

UNM ECSC FOCUS Verification Process At-A-Glance FY26



Introduction

In partnership with the New Mexico Early Childhood Education & Care Department (ECECD), the UNM Early Childhood Services Center (ECSC) is proud to offer FOCUS verification services to early childhood programs across the state.

As part of our commitment to supporting programs participating in FOCUS, we aim to provide clear, upfront information about what to expect before, during, and after your verification visit. The following overview outlines the steps following your application for FOCUS verification.

Our goal is to ensure a smooth and supportive process every step of the way. If you have questions at any point, please feel free to contact our verification team at focusverification@unm.edu. For general questions related to NM ECECD FOCUS, reach out to the NM ECECD FOCUS Manager, Rosario Roybal, at rosario.roybal@ececd.nm.gov.

Verification Timelines and Expectations

2-Star+ Verification Timeline

Programs are expected to participate in services provided by UNM ECSC and to obtain FOCUS 3-Star within two years from their start date.

- If FOCUS 3-Star is not achieved within this period, the program's subsidy rate will revert to the NM ECECD Child Care Licensing 2-Star level.
- Programs that have not successfully verified may request an extension from the NM ECECD FOCUS Manager to complete a successful verification.

3, 4, and 5-Star Verification Timeline

FOCUS verification is required annually. Applications submitted between October and December may experience delays due to year-end activities and UNM holiday closures. To ensure an annual visit, applications must be received no later than October 1st.

- **Programs requesting a star-level change will be expected to meet with their consultant prior to verification.**

FOCUS Verification Process

Step 1: FOCUS Verification and Approval Process

The NM ECECD FOCUS Manager reviews and approves all applications electronically, then forwards them to the UNM ECSC Verification & Assessment Manager for review and assignment.

Monthly, the UNM ECSC Verification & Assessment Manager requests confirmation of each program's licensing status by submitting the program's licensed name and EPICS/License number. The NM ECECD Regional Child Care Licensing Supervisors confirm whether the program is in **good standing** or under **Conditions of Operation (COO)**.

- If the program is in **good standing**, the program is assigned to a verifier for scheduling.
- If the program is **under a COO**, the program's status is documented, and notification is sent via FOCUS verification email to the program administrator, ECSC Consultant, and NM ECECD FOCUS Manager. UNM ECSC cannot proceed with verification until the COO is lifted, and the program is in good standing. At that point, the program must submit a new FOCUS application for verification.

UNM ECSC FOCUS Verification Process

At-A-Glance FY26



Step 2: Scheduling Your Verification Visit

Within **45 business days** of application approval, a verifier will contact the program administrator to schedule the visit and confirm the date, time, and duration. If a team member is shadowing the verifier, you will be notified in advance.

Note: *Verification visits must occur during the program's regular licensed hours and with enrolled children present.*

Step 3: Day of Verification

On the day of your scheduled verification, the assigned verifier(s) will arrive and follow your program's visitor protocols, including all health, safety, and sign-in procedures.

In partnership with the program administrator(s), the verifier(s) will collaboratively determine how to complete all three components of the verification process, using the **Observe, Interview, Review Records, Report (OIR-R)** approach.

- A. **Observe:** Classroom observations, interactions, and environments
- B. **Interview:** Dialogue and conversation with program staff
- C. **Review:** Classroom and program documentation
- D. **Report:** Complete verification tool and debrief

Step 4: Documentation Review/Observations

During the documentation review, the verifier(s) will review materials that demonstrate how your program meets the FOCUS Essential Elements of Quality. This may include evidence related to social-emotional support, inclusive practices, staff-to-child ratios, educator-child interactions, health and safety practices, and other relevant criteria. In addition to reviewing documentation, the verifier(s) will tour the facility, conduct ratio counts, and observe in classrooms for evidence to support criteria and program practices.

Step 5: Verification Summary and Debrief

The verifier(s) will compile notes and documentation using the FOCUS criteria and verification tool and will discuss any outstanding components related to the Essential Elements of Quality.

Once documentation is complete, the verifier(s) will conduct a preliminary debrief session with the program administrator(s) or a designated staff member to review key observations and next steps.

Step 6: Final Review and Decision

After the visit, the verifier(s) will finalize the notes and documentation within the verification tool and submit it to the UNM ECSC & NM ECECD FOCUS Leadership Team for review and approval. A final decision will be communicated via email within 15 business days.

Step 7: Verification Outcome and Next Steps

If all criteria are marked "**Met**"

- The NM ECECD FOCUS Manager will email the FOCUS Verification Form to the program administrator, UNM ECSC, and NM ECECD FOCUS Leadership Team.
- The UNM ECSC Verification & Assessment Team will also share the finalized tool via email to the program administrator, assigned UNM ECSC consultant, UNM ECSC, and NM ECECD FOCUS Leadership Team

If any criteria are marked "**Not Met**"

- The verifier will outline next steps and deadlines via email (copying relevant parties).
- If a program is given a follow-up period to address "Not Met" components of the criteria, they will have one week from the date of receiving the verification tool to submit a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Action Plan.

UNM ECSC FOCUS Verification Process

At-A-Glance FY26



- If the “Not Met” components are not completed by the end of the follow-up period, the verifier will contact the program administrator to discuss the next steps, which may include a case management meeting with the UNM ECSC and NM ECECD FOCUS Leadership Team.
- **Please note** that verifications may be determined as unsuccessful, requiring the program to reapply for verification. This determination is made on a case-by-case basis.

During the follow-up period, the consultant will document progress through coaching visits. Once all “Not Met” components are complete, the consultant will submit a final visit report via email and cc the verification team. Upon review and approval, the FOCUS verification team will send the completed/finalized verification tool. The NM ECECD FOCUS manager will issue the FOCUS Verification Form.

Step 8: Ongoing Support and Feedback

After all verifications, programs will be invited to complete an anonymous evaluation of the verification experience. Your feedback is essential to UNM ECSC’s commitment to continuous improvement and helps enhance our processes and communication with early childhood programs statewide. Consultants will continue to support programs in strengthening and sustaining high-quality practices through Practice-Based Coaching (PBC) and training, as needed.