



Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS Revisioning Process: A Process Evaluation

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Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

In 2002, Pennsylvania was among the initial leaders spearheading the way by designing, building, and implementing the Keystone STARS program to help increase the quality of early care and education. Fourteen years later, it was time again to lead the way through redesigning Keystone STARS to ensure that the system is responding to new challenges and leveraging new opportunities.

Keystone STARS revisioning was driven by findings within the 2015 report, *An Inquiry of Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS*, (November 2015). It was funded by Pennsylvania's Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge Grant. The purpose of Revisioning Keystone STARS was to ensure higher provider participation and to increase the number of young children receiving high-quality early care and education. Throughout the Revisioning process it was imperative to incorporate the voices of leadership and others in the field of early care and education to ensure the system's effectiveness and responsiveness to issues of equity and diversity for all stakeholders.

Pennsylvania's Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) approached the Keystone STARS Revisioning process by utilizing an intensive stakeholder engagement strategy. This approach was selected to ensure participation of many voices in the field of early care and education. These key stakeholders were empowered to participate in the process of examining the current Keystone STARS system, consider alternatives, think deeply about core principles guiding the system, and help design the new system.

Keystone STARS Revisioning began in February 2016 with the entire process taking 16 months. Towards the end of this timeline, an independent researcher was hired to

further examine the stakeholder engagement process. The researcher conducted a process evaluation using data collected and analyzed from three sources: stakeholder interviews, online surveys, and a document review. The overarching question was: **Did the Keystone STARS Revisioning process meet its goal to fully engage stakeholders?**

Key findings illustrated a variety of strategies employed to help engage stakeholders. Examples included:

- Convening a group of diverse stakeholders referred to as the *Think Tank* to help guide the process;
- Utilizing the *Think Tank* as ambassadors to the field to help gather feedback throughout the process;
- Leveraging online platforms for meetings, surveys to the field, and keeping the recording of meetings and materials relevant to the Revisioning on the PA Keys website;
- Activating online workgroups open to anyone in the field to participate; and
- Providing regular updates through multiple modalities: webinars, email blasts, process updates, presentations to various stakeholder groups by OCDEL leadership and STARS *Think Tank* participants, etc.

In addition, evidence was found that the Keystone STARS Revisioning process incorporated elements of Implementation Science (Metz, Naoom, Halle, & Bartley, 2015), including data to help drive decision-making and the use of feedback loops.

While multiple strategies were in place, some strategies yielded stronger results than others. For instance, the use of the STARS *Think Tank* helped to ensure that over 2,345 stakeholders provided feedback on the new



core principles for Keystone STARS. Even with a significant number of stakeholders participating in the Revisioning process, there are continued opportunities to bring a diverse group of voices to the table.

Some of the more effective practices identified include resources designated for the process, skilled facilitators, intentional communications, and the use of data and feedback loops. Challenges or barriers identified by participants were the absence of diverse voices in the work, time constraints, and geographic location of face to face meetings. To summarize, participants of the STARS *Think Tank* felt they were successful in meeting the expectation of engaging a diverse group of stakeholders. However, participants also shared that continued opportunities exist to ensure all missing voices are heard.

Recommendations generated from this study include the following:

1. Continue to build and utilize feedback loops to further engage stakeholders in the new Keystone STARS system;
2. Consider continued engagement of the STARS *Think Tank*; and
3. Develop and implement a robust evaluation plan for the Keystone STARS initial transition year of 2017-2018.

The final recommendation was inspired from two participants interviewed for this study.

- “...part of revisioning is to really look at what matters.”
- “I think, overall, if we’re true to the idea of Revisioning, then we’re committed to, not a product that’s bound by a particular timeline, but...we’re committed to a process that engages voices from [the] community, as well as science, in an honest and authentic way.”

In the spirit of these themes, the final recommendation is to continue to focus on continuous quality improvement¹ for the entire system of early care and education. As one participant shared, this means providing time and space to examine additional aspects of Pennsylvania's early care and education system as well as Keystone STARS.

In relation to Keystone STARS, *continuous quality improvement* for the system would be enabled through the a) continued engagement of stakeholders, b) incorporating data from advances in QRIS studies, c) developmental research, and d) data from an ongoing evaluation of Keystone STARS. This data and feedback could be used for system level changes and adaptations. Building on effective

practices and lessons learned in the Keystone STARS Revisioning process and working to incorporate the voices of those missing could help Pennsylvania begin to consider and address issues of access and equity within a Quality Rating and Improvement System. Thus, it could enable a more inclusive system of QRIS.

¹ For additional ideas about continuous quality improvement in QRIS see BUILD's QRIS 3.0 recommendations found here: <http://qrisnetwork.org/sites/all/files/resources/2016-02-10%2009%3A21/QRIS%203.0%20Report%20V11%202016.2.5%20FINAL.pdf>



What is Keystone STARS Revisioning

This section defines the purpose of the Keystone STARS Revisioning process and key points in the 16 months examined.

TIMELINE AND PURPOSE

This evaluation examines the process of redesigning the Keystone STARS Quality Rating and Improvement System within a 16-month period. It is important to note that work was underway well before the time examined in this evaluation. As with any system development or redesign, it requires the efforts of dedicated and passionate individuals to take on a task as large as this. Thus, this evaluation, while concentrating on the 16 months from February 2016-May 2017, acknowledges the important work of individuals and groups that have contributed to this process in the months and years prior.

Those who participated in the process through the *Think Tank* best describe the purpose or basis of the Keystone STARS redesign—referred to as *Revisioning*:

“The revisioning process was really built upon this idea that we wanted to both consider stakeholder input, and field recommendations around what really matters to them in the classroom, but also uphold evidence ... the science of what is deep and meaningful about a quality early learning experience. That’s really the basis for revisioning, and I think the process has very much been stakeholder driven.” Participant 3

Timeline and Visual

“The major objective was to create a system, a quality rating improvement system that was less burdensome on the providers that the system was designed

to support. When I say less burdensome, I mean things like that there would not be any redundancy of monitoring. There would not be redundancy of paperwork. That indicators and performance standards would be evidence based, but would also be achievable and would not produce a financial burden for programs. That programs would find themselves able to move through the system in a timely manner, and find success in moving through the system. Those were the overall kind of goals and what really kind of drove our process. We talked a lot about keeping it simple. **Making it meaningful. Making it evidence based, but making sure it was deep but simple.**” Participant 4

The Keystone STARS Revisioning process was driven by data shared in the University of Pennsylvania’s STARS Inquiry Report (November 2015) and expectations outlined in the Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge Grant. As one participant of the process shared:

“We had that wonderful report come out at the end of 2015, which then set the stage as a great piece of research and data for us to move forward into our STARS Revisioning and look deeper into our existing system to think in terms of where can we refine and enhance and ensure that we are doing the best work possible to support positive outcomes for children and families.” Participant 7

The primary objective was to redesign the Keystone STARS system. The process of redesign began to be referred to as *Revisioning* as it became evident that it was vital to “Re-vision” the entire system in order to develop a structure and method that met the needs of all children, families, and providers.



