



Reaching higher for  
quality early learning



## Program Report 2010

Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare  
Office of Child Development and Early Learning

As a small-business owner, the most critical challenge we face is finding and retaining excellent employees...The biggest challenge for many of our employees is finding good quality early-education programs that allow them to go to work each day with full concentration on their jobs.

When the state invests in early childhood education programs such as PA Pre-K Counts, Keystone STARS, Early Intervention, Head Start, Nurse-Family Partnership and Parent-Child Home Program, the state helps to build a competent work force...

James Heckman, Nobel laureate in economics, states: "As a society, we cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school age — a time when it may be too late to intervene. Because learning is a dynamic process, it is most effective when it begins at a young age and continues through adulthood. The returns to human capital investments are greatest for the young for two reasons: Skill begets skill and younger persons have a longer horizon over which to recoup the fruits of their investments."

Pennsylvania's economic success depends on the education of our children.

Charlene Friedman, CFO, Friedman Real Estate, "Workforce development begins in pre-kindergarten," Centre Daily Times, June 24, 2010



## 2010 Program Report

<b>I. Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>II. Keystone STARS: Improving quality in early care and education .....</b>	<b>9</b>
• Reversing the trend	
• Creating more opportunities for Pennsylvania’s children to receive a quality early education	
<b>III. Setting the standard for quality improvement .....</b>	<b>15</b>
• Providing qualified teachers who continue to learn	
• Creating a positive learning environment for children	
• Supporting children’s development at home	
• Promoting solid business practices as the foundation for quality early learning	
<b>IV. Providing supports to meet quality standards.....</b>	<b>23</b>
• Early Learning Keys to Quality System	
• Targeted financial supports	
• Career and Professional Development	
• Technical Assistance	
<b>V. Ensuring accountability to produce results for children and families .....</b>	<b>31</b>
• Program accountability	
• STARS Designator reliability	
• Technical Assistance reliability	
<b>VI. Keystone STARS – Part of the Quality Early Education Continuum .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>VII. Vision for the future .....</b>	<b>35</b>

Appendix A: Timeline of development of Keystone STARS

Appendix B: Summary of Performance Standards

Note: For a more detailed report on Keystone STARS, including historical data on program participation and supports, please refer to “Demonstrating Quality: Pennsylvania Keystone STARS 2010 Program Report,” available on the OCDEL Research web site, [www.ocdelresearch.org](http://www.ocdelresearch.org)



February 1, 2011

I am pleased to present the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning's 2010 Keystone STARS Program Report. The report shows how this voluntary quality improvement program and rating system has made a significant impact on early care and education in Pennsylvania.

The success of our communities relies on access to quality early care and education. Our working parents need access to quality early care and education programs so they can retain their jobs, be more productive at work and continue to build job skills. Our young children need quality early learning experiences before kindergarten in order to enter tomorrow's workforce with the skills and education they need to succeed.

Keystone STARS, as part of Pennsylvania's early education continuum, has enabled early care and education programs to improve quality through qualified teachers, appropriate curriculum and learning environments, partnerships with families and communities, and solid business practices. In fact, Keystone STARS has reversed the negative trend of declining quality in child care and set the foundation for teacher quality, classroom assessment and continuous quality improvement on which our early education continuum is based.

Child outcomes from preschoolers in high quality Keystone STAR 3 and 4 centers show that children are making terrific progress each year they participate and entering kindergarten ready to learn. Nearly every child (97%) finished the 2009-2010 program year with age-appropriate or emerging age-appropriate language, math and social skills.

Keystone STARS, which began as a pilot program during the Schweiker administration, has grown to become Pennsylvania's largest quality early learning initiative, serving approximately 170,000 children and their families in nearly 4,500 programs across the commonwealth. As the program evolves, we look forward to more teachers earning college degrees, more programs earning high quality STAR 3 and 4 ratings, and more children entering school ready to learn.

I invite you to review the report and visit a Keystone STARS program in your community. It is the commitment of families, programs, schools, communities and our elected officials that makes it possible for more of Pennsylvania's young children to reach their promise.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Todd Klunk". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "K" at the end.

Todd Klunk  
Acting Deputy Secretary  
Office of Child Development and Early Learning

## I. Executive Summary

With 60% of Pennsylvania's young children in child care as their parents work,<sup>1</sup> and nearly 10% of Pennsylvania's school-age children participating in afterschool programs,<sup>2</sup> Pennsylvania needs quality early care and education to support its workforce today and prepare our workforce of tomorrow.

Parents with access to quality, reliable early care and education can continue to work and build job skills, and as a result, experience up to a 30% long-term earnings increase throughout their careers.<sup>3</sup> They are also more productive at work and have fewer absences related to child care.

When children, especially those at risk of failing in school due to poverty or other factors, receive quality early care and education, they are more likely to do well in school, graduate high school, attend college or job training programs and have higher earnings. They are also less likely to require special education or remediation in school, or public assistance as adults.

In 2002, a study commissioned by Governor Mark Schweiker revealed a disturbing trend: a decline in quality in child care since the 1990s, with a corresponding decline in the overall qualifications of staff during 1996-2000.

A consistent challenge for child care programs is having sufficient resources to maintain a quality environment. Unlike K-12 education, funding for child care is mostly market-driven (i.e., based on what the parent can pay) not based on the actual cost of care.

For example, the average annual fee for full time care for a four year old in a child care center in Pennsylvania is \$8,060 per year.<sup>4</sup> The cost of a full day quality preschool program, however, with qualified teachers, small class sizes, appropriate learning activities, child observation and assessment, is between \$9,500 - \$10,900 a child per school year.<sup>5</sup>

This gap in resources impacts a child care program's ability to recruit and retain qualified teachers, provide age-appropriate curriculum and learning activities, and document child outcomes throughout the year, all key components to a quality early care and education program.

The 2002 report recommended that "the state should focus on improving the quality of existing [child care] programs before considering further expansion of services in the commonwealth."<sup>6</sup> The answer was the Keystone STARS/ Early Learning Keys to Quality rating and improvement system.

Begun as a pilot program in 2002, Keystone STARS / Early Learning Keys to Quality supports child and school-age care, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and Head Start programs that are committed to continuous quality improvement. Keystone STARS offers families a valuable tool to gauge quality in early learning and school-age programs. Keystone STARS improves quality in these programs through Standards, Training/Professional Development, Assistance, Resources, and Support.



Greetings from ABC Kiddie Kampus, a Keystone STARS program in Lackawanna County. Their teacher recently earned her associate's degree, with honors, thanks to her T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship.

- **Standards:** Programs may enter Keystone STARS at the Start with STARS level and earn a STAR 1 through STAR 4 rating by meeting research-based standards for staff qualifications and professional development, the learning environment, partnerships with family and community, and business management.
- **Training - Professional Development:** Pennsylvania offers financial assistance for college credits and professional development opportunities to help Keystone STARS programs meet the educational and early childhood expertise requirements of staff.
- **Assistance:** Through six Regional Keys, Keystone STARS programs may receive technical assistance on meeting the requirements for higher STARS levels.
- **Resources and Support:** Keystone STARS programs may be eligible for targeted financial supports to help continue to improve quality in their programs. Keystone STARS programs serving children who receive Child Care Works subsidy also receive a STARS add-on rate to supplement this subsidy.

**Keystons STARS has reversed the negative trend of declining quality in child care.**

Pennsylvania is one of 23 states that include all core components for a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) as recognized by leading research.<sup>7</sup> Keystone STARS is the largest quality early care and education program in Pennsylvania, serving children from birth through school-age in every county. As of

September 2010, nearly 4,500 child care programs (nearly 70% of child care centers) served more than 170,500 children across the commonwealth.

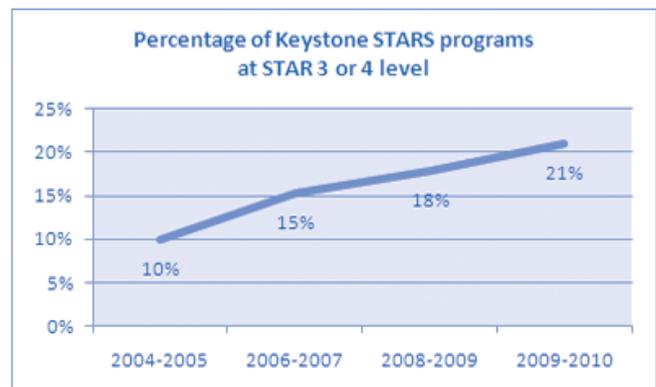
## Keystone STARS – Creating more opportunities for Pennsylvania’s children and families to receive a quality early education

Results from the 2006 evaluation by the University of Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania State University indicated that Keystone STARS helps child care programs improve their overall quality. Further, Keystone STARS reversed the negative trend of declining quality in child care that was evident in the 1990’s.<sup>8</sup>

### Providing higher quality early learning opportunities

Through its four STAR levels and supports, Keystone STARS makes it possible for child care programs to increase quality in manageable steps that otherwise they may not have taken. The result is more quality early learning opportunities for Pennsylvania’s children and families:

- Between 700-1,200 STARS programs moved up at least one STAR level each year since 2004-2005;
- The percentage of Keystone STARS programs with a high quality STAR 3 or 4 rating has more than doubled since 2004;
- The percentage of Child Care Works subsidy children enrolled in Keystone STARS programs has increased from 39% (55,298) in 2008 to 53% (76,005) in 2010.



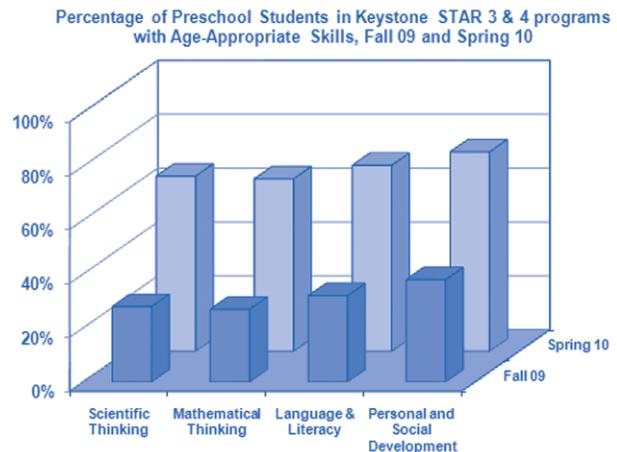
## Creating positive outcomes for children

In 2009-2010, Pennsylvania's Keystone STAR 3 and 4 programs began reporting children's outcomes three times a year using an authentic assessment tool.<sup>9</sup>

In 2009-2010, more than 97% of preschoolers in Keystone STAR 3 & 4 programs showed age-appropriate or emerging age-appropriate literacy, numeracy, and social skills after attending a Keystone STARS program.<sup>10</sup>

- More than 65% of preschoolers who attended Keystone STARS 3 & 4 programs finished the 2009-2010 program year with age-appropriate literacy, numeracy and social skills.

- The percent of children who were proficient in Scientific Thinking increased from 28% in Fall to 65% in Spring.
- The percent of children who were proficient in Mathematical Thinking increased from 27% in Fall to 64% in Spring.
- The percent of children who were proficient in Language and Literacy increased from 32% in Fall to 69% in Spring.
- The percent of children who were proficient in Personal and Social Development increased from 38% in Fall to 74% in Spring.



The continued commitment of early learning programs to quality improvement, demand of families to be able to access and afford quality early learning for their children, and the proven results of high quality STAR 3 and 4 programs shows that Keystone STARS is meeting vital needs in our communities.

## Keystone STARS: Setting the standard for quality improvement

Keystone STARS incorporates Pennsylvania's commitment to quality program design, comprehensive accountability, and documenting positive outcomes for children. Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS program includes nearly every quality category identified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families.<sup>11</sup>

My son Jason is enrolled at Warwick Child Care, a STAR 4 center. As part of Keystone STARS, the center requires all the lead teachers have their Child Development Associate credential (CDA) or a degree. The amount of information that Jason comes home with every day is unbelievable for a two-year-old! He is able to count to 20 and can count to 10 in Spanish, knows all his colors and his vocabulary blows me away!

Warwick Child Care implements the Early Learning Standards in their lesson planning, and I believe that helps the teachers focus more on my son's weak points. I truly believe that Warwick works with every child individually. Other than home with me, I could not think of a better place for my son to spend his day.

Since I am a single working mom, I would never even imagine sending my child to such a high-quality child care, but because I was approved for Child Care Works, the subsidized child care program, I am able to feel at ease dropping my son off at school each morning knowing that he is getting the best quality care out there!

