

The APPLE Accreditation process is a voluntary, self-directed program. Since 1999, APPLE has been providing Early Learning Centers with the necessary tools to achieve a level of quality to assist them in improving outcomes for the children and families they serve. Many states provide additional incentives to encourage accreditation; but the most important incentive is that by meeting accreditation standards, Centers have the opportunity to improve the health and safety of the children, improve learning outcomes through teacher interactions and research-based curriculum, and improve communication with staff, parents, and the community.

There are several steps that a Center should take before beginning the accreditation process. The answers to the following questions are critical.

- Does the Center have a clearly defined mission?
- Does the Center have a dedicated team that can work on the accreditation process?
- Is the Center ready to make the necessary changes to achieve accreditation?
- Does the Center have the necessary resources to achieve the required standards and the resources to sustain them?

If the answers to the questions above are YES, then it is time to begin. Centers may proceed at their own pace with up to 18 months to assemble and submit their portfolio. The APPLE Program Office provides guidance and technical assistance at every step. On-site technical assistance is available for a fee. Our goal is to work with every Center, so that every child has access to a quality early childhood education program.

To begin, the APPLE application is available at www.faccm.org/apple-forms. Once it is completed, it should be mailed to **908 S Andrews Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316** or **Faxed to 954-767-4701**. Once the application and a non-refundable application fee are received, the clock begins. An APPLE ID and password will be sent via email to access the members area of the FACCM website, which includes the APPLE Manual, the Portfolio Self-Evaluation Checklist and instructions, as well as other useful documents.

EARLY LEARNING CENTERS LOCATED IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA

APPLE accreditation is a member benefit of FACCM and the Center must be a member in good standing of FACCM to participate in APPLE Accreditation in every stage of the accreditation process.

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications from the APPLE office are sent via email. Please ensure that the owner's and director's email addresses are up to date.

IF THE CENTER SERVES SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN AT ANY TIME DURING THE YEAR, all Standards and Procedures for this age group must be addressed. The verification will include a review of the School Age Program, and, if in compliance, the Center will earn the School-Age Unit Certificate Endorsement (SAUCE) in addition to the APPLE Accreditation. If the School-Age Program does not meet the APPLE standards, the APPLE Accreditation will not be awarded.

All submitted materials become the property of FACCM, Inc. and will not be returned. Your intellectual property rights are protected.

NEW PROGRAMS SEEKING ACCREDITATION

The Center has 18 months from the date APPLE emails the Center with its unique ID and password to complete the self-study phase of the APPLE Accreditation process and to submit the Portfolio. Under certain circumstances an extension may be requested through the APPLE Program Office.

The APPLE Manual contains the Standards and Procedures that are the requirements to earn Accreditation. It provides detailed information about the documentation that must be submitted as evidence that the Standards are met. It also describes what the verifier will be observing when the Center moves to the verification phase of the accreditation process. The following timeline and process apply to applicants that choose the Standard accreditation process, for the Advanced process, please refer to this [document](#).

POLICIES

Other important policies are available in the members area of the website including policies on: Toxins, Attendance & Supervision, Confidentiality, Employee Records, Reaccreditation, Non-Compliance, and Revocation.

The first step of the accreditation process is Compiling the Portfolio...

The Portfolio Self-Evaluation Checklist is the guide to successfully compiling the Portfolio. It is important to pay attention to the timelines to ensure that the Portfolio is submitted on time.

- The Center will need to create an electronic copy of the Portfolio in PDF format that includes all required documentation. The Center should keep an identical paper copy onsite for the verifier's reference, if needed, as well as for the Center's records for the term of the accreditation period.
- Address each item in the Portfolio Self-Evaluation Checklist. Submit all documentation listed in the Evidence section of the Portfolio. Failure to submit required documentation will result in a "resubmit". If an item is not included, or not applicable, a statement to that effect along with an explanation is required.
- All submitted materials must be organized and legible.
- All attachments/enclosures must be titled and placed in the same order as listed in the Portfolio Self-Evaluation Checklist. Failure to organize the Portfolio in the same order may result in a "resubmit."
- The submitted Portfolio must be a professional presentation.
- Additional instructions for electronic submission and recommended file naming procedures can be found on the instructions page of the Portfolio Self-Evaluation checklist.
- All appendices must also be included.