The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) provided guidance and leadership for the Revisioning of Keystone STARS. The expectation was to utilize a stakeholder engagement process that allowed for stakeholders to participate in the Revisioning process through in-person and virtual events. In addition, they wanted to engage both internal and external partners (Early Care and Education Direct Service Providers, Advocacy Organizations, School Districts, Regional Keys, Child Care Certification, Professional Development/Technical Assistance organizations, Child Care Information Services, and Early Intervention) to reach out to child care providers and others not engaged in the Keystone STARS system to participate in the redesign. Further, OCDEL directed special attention to be given to issues around diversity and disproportionality currently present in the Keystone STARS system.

Propulsion Squared, a consulting firm based in Atlanta, GA, facilitated the Keystone STARS Revisioning process. Throughout the Revisioning

process, facilitators were charged with sharing national data and trends in QRIS, innovations, new developmental research, and guiding participants to reach consensus on a new overarching conceptual framework for Keystone STARS.

The following shares key time points in the process.

STARS *Think Tank* Development

In order to engage stakeholders in the process, the STARS *Think Tank* was formed. The *Think Tank* was charged with the following:

... engaging a diverse group of stakeholders in the creation of a new conceptual framework for Keystone STARS. This new framework will define the shared core principles of a quality rating and improvement systems that is meaningful to and inclusive of all children, families and early learning professionals in Pennsylvania's diverse early learning settings.

Further, throughout the work of the Revisioning, the *Think Tank* followed the words of Fred Rogers, “Deep and simple is far more essential than shallow and complex.”

In December 2015, applications for the *Think Tank* went out broadly to the early care and education community in Pennsylvania. While over 400 stakeholders applied to be members of the STARS *Think Tank*, a committee of OCDEL staff, external partners, and advocates selected 42 stakeholders. Selection focused on diversity of regions, race/ethnicities served, socioeconomic status, and early care and education program type.

However, it became evident the group was still missing some stakeholder voices. To address this, *Think Tank* members were requested to “bring a friend” to join meetings. Guidance was given to bring someone who was missing from the process. After this, there were 86 official *Think Tank* participants. One participant shared who was at the table for the work of the *Think Tank*:

“We had, I guess you could kind of say an ecosystem of participation. The main group was approximately 90 *Think Tank* team members who applied to be a part of the *Think Tank*. They were stakeholders representing Early Intervention, Certification, Quality Initiatives, the Regional Key and the PA Key. There were providers that represented multiple settings (Family Child Care, Group, Center, Multiple Pedagogies, Montessori, Head Start, Early Head Start and Faith-Based) Then there were advocates in that main group.” Participant 2

Shared Core Principles

The first meeting of the *Think Tank* was from February 26-27, 2016 in State College, PA. During this meeting, facilitators guided participants to think about Pennsylvania’s system of early care and education as a whole

and address the question: What is possible for children, families, and providers? Participants were requested to consider an inclusive perspective in regard to the diversity of early care and education programs across the state as they focused on this question. A draft version of the shared core principles for Revisioning was developed through the work in this meeting.

Between March and May 2016, these core principles were taken to the early care and education field for feedback. This included holding virtual webinars to share the process of the Keystone STARS Revisioning and to gather input from the field on the draft. Over 50 regional



town hall meetings were held across the state in April and May for additional feedback. STARS *Think Tank* members held small community-based meetings and were provided with a communication action plan, the revision timeline, and a PowerPoint presentation to share updates and the drafted core principles for feedback. Data and feedback from these efforts were brought to the June 2016 STARS *Think Tank* meeting, reviewed, and then used to revise the drafted core principles to reflect the voices of the field.

In sum, over 2,345 early care and education stakeholders provided feedback on the new Keystone STARS Core Principles. In July 2016, the newly adopted core principles were shared:

Keystone STARS is a responsive system to improve, support, and recognize the continuous quality improvement efforts of early learning programs in Pennsylvania. Our system is guided by three core principles:

- *A whole child approach to education is essential to meeting the holistic and individual needs of each and every child and family.*
- *Knowledgeable and responsive early care and education professionals are essential to the development of children and the support of families.*
- *Building and sustaining ongoing positive relationships among children, families, early care and education professionals and community stakeholders is essential for the growth and development of every child.*

We believe inclusion, diversity, equity and respect are foundational values embedded in these principles.

Timeline Shared

In September 2016, the STARS *Think Tank* met and a timeline for implementation was distributed to the field in October 2016 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1:



Development Of Workgroups

In October 2016, further feedback from the field was requested for several key areas. Thus, invitations for participants to join workgroups for *Communication*, *Quality Indicators*, and the *Professional Development System* were sent through email blasts, process updates, and other methods. The primary purpose of these workgroups was to gather additional feedback and insights from the field and to offer a broader avenue for participation for those not chosen for the STARS *Think Tank*, or those looking for a more focused topic area. As one participant shared: “*There was a professional development workgroup. There was a communication workgroup. There was an indicator workgroup. These are people who took an idea, dove a little bit deeper into that idea and made recommendations back to the Think Tank. There were anywhere from 100 people on the indicator workgroup, to more like 25 or 30 people on the communications workgroup. PD has...maybe 50 people.*” All materials from the workgroups were posted on the PA Keys website. Materials

