certification within the one year time period. A school must show evidence of improvement in recommended categories during the subsequent site visit, one year later.
- **Certification Withheld:** Certification is withheld when a school does not meet a substantial number of the National Standards for Primary Project. When certification is withheld, a letter outlining recommendations which will be necessary to move to full

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certification status is given and the certification coordinator is available to answer any clarifying questions. The school may reapply at its own discretion, but the site visit should not occur until one year from the visit to allow ample time for corrective actions to be made.

4) What does the certification process entail?

- School requests a Certification Packet - Upon receipt of packet, school team reviews all materials, with particular attention to assessing readiness for certification. The decision for readiness is based upon how the school views its adherence to the National Standards. Included in the packet is a certification rubric, which is a readiness inventory. These materials offer a transparent opportunity for schools to understand what core areas the endorser will be assessing during a certification visit.
- If a school thinks they are ready to pass certification, they submit application materials to Children's Institute. These initial application materials include:
 - a) A letter of support for the certification process from the principal, indicating their active involvement in the visit, their administrative commitment and role in the overall program, and the role of Primary Project in their school,
 - b) Evaluation data from the past three years,
 - c) Primary Project National Certification Application.
- If the certification packet is complete, an endorser is assigned. The endorser contacts the school to set up a date for the visit and an agenda.
- Blind national review of recommendations and final recommendation by Children's Institute.

5) Who has final authority for determining certification status?

The Children's Institute's Executive Director has the ultimate authority to determine the certification status of a school. The Executive Director delegates to the Certification Team the roles, responsibilities, and authority to facilitate the efficient operation of the certification program. The Certification team includes two levels of review: 1) site endorsers and 2) report reviewers. The endorser conducts site visits, and makes a recommendation regarding certification status. Reviewers support or reject the recommendation and final determination is made by the Executive Director and National Director of Primary Project.

6) What is the due process procedure for sites in the certification process?

- Applicants are notified by mail of the certification decision. In the event that certification has not yet been achieved, the applicant receives recommendations to be met in order to satisfy the standards.
- Questions or concerns specific to endorser recommendations after a site visit or the actual decision of the review team should be brought to the Certification Coordinator. If the Certification Coordinator cannot address them to the satisfaction of the site, the Certification Coordinator will bring the questions or concerns to the National Director of Primary Project and/or the Executive Director.
- The final decision will be sent in writing to the site.

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7) How can I use the Standards and Rubric to assess my program?

The first step is to become familiar with the Primary Project Standards and the rubric. The Standards outline in detail the key components of Primary Project. After a program reviews the standards and rubric, staff decides whether to focus on targeted improvements or begin the process that could lead to a certification application.

- If a school identifies areas that are not aligned with the Standards, or has experienced program drift, a certification application should not be submitted. After improvements are made to meet the standards, a program may be ready to apply for National Certification.
- The goal is to provide programs with the necessary tools and support to implement the Primary Project program based on the standards and best practices.

8) Who developed the Primary Project National Standards and Rubric?

The standards were developed by a national team including administrators, supervisors, child associates, and others with experience in Primary Project. These standards describe the best practices and research in Primary Project programs from decades of experience and implementation across different states. The rubric was developed as a way for schools to understand what the endorser will be looking for during interviews and observations.

9) What happens when there are multiple sites?

Each school must go through the application process and apply for certification individually. Two schools may request a joint visit.

10) When are application materials due?

If you would like to have a certification visit during a particular school year, you should have the application materials to Children's Institute by March 15th.

11) Who provides support or technical assistance during the certification process? Are there mentors who can help throughout the process?

Children's Institute staff is available to answer questions on the certification application process. If schools have questions or concerns about the certification process or results, they can address those concerns through the certification coordinator, Arlene Bobin.