- All appropriate fees must be paid prior to submitting the electronic copy of the Portfolio to the APPLE Program Office.
- The payment form and fee schedule are posted under the [APPLE tab](#) at FACCM.org.

Next Step: Portfolio Review...

Once the Portfolio is submitted, it will be reviewed by the APPLE Program Office **within** 120 days. There are two (2) potential outcomes:

1. **If the portfolio passes, MOVE TO THE VERIFICATION STAGE:** This means that the Portfolio has substantially met the APPLE requirements and has passed with a 90% or higher score. The next step will be the assignment of a verifier who will visit the Center to ensure that all observable Standards and Procedures are met.
2. **If the portfolio does not pass, RESUBMIT:** This means that there is incomplete or missing documentation. The Center will be notified and given a list of the missing or incomplete criteria. The Center will have **up to** three (3) months to submit the remaining documents to raise the score to 90% or higher along with the appropriate resubmission fee. PLEASE NOTE: It is critical to note the dates and timing for re-accreditation. A Center may not want to take the full time allotted if that could lead to a lapse in accreditation. Should that happen, the Center would only be granted a three year accreditation period versus a five year reaccreditation period.

In the event of a “RESUBMIT”, the entire Portfolio must be revisited. All submissions must be brought up to current status. Additional documentation may be required. For example, new employees would have to be added to the employee documentation section, new licenses or certificates might need to be submitted etc.

Next Step: Verification Visit...

Once the Portfolio is approved and the Center is notified that it has been moved to the verification stage:

- The verifier will visit the Center within the three (3) month period following the Portfolio’s approval.
- The Center will be permitted to block out two (2) dates per month during which a visit will not take place.
- Once those dates are determined, the Center will be given a three (3) week window during which the verifier will make an **unannounced** visit.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE ABILITY TO BLOCK OUT DATES IS ONLY POSSIBLE IN THE INITIAL THREE (3) MONTH PERIOD. IF A RE-VERIFICATION VISIT IS REQUIRED, THERE IS NO OPPORTUNITY TO BLOCK OUT ADDITIONAL DATES. IF THERE ARE EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES, CONTACT THE APPLE OFFICE.

The job of the verifier is to verify that the documentation submitted is reflective of what actually takes place at the Center. The verifier will observe each classroom to ensure

that it meets the APPLE Standards and Procedures. The verifier will check for general safety and cleanliness of the facility. The verifier will observe the schedule, the classroom management, the teacher student interactions, and the literacy experiences as well as other criteria indicated in the APPLE Manual. It should be noted that if the Portfolio Reviewers had questions about any of the items in the Portfolio submitted, the verifier will request to see those specific items.

The Center should plan for a full day of observation. If the Center's enrollment is currently over 150 children, two verifiers may conduct the visit, or one verifier may conduct the visit over two or more days, depending on the availability of verifiers and the size of the Center.

The completed parent and staff survey summary sheets as well as the completed surveys must be available for the verifier. Instructions for administering the surveys are included with the survey forms.

- **Parent Surveys: (Appendix 9a-9c)** Parent surveys are included in English and in Spanish. These are to be completed when the Center receives notice from the APPLE Program Office that the Center has been moved to the verification phase. A parent from the Center should be selected to be responsible for the collection of the parent surveys. After the surveys have been collected, the Director will then complete the Parent Survey Summary Form and have it available for the verifier along with the original survey forms. All of these forms can be found in the Appendices section of the APPLE Manual.
- **Staff Surveys: (Appendix 10a-10c)** are included in English and in Spanish. Each staff member must receive a copy of the survey. Staff should be instructed to complete the survey alone and NOT to discuss the survey with the other staff members. The survey should be submitted anonymously. Each staff member should return his/her own survey to the Center Director prior to the verification visit. The Director will complete the Staff Survey Summary Form and the Director response to Staff Survey Form to submit to the verifier, along with the original surveys, at the time of the visit. All these forms can be found in the Appendices section of the APPLE Manual.