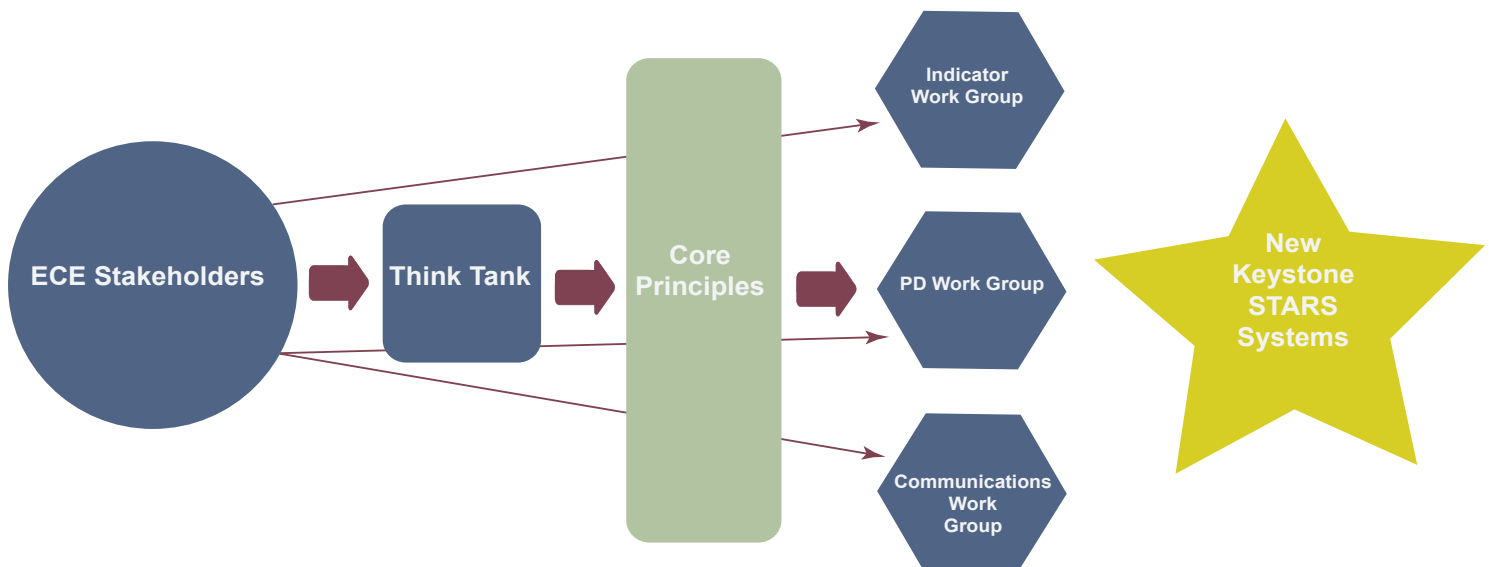
included any online meetings held, materials presented, and surveys that were sent by workgroups into the field to gather additional perspectives and information. The findings and perspectives of the workgroups were shared with the STARS *Think Tank* as they continued to push through the timeline for Keystone STARS Revisioning.

Continued Work Of The *Think Tank*

The *Think Tank* convened for two other meetings in between November 2016 and March 2017, to continue the process of examining data from workgroups and proceeding through the timeline of Revisioning. In May 2017, the process began for the STARS Revision Pilot and preparations for the official launch of the new system in July, 2017. Figure 2 below illustrates the stakeholder engagement approach followed during the Revisioning process.

Figure 2

Keystone STARS Revisioning Process



Drivers for Revisioning: Data, RTT-ELC, OCDEL Leadership, Voices from the Field

Evaluation of the Keystone STARS Revisioning Process

This section provides information about the evaluation questions studied and the guiding theoretical frameworks employed. Please note, this evaluation focused on the Keystone STARS Revisioning process between February 2016 and April 2017. All data was collected by May 31, 2017.

THE MERITS OF A PROCESS EVALUATION

The intention of this evaluation was to examine the Keystone STARS Revisioning process and to investigate whether the expectations set forth from the Office of Child Development and Early Learning to utilize a stakeholder engagement approach was actuated. By applying process evaluation and qualitative methods, the voices of participants were documented, and detailed descriptions of engagement and interactions throughout the process were shown (Patton, 2002). In addition, using the data from a process evaluation allows a picture to emerge that illustrates if a program or initiative is "... operating the way it is supposed to be operating" (Patton, 2002, p. 160), and reveals areas for improvement and strength to build on (Patton, 2002). This process evaluation sets the stage for a larger evaluation as the new Keystone STARS system is implemented.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Evaluation questions were designed with guidance from OCDEL leadership.

- Did the Keystone STARS Revisioning meet its goal to utilize a stakeholder engagement process?
 - What voices were missing from the process?
- What were the most effective elements of the process?
- What were the challenges and barriers to the process?

GUIDING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The research predominately utilized grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory is an approach to data collection and analysis in which the researcher analyzes collected data to look for themes, commonalities, and ideas. As opposed to searching the collected data for pre-determined concepts, the researcher searches for patterns and concepts to emerge through inductive steps. Generally with grounded theory methodology, the researcher analyzes pieces of data individually to look for patterns, and then looks for patterns across separate pieces of collected data. The researcher looks for themes or codes, then articulates the nature or parameters of the codes, and the ways distinct themes also relate to one another (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). This methodology can yield rich descriptions and explanations of this phenomena, in this case, a Revisioning process that is rooted in the artifacts of the event and the perspective of the participants as opposed to one that looks for preconceived notions of what the process "should be" or "must have been."

In addition, the framework of Implementation Science was used after the first analysis to look for evidence of data usage and feedback loops (Metz et al., 2015).

Methodology

This section shares information on the evaluation questions, data sources and analysis.

Three different data sources were collected to answer the evaluation questions. Table 1 below illustrates each evaluation question and the data sources used to help answer that question.

Table 2 provides summary information on each data source. Following table 2, additional information is provided for each data source and the analysis.

Table 1.
Evaluation questions and data sources

Evaluation Questions	Data Sources
Did the Keystone STARS Revisioning meet its goal to utilize a stakeholder engagement process?	Document Review, Qualitative Interviews, Online Surveys
What were the most effective elements of the process?	Document Review, Qualitative Interviews, Online Surveys
What were the challenges and barriers to the process?	Document Review, Qualitative Interviews, Online Surveys

Table 2.
Summary information for each data source

Data Source	Summary Information
Document Review	Summary Information Documents (PowerPoints, agendas, surveys, etc.) obtained from the PA Keys website, facilitators, and OCDEL leadership.
Qualitative Interviews	13 interviews conducted with <i>Think Tank</i> members
Online Survey	2 online surveys: 1 for <i>Think Tank</i> members, 1 for Workgroup members



DATA SOURCE ONE: DOCUMENT REVIEW

A document review was conducted and completed in three phases. Publicly accessible documents and planning documents related to the *Think Tank* were considered for review.