Crystal R., Montgomery County

**2009-2010: Keystone STARS: Quality Design, Accountability and Results**

Design	Accountability	Results
<b>Staff qualifications and professional development: Providing qualified teachers who continue to learn</b>		
<p>Sets the educational requirements and continuing education for directors and staff.</p> <p>Ex. STAR 4 - Directors and at least half of lead teachers must have at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education.</p>	<p>STARS Specialists verify degrees and completion certificates during Designation visits and renewal.</p>	<p>The number of early childhood professionals earning their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential has nearly doubled since 2006-2007.</p> <p>There has been a 60% increase in professionals earning their Director Credential since 2007-2008.</p>
<b>Learning Program: Creating a positive learning environment for children</b>		
<p>Measures child observation, curriculum, assessment and quality of the learning environment.</p> <p>Ex, STAR 4 – Programs crosswalk curriculum with the PA Early Learning Standards and/or relevant Academic Standards, earn an overall score of 5.25 on the 7-point Environment Rating Scale (ERS), and complete assessments of each child's progress three times a year.</p>	<p>STARS Specialists verify use of the PA Early Learning Standards and/or relevant Academic Standards.</p> <p>All STARS programs complete a self-assessment with ERS scales.</p> <p>STAR 3 &amp; 4 programs evaluated by an independent ERS assessor every other year; enter child outcomes three times a year into the Early Learning Network.</p>	<p>STAR 3 average ERS scores increased from 5.03 in 2004-2005 to 5.23 in 2009-2010.</p> <p>STAR 4 average ERS scores increased from 5.36 in 2004-2005 to 5.62 in 2009-2010.</p> <p>More than 97% of preschoolers in Keystone STAR 3&amp;4 programs ended the 2009-2010 year with age-appropriate or emerging age-appropriate literacy, numeracy, and social skills.</p>
<b>Partnerships with Family and Community: Supporting children's development at home</b>		
<p>Measures program's efforts to provide families with community resources, involve families in the program, and promote smooth transitions for children.</p> <p>Ex: STAR 4 – Provide written updates on the child to parents daily, teachers hold two parent conferences a year, and create policies to involve parents in the program.</p>	<p>Programs provide documentation of parent communications, such as parent sign-off sheet requesting an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), and invitations to parent-teacher conferences.</p> <p>STARS Specialists may interview staff during their Designation visit about parent communications.</p>	<p>96% of parents surveyed in 2010 from STAR 3 and 4 programs agreed that teachers interacted with their child in a positive manner and provided services that met their child's needs and Information on their child's performance motivated them to support their child's learning and development at home.</p>
<b>Leadership and Management: Promoting solid business practices as the foundation for quality early learning</b>		
<p>Measures business practices; staff communications and support; employee compensation; and continuous quality improvement.</p> <p>Ex. STAR 4- Programs must obtain an annual independent financial review by a certified public accountant (CPA) and offer at least four employee benefits to staff.</p>	<p>STARS Specialists review documents such as financial record keeping system, organizational charts, job descriptions, and documentation of system of site safety review. STARS Specialists may interview program staff about content of staff meetings.</p> <p>STAR 2,3,4 programs submit an annual facility professional development plan.</p>	<p>Because they are implementing best business practices to meet the this standard, more than 50 Keystone STAR 3 and 4 programs can meet the enhanced budgeting and reporting requirements as lead agencies for PA Pre-K Counts.</p>

## Providing supports to meet quality standards

High quality standards only impact children's development if programs have the resources to meet them. Pennsylvania offers Keystone STARS programs a variety of supports to assist with educational requirements, curriculum and assessment, and sound business practices.

**Early Learning Keys to Quality System.** Through the Pennsylvania Key and six Regional Keys, the Early Learning Keys to Quality System coordinates professional development and access to higher education, STARS designations and technical assistance.

**Targeted financial supports.** Eligible Keystone STARS programs may apply for Start with STARS one-time grants, Support Grants, Merit Awards, and Education and Retention Awards to help them move up the STARS ladder and continue to improve quality. Grants and awards do not cover the full cost of providing children with quality early learning services. Keystone STARS programs also receive a STARS add-on rate to supplement Child Care Works subsidy and help pay for the higher cost of quality early learning experiences.

**Career and professional development.** Pennsylvania provides supports for early childhood education and school-age program staff to access higher education, earn professional credentials, and receive meaningful continuing professional development. Supports include the Pennsylvania Director Credential and School-Age Professional Credential, T.E.A.C.H. scholarships, and vouchers for completing credit-bearing coursework.

**Technical assistance.** At each Regional Key, staff monitor and guide early learning programs through the process of earning their STARS award and improving quality as they move up the STARS ladder. STARS programs can also receive one-on-one technical assistance and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation. In 2009-2010, a higher percentage of Keystone STARS programs receiving technical assistance (43.9%) moved up a STAR level than programs who did not receive technical assistance (27.5%).<sup>12</sup>

## Keystone STARS – Part of the Quality Early Education Continuum

Keystone STARS/Early Learning Keys to Quality has become an integral part of continuous quality improvement of early learning in all settings. Keystone STARS built the foundation for educational advancement, professional development, and classroom assessment that many other OCDEL programs need to provide quality services for children and families.

**Aligning professional development for all early learning programs.** To better support the early education professionals working towards Early Childhood Education (ECE) Certification, OCDEL and the PA Early Learning Keys to Quality began work to align the Professional Development Record (PDR) required of STARS programs with the educational requirements for ECE Certification, as well as to extend the use of the PDR to all OCDEL programs.



One of our littlest learners from Chester County Intermediate Unit Infant Center. The center participates in Keystone STARS and Nurse-Family Partnership and enrolls children receiving Child Care Works.

**Making quality early learning more accessible to vulnerable families.** Families receive information on choosing quality early learning programs like Keystone STARS when they apply for Child Care Works subsidy. Keystone STARS programs receive additional financial supports if they serve children receiving Child Care Works subsidy or Early Intervention services. Through the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECHMC) service available to Keystone STARS programs, more eligible children are receiving the Early Intervention services they need earlier, and may need fewer or no services later because of this early identification.

**Providers Participating in Keystone STARS by STAR Level and Provider Type, June 2010**

	Start W/STARS	STAR 1	STAR 2	STAR 3	STAR 3A	STAR 4	STAR 4A	TOTAL
Center	295	1,069	864	347	9	213	210	3,007
Group	60	171	68	29	2	12	7	349
Family	339	473	138	42	0	36	36	1,064
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>1,713</b>	<b>1,070</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>4,420</b>

**Estimated Children in Keystone STARS Providers by STAR Level and Provider Type, June 2010**

	Start W/STARS	STAR 1	STAR 2	STAR 3	STAR 3A	STAR 4	STAR 4A	TOTAL
Center	15,635	56,657	45,792	18,391	477	11,289	11,130	159,371
Group	660	1,881	748	319	22	132	77	3,839
Family	1,695	2,365	690	210	0	180	180	5,320
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17,990</b>	<b>60,903</b>	<b>47,230</b>	<b>18,920</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>11,601</b>	<b>11,387</b>	<b>168,530</b>

**Making the vision of PA Pre-K Counts possible.** Pennsylvania is one of the first states to create a high quality public pre-kindergarten program that builds off community expertise by including both community- and school-based early learning programs. Keystone STARS has made it possible for child care programs to meet the quality expectations and participate in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts.

The impact of Keystone STARS/Early Learning Keys to Quality extends beyond participating programs, their staff and families they serve. The standards and supports have raised the bar for all early learning programs in the commonwealth.

Keystone STARS has given so much to this field. They have encouraged centers to strive for quality and further education for staff. They provide technical support for centers that are looking for ways to increase quality. Issuing grants to centers that show that they are making a difference in the lives of children. Maybe the most important is holding centers accountable for the care that they provide and giving parents a comprehensive way to choose high quality care for their child.

Heather Celio, Director, Downtown YMCA, Erie County

## II. Keystone STARS: Improving quality in early care and education

In Pennsylvania, approximately 60% of children under age six need some form of child care as their parents work,<sup>13</sup> and nearly 10% of Pennsylvania's K-12 children participate in school-age programs.<sup>14</sup> The quality of this care impacts parents' reliability at work, children's cognitive and social development, and the quality of our future workforce.

Access to affordable, quality early care and education has an immediate impact on our workforce:

- Families with access to child care assistance like Child Care Works are up to 15% more likely to be employed, be more productive at work, stay off welfare, and have higher earnings.<sup>15</sup>
- Employee absences due to child care breakdowns cost U.S. business approximately \$3 billion in 1998.<sup>16</sup>
- Accessibility to an early childhood program is a key factor in parents earning higher education degrees and job training to remain competitive.<sup>17</sup>
- Because parents can remain in the workforce when their children are young and continue to gain job skills, they can experience a long-term earnings increase up to 30% even after their children leave early care and education.<sup>18</sup>

While their parents work, children that participate in quality early care and education are more likely to enter kindergarten with the necessary skills and:

- Are less likely to require costly special education and remediation services;
- Are more likely to do well in school, graduate, and attend college or career training; and
- Are more likely to be employed and have higher earnings.<sup>19</sup>

Accessing quality early care and education is especially important for our vulnerable children. Children affected by risk factors such as limited family earnings are more likely to enter school behind their peers and benefit most from quality early experiences. According to the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) 2009-2010 Program Reach and Risk Assessment Report, there are 737,202 children under age five in Pennsylvania. Of those:

- 58% live in economically at-risk households, earning up to 300% of poverty.<sup>20</sup>
- 20% live in families whose mother did not receive early prenatal care.

The benefits of investing in quality early care and education can really add up. Communities can see up to a 10% return on investment in quality early care and education as children become successful adults.<sup>21</sup>

### Reversing the Trend

Since 1978, Pennsylvania has periodically assessed the overall quality of the state's early care and education programs to inform program development and policies.<sup>22</sup> In 2002, Governor Mark Schweiker commissioned the Pennsylvania Early Childhood Quality Settings Study as part of his Task Force on Early Childhood Care and Education. The study revealed a negative trend of declining quality in child care compared to results from studies completed in the 1980's and 1990's.<sup>23</sup>



Family picnic for families enrolled in SmartKids child care center, Washington County

Significant decreases were noted in both child care centers and family child care homes. In both cases, classroom quality scores (Environmental Rating Scales) as measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) and the Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS) dropped from a 4.50 level (adequate quality) to just below 4.00 (minimal quality). The 2002 study also noted that there was a corresponding drop in the overall qualifications of staff during 1996-2000.

### Challenges to reaching quality in child care

A consistent challenge for child care programs is having sufficient resources to maintain a quality environment. Unlike K-12 education, funding for child care is mostly market-driven (i.e., based on what the parent can pay) not based on the actual cost of care. This creates a resource gap that, without targeted financial supports and technical assistance, causes a quality gap in early care and education that can result in an achievement gap as children move to school and careers. The achievement gap of our students results in greater public costs in special education, remediation, public assistance, incarceration, and lost taxes. Essentially, the entire community pays if it fails to provide its children with a quality education from birth.

According to the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRRA), the average annual fee for full time care (up to 10 hours a day) for infants in a child care center in Pennsylvania is \$9,880 per year, or more than \$800 a month.<sup>24</sup> This can rival housing costs for most families; however, a high quality early learning experience for infants that includes teachers with bachelor's degrees, small class sizes, appropriate learning activities, health consultation, child observation and assessment, such as the Keystone Babies program, costs approximately \$15,000 per child per year. This represents about a \$40,000 difference in resources for one infant/toddler classroom.

My children started in the Keystone STAR 4 program at the Child Development Laboratory at six months and are now four years old. They adore being there. It is hard to get them to leave at the end of the day, and often their play at home is about "Room to Grow." I love hearing about amazing things they've learned, heard, seen, and read. They have taught me how to tell boy ducks from girl ducks, the difference between the ocean and the sea, and how to sign the alphabet. I cannot imagine a better place for my children to learn, grow, be loved, and thrive.  
Eva L., Ph.D., Associate Professor and Mom, Centre County

Similarly, the average annual fee for full time care (up to 10 hours a day) for four year olds in a child care center in Pennsylvania is \$8,060 per year, or about \$675 a month.<sup>25</sup> According to the National Institute for Early Education Research, a full day (9 hour) quality preschool program only during the school year (approximately 10 months) costs between \$9,500 - \$10,900 per child per school year.<sup>26</sup>

For programs that serve children receiving Child Care Works subsidy, they may not even be receiving their full parent fee.<sup>27</sup> Programs that serve a large percentage of children receiving Child Care Works are serving children who can benefit most from high quality early learning but in turn struggle with inadequate resources to provide high quality.

This gap in resources impacts a child care program's ability to recruit and retain qualified teachers, provide age-appropriate curriculum and learning activities, and document child outcomes throughout the year, all key components to a quality early care and education program.

For example, despite the important role they play in child development, child care workers are among the lowest paid workers in the United States. Only 18 of 770 occupations reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics have lower average wages than child care workers.<sup>28</sup>

In Pennsylvania, the average salary for a child care worker is roughly \$19,800 a year – only slightly above the federal poverty level for a family of three. Health insurance coverage for child care workers and their dependents is not typically offered at child care centers.<sup>29</sup> In comparison, the average salary for a kindergarten teacher for 10 months a year is \$50,930, usually with full benefits.<sup>30</sup> Many early childhood teachers with bachelor’s degrees are drawn to kindergarten positions because of the more adequate compensation and benefits.