When the verification is complete:

- The verifier will review the verification visit with the Center Director or the individual designated as the Center Representative at the end of the visit in the **“Exit Review.”**
- The Center Director or Representative will have the opportunity to provide responses and comments on the exit review form.
- Both the verifier and the Center Representative will e-sign the exit review form.
- A copy will be emailed to the Center.
- The verifier will then submit all verification materials and the Exit Review materials to the APPLE Program Office.
- All submitted materials will be reviewed by the APPLE Commission.

Next step: Submit the Verifier Evaluation...

The Center Director or Representative completes the Verifier Evaluation Form (Appendix #7) online within three (3) days of the visit. The link to this form will be emailed to the Center prior to the visit. The Verifier Evaluation Form serves to inform the APPLE Program Office about the onsite visit and the expertise of the verifier. Verifier evaluation forms are reviewed by the APPLE Program Office and the feedback is used to evaluate verifier performance and maintain quality.

Next step: APPLE Commission Review...

All verifier materials are reviewed within 60 days and may be compared with the Portfolio submission by the APPLE Commissioners. Members of the APPLE Commission will determine the status of the Center's accreditation. The Commissioners have the following options:

- Recommendation for Accreditation
- Probation for renewing Centers
- Provisional for new Centers
- Deferral (which will require a second verification visit); or
- Denial with no re-verification option

If the center is substantially compliant with the APPLE standards, it will be notified via email that it is accredited. A copy of the accreditation certificate will be mailed to the center.

If it is determined that a center's environment poses a **potential** threat to the health and/or safety of the children, the center may be given a Probationary/Provisional accreditation. In the event a Center receives Probation or Provisional accreditation status, the Center will be given the task of submitting an action plan for improvement. The Commissioners may approve the plan as written or modify it. Once the plan is approved, the Center will continue this status for up to three (3) months. During that time, a verifier will make an **unannounced** visit to verify that the plan has been implemented. The verifier will file a report with the APPLE Program Office and a final determination on the status will be made. The Commissioners may decide to remove the Center from Probation or Provisional status or extend the status for up to an additional three (3) months. A fee will be assessed if either of these options are approved. An additional fee will be assessed if the status is extended beyond the three (3) month period.

In the event of a deferral, the Center will have up to three (3) months to resubmit the necessary items and make changes or improvements. The Center must request a re-verification visit in writing once it is prepared to receive a second visit. There will be a second verification visit fee assessed and the APPLE office will schedule the unannounced visit as soon as practical

If the Center is accredited and the current accreditation will expire during this re-verification time period, there will be no extensions issued by the APPLE Program Office. The APPLE Program Office will do everything possible to complete the process

prior to the expiration, but it will not guarantee that a lapse will not occur. If there is a lapse in the accreditation, then the Center will receive a three (3) year accreditation instead of a five (5) year re-accreditation.

NOTE: On a Center's first deferral, technical assistance will be offered to assist the center to achieve accreditation. If the Center is deferred a second time, technical assistance will be required before the Center can move forward with the accreditation process.

An automatic deferral occurs when a Center :

- Fails to complete background screening for all employees: or employs individuals whose background screening results preclude them from working with young children
- Provides inaccurate or fraudulent submissions
- Leaves a child unattended; fails to account for the children in care.
- Fails to maintain substantial compliance with child care licensing demonstrating repeated serious violations.

In the event of a denial, an applicant has the right to appeal the denial of accreditation within 30 days of receiving notice. If the denial is emailed, the clock starts at the time the email was delivered. If the denial is mailed, the clock begins five days from the date the APPLE staff documents its mailing. If an applicant wishes to appeal, it must submit a detailed letter to the APPLE Director outlining the objections. The APPLE Program Director will submit the appeal to the APPLE Governing Board, and the Board will have 30 days to make a decision.

If an applicant wishes to appeal a deferral, it will have ten (10) days to submit in writing a detailed request for the APPLE Governing Board to review the decision. The Board will have thirty (30) days from the date the appeal is presented to make a decision. The APPLE Program Director will present the appeal requests to the Governing Board within 14 days of receipt. The Governing Board may overturn and/or modify the decision.