- Phase 1: A document search and initial review of all documents relating to the Keystone STARS Revisioning from the PA Keys website was conducted.
- Phase 2: The facilitators and OCDEL provided access to all *Think Tank* documents relating to the process, including agendas and notes from meetings.
- Phase 3: All documents were read, analyzed, categorized, and coded for common themes

In total, 39 documents were reviewed.

DATA SOURCE TWO: INTERVIEWS

Interviews were conducted with members of the *Think Tank*. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions to allow participants to generate their own ideas and provide rich details. Interview participants were selected from the attendance lists for *Think Tank* meetings that were obtained from the facilitators at Propulsions Squared and OCDEL. Selection of participants focused on gathering a diverse group of participants with a variety of different roles within early care and education across the state. In total, 13 participants were interviewed out of the 86 *Think Tank* members identified. See the next sections for the results.

DATA SOURCE THREE: SURVEYS

An anonymous online survey of *Think Tank* members was administered to obtain information on topics such as:

- Participants' role in the early care and education field
- Perceptions of who was able to participate

in the STARS *Think Tank* (what voices were heard)

- Perspectives on the effectiveness of the STARS *Think Tank*
- Perceptions of what went well and assessment of the success of the Revisioning
- Perceptions of what could have been different
- Suggestions for future evaluation

The survey consisted of open-ended and rating questions, 11 questions total. 42 members of the *Think Tank* completed the survey for a response rate of 49%.

Think Tank respondents (42) identified as taking a variety of roles within the Early Care and Education field. These included:

- Center based child care providers/teachers/directors
- Family child care providers
- Advocates
- Head/Start Early Head Start
- OCDEL
- Higher Education
- Regional Key/PA Key Staff
- Professional Development: Technical Assistant
- Early Intervention
- Subsidy/CCIS
- Certification
- Consultants

An additional online survey was conducted for participants of the workgroups. This anonymous survey asked questions about the participant's perception of the effectiveness of the workgroups and what could have been different. 84 participants of the workgroups completed the survey.

ANALYSIS

In order to ensure a rich and deep understanding of the nature and the quality of the Revisioning process, data were collected from multiple sources using various methods. In-depth

qualitative interviews with multiple stakeholders, online surveys, and documents were analyzed separately and then compared to one another in a thematic analysis (common themes). The researcher recruited others to analyze the data independently to gain multiple perspectives on ways of interpreting the data. (Please note: appropriate ethical measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants.) This process is referred to as triangulation (Denzin, 1997; Patton, 1999) and is used to help generate deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon, greater trust, and credibility in the research process. Therefore, triangulation was used when warranted throughout the process.

In addition to coding for common themes, the data were coded to indicate which specific components of implementation science were present in the process. This included:

- The presence of feedback loops/ communication protocols

- Integrating data in the process

Feedback loops and data usage were operationalized through the lens of Implementation Science:

“Feedback loops and data are used to drive decision-making, as well as to support effective communication and feedback loops across multiple levels of the system... Implementation frameworks emphasize the need for continuous quality improvement through the systematic assessment and feedback of information and data related to planning, implementation, and outcomes (Chinman, Imm, & Wandersman, 2004).” (Metz et al., 2015)



Findings

This section shares the findings from all three data sources: the document review, interviews, and online surveys. The findings are organized by evaluation questions. Three additional common themes are shared after the evaluation questions, participant's perspectives of success, what could have been different, and the integration of data and feedback loops.

UTILIZING A STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Document Review

The documents included in the document review indicated evidence of a *stakeholder engagement approach*. The documents demonstrating this approach included: the webinar PowerPoint presentations for workgroups; agenda items from the *Think Tank* and Workgroup meetings (evidence of incorporating feedback and data collected from stakeholders); several versions of the core principles that changed after stakeholder feedback, invitations for potential participants to participate in the workgroups through multiple announcements (emails, newsletters, etc.); the widespread updates about Revisioning provided on the PA Keys website and documented in update webinar PowerPoint presentations; and email updates as well as information integrated from the regional town hall meetings facilitated by *Think Tank* members. Attendance data illustrates stakeholders from the following areas participated in the *Think Tank*:

- Center based child care providers/teachers/directors
- Family child care providers
- School age providers
- Private and public Pre-K providers
- Public school districts
- Montessori providers
- City/State government representation
- Advocates
- Head/Start Early Head Start
- OCDEL
- Higher Education
- Regional Key/PA Key Staff
- Professional Development: Technical Assistants
- Early Intervention
- Subsidy/CCIS
- Certification

STARS *Think Tank* Participant Interviews

STARS *Think Tank* Interview participants described the approach for the Keystone STARS Revisioning as *engaging stakeholders* and utilizing a *collaborative, inclusive process*:

“... I really think it was very stakeholder driven. I think the approach came from, how do we meld huge system change that we have to be able to design a system that can meet fidelity ... so it's not going to work for everyone, because always in policy choice, there are winners and losers.” Participant 2

“I would say it was an inclusive process, where all voices were heard. And that opportunity was given for all voices to be heard.” Participant 12

“I think the approach was definitely a collaborative approach that engaged the state stakeholders. The approach was an approach that used data and evidence to create the foundation of the conversation. I would definitely say it was an evidenced-based approach, because there was tons of research done ahead of the re-visioning process. There was a lot of foundation setting based on previous research.” Participant 4

“...we had excellent representation from the early childhood field as far as provider types, so there were representatives from the Montessori community, from childcare, family



childcare, group centers, our migrant head starts, our head starts are school based, so the provider community itself I thought was well represented. The advocacy community had excellent representation; representation from our certification, from our subsidy, from our Regional Key partners, from our Early Intervention partners. Our OCDEL leadership participated. I really feel like it was really diverse and well represented.” Participant 5

When talking about the approach used for the Revisioning, participants talked about the *variety of perspectives* and *different voices heard*.