The Center for the Child Care Workforce reports that, in a field where continuity is of primary importance, the child care workforce experiences an annual job turnover rate of up to 40 percent.<sup>31</sup>



York JCC child care center participates in Keystone STARS, PA Pre-K Counts and enrolls children receiving Child Care Works

Because most families cannot afford the higher cost of quality early care and education, programs either provide the level of quality their families can afford or search for other sources of funding, such as grants and in-kind donations.

### Pennsylvania’s response: Keystone STARS

The 2002 report recommended that “the state should focus on improving the quality of existing [child care] programs before considering further expansion of services in the commonwealth”<sup>32</sup> and identified critical components to a quality early childhood program that are consistent with research studies:

- Well-educated staff with specific training in early childhood development and education;
- Consistency of staff over time;
- Low child-staff ratios and small classroom sizes;
- Comprehensive educational and social services available or by referral;
- Supportive and regular supervision of staff;
- Involving parents in the program; and
- Systematic monitoring and evaluation of the program.<sup>33</sup>

The answer was the Keystone STARS/ Early Learning Keys to Quality rating and improvement system.

Begun as a pilot program in 2002, Keystone STARS / Early Learning Keys to Quality supports child and school-age care, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and Head Start programs that are committed to continuous quality improvement. Keystone STARS offers families a valuable tool to gauge quality in early care and education and school-age programs.

Pennsylvania is one of 23 states that include all five core components for a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) as recognized by leading research.<sup>34</sup>

- Standards that are research-based;
- Assessment and accountability;
- Program and practitioner outreach and support, including technical assistance;
- Financing incentives and compensation; and
- Parent and consumer education.

Keystone STARS is now the largest quality early care and education program in Pennsylvania, serving children from birth through school-age in every county. As of September 2010, nearly 4,500 child care programs (nearly 70% of child care centers) served more than 170,500 children.

Keystone STARS improves quality in early learning and afterschool programs through Standards, Training/ Professional Development, Assistance, Resources, and Support.

- **Standards:** Programs may enter Keystone STARS at the Start with STARS level and earn a STAR 1 through STAR 4 rating by meeting research-based standards for quality, such as staff qualifications and professional development, the learning environment, partnerships with family and community, and business management. Programs must also earn certain scores on their Environment Rating Scales (ERS) assessments based on their STAR levels.
- **Training- Professional Development:** Keystone STARS standards require higher educational levels for staff as programs move up the quality ladder while offering financial assistance and professional

**Providers Participating in Keystone STARS by STAR Level and Region as of June 30, 2010**

	Start W/STARS	STAR 1	STAR 2	STAR 3	STAR 3A	STAR 4	STAR 4A	TOTAL
Central	41	153	104	52	0	30	16	396
Northeast	51	335	210	100	1	62	40	799
Northwest	82	188	105	46	1	45	19	486
South Central	57	268	255	82	1	70	47	780
Southeast	391	544	303	86	1	31	79	1,435
Southwest	72	225	93	52	7	23	52	524
<b>TOTAL</b>	694	1,713	1,070	418	11	261	253	4,420

**Estimated Children in Keystone STARS Providers by STAR Level and Region as of June 30, 2010**

	Start W/STARS	STAR 1	STAR 2	STAR 3	STAR 3A	STAR 4	STAR 4A	TOTAL
Central	871	5,727	4,378	2,264	0	1,182	752	15,174
Northeast	1,425	13,489	10,290	4,604	53	3,010	1,976	34,847
Northwest	1,526	5,296	3,609	2,036	53	2,289	815	15,624
South Central	1,455	9,626	12,291	3,380	53	2,756	2,215	31,776
Southeast	9,995	18,044	12,651	4,180	53	1,595	3,005	49,523
Southwest	2,718	8,721	4,011	2,456	287	769	2,624	21,586
<b>TOTAL</b>	17,990	60,903	47,230	18,920	499	11,601	11,387	168,530

development opportunities. For example, child care and Head Start programs are eligible for T.E.A.C.H. scholarships to earn the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, college degrees, or teacher certification while continuing to work full-time. Early learning professionals also have access to specialized professional development workshops and professional credentials.<sup>35</sup>

- **Assistance:** Through six Regional Keys located throughout the commonwealth, programs participating in Keystone STARS may receive technical assistance on meeting the requirements for higher STARS levels, including preparation for ERS assessments.
- **Resources and Support:** Keystone STARS programs may be eligible for Start with STARS one-time grants, Support Grants, Merit Awards, and Education and Retention Awards to help continue to improve quality in their programs. Keystone STARS programs serving children who receive Child Care Works subsidy also receive a STARS add-on rate to supplement this subsidy.

Keystone STARS incorporates Pennsylvania's commitment to quality program design, comprehensive accountability and documenting positive outcomes for children to provide more children access to quality early learning opportunities.

## Creating more opportunities for Pennsylvania's children to receive a quality early education

In less than a decade, Keystone STARS has created more quality early learning opportunities for Pennsylvania's children and families and is documenting the positive results. In fact, Pennsylvania is one of only four states to evaluate the impact of its Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) system on the quality of child care over time.<sup>36</sup>

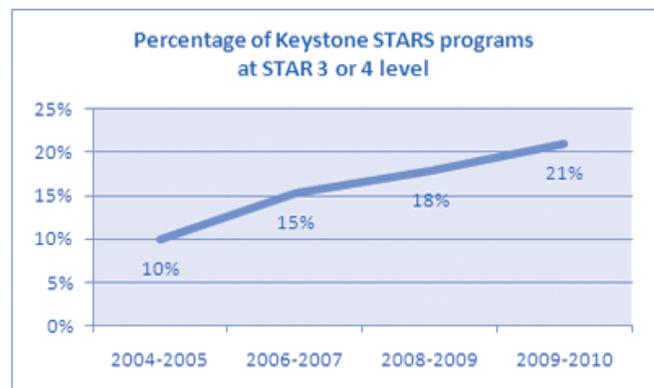
Results from the 2006 evaluation by the University of Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania State University indicated that Keystone STARS helps child care programs improve their overall quality. Further, Keystone STARS reversed the negative trend of declining quality in child care that was evident in the 1990's.<sup>37</sup>

## Providing higher quality early learning opportunities

Through its four STAR levels and supports, Keystone STARS makes it possible for child care programs to increase quality in manageable steps that otherwise they may not have taken. The vision is for all STARS programs to continue to improve quality and move up the STARS ladder.

Between 700-1,200 STARS programs moved up at least one STAR level each year since 2004-2005.

In fact, the percentage of Keystone STARS programs earning a high quality STAR 3 or 4 rating has more than doubled since 2004.



**Reaching vulnerable children.** In partnership with Pennsylvania’s Child Care Information Services (CCIS) agencies, more children receiving Child Care Works subsidy have access to quality early learning opportunities. When families enroll in Child Care Works, their CCIS representative discusses the quality early learning opportunities available to them and will refer them to programs that meet their needs with a priority given to Keystone STARS programs.

**In 2009-2010, more than 97% of preschoolers in Keystone STAR 3 & 4 programs showed age-appropriate or emerging age-appropriate proficiency in literacy, numeracy, and social skills after attending Keystone STARS.**

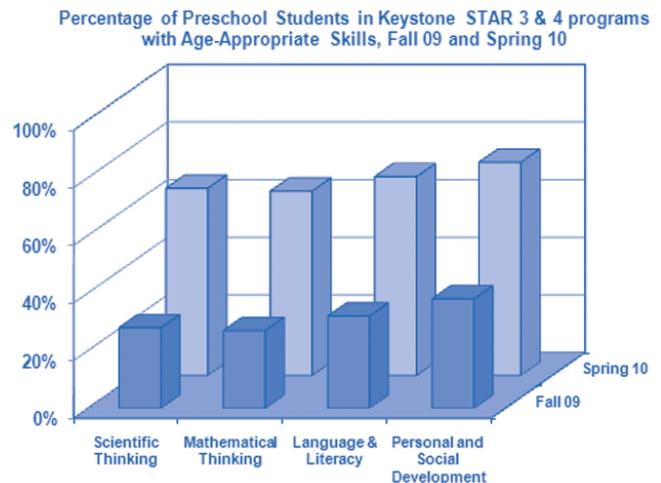
As these parents become better educated about the importance of choosing quality early care and education and the quality programs available, they continue to choose Keystone STARS. In fact, the percentage of Child Care Works subsidy children enrolled in Keystone STARS programs has increased from 39% (55,298) in 2008 to 53% (76,005) in 2010.

### Creating positive outcomes for children

In 2009-2010, Pennsylvania’s Keystone STAR 3 and 4 programs began reporting children’s outcomes three times a year using an authentic assessment tool.

In 2009-2010, more than 97% of preschoolers in Keystone STAR 3 & 4 programs showed age-appropriate or emerging age-appropriate proficiency in literacy, numeracy, and social skills after attending Keystone STARS.<sup>38</sup>

- More than 65% of preschoolers who attended Keystone STARS 3 & 4 programs finished the 2009-2010 program year with age-appropriate proficiency in literacy, numeracy and social skills.
  - The percent of children who were proficient in Scientific Thinking increased from 28% in Fall to 65% in Spring.
  - The percent of children who were proficient in Mathematical Thinking increased from 27% in Fall to 64% in Spring.
  - The percent of children who were proficient in Language and Literacy increased from 32% in Fall to 69% in Spring.
  - The percent of children who were proficient in Personal and Social Development increased from 38% in Fall to 74% in Spring.



The continued commitment of early learning programs to quality improvement, demand of families to be able to access and afford quality early learning for their children, and the proven results of high quality STAR 3 and 4 programs shows that Keystone STARS is meeting vital needs in our communities.

Keystone STARS works by

- Setting the standard for quality improvement;
- Providing supports to meet quality standards;
- Ensuring accountability to produce results for children and families; and
- Being part of Pennsylvania’s quality early education continuum.

### III. Setting the standard for quality improvement

Keystone STARS Performance Standards reflect research-based indicators designed to improve outcomes for children. The standards are organized into four STAR levels that build upon each other in order to support continuous quality improvement. As programs meet higher quality standards, they earn higher STAR levels. Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS program includes nearly every quality category identified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families.<sup>39</sup>

There are Keystone STARS Performance Standards for centers, group child care homes, and family child care homes.<sup>40</sup> Performance Standards have evolved over time based on feedback from the early childhood community and to align with best practices and quality improvements in the field.

Keystone STARS Performance standards measure:

1. **Staff qualifications and professional development:** establishes the educational requirements for directors and teachers and amount and type of annual continuing education.
2. **Learning program:** establishes benchmarks for curriculum, child observation and assessment and a program's Environment Rating Score (ERS) acceptable rating.
3. **Family and community partnerships:** families and community members are encouraged to become a part of the child's learning progress.
4. **Leadership and management:** a quality program has to have sound business practices to ensure your child's safety and early learning.

The most recent standards are available on the Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality website, [www.pakeys.org](http://www.pakeys.org).

#### Providing qualified teachers who continue to learn

##### **Performance Standard: Staff qualifications and professional development**

Teacher quality is critical to the success of an early learning and school-age program. Qualified teachers keep children engaged, promote positive development, address concerns, and work with families to create learning experiences both in school and at home. Several studies have found that the presence of teachers with a bachelor's degree specialized in early childhood education leads to better outcomes for young children.<sup>41</sup> The 2006 evaluation of Keystone STARS found that classrooms with teachers who had at least an associate's degree had significantly higher Environment Rating Scale scores.<sup>42</sup> As with any profession, continuing professional development is necessary to refine skills and gain updated knowledge.

Our son attends the Ann Street School in Milford, PA. It's a valuable program to us because of several reasons. It teaches our son positive messages about education and its importance in our lives. It teaches him about positive interactions with others, how to problem solve, that learning is fun, and most important how to be independent. Early learning programs encourage successful educational futures!

The Ruzanski Family, Pike County

**DESIGN:** This standard sets the educational levels and continuing professional development requirements for program directors and staff.

Educational requirements increase for directors and staff as the program moves up the STARS ladder, for example:<sup>43</sup>

- At STAR 2, at least half of lead teachers must have an associate’s degree in early childhood education.
- At STAR 3, Directors and all lead teachers must have at least an associate’s degree in early childhood education.
- At STAR 4, Directors and at least half of lead teachers must have at least a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education.

Directors and staff in all STARS programs must take a certain number of hours of professional development each year. Professional development must relate to the early childhood field and include college credit coursework by approved college or university; professional development by a Pennsylvania Quality Assurance System (PQAS) approved instructor or be eligible for Act 48 or Continuing Education Units (CEU) hours.

**More early childhood teachers are earning professional credentials and college degrees than ever before.**

At STAR 2 and above, each director and staff person develops a Professional Development Record (PDR).<sup>44</sup> The PDR allows staff to track the professional development and coursework taken over time and assess their knowledge and skill levels in eight knowledge areas to identify needs for future professional development. In 2006, the PDR was updated to be more inclusive of all early childhood education professionals in child care, Head Start, and preschool settings.

All directors in Keystone STARS programs must complete professional development on the Core Body of Knowledge and Professional Development Record, and Foundation of the Environment Rating Scale (ERS).

Targeted financial supports for staff to earn their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, college degrees and continuing professional development are available through T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) scholarships and vouchers. See page 25 for details.

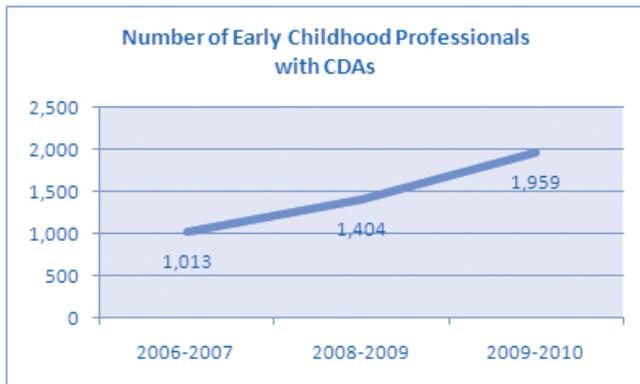
**ACCOUNTABILITY:** During the first Designation visit, STARS Specialists verify documentation of educational levels and professional development such as a signed training plan, completion certificates, transcripts, and through interviews. STARS programs must submit documentation annually (and receive a Designation visit every other year) to show they are meeting the standards for their STAR level.

At STAR 2 and above, directors meet with staff to review their annual professional development plan based on their PDR assessment.

I will hire “heart” over a degree any day, but with STARS I find that I can have both. Keystone STARS provides the resources to train people with heart.  
Donna Thornton, West Chester United Methodist Children’s Center, Chester County

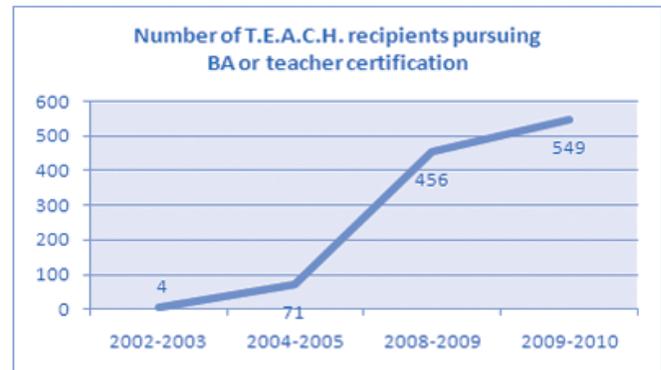
If a program does not meet the standard for their STAR level during designation or re-designation, it may either create an action plan with the STARS Specialist and implement quickly to meet the standard, or receive a lower STAR level and re-apply at a later date when the standard has been met.

**RESULTS:** More early childhood professionals are earning credentials and college degrees than ever before, increasing their expertise and ability to provide developmentally-appropriate learning activities for children.



The number of early childhood teachers earning their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential has nearly doubled since 2006-2007.<sup>45</sup>

In 2009-2010, 237 early childhood professionals earned their Director Credential, an increase of 60% from 2007-2008.



## Creating a positive learning environment for children

### Performance Standard: Learning Program

When you enter a classroom in a quality early learning program, you will see children happily engaged in a variety of activities, many of them play activities, with teachers observing or guiding the children's interactions. What you may not realize is that these activities are based on a curriculum to develop children's language, reading, math and social skills. Teachers intentionally observe children's behavior and progress to assess the child's development and determine the appropriate learning activities to promote development. Quality school-age programs also include an intentional curriculum designed to build upon and enhance what children are learning in school.

**Pennsylvania is one of the first states to develop Early Learning Standards from birth - 2nd grade.**

A quality, research-based curriculum guides a teacher to provide learning activities that help every child in the classroom develop. Curriculum includes both the carefully planned environments and activities in the classroom, such as recurring story telling at circle time, and unplanned and spontaneous learning, such as learning about climate and weather during the first snowfall or developing self-regulation skills while waiting for a turn on the slide. No matter what model is used, curriculum "affects students by initiating learning and by exposing students to experiences designed to help all children to attain skills and knowledge and to change values and feelings."<sup>46</sup>

In early childhood, a young child's progress cannot be measured by a series of tests; it requires ongoing observations by teachers and parents, collection of the child's work, and the use of a valid and reliable assessment tool. Regular child assessments guide teachers and parents as they work together to support the child's early

learning and development. Child assessments are also a valuable tool when evaluating and refining program design and implementation.

**DESIGN:** This standard measures child observation, curriculum, assessment and the quality of the learning environment.

All STARS programs use the Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood and relevant Academic Standards for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and above as a resource for building an appropriate curriculum.

Pennsylvania's Learning Standards for Early Childhood outline the approaches to learning, communications, (emerging) literacy and numeracy, creative expression, social, and physical skills that a child develops throughout the course of the year and provides guidance for activities to support this development in the classroom and at home. The standards also address involving families in their child's learning, including sharing information with families on their child's progress, possible screenings to better assess development, and connecting families with community services. They are not designed to be used as a curriculum or assessment tool but to guide parents and teachers as they choose appropriate learning activities and assessment tools for young children.



Drawing together at Begin With Us child care program, a Keystone STARS program in Blair County. The program also participates in Child Care Works, PA Pre-K Counts and Keystone Babies.

All STARS programs also complete a self-assessment of the classroom and learning activities using the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) checklist. The nationally recognized Environment Rating Scales rate features of a classroom that promotes children's learning, such as:

- the physical design of the classroom;
- the daily schedule of activity, the types and amount of learning activities available to children;
- how teachers interact with children, parents, and each other;
- how children interact with each other; and
- promoting acceptance of diversity.<sup>47</sup>

There are four scales based on the learning environment:

- Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scales- Revised (ITERS-R);
- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales – Revised (ECERS-R) – for preschool classrooms;
- School-Age Environment Rating Scales (SACERS) – for classrooms of children ages 5-12; and
- Family Child Care Environment Rating Scales (FCCERS).

Teachers also assess children's progress in areas such as language and literacy; scientific thinking; mathematical thinking; and personal and social development using an authentic assessment tool.

As programs move up the STARS ladder, the detail and number of child assessments and required scores on the Environment Rating Scales increase. For example:<sup>48</sup>

- At STAR 2, programs use the PA Early Learning Standards and/or relevant Academic Standards to plan learning activities, complete an ERS self-assessment of every classroom and develop a written Improvement Plan for any subscore below 3.0 on the 7-point scale and assess children's development once a year, the first within the first 45 days of enrollment.

- At STAR 3, programs implement a curriculum that incorporates Pennsylvania’s Learning Standards for Early Childhood and/or relevant Academic Standards; earn at least a 4.25 overall score on the ERS scale by an independent assessor; complete an assessment of each child’s progress three times a year and report outcomes in Pennsylvania’s Early Learning Network (ELN).
- At STAR 4, programs crosswalk curriculum and assessment with the PA Early Learning Standards and/or relevant Academic Standards; earn an overall score of 5.25 on the 7-point ERS scale by an independent assessor; and complete an assessment of each child’s progress three times a year; use these outcomes in curriculum and individual child planning; and report outcomes in Pennsylvania’s Early Learning Network.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** STARS Specialists verify that the PA Early Learning Standards and/or relevant Academic Standards for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and above are available and may interview program staff during the Designation visit about their understanding and use of the Standards. Programs at STAR 2 and above are encouraged to address each Key Learning Area daily in their lesson planning.

**Both the number of ERS assessments and overall ERS scores for STAR 3 and 4 programs have increased over time.**

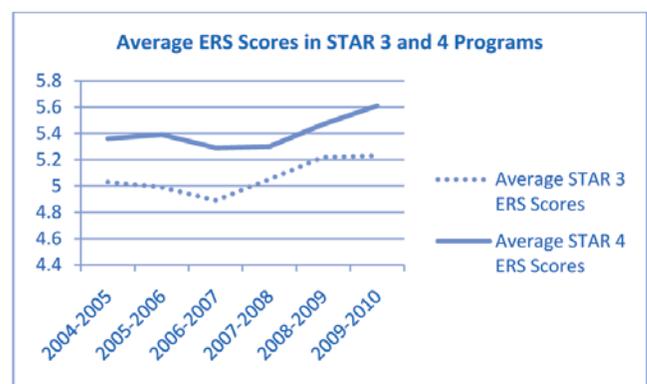
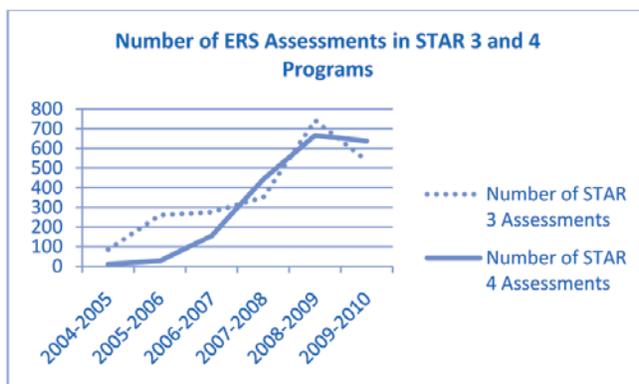
All STARS programs complete a self-assessment using the appropriate ERS scales. At STAR 2 and above, programs must complete an assessment of every classroom/age group each year and develop a written Improvement plan for any subscale score below 3.0. STARS Specialists review the self-assessments and improvement plans at their Designation visit and discuss progress throughout the year.

STAR 3&4 programs are evaluated by an independent ERS assessor every other year. STAR 3 programs must have an average facility score of 4.25 on a 7-point scale; STAR 4 programs must have an average score of 5.25. STARS Specialists also review the independent ERS reports during Designation visits.

For STAR 3 and 4 programs, STARS Specialists review child records, lesson planning, and written examples of classroom planning that were developed or adapted using the information gained through individual & group child observations. STAR 4 programs are expected to have documentation signed by the parents that assessment results were shared with them.

STAR 3&4 centers also report child outcomes into the Early Learning Network (ELN). STARS Specialists verify and review aggregate data from outcomes during the Designation visit.

**RESULTS:** Both the number of ERS assessments and overall ERS scores for STAR 3 and 4 programs have increased over time.



Number of Assessments and Overall ERS Scores in Keystone STAR 3 and 4 Programs by Fiscal Year						
	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Number of STAR 3 Assessments	85	260	276	352	742	538
Average STAR 3 ERS Scores	5.03	4.99	4.89	5.05	5.22	5.23
Number of STAR 4 Assessments	12	28	155	443	666	637
Average STAR 4 ERS Scores	5.36	5.39	5.29	5.3	5.47	5.61

Child outcomes for preschoolers in STAR 3 and 4 centers indicate that children are making progress throughout the year. More than 65% of preschoolers who attended Keystone STARS 3 & 4 programs finished the 2009-2010 program year with age-appropriate literacy, numeracy and social skills. See page 14 for details.

## Supporting children’s development at home

### Performance Standard: Partnerships with Family & Community

Educating a young child is a group effort. Parents and family members are children’s first and most important teachers. When parents are involved in their children’s learning, children do better in school. Research has shown that not only is it vital for families to be involved in children’s early learning, children whose parent/guardian participates in their learning throughout school have higher student performance.<sup>49</sup> In order for early learning programs to have the greatest impact on a child’s development, it needs to build partnerships with families.

My child participates in a Keystone STAR 4 child care program at Little People Country Club. The girls at this center work extremely hard for this accreditation and it shows in my son. My son has autism and this program has helped my son improve tremendously. I would not be able to send my son here if it wasn’t for child care subsidy through Child Care Works/CCIS.

Parent, Northampton County

At-risk families (due to low-income, low education level of parents, English language learners, or other factors) often have challenges that can impact children’s health, safety, or ability to learn and need access to other services in order to provide a stable, nurturing home life for the child. Programs can help families access additional services in the community.

Families also play a critical role as children transition to a new classroom, to a new program and on to kindergarten. These transitions can be stressful and impede children’s learning unless families and teachers work together to make the process go smoothly.

**DESIGN:** This standard measures the depth of a program’s efforts to provide families with community resources, involve families in the program, and promote smooth transitions for children to another classroom, program, or school.

All STARS programs provide information on community services to families and have an initial meeting with parents within 60 days of enrollment. The required amount of information and interaction increases at each STAR level. For example:<sup>50</sup>

- At STAR 2, written updates on the child are provided to parents daily and teachers hold one parent conference a year.
- At STAR 3, written updates on the child are provided to parents daily, teachers hold two parent conferences a year, and parents are involved in at least one group activity to help meet program learning goals.
- At STAR 4, written updates on the child are provided to parents daily, teachers hold two parent conferences a year, and programs have established policies to involve parents in program planning and decision making.