The Governing Board will review the written evidence in the case of a denial or deferral and has the authority to authorize the APPLE Program Director to contact the applicant, verifier, or others to obtain additional evidence. Once a decision is rendered, the decision is final.

Following is a list of reasons an applicant may appeal the Commission's decision:

- Bias on the part of the verifier
- Verifier's inability to follow the proper procedures
- Other reasonable objections based on the Exit Report

ADVANCED APPLE

When considering accrediting or re-accrediting your center, Advanced APPLE might be an appropriate option. Advanced APPLE is an accelerated process with shorter timelines. The details about Advanced APPLE are in the [Policies and Forms Section](#) of the website.

Re-Accreditation:

APPLE Accreditation is initially valid for 3 years with subsequent re-accreditation terms valid for 5 years. Centers may initiate the APPLE re-accreditation process 18 months before the the Accreditation expiration date. Centers that have initiated the APPLE re-Accreditation process must submit the new, completed Portfolio to the APPLE Program Office not less than 8 months, but not more than 12 months, before the end of the accreditation term. If the Portfolio is not submitted 8 months prior to the Accreditation expiration date, the Center will have the option of selecting Advanced APPLE by paying all additional fees to assure there is no lapse in accreditation. This option will only be available up to the fifth (5th) month prior to the Accreditation expiration date. APPLE will not guarantee there will not be a lapse in a Center's accreditation. Moreover, if the re-accrediting Center is deferred after selecting Advanced APPLE, this could result in a lapse. The Advanced APPLE process will only guarantee that there is no lapse in accreditation if it is approved by the Commission upon its first submittal (See details under the Policies and Forms Section of this manual).

New Location or Change of Ownership:

In these situations, follow the policy and guidelines for APPLE Accreditation Amendment in the Policies and Forms Section.

Annual Updates Required

All APPLE Accredited Programs must complete the Annual Update Report and submit it to the APPLE office by the last day of the month of the Center's anniversary date. For instance, if your Accreditation anniversary date is June 15, the Annual Update Report must be submitted no later than June 30th. If a report is not submitted by the due date, the center will be notified that is is not in compliance with APPLE standards, and may have its accreditation revoked. Any report received after the last day of the month will be assessed a late fee. You will find the Annual Report Form under the Policies and Forms Section of the website at FACCM.org under the APPLE tab.

Annual Reports are due the 1st and 2nd anniversary of a 3-year accreditation;

Annual Reports are due the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year of a 5-year accreditation

Disclaimer

When the decision is made to pursue early childhood program accreditation it is a commitment on the part of the program to a standard of quality that is above the minimum requirement. For Owners and Directors engaged in the field of early education, the expectation is for professionalism. The expectations for the documentation submitted for review and the verification visit are that they present an accurate and truthful representation of the nature and extent of the program's operating policies and day-to-day operation.

- The APPLE Program Office reserves the right to make unannounced visits to APPLE accredited centers for the purpose of ensuring compliance with APPLE criteria throughout the accreditation period. APPLE has the authority to revoke APPLE accreditation if, during the period of accreditation, the Center's quality is determined to be non-compliant to a degree which would have caused the Center to not become accredited had the same situations or conditions existed at the time of accreditation.
- The APPLE Program Office will notify the appropriate local and state agencies if APPLE accreditation is revoked. These entities may include DOH, DCF, OEL, local ELC, or local licensing authorities.
- The APPLE Program Office will cooperate with all government and non-profit entities that have a vested interest in assuring that a Center maintains quality standards. The APPLE Program Office will provide requested information to these entities when requested as a result of an inquiry or investigation.
- APPLE is open to all Early Learning Centers in the United States of America that meet the criteria.
- For Centers located in the State of Florida, APPLE accreditation is considered a benefit of membership in the Florida Association for Child Care Management (FACCM) and membership in FACCM must be maintained throughout every phase of accreditation and during the period of accreditation.
- FACCM reserves the right to refuse or revoke membership in the FACCM organization due to unprofessional conduct