“You know, it was really interesting, because I was surprised ... That from the beginning, it was not the same old, same old folks that I would have expected. In fact, when I got to the Penn State, I was surprised, pleasantly surprised by the number of new faces. We have a tendency here ... You know, for myself, I've been doing this for a really long time ... That sometimes we can't distinguish what meeting we're in, because it's all of the same people. It's like, okay: "What are we talking about today?" So this was exciting and invigorating, I mean there were folks that did represent kind of, have a historical perspective, but there were also those folks that some of which were new to the system, but were within the system...So I think that

the diversity of the folks that were kind of on the *Think Tank*, was surprising. Pleasantly surprising, and I think important...it was an open process.” Participant 12

The approach was also characterized as *strengths based*.

“I would definitely say it was a strengths-based approach, first and foremost. We really looked deeply at what was functioning really well in the system, as well as what were areas that the providers really felt more pain points that really needed to be strengthened, and enhanced, and improved...” Participant 5

Think Tank Online Survey

53.7% of respondents strongly agree the *Think Tank* was effective in fulfilling its original purpose. While almost 30% (26.88%) agreed with the statement, 19.5% of respondents were undecided. 41 out of 42 respondents completed this question.

Think Tank respondents were asked to rate their agreement on a series of statements about the *Think Tank* via the online survey. (See Figures 3 and 4.) All 42 respondents answered this question.

Figure 3: Participants' perspectives on the quality of the *Think Tank* meetings.

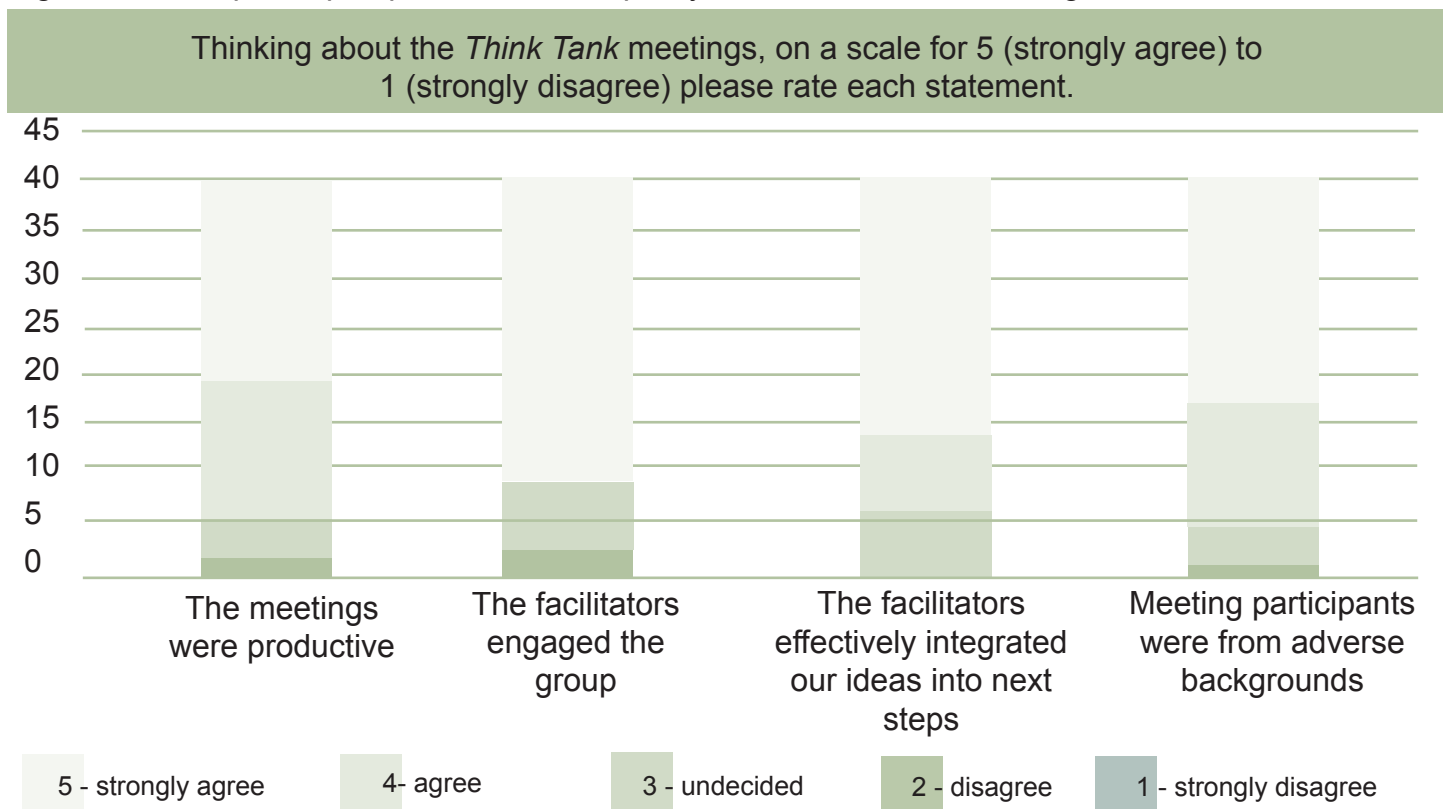
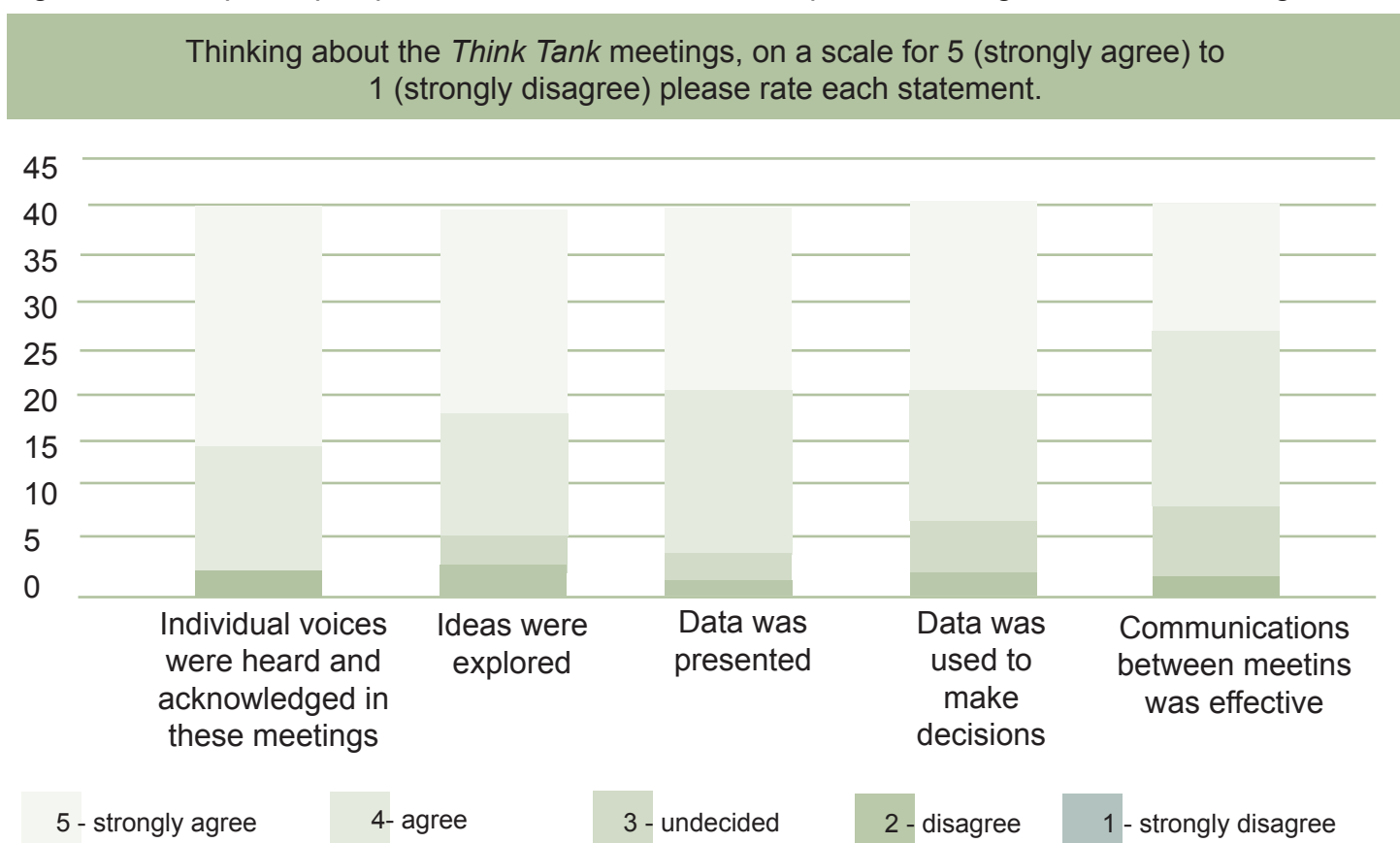