STARS programs are also required to support a smooth transition for children to new classrooms or new programs. All programs provide general information to parents on transitioning a child to a new setting. The higher the STAR level, the more involved the program and family become in supporting a smooth transition. For example:

- At STAR 2, programs transfer child records at the request of the parent/guardian to the next program or school; and include age-appropriate activities that prepare children for transition.
- At STAR 3, programs also offer a group meeting for families with tips on how to help their child transition to a new program or school and send a letter of introduction to the child’s next program or school.
- At STAR 4, programs offer individual parent conferences to discuss the child’s transition to a new program or school and develop a written transition plan for the family.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** Depending on the STAR level, programs must provide documentation of parent communications such as a parent meeting notice; parent sign-off sheet requesting a copy of a child’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) to address special needs; template of daily child updates to parents; and invitations to parent-teacher conferences. STARS Specialists may also interview program staff during their Designation visit to discuss general information provided to parents.

Programs at STAR 2 level and above are also required to present a list of local stakeholders involved in early care and education, such as other early learning programs, school districts, and community engagement groups.

**RESULTS:** Parents rate high satisfaction with Keystone STARS and engage in their child’s learning. In a 2010 survey of over 7,000 parents whose children participate in a Keystone STAR 3 or 4 center, approximately 96% reported that:

**Parents rate high satisfaction with Keystone STARS and engage in their child’s learning.**

- The daily activities and the background and experience of teachers met their expectations;
- Teachers interacted with their child in a positive manner and provided services that met their child’s needs;
- Teachers were available at convenient times, were honest when discussing difficult issues, and made it easy to talk about their children and family; and
- Information on their child’s performance motivated them to support their child’s learning and development at home.

Nearly every parent (98%) responded that the program respected his/her culture.

## Promoting solid business practices as the foundation for quality early learning

### Performance Standard: Leadership and Management

Solid business practices are essential to providing a quality early learning program. Many child care programs operate on slim budgets and must be able to manage their expenses efficiently to provide adequate facilities, equipment and staffing. How a child care program operates its business can have a direct impact on a child's early learning and development.

For example, when organizations offer adequate compensation and benefits, they have lower turnover, which translates into greater consistency in teachers for children and less time and resources used to train new teachers.

**DESIGN:** This standard measures business practices; staff communications and support; employee compensation; and continuous quality improvement.

All STARS programs complete a program-wide professional development plan and develop and distribute a parent handbook. At each STAR level, greater organizational structure, accountability and continuous quality improvement is required, for example:<sup>51</sup>

- At STAR 2, programs keep more detailed budgets and financial records and provide at least two employee benefits such as health insurance, annual raises, sick and vacation leave, paid family leave, and child care benefit.
- At STAR 3, programs conduct at least two classroom observations of teachers a year, develop a salary scale based on education and experience, develop a policy and procedures manual, and offer at least three employee benefits to staff.
- At STAR 4, programs must also obtain an annual independent financial review by a certified public accountant (CPA) and offer at least four employee benefits to staff.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** During the Designation visit and onsite reviews, STARS Specialists review documents such as parent handbooks, program budget sheets, the financial record keeping system, organizational charts, job descriptions, staff meeting minutes, and documentation of the system of site safety review. STARS Specialists may also interview program staff to learn more about the content of staff meetings.

For STAR 2 and above, programs also submit an annual facility professional development plan to their Regional Key.

[Because of Keystone STARS] I have a better and broad understanding to where I want to take my business and the children I serve. My vision is to take my very diverse facility and provide one of the best, educational, safest facilities throughout this area targeting families under hard financial circumstances and English Language Learners.

Damaris Alvarado, child care provider, Philadelphia County

**RESULTS:** All Keystone STARS programs are meeting their relevant standards for business management.

Because they are implementing best business practices to meet this standard, more than 50 Keystone STAR 3 and 4 programs can meet the enhanced budgeting and reporting requirements as lead agencies for PA Pre-K Counts. Enhanced management practices have also enabled many Keystone STARS programs to become stronger early learning partners with Early Intervention, school districts and Head Start programs in their communities.

## IV. Providing supports to meet quality standards

High quality standards will only impact children's development if early learning programs have the resources to meet them. Without supports to address the challenges programs face to meet standards, the standards themselves are essentially useless. Although child care can have a lifelong impact on our children's future success in school and in the workforce, it is one of the lowest-paying sectors in Pennsylvania. In order for child care programs to meet the quality standards of Keystone STARS, a variety of supports are available to assist with educational requirements, curriculum and assessment, and business practices.

Pennsylvania's supports are designed to meet the variety of needs of the early care and education community across the commonwealth. Supports include:

- Early Learning Keys to Quality System;
- Targeted financial supports;
- Career and professional development; and
- Technical assistance.

### Early Learning Keys to Quality System

In order to make supports available statewide while addressing the unique needs of each region, Pennsylvania developed the Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality system. Pennsylvania's Early Learning Keys to Quality system, consisting of the Pennsylvania Key and six Regional Keys, coordinate resources for programs, STARS designations and technical assistance; professional development; and community engagement critical to OCDEL programs including Keystone STARS, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, Family Support Programs, and state-funded Head Start (Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program).

The Regional Keys serve as a geographic hub to connect early learning programs and services. Some of their responsibilities include:

- Assist child care and Head Start programs as they apply for Keystone STARS and assign STARS designations for programs in their region.
- Ensure that adequate professional development is available to meet the needs of early learning and school-age programs and professionals in the region and ensure the content of professional development is based upon the Learning Standards for Early Childhood, Core Body of Knowledge, PA Code Title 22, Chapter 49 and most current research.
- Provide or coordinate STARS Technical Assistance with the region for STARS programs working to move to the next STAR level.
- Implement Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) which provides child-specific consultation services to Keystone STARS programs to address the social/emotional concerns of young children in order to reduce expulsions and promote healthy development.



Students conduct science activity in Lehigh Valley Child Care's school-age child care program, Lehigh County

## Targeted Financial Supports

Targeted financial supports are available to programs to help them move up the STARS ladder and continue to improve quality. Programs must use grant funds for very specific items that will improve the quality of the program and meet the standards for a higher STARS level. For example, at the lower STAR levels, the main expenses to meet the standards focus on equipment and materials. As you reach higher STAR levels that require teachers with college degrees and staff benefits such as health insurance, the main expenses are investing in your human resources.

To receive award funds, the program must document that at least five percent of children enrolled receive Child Care Works subsidy or Early Intervention services. In addition, the provider must be willing to enroll a child who qualifies for subsidy, if space is available.

The amount of the program's award is based upon the following:

- The provider's size based upon the calculation of the full-time and part-time enrollment of children receiving child care services.
- The provider's percentage of full-time and part-time enrollment receiving Child Care Works subsidy or Early Intervention services. If a child is receiving both Subsidy and Early Intervention Services, the child will be counted only one time.
- To be included in the award percentage, the children must be enrolled in child care services. Children funded exclusively through Head Start, PA Pre-K Counts, or Early Intervention do not count toward the program size for awards.
- A provider may be eligible for a higher award by serving a 26% or higher population receiving Subsidy or Early Intervention.

Grants and awards do not cover the full cost of providing children with quality early learning services. They supplement, but do not supplant, other sources of income such as Child Care Works subsidy, other private grant funding, or parent payments.

For the past two years we have grown a school garden at our Keystone STARS child care center. Most of our children have no prior experiences growing vegetables, so it is such an exciting time. When we harvest the first carrots and make carrot soup you can see the attachments happening in the children's heads- wow, we can grow these things ourselves, without going to the grocery store? And maybe they will talk their parents into growing some food at home...every little bit helps. Our gardening activities foster growth of academic and social-emotional skills. If these children are planting a community garden someday, we will know we have made a difference.

Allison Troutman, Teacher, Community Action Program,  
Lancaster County

The grant options available are:

**Start with STARS one-time grant.** Programs at the Start with STARS level may apply for a one-time only grant to help address the facility's environment safety needs that are identified on the Site Environment Checklist. The Site Environment Checklist allows programs to rate specific items related to space, learning activities and business practices that promote quality early learning to determine their strengths and areas that need improvement. Because this grant can only be received by a program once, it is expected that the number of Start with STARS grants awarded will decrease over time as programs earn higher STAR levels.

**Support Grant.** STAR 1 programs may apply for a Support Grant to help move to the next STAR level. Awards can be used for Site Supports (such as learning materials that support curriculum goals) or Professional

Development (for staff to meet quality standards) to help move to the next STAR level. Programs can only receive this annual grant twice. Because this grant is specific to STAR 1 programs, it is expected that the number of Support Grants will decrease over time as programs earn higher STAR levels.

**Merit Award.** STAR 2,3 and 4 programs may apply annually for a Merit Award for costs associated with earning program accreditation, professional development, and other activities to continue to improve quality. STAR 2 providers may be eligible to receive a Merit Award annually for up to three years in order to improve quality to reach STAR 3 and 4. Award funding for STAR 2 providers may be extended for an additional two years with the submission of a detailed STARS Continuous Quality Improvement Plan.

**Education & Retention Award (ERA).** STAR 2, 3 and 4 programs may also apply annually for Education & Retention Awards for highly qualified directors and/or teaching staff who have attained specialized degrees, credentials, and/or specified credit-bearing professional development in Early Childhood Education. The ERA helps STARS programs retain qualified staff and encourage other staff to pursue higher education, which improves the overall quality of their programs.

Programs must pre-approve and maintain receipts for expenditures for all award funds.

As programs continue their quality and move up the STARS ladder, there has been a corresponding increase in Merit Awards and Education and Retention Awards over time.

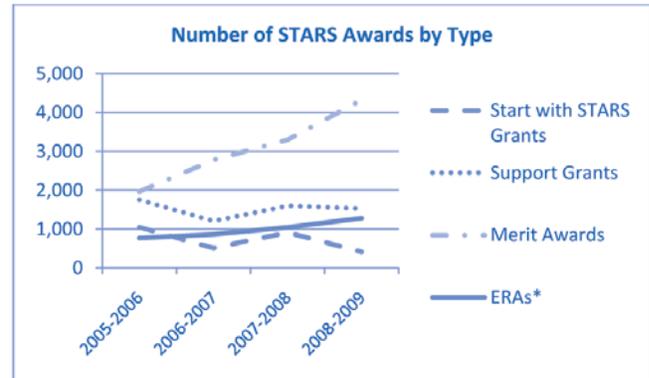
**Subsidy add-on for STARS programs.** Keystone STARS programs serving children who receive Child Care Works subsidy also receive a STARS add-on rate to supplement this subsidy to help pay for the higher cost of higher quality early learning experiences. The add-on rate increases as the STAR levels increase.

## Career and Professional Development

Research has shown that good teachers are essential to quality early care and education. Keystone STARS standards require increased educational requirements and continuing professional development as programs earn higher STAR levels. In order to meet the growing demand for credentials, degrees, and continuing education, Pennsylvania provides supports for early childhood education and school-age program administrators, teachers, and staff to access higher education, earn professional credentials, and receive meaningful continuing professional development.

To help professionals meet these demands, Pennsylvania offers a number of supports including:

- Core Series and required professional development for STARS programs;
- Setting a career path in early care and education through the ECE Career Lattice;
- Establishing standards for instructors serving early childhood and school-age professionals through the Pennsylvania Quality Assurance System (PQAS);
- Professional Credential programs for early childhood education; and
- Improving access to higher education for early childhood professionals.



\*ERA awards by program, not individual. Multiple staff at one program may receive ERAs each year.

## Core Series and required professional development for STARS programs.

STARS Standards require each director of a facility to complete the Core Series professional development. The Pennsylvania Key develops the curriculum and each Regional Key is responsible for providing and/or coordinating adequate sessions to meet the needs of practitioners.

The Core Series comprises the following workshop sessions:

- STARS Orientation Part 1;
- Core Body of Knowledge/Professional Development Record;
- Environment Rating Scales;
- Continuous Quality Improvement;
- Facility Professional Development Plan;
- Early Learning Standards or School Age Links to Learning Foundations; and
- STARS Orientation Part 2.

Each Regional Key also coordinates other professional development sessions so STARS programs can meet the continuing education requirements of the standards. STARS Support workshops include Ages and Stages Screening Tool; Pediatric First Aid and CPR; Child Observation; Mandated Reporter/Child Abuse; and Using Portfolios to Bring Out the Best in School-Age Children.

## Setting a career path in early care and education: Early Childhood Education Career Lattice.

The Early Learning Career Lattice outlines the career options available for individuals interested in working in early care and education. It helps those who are new and veteran to the field make smart education and professional development choices that can help advance their career.

The Career Lattice is organized in eight levels that indicate the level of education that is required for positions in child care/ school-age care, Early Head Start/Head Start, Early Intervention, public schools, private academic schools, consultants/mentors/trainers, and higher education faculty.<sup>52</sup>



Children take care of classroom pet at Community Action Partnership of Somerset County

## Establishing standards for instructors serving early childhood and school-age professionals through the Pennsylvania Quality Assurance System (PQAS).

The Pennsylvania Quality Assurance System (PQAS) certifies instructors who provide professional development opportunities to early childhood and school-age professionals in Pennsylvania. The PQAS System maintains a registry of approximately 1,800 approved instructors to help ensure that professional development activities meet quality standards. In 2009-2010, requirements for PQAS instructors and technical assistance consultants were revised to align with the Pennsylvania Early Learning Career Lattice. In 2009-2010, 480 instructors were awarded PQAS approval. PQAS instructors conducted approximately 11,600 workshops averaging 15 professionals per session. Programs such as PA Pre-K Counts, Keystone STARS, Keystone Babies, Nurse-Family Partnership and Parent-Child Home program require that some or all continuing education be conducted by a PQAS instructor.

## Professional credential programs for early childhood education.

Professional credentials are an important step on the career development ladder for early childhood education professionals. In addition to providing financial assistance to earn the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential<sup>53</sup>, OCDEL developed the following credentials:

- **Pennsylvania Director Credential** –The Pennsylvania Director Credential provides a standard by which to measure program management, fiscal and leadership abilities of directors and administrators of early childhood and school-age programs. The Pennsylvania Director Credential is one of 24 States’ director credential programs approved by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Directors can earn the credential through coursework at 33 higher education institutions or through portfolio submission. In 2009-2010, 237 early care and education professionals earned their Director Credential.
- **Pennsylvania School-Age Professional Credential** – Modeled after the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, the Pennsylvania School-Age Professional Credential (SAPC) was developed to support professionals providing school-age care and education in Keystone STARS programs to meet requirements for the Career Lattice (Level III), Education and Retention Awards, T.E.A.C.H. Scholarships, and child care regulations.<sup>54</sup> The credential coursework is offered as community-based or college credit with online options available. In 2009-2010 the focus was to better facilitate the independent assessment process of the credential. As a result, nearly three times more candidates successfully completed the assessment process in 2009-2010 than in 2008-2009 and were awarded the credential. In 2009-2010, criteria was drafted for school-age professionals who currently have CDAs to earn a SAPC without going through the entire process (called “Second Setting”).

## Improving access to higher education for early childhood professionals.

OCDEL’s collaboration with the higher education and foundation communities is making it easier for Pennsylvania’s colleges and universities to offer early childhood education degrees and for early childhood staff to earn those degrees.

**Teacher Induction Supports.** Research shows that although their education may be excellent, teachers who are new to the classroom may find that in practice effective instruction, planning and preparing assessments are more difficult than they seemed in school. Without some mentoring, support, and specialized professional development, they may become frustrated and leave the field.

All teachers in Pennsylvania with Instructional Level I (provisional) certification are required to convert to Instructional Level II (permanent) certification within six years of active teaching. For Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts teachers in community-based settings (Head Start, child care, nursery school) the six year deadline did not begin until the start of the 2008-2009 program year. In order to obtain the Level II certificate, teachers must have at least three years of teaching experience, one year’s participation in a Department-approved Teacher Induction Plan, six satisfactory semiannual evaluations and continuing education. Keystone STAR 3 and STAR 4 certified teachers may also voluntarily convert their Instructional Level I to a Level II with the support of their program administrators.

In order to facilitate the induction of early childhood education teachers in community-based programs, the Pennsylvania Department of Education revised its policy in 2008 to include teaching experience in non-school district-based settings to count toward the three year minimum.

**Gate Opener Project.** OCDEL, in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Key and the Grable Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, and the William Penn Foundation, issued its first grants to nine institutes of higher education in 2009-2010 to help “open the gates of higher education” to early childhood professionals. Because many early childhood professionals enter the field with no or some college coursework, there can be significant challenges as they return to school to earn bachelor’s degrees. Through the Gate Opener Grants, these colleges and universities work with early childhood professionals to address challenges that they face as they access and earn Bachelor’s degrees. These projects assist teachers working in Keystone STARS programs; Head Start; and Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts to earn bachelor’s degrees and certification in early childhood education. Some of the barriers addressed in the first year of the project include PRAXIS review support; a need for classes available at time convenient for non-traditional students; and student teaching placement options. Approximately 577 early childhood professionals have benefitted from the project.

**Higher Education Articulation Project.** In 2007-2008, OCDEL, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Key and the State System of Higher Education, began working with two and four year higher education institutions to develop a seamless program-to-program early childhood education (ECE) articulation to make it easier for early childhood students to transfer all associate’s degree credits into a four-year program. Without such an agreement, students who enter a bachelor’s degree program with an associate’s degree are forced to repeat courses, expending their time and resources, and slowing the progress to providing educated teachers to the commonwealth’s early care and education programs.

A Pennsylvania Early Childhood Program-to-Program Articulation provides a seamless transfer of an early childhood education (ECE) associate’s degree program based on the core competencies in the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Standards and PreK-4 Guidelines for teacher preparation into a P-K4 bachelor’s degree and certificate program.

In 2009-2010, 33 ECE Program-to-Program Articulation agreements were developed among three articulation project teams led by Bloomsburg University of PA, Shippensburg University of PA, and Slippery Rock University.

Our center has been involved with Keystone STARS since 2003. We started at STAR 1, but quickly worked our way to a STAR 4 and are very proud of this accomplishment.

Because of the STARS program I have been able to increase my education through T.E.A.C.H. It has always been a goal of mine to get a degree in Early Childhood Education. Because I was busy raising my children, my education was put on the back burner. As my children got older and became more dependent I started thinking about my own career.

I started working at ABC Kiddie Kampus as an assistant group supervisor. I really enjoyed working with the children and new this was my calling. I chose to take online classes at Northampton Community College. It took me 3 ½ years of hard work, but I finally graduated in May 2010 with a 3.47 GPA.

Did I mention I am 43 years old?! If it was not for the STARS program and T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship, I would not have accomplished my dream.

Tammy Uhrin, Teacher, ABC Kiddie Kampus,  
Lackawanna County

**T.E.A.C.H. Scholarships.** T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) works with child care and Head Start programs participating in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, early childhood staff and higher education institutions to offer scholarship programs and supports that improve the education and compensation of early childhood staff. Scholarships are offered for Child Development Associate (CDA) credential coursework and assessment; Pennsylvania Director Credential; associate's and bachelor's degree programs and teacher certification.

In 2009-2010, approximately 1,836 individuals received T.E.A.C.H. scholarships to attend 49 colleges and universities throughout the commonwealth.

Pennsylvania was selected as one of three states in 2008-2009 to participate in a national initiative to pilot a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship for afterschool and youth work professionals. Implementation of the scholarship continues to be accomplished through a partnership between the Pennsylvania Key, Pennsylvania Child Care Association (PACCA), Pennsylvania Afterschool Youth Development Network (PSAYDN), the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania and the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST). In 2009 – 2010 the T.E.A.C.H. Afterschool and Youth Work Scholarship provided financial assistance and other supports for 18 staff to earn college coursework toward a Pennsylvania School-Age Professional Credential, Youth Work Certificate or associate's degree. Scholarship recipients maintained a grade point average of 3.9. Several individuals completing the Pennsylvania School Age Professional Credential coursework have indicated interest in continuing in an associate's degree program.

**The number of T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients earning bachelor's degrees increased by 125% since last year.**

**Voucher Program.** Pennsylvania Keys to Professional Development Refund Voucher Program offers reimbursement to teachers working at least 20 hours a week in STAR 1 or above child care programs or working in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts classrooms for courses that earn college credits (including CDA coursework) and payment for the CDA assessment. Professionals must receive a grade of B or higher to be eligible for reimbursement. In 2009-2010, approximately 2,808 vouchers were awarded to professionals.

## **Technical Assistance**

An important component to learning and continuous quality improvement is learning while doing. In addition to supports to earn credentials, degrees, and professional development, OCDEL provides technical assistance to its programs. Most OCDEL programs have technical assistance support available, such as Preschool Program Specialists for Head Start Supplemental and Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts programs, and STARS Specialists/Managers for Keystone STARS programs.

At each Regional Key, STARS Managers monitor and guide early learning programs through the process of earning their STARS award and moving up the STARS ladders. STARS Managers have knowledge in both early childhood education and solid business practices.

STARS Management services include, but are not limited to:

- Outreach and promotion of Pennsylvania's early learning quality initiatives;
- Interpreting the Keystone STARS Performance Standards;
- Connecting and/or providing practitioners with information, supports, resources, and professional development;
- Collaboratively assisting programs to develop and implement appropriate plans to achieve program-defined Keystone STARS goals; and
- Designating and awarding Keystone STARS.

## STARS Technical Assistance

STARS Technical Assistance (TA) is an intensive, one-on-one service provided to STARS programs to help the facility achieve specific Keystone STARS quality performance standards and move to higher STAR levels. Technical Assistance is administered through the Regional Keys, by contract with consultants who have the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to guide programs in each of the Keystone STARS content areas of Staff Qualifications and Professional Development, Early Learning (and School-Age) Program, Partnerships with Family and Community, and Leadership and Management.

**Keystone STARS programs that received Technical Assistance in 2009-2010 were twice as likely to move up a STAR level than those who did not.**

The goals of STARS Technical Assistance are to:

- Assist eligible STARS programs to achieve specific quality performance standards and achieve higher STAR levels using an established action plan.
- Enhance, but not duplicate, the services provided by other parts of the early care and education system including the STARS Management process, professional development, and other initiatives of the Department of Public Welfare and the Department of Education.
- Promote a team approach to addressing the needs of professionals and programs, in conjunction with the STARS Manager and other partners.

Any certified or registered center, group, and/or home-based child care provider that is enrolled in Keystone STARS and has enrolled in or completed the Keystone STARS Core Professional Development Series may request STARS TA services.

In 2009-2010, OCDEL found that a higher percentage of STARS providers receiving TA moved up a STAR level (43.9%) in 2009-2010 than those who did not receive TA (27.5%).<sup>55</sup>

## Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program

Children who are emotionally healthy have a significantly greater chance of achieving success in school than those with emotional difficulties. Scientific research demonstrates that helping children address social/emotional issues in their early years can improve their ability to learn for life and improve their quality of life and those of their families.<sup>56</sup>

The Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) program provides child-specific consultation services to Keystone STARS programs to address the social/emotional concerns of young children in order to reduce expulsions and promote healthy development. ECMHC services are provided at the request of the director and teacher and with the permission of the child's parent or guardian.

ECMHC services are offered within the framework of the "The Pyramid Model" introduced by The Center on Social and Emotional Foundations for Learning.<sup>57</sup> ECMHC provides both prevention and intervention services to minimize the child's need for more intensive services in the future and to increase the staff's confidence and competence in dealing with children with challenging behaviors. ECMHC Consultants work directly with teachers and parents to increase their capacity to understand and address the child's developmental needs. A synthesis of 26 studies concluded ECMHC consultation helped increase staff confidence and competence in dealing with children with challenging behaviors, lower stress, and provide a higher quality of service.<sup>58</sup> In 2009-2010, nearly 450 children in 51 counties received ECMHC services.

## V. Ensuring accountability to produce results for children and families

In order to make best use of public resources that produce positive outcomes for our young children, OCDEL continues to develop a system of accountability at the family, provider, and administrative levels. Through data review and site visits, OCDEL staff monitor adherence to performance standards and fiscal requirements. Regional specialists such as STARS Specialists, Preschool Program Specialists, Early Intervention Advisors, and Subsidy Coordinators conduct site visits to monitor programs and provide technical assistance and supports for programs to continue to improve their quality. If programs are not meeting the requirements, they either work with their specialist or OCDEL staff to develop a corrective action plan which is then monitored until fully implemented, or drop to the next lower STAR level until the standards are met. OCDEL also collects customer satisfaction surveys from both families and providers.

OCDEL has expanded accountability measures in Keystone STARS for programs, STARS Designators and technical assistance organizations.

### Program accountability

The six Regional Keys work with eligible child care and Head Start programs to determine their STARS designation. Before receiving a STARS designation, a program must complete a detailed checklist and provide on-site documentation during their Designation visit to prove that they meet every performance standard for that STAR level. Because each STAR level builds on the previous level, they also need to show they meet the requirements for the previous STAR levels as well.

Many Regional Keys use a process of pre-designation to ensure that the program has adequately completed and organized their paperwork in advance of the Designation visit.



Mom helps son hear his heartbeat and learn about health at a parent-child workshop at the Family YMCA of Easton, Phillipsburg & Vicinity in Northampton County

During their first Designation visit, STARS Specialists verify that each performance standard is met and through a facility tour, interviews with staff and review of documentation such as transcripts and degrees, lesson plans, financial documents, and child assessment reports. Programs are encouraged to keep all STARS designation documentation in a separate file/binder box for easy updates and verification.

To renew, Keystone STARS programs must submit documentation annually (and receive a Designation visit every other year) to show they are meeting the standards for their STAR level.

STAR 3 and 4 centers enter child, teacher and classroom information into Pennsylvania's Enterprise to Link Information Across Networks (PELICAN). The goal of PELICAN is to have a single integrated information system that will allow OCDEL to track

how Pennsylvania children and families use OCDEL programs and, with a focus on quality, to provide easily accessible information for Pennsylvania parents about early learning programs and services.

In 2009-2010, OCDEL launched Phase I of PELICAN Keys to Quality which manages Keystone STARS information as well as Head Start Supplemental and integrates it with the other PELICANs. STAR 3 and 4 programs also enter child outcomes data into Pennsylvania's Early Learning Network.

### **Environment Rating Scales (ERS) Assessments.**

Since 2002 Pennsylvania has implemented the nationally-recognized Environment Rating Scales (ERS) as a standard tool to assess the quality of early learning programs participating in Keystone STARS, Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program and Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts. Independent ERS assessors visit classrooms in child care programs, Head Start programs, licensed nursery schools and pre-kindergarten classrooms in public schools.

All Keystone STARS programs participate in ERS assessments. Each program is required to attend training to learn the Environment Rating Scales and conduct a self-assessment of their classrooms. For STAR 3 and 4 programs, independent evaluators conduct an ERS assessment of one classroom for each age range (Infants, Toddlers, Preschoolers, School-Age). If programs do not meet the required ERS scores, the assessor, STARS Specialist, and program will develop an action plan and provide additional technical assistance to help them meet their goals, or the program may drop to a lower STAR level until they can meet this standard.

### **Continuous quality improvement (CQI) plans.**

At STAR 2 and above, programs must complete a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) plan. The purpose of the plan is for programs to think strategically about the specific steps they need to take to move to the next STAR level or to improve program practices. Programs also identify a process to review and evaluate the CQI plans annually, determine what progress was made over the year, and refine the plan for the coming year.

Jenkintown Day Nursery was founded in 1903 and has always had the mission to provide affordable, quality, educational child care to children of working families in our community.

Although we always felt we provided quality, educational care, the Keystone STARS program has had us examine all aspects of our program and helped us to elevate our standards even higher. Our staff have achieved professional gains and we strive to continue to further their education and keep our goals elevated.

All children, regardless of family income, deserve the best start possible. OCDEL's programs make this possible by helping a non-profit provider like us, make quality early education a reality to all.

Carol Martin, Jenkintown Day Nursery, Montgomery County

## STARS Designator reliability

In order to ensure consistency among the STARS Specialists and Managers who conduct Designation visits and assign STAR levels to programs throughout the commonwealth, each Designator must verify their reliability regularly through Designator Reliability Visits. Designators complete a Designation Reliability Visit for every 25 designations, alternating between pairing with a Designator from the same Regional Key and a Designator from a different Regional Key. Both Designators complete the designation of a program at the same time, but independently of one another. After the designation is complete, the results are compared to determine reliability. The results assist in determining if there are any standards that need to be better clarified, if any component of the designation process needs to be better defined or if additional training or support is required for Designators.



PA Pre-K Counts graduating class at Children's Aid Society, Clearfield County. Children's Aid Society is able to participate in PA Pre-K Counts because of their STAR 3 rating in 2010.

## STARS Technical Assistance Accountability Plan

In 2008 – 2009 Pennsylvania developed the Keystone STARS Technical Assistance Accountability Plan (STARS-TAAP) to support consistency and quality in technical assistance across the commonwealth. The system consists of the following key performance:

- **Qualifications, Professional Development and Professionalism** requirements of technical assistance consultants to ensure consultants are highly qualified and continue to stay current on trends, research and issues in the field.
- **Reporting Obligations** to include timely, accurate submission of reports, timely follow-up and completion of referrals, records management and targets.
- **Measurable Impact on Provider** establishes the expectation that technical assistance will have some influence on the measurable improvement of a program. Change affected may be in knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviors in the target population resulting in improvement in specific standards, STAR level change and “stickiness” of the improvement.

## STARS Provider Survey

As part of its work to continue to strengthen and improve the Keystone STARS program, OCDEL conducted a provider survey that focused on provider perception of the most beneficial aspects of STARS and on ease of use of the various STARS resources. Eighty percent of providers report that the processes associated with the Support and Merit Grants, and the Education and Retention Grants were somewhat easy to very easy to use and 75% of the providers found that the STARS Technical Assistance and Professional Development supports were at least good quality and were helpful.

## VI. Keystone STARS – Part of the Quality Early Education Continuum

As Pennsylvania's early education system has evolved, Keystone STARS/Early Learning Keys to Quality has become an integral part of continuous quality improvement of early learning in all settings. Keystone STARS built the foundation for educational advancement, professional development, and classroom assessment that many other programs need to provide quality services for children and families. Here are some examples of how Keystone STARS connects with other OCDEL programs:

**In 2009-2010, 51 Keystone STARS programs were lead agencies for Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts. Another 136 STARS programs also participated in PA Pre-K Counts as partner agencies.**

**Aligning professional development for all early learning programs.** To better support the early care and education professionals working towards ECE Certification, OCDEL and the PA Early Learning Keys to Quality began work to align the Professional Development Record (PDR) required of STARS programs with the educational requirements for ECE certification, as well as to extend the use of the PDR to all OCDEL programs.

In fact, the Early Childhood Career Lattice and PDR have been refined to apply to all early childhood staff in Head Start, preschool and child care settings.

**Making quality early learning more accessible to vulnerable families.** When families apply for Child Care Works subsidy at their Child Care Information Services (CCIS) agency, they receive information on quality early learning and on Keystone STARS. Child care searches are prioritized to give the STARS programs first.

In order to encourage STARS programs to serve our vulnerable children, at least five percent of a program's enrollment must be receiving Child Care Works subsidy or Early Intervention services in order to receive support grants or merit awards. In addition, STARS programs receive a subsidy add-on for each Child Care Works subsidy child they serve. The amount of the add-on increases for each higher STAR level.

Through the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECHMC) service available to Keystone STARS programs, more eligible children are receiving the Early Intervention services they need earlier, and may need fewer or no services later because of the early identification.

**Making the vision of PA Pre-K Counts possible.** Pennsylvania is one of the first states to create a high quality public pre-kindergarten program that builds off community expertise by including both community- and school-based early learning programs. Keystone STARS has made it possible for child care programs to meet high quality standards and participate in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts. Keystone STARS was also the first program to implement Environment Rating Scales assessments; the same ERS assessors also assess PA Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental classrooms.

The impact of Keystone STARS/Early Learning Keys to Quality extends beyond participating programs, their staff and families they serve. The standards and supports have raised the bar for all early learning programs in the commonwealth.

## VII. Vision for the future

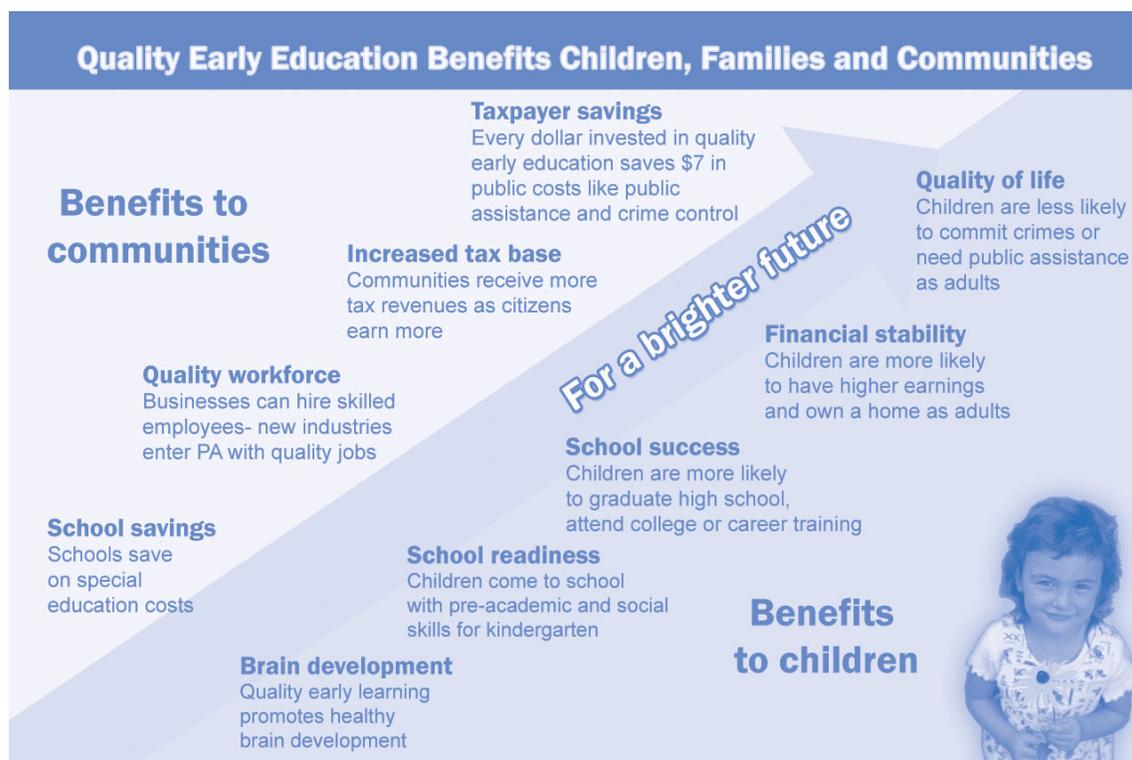
Keystone STARS/ Early Learning Keys to Quality was essential to reversing the declining quality in child care and education level of teachers. Keystone STARS has created opportunities for teachers to make early care and education a lifelong career, and school-based and community-based early care and education programs to work together to provide a high quality early learning opportunities for more children. With a strong foundation set, Keystone STARS/Early Learning Keys to Quality can focus on helping programs reach higher quality standards while strengthening accountability.

**Increasing access to higher education and continuing professional development.** As Keystone STARS programs move up the STARS ladder, more lead teachers are required to have bachelor's degrees in early childhood education. Pennsylvania will continue its support of early childhood teachers earning college degrees and certification through initiatives such as the revision of the Early Learning Career Lattice, increase in program-to-program articulation agreements, and Teacher Induction Supports.

**Promoting best practices and continuous quality improvement.** Based on research and years of experience in continuous quality improvement for early learning programs, OCDEL is developing and continues to refine good, better, and best practices for each STARS performance standard.

**Refining data systems and documenting progress for more children.** OCDEL is committed to the continuing development of PELICAN Keys to Quality to include child, family, teacher and classroom data for Keystone STAR 3 and 4 group and family child care homes, and include child outcomes in the Early Learning Network as well.

**Increased reliability and accountability.** Pennsylvania will continue to support consistency in STARS designations across the state through specialized professional development for STARS Managers/Specialists and other supports.



## Endnotes

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- <sup>3</sup> Timothy J. Bartik, Ph.D., Senior Economist at the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, at the Early Learning Investment Commission Economic Summit, April 19, 2010, Harrisburg, PA, [www.pa-elic.org](http://www.pa-elic.org)
- <sup>4</sup> "2009 State of Child Care in Pennsylvania," NACCRRRA, <http://www.naccrra.org/randd/data/docs/PA.pdf>
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- <sup>27</sup> Child care programs can receive up to the rate ceiling in subsidy from the state, a co-pay from the parent (based on parent's income, not on cost of care) and can charge the parent for the difference between the reimbursement rate and their parent fee, although they are not required.
- <sup>28</sup> American Federation of Teachers. "Profile of the Early Childhood Education Workforce."
- <sup>29</sup> Pennsylvania Child Care Association (PACCA) 2008 Wage and Benefit Survey, pg13.
- <sup>30</sup> PA Bureau of Labor and Industry 2010 Statewide list of High Priority Occupations, [www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/statewide\\_high\\_priority\\_occupations/12888](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/statewide_high_priority_occupations/12888)
- <sup>31</sup> Center for the Child Care Workforce. *Current Data on the Salaries and Benefits of the U.S. Early Childhood Education Workforce*. June 2004. ([www.ccw.org/pubs/2004Compendium.pdf](http://www.ccw.org/pubs/2004Compendium.pdf)), 5.
- <sup>32</sup> "Early Care and Education: The Keystone of Pennsylvania's Future Quality Study," November 2002, p 21.
- <sup>33</sup> Early Care and Education: The Keystone of Pennsylvania's Future Executive Brief," November 2002, p 8.
- <sup>34</sup> Child Care Bureau, 2007; Mitchell, 2005; Zellman & Perlman, 2008
- <sup>35</sup> See page 25 for more information on career development in the early childhood workforce.
- <sup>36</sup> Child Trends. (2010.) Quality Rating and Improvement Systems for Early Care and Education. *Early Childhood Highlights*. Vol.1, Issue 1, May 10, 2.
- <sup>37</sup> "Evaluation of Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS Quality Rating System in Child Care Settings," December 2006.
- <sup>38</sup> Based on program reports for 9,804 children in Work Sampling Online reporting tool.
- <sup>39</sup> Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services, April 2010, p 42. [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/cc/childcare\\_quality/compendium\\_qrs/qrs\\_compendium\\_final.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/cc/childcare_quality/compendium_qrs/qrs_compendium_final.pdf).
- <sup>40</sup> In order to be eligible for Keystone STARS, programs must meet the minimal health and safety requirements for their program, such as Child Care Certification Regulations and Head Start Performance Standards.
- <sup>41</sup> (Barnett, 2003a; Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001; Howes & Brown, 2000), [www.iir.berkeley.edu/csce/pdf/teacher.pdf](http://www.iir.berkeley.edu/csce/pdf/teacher.pdf)
- <sup>42</sup> "Evaluation of Pennsylvania's STARS Quality Rating System in Child Care Settings," (December 2006), available at [www.pakeys.org/uploadedContent/Docs/ELinPA/STARS\\_2006\\_Evaluation\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.pakeys.org/uploadedContent/Docs/ELinPA/STARS_2006_Evaluation_FINAL.pdf).
- <sup>43</sup> These are a few examples of the standards for child care centers and are not a comprehensive list of requirements. To download the full standards, visit [www.pakeys.org](http://www.pakeys.org).
- <sup>44</sup> More information on the PDR available on the Pennsylvania Keys website, [www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Career\\_CBK](http://www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Career_CBK)
- <sup>45</sup> Numbers include professionals who are not employed in STARS programs.
- <sup>46</sup> Vold, E. B. (2003). Young children's affirmation of differences: Curriculum that is multicultural and developmentally appropriate. In J. P. Isenberg & M. R. Jalongo (Eds.), *Major trends and issues in early childhood education: Challenges, controversies, and insights (Second edition)* (pp. 30-46). New York: Teaches College Press, p. 31.

<sup>47</sup> For more information on the Environment Rating Scales, visit [www.fpg.unc.edu/~ECERS/](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ECERS/).

<sup>48</sup> These are a few examples of the standards for child care centers and are not a comprehensive list of requirements. To download the full standards, visit [www.pakeys.org](http://www.pakeys.org).

<sup>49</sup> Jeynes, W. H. (2005). Parental involvement and student achievement: A meta-analysis (Family Involvement Research Digest). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Retrieved January 1, 2007, from [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/publications\\_resources/publications\\_series/family\\_involvement\\_research\\_digests/parental\\_involvement\\_and\\_student\\_achievement\\_a\\_meta\\_analysis](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/publications_resources/publications_series/family_involvement_research_digests/parental_involvement_and_student_achievement_a_meta_analysis).

<sup>50</sup> These are just singular examples of what is included in the standard. For all requirements, download the full standards at the PA Early Learning Key to Quality website, [www.pakeys.org](http://www.pakeys.org).

<sup>51</sup> These are just singular examples of what is included in the standard. For all requirements, download the full standards at the PA Early Learning Key to Quality website, [www.pakeys.org](http://www.pakeys.org).

<sup>52</sup> You can download the Lattice at [www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Career\\_Requirements](http://www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Career_Requirements).

<sup>53</sup> The Child Development Associate credential is a nationally recognized credential for early childhood professionals in center-based, family child care, and home visitor programs. The Child Development Associate (CDA) Competency Standards and Assessment System provide standards for training, evaluation, and recognition of practitioners based on their ability to meet the unique needs of an age group. For more information, visit [www.cdacouncil.org/cda.htm](http://www.cdacouncil.org/cda.htm).

<sup>54</sup> Recognized in regulations as equivalent to 9 credit hours from an accredited college or university in elementary education or child development and 1 year experience with children. This is the same as the Child Development Associate(CDA).

<sup>55</sup> "Demonstrating Quality: Pennsylvania Keystone STARS 2010 Program Report," p. 67. [www.ocdelresearch.org/Reports/Forms/AllItems.aspx](http://www.ocdelresearch.org/Reports/Forms/AllItems.aspx)

<sup>56</sup> Karoly, L.A., Kilburn, M.R. & Cannon, J.S. (2005). Early Childhood Interventions: Proven Results. Future Promise. Pittsburgh, PA: RAND Corporation

<sup>57</sup> [www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/)

<sup>58</sup> (Brennan, E. M., Bradley, J. R., Allen, M. D., & Perry, D. F. [in press]. The evidence base for mental health consultation in early childhood settings: Research synthesis addressing staff and program outcomes. *Early Education and Development*.)

## Appendix A: Timeline of development of Keystone STARS

OCTOBER 2002	Department of Public Welfare distributed the Keystone STARS pilot project application to Regulated Child Care Centers and Group Homes
JANUARY 2003	STAR 1 and STAR 4 (based on accreditation) designations awarded STAR 1 programs randomly selected for case management
MARCH 2003	STARS Case Managers began onsite visits to Keystone STARS sites
MAY 2003	Keystone STARS Merit Awards established and distributed to STAR 4 providers
JUNE 2003	Keystone STARS moved from a pilot project to statewide implementation
JULY 2003	898 Child Care Center and Group Home Providers Participated in Keystone STARS (752 at STAR 1, 33 at STAR 2, 113 at STAR 4)
OCTOBER 2003	First Step to STARS Grant made available and distributed to 1,454 Providers
DECEMB 2003	Keystone STARS Education & Retention Award (ERA) established
JANUARY 2004	Department of Public Welfare distributed the Keystone STARS Performance Standards for Family Day Care Homes
JUNE 2004	Family Child Care began participating in Keystone STARS
JULY 2004	Keystone STARS became the system of Continuous Quality Improvement; STARS Technical Assistance began
SEPTEMBER 2004	Department of Public Welfare established the <i>Office of Child Development</i>
FEBRUARY 2005	First Early Learning Program achieved a STAR 4 based on the Keystone STARS Performance Standards (not based on accreditation)
APRIL 2005	Number of Keystone STARS participants surpassed the 3,000 mark
JULY 2005	The <i>Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality</i> established including Six <i>Regional Keys</i> and the <i>Pennsylvania Key</i> based in Harrisburg, PA
JANUARY 2006	Infant/Toddler Mental Health Pilot Project began in the Northwest, Southwest, and South Central Regional Keys
MAY 2006	Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality Career Lattice released
JUNE 2006	Pennsylvania Director's Credential Portfolio Assessment began
JULY 2006	Keystone STARS Performance Standards for Centers revised; Head Start State Supplemental Programs and Keystone STARS began collaboration; School Age Child Care (SACC) Project aligned with the Regional Keys. Online PD Calendar made available
AUGUST 2006	First Family Child Care achieved STAR 4 based on the Keystone STARS Performance Standards (not based on accreditation)

SEPTEMBER 2006	First School-age Professional Credential classes began
JANUARY 2007	Pennsylvania's Departments of Education and Public Welfare established the Office of Child Development and Early Learning
MARCH 2007	First STAR 4 awarded to a Head Start State Supplemental Program
MAY 2007	Environment Rating Scale (ERS) staff doubled to meet increasing demands; over 3,000 practitioners trained on ERS Scales
JUNE 2007	OCDEL offices established at 333 Market Street, 6th Floor, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
AUGUST 2007	SACC-specific STARS Worksheets available
SEPTEMBER 2007	Initiation of Tiered Reimbursement increased the daily subsidized child care rate for Keystone STARS providers with a STAR 2 and above
NOVEMBER 2007	STARS Advisory Committee visited each region during the Listening Tours to obtain feedback from the provider community
APRIL 2008	Keystone STARS Media Campaign occurred
JULY 2008	Early Intervention participation included in calculation of STARS Grants/Awards eligibility; Tiered reimbursement rate increased for children who receive CCW subsidy; First STARS Leadership Institute held in State College, PA
FEBRUARY 2009	Official results released on Keystone STARS Provider Survey
MARCH 2009	The Performance Standards for Group Homes revised based on feedback from Providers, Advisory Committee, and Regional Keys.
JUNE 2009	PELICAN Keys to Quality implemented, allowing for improved tracking of designations and grants/awards Second STARS Leadership Institute
JULY 2009	OCDEL partners with Office of Children, Youth & Families to integrate Keystone STARS into child care purchasing through child welfare agencies; Speech from President Obama references Pennsylvania's success in early learning.
AUGUST 2009	STAR 3 and STAR 4 Centers began accessing the Early Learning Network (ELN) to report child outcome data using the Work Sampling System and Ounce Scale Online
SEPTEMBER 2009	Improved use of Keystone STARS in Child Care Works reported with over a 6% increase during the past year, with 46% of Child Care Works children receiving child care from Keystone STARS providers
OCTOBER 2009	Version 1.0 of "Good, Better, Best: Pennsylvania's Continuous Quality Improvement Guide to Best Practices" released

## Appendix B: Summary of Performance Standards

Full standards for center, group and family child care programs available at [www.pakeys.org](http://www.pakeys.org).

### Staff Qualifications and Professional Development

#### STAR 2

- Effective July 1, 2008, directors and staff will meet specific levels on Pennsylvania's Early Learning Career Lattice.
- Directors participate in at least one professional growth and development activity annually and attend at least 15 hours of training annually.
- One staff member per classroom must have pediatric first aid certification, and all staff must have child abuse mandated reporter training. Staff must attend at least 12 hours of training annually.

#### STAR 3

- Minimum qualifications for directors and staff increase.
- Directors enroll in the Pennsylvania Director's Credential.
- Directors participate in at least two professional growth and development activities and staff participate in at least one.
- Annual clock hours of training increase to 21 for directors and 18 for teaching staff.

#### STAR 4

- Staff qualifications represent best practices for the early learning field.
- Directors participate in at least three professional growth and development activities.
- Staff participate in at least two professional growth and development activities.
- Annual clock hours of training increase to 27 for directors and 24 for teaching staff.

### Learning Environment

#### STAR 1

- Site obtains and maintains copies of the appropriate Learning Standards for all age groups in the program.
- Site completes an environment checklist.

#### STAR 2

- Child observations are completed at the beginning of a child's time in the program and once yearly after the initial observation.
- The program completes an environment rating scale (ERS) self-assessment and creates an Improvement Plan for low scores.

#### STAR 3

- Child observations must occur at least three times per year, and the results of the observations must be used to tailor the program to the child.
- A learning curriculum that incorporates the Pennsylvania Learning Standards is established.
- An ERS visit is completed with required minimum average and classroom scores.

#### STAR 4

- Assessment of the child is completed and shared with parents at least twice per year.
- The program's curriculum and assessment tools are cross-walked to the Learning Standards.
- The minimum ERS scores that the facility must meet increase.

## Partnerships with Family and Community

### STAR 1

- Families are provided information about their community and transitioning their child to other educational settings.
- A “Getting to Know You” meeting is held with parents within 60 days of enrollment.

### STAR 2

- If the child has an IEP or IFSP, the program requests a copy to inform classroom practice.
- Information about the child’s day at the program is shared with parents.
- Parents are offered at least one conference per year.

### STAR 3

- A plan is written to refer families to community resources.
- The program coordinates a group activity to include families in meeting the program’s goals.
- Parents are offered at least two conferences and a group meeting about transition.
- The program sends a letter of introduction to community and school stakeholders regarding transition and participates in transition activities.

### STAR 4

- Activities are implemented to meet IEP/IFSP goals.
- Policies regarding parent engagement and partnership in the planning and decision making for the program are implemented.
- The program offers parents an individual meeting about transition and develops and shares a plan for child transition with parents and stakeholders.

## Leadership and Management

### STAR 1

- Program develops and distributes a Parent Handbook.
- Illnesses and injuries are tracked, and a prevention plan is enacted.
- A staff meeting has been held within the past six months.

### STAR 2

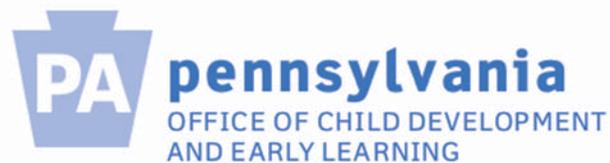
- Program creates an operating budget and financial record keeping system.
- A personnel policy manual is created and shared with staff.
- System of site safety review and action plan created.
- Staff meetings held at least once per month.
- Director meets with staff to discuss quality and professional development.
- At least two employee benefits are provided to full-time staff.

### STAR 3

- Teachers are provided paid lesson planning time monthly.
- Teachers are observed in the classroom, and they are provided feedback.
- Performance evaluations are provided to employees.
- A salary scale is created and shared with staff
- Three benefits are provided to full-time staff.

### STAR 4

- An operational business plan, risk management plan, strategic plan, and financial review by a CPA are completed.
- A written code for professional staff conduct is instituted.
- Teachers are provided weekly paid lesson planning time and breaks.
- Four benefits are provided to staff.



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