Figure 4: Participants' perspectives on the communication process during *Think Tank* meetings.



PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROCESS

Think Tank Interview and *Think Tank* Online Survey

The following suggestions for who was missing from the process were shared:

- **Additional cultures and voices of color**

“By and large providers, particularly program-level folks who are not English speaking. Or who are not part of the group. We did have a couple, particularly there’s a couple *Think Tank* members and there a couple advocacy organizations that have really done incredible work trying to bring folks to the table who are sort of usually not a part of this process. And to sort of say to them, “Hey, you know what, why don’t you let us collect all of your feedback for you and we can feed it up?” So we did try to bring groups together like that. But I will say that we have some providers who serve dual-language learners, and we have some participants who represent our migrant head start. But we are sort of missing many of the folks who are not part of the dominant culture.” Participant 1

- **Families**

“...families have been a hard voice to capture accurately. A lot of the folks that aren’t at the table are parents themselves, or grandparents as well. A lot of the people that we work with everyday also carry that family experience with them, but I always find in our line of work... it’s really...hard to get to where families are at, and accurately capture their voice. We tried to challenge ourselves in doing that, but I’m not sure that we totally got there.” Participant 5

- **Providers**

“...would say, I think this is due to timing, but I would have liked to have seen more staff

that are actually working in the programs. There were a couple of teachers and different staff members, but I think the fact that it was on a weekday and it was all day. I know there were some webinars where they were seeing a little bit more in terms of involvement of actual providers, but you weren’t seeing a lot of those voices at the table.” Participant 9

- **Health and safety sector representation**
- **Representative from the early learning investment commission**
- **Business community stakeholders**
Department of Education representatives
- **Department of Community and Economic Development representatives**
- **Additional staff from Certification and CCIS and the PA Key**
- **Experts working with dual language and immigrant populations**
- **STARS 1 and 2 providers of underserved populations**
- **Group child care providers both home and out of home based**
- **More higher education representatives**
- **Migrant community stakeholders**
- **Religious schools**
- **Outdoor-based settings**
- **State representatives or staff**
- **Fathers and men**
- **Advocates for LGBTQ**

EFFECTIVE ELEMENTS OF THE PROCESS

Think Tank Interview and *Think Tank* Online Survey

Think Tank participants shared elements that helped the process move forward including:

1. Funding to support this process

“I think that having resource definitely made it successful. Having ... being a Race to the Top State, I can’t really overstate that. Having some resource at our fingertips that had flexibility was huge. That was very helpful.” Participant 3

2. Skilled, resourceful facilitators who used organization and planning

“They were conduits in a sense where they gave us what we needed, they set the stage, they kept the barriers in place and guided us, and if we got off track, they were like, “Okay, remember this is the question on the table right now.” ... They maintained order. They kept us on task. They continually provoked the question, and they continually refined the answer. Every time we got an answer, then they provoked more questions from the existing answer to see if there was anything left that we could purge out of it to get to the purest understanding that we wanted to have.” Participant 10

“The element to me that helped to move the process along was the fact that one, once we began to discuss and to make decisions, all of that was written down, and so the facilitators were wonderful with their ability to take what we were saying and to put it into their computer and to give it back to us in a sense almost like a completed task so that we could see it professionally as it would be presented if we were receiving it at that moment. Even though it was step by step

processing, which was helpful, each step was made into in a sense a final outcome so that we could see, here’s what you developed this time that we’ve met.” Participant 10

“Having that capacity to just kind of do a lot of deep thinking, they really brought that to us ... they gave us that space. They really enabled that ... they also have done something really interesting, which I think is that they’ve really challenged us to think differently. We don’t always agree, and I think that’s a space that you don’t usually think of consultants as being ... I don’t know what your preconceived notions are, but when I think consultant, I think of somebody who’s very agreeable, and who’s going to come in and give you some ideas, and help get you straight, and kind of send you on your way, right...” Participant 3

The facilitators really kept us focused. They kept us focused, they kept us on target. They always made sure that we thought about what the actual mission was, of why we were there. Instead of allowing people to come in their siloed views...” Participant 13

3. Communication: Intentional communication through the website, clear communication about the process and opportunities for feedback intentionally built in

“I think the communication piece was extremely important, to have a record and access on the PA Key website, to the work that had been done before, and the work that was coming up. So having that designated site, you could always ... And you know, if there was a webinar meeting, the webinar was there and recorded. I think having regularly scheduled meetings that were announced... I mean these are all kind of structural pieces. So that communication was good. And when there was lengths of time that ... There would be times when I’d say ‘We need really need to get more stuff out there’, that OCDEL responded to those kinds

of things, so that the folks in the field knew that there was movement.” Participant 12

“...think **the thing that moves the process along is clear communication with everyone**—‘Here’s the steps in the process. Here’s what’s going to happen. We’re in step four. By the way we’re adding a public webinar because we think the things that you have done, it’s important to give people information on that step, so we’re going to add in ...’ being flexible enough to add in, to keep informing them back, what’s working, and then telling them when you’re diverging from the process that you committed to them that you would follow. We did other ways to inform people besides the public webinars. We did articles in the newsletter, their early learning newsletter they put out, and so forth. Just constantly looking for opportunities. There was an early learning summit back in the fall and [facilitator] was there to lead discussion groups. Constantly looking for opportunities to talk about this process to more people. We had that timeline and those steps and that process up there in front of people every time, but we also informed them ‘We’re going to add this on, we’re going to do this. We’re going to go to the summit, we’re going to be there, if you’re going to be there, come talk to us. Bring other people who haven’t had an opportunity to participate in the process and so forth.’” Participant 2

“I mentioned, they really did a wonderful job analyzing and collecting a wealth of data from the multiple surveys that went out, not only to *Think Tank* members, but to the community as a whole. Part, on top of facilitating all of the sessions, in between all of that they were also doing multiple surveys with the community just to make sure they were attempting to tap into every voice that wanted to be heard. I think kudos to the entire process in that **there were opportunities throughout the past, I want to say two years at this point, a little less than two**

years maybe, for everybody to weigh in on their thoughts and opinions and feelings on where we were heading with everything.” Participant 5

4. Additional elements that made the *Think Tank* effective included:

An open and transparent process, the diversity of the group, ideas and voices heard in discussion throughout the process, engagement in the process: “We built thoughts and ideas off of each other, which made for a great product. Everyone was consistently engaged.” Online *Think Tank* Survey Respondent

Workgroup Online Survey

Respondents to the online workgroup survey shared that workgroups were effective because of the facilitators and the online format of meetings, as well as space for collaboration and sharing ideas (81 responded). In addition, responses shared alternate perspectives of the workgroups’ ineffectiveness.²

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES TO THE PROCESS

Think Tank Interviews

The following challenges and barriers to the Revisioning process were articulated:

- **Not having face-to-face meetings for the workgroups to provide feedback**
- **Geographic location of face to face *Think Tank* meetings**
- **Missing voices in this work (especially additional providers)**

² See Appendix A for quotes from the Workgroup online survey responses

“...think that we did have some challenges getting some folks to the table that we needed to support a little bit more than others. Like for example some of the family childcare providers did need more sort of financial resource support to just to get themselves to the meeting. Rather than maybe someone who works for a bigger organization who could absorb some of those costs.” Participant 1

“I will say that leadership is really intent and has a goal to think of inclusion and diversity, but once again it’s much more than a written statement. It’s about the actions that parallel that, we don’t talk about the actions that parallel that. We simply make the sweeping statement that it should be inclusive and diverse for all people, right? So what does that actually look like in implementation? We really haven’t got to that and we’re not probably going to get to that because those populations aren’t even at the table.” Participant 13

- **Time**

“.... I think the process could have used, maybe a little more room for thinking and debating in the middle.” Participant 7

“I don’t think there were a lot of barriers, other than the time. I think the time frame was just so tight, and trying to meet in the state of Pennsylvania in the middle of winter is just hard to do.” Participant 9

PERSPECTIVES ON IMPROVEMENT

Think Tank Interviews and Think Tank Online Survey

Predominantly, *Think Tank* participants shared the following ideas to improve the process of Revisioning:

- **More open communication and transparency. Several respondents specifically stated this around the workgroups**

“The online meetings were too big and therefore there was little to no opportunity to fully participate.”

“The workgroups were too large. Maybe they could have been broken down into regions. They also didn’t function like it was initially stated. I know there was limited time, but I think there should have been more town hall meetings later. I think the field wanted to hear and respond to various issues along the way.”

- **Additional time**

“More time with the proposed standards, communication plan and PD/TA/Coaching plan to review and provide feedback.”

“It was hard to fit all of the work into one day sessions--more time would have been great”

- **Nothing to change**

“Nothing, I thought it was a very engaging process.”

“Not much! Possibly have facilitators at the breakout sessions to keep participants on track, though some of those ‘off the rails’ discussions yielded good insight.”

Additional ideas included:

- Holding face to face meetings for workgroups;
- More face to face meetings for the *Think Tank*
- Inclusion of more child care providers;
- Another meeting to reflect on the final draft; and
- Change in location of face-to-face meetings for the *Think Tank*

Workgroup Online Survey

When asked what could be changed about the workgroups (76 responded), respondents to the online survey shared a desire to have more input and feedback to the work.

“Due to the large size of the workgroup, and the limited interaction from being in ‘GoTo Meeting’, I never really felt like my input was acknowledged or valued. There was not a lot of ability for members within the group to share ideas or have real discussions. Being able to interact more instead of the one-way presentation style would have made this more of a workgroup and less of a presentation/update on what the *Think Tank* was doing.”

Respondents also expressed a desire for workgroups to meet face-to-face:

“While the webinars were easy and convenient—I feel that the not all the voices were heard since it was not a face to face process.”

PERSPECTIVES ON SUCCESS

Think Tank Interviews and *Think Tank* Online Survey

When talking about the success of the Revisioning process, some *Think Tank* interview participants were hesitant to conclude that the process was successful. Generally, they wanted to see all finished products and the early care and education field’s acceptance of the new system before deciding if Revisioning was successful.

“I hesitate because I haven’t seen the finished product. And you know, along the way, I thought that the process was effective and inclusive. So now I’m waiting to see what the final product is. So we know the standards will have been cut in half, we have a basic idea about what the general concept of the standards are, because when the *Think Tank* saw it last, they were not the final standards...I think that it’s going to be something that we’re going to have reflect back on, and you know have some conversations with the folks who are actually going to be using these.” Participant 12

“It’s very difficult to answer that question until after the standards are actually in the hands of the provider community, and I’m hearing from them and I’m receiving their feedback on the new system.” Participant 5

“I do think the process worked. I will say that from the initial part of it, coming together as the *Think Tank*, it was such a big project that it seemed like it would be difficult to achieve in any kind of reasonable amount of time. I kind of thought, okay, maybe five years from now this is going to happen. I think I’ve been impressed by the speed... I think that that is definitely a success. The new updates are not fully public yet, so I think until everything is kind of released and we know the final decision, when we see how it works in the



field, I may have to wait to give you a positive answer for that. I do feel confident that the voices were heard around the table, and that this is a system that's really going to be an improvement to our current system.” Participant 6

that being said, we came up with goals and I believe all of those were met. The goals were met... The fact that they brought real people to the table, into the process, and gave us the right to have a voice is what helped the revising process to succeed.” Participant 10

Many share the success of the *Think Tank* in using the stakeholder engagement approach and providing opportunities for feedback:

“I believe the *Think Tank* was successful. I believe the *Think Tank* worked because the voices were diverse. The voices were practitioners in their own right and not just some people ... I don't use this word, but for lack of a better word, people say pencil-pushers. I **believe that the *Think Tank* was very successful because the goals were met. There was a purpose and the purpose was to revise.** The mission was for us to have a revised set of standards and measurements that would help to secure the autonomy of children being served in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. With

“The *Think Tank* I think was really successful. It provided an opportunity for voices to emerge that typically aren't heard, and it allowed for a safe space for people to disagree, and to have some very tough conversations. **I think the evidence of the success is not so much about the product that developed, although for every *Think Tank* meeting a product was developed.** We'd have a *Think Tank* meeting. People would provide input to a logic model, and the next *Think Tank* meeting they would see their work, literally come in front of them. They could validate that that truly was their work. That was a huge success.” Participant 4

Participants from the *Think Tank* who were also in workgroups had mixed feelings about the

success of workgroups. Many cited the need for face-to-face meetings and more transparency.

Respondents of the *Think Tank* online survey were asked a series of questions about their perception of the overall Keystone STARS Revisioning process. When asked if they agreed that the process was successful, 39% strongly agreed, 31.7% agreed, 14.6% were undecided, and 2.4% disagreed. 41 respondents answered this question.

34 respondents shared their perspective about what has made the STARS Revisioning process successful. Predominately, responses highlighted the openness and communication of the process and the diversity of both stakeholders and the voices “heard.”

“The diverse field of early childhood professionals came together with equal footing to concentrate on the needs of families, children and the profession itself. That teamwork brought us to where we are.”

“Having voices from the field be heard.”

“The process was designed to allow many voices in the community to provide feedback.”

“All voices were heard during the process.”

DATA AND FEEDBACK LOOPS

Document Review

Across documents reviewed, evidence indicated that the facilitators, *Think Tank* members, and OCDEL Leadership (PA Key Staff, etc.) reached out into the early care and education community for feedback using a variety of modalities. This included:

- Regional town halls
- Monthly PA Key updates
- *Think Tank* meeting agendas

- PowerPoint presentations from webinars for workgroups and Revisioning updates
- Multiple surveys to the field (performance indicators and communication strategies as examples)

Think Tank Interviews

In addition, participants shared the integration of data as well as the importance of reaching out into the community for feedback and sharing communication. In every interview, the participants talked about the use of data to either:

- Start/drive the Revisioning process (the STARS Inquiry, and other needs assessment data)
- Help guide the development and the process (development of the core principles)
- Hear perspectives from the field (surveys in the workgroups, etc.)
- Review data brought by the facilitators about best practices, other QRIS trends, and/or new research from developmental science

Discussion

This section shares a brief discussion of the findings and recommendations for next steps.

USING A STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS: BARRIERS/CHALLENGES AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Pennsylvania's Office of Child Development and Early Learning led the Keystone STARS Revisioning by utilizing a stakeholder engagement approach. Overall, *Think Tank* members characterized the approach of Revisioning as: *stakeholder driven, inclusive to diverse voices of stakeholders, collaborative, and strengths-based*. As one participant articulated:

“It's like this is an extremely informed process, by people in the field ...and everybody who works with young children and therefore has a stake in this system. I would say, it's that broad based informed, stakeholder involvement that was a commitment from the leadership, the OCDEL leadership in Pennsylvania, that's what they wanted. They wanted products and process that were informed by that, not by something they had decided. They put a huge level of trust in that process and a commitment to this would be a stakeholder led process.”
Participant 2

In general, the *Think Tank* participants felt engaged and reported that their voices were heard in the process. However, when further probed into which stakeholders were engaged, they felt that some voices were missing. Specifically, there could have been more child care providers and families included as well as representatives including the following:

- Additional cultures and voices of color
- Health and safety sector representation
- Representative from the early learning investment commission

- Business community stakeholders
- Department of Education representatives
- Department of Community and Economic Development representatives
- Migrant community stakeholders
- Fathers and men
- Advocates for LGBTQ

When asked if they thought the *Think Tank* was effective in meeting its original target to engage a diverse group of early learning stakeholders in the creation of a new conceptual framework, 80.5% agreed or strongly agreed. 90% believed the meetings of the *Think Tank* included those with diverse backgrounds.

Predominantly, the *Think Tank* members felt they were effective in their original goal, yet there is still work to do to be even more inclusive in the process of engaging a diverse group. There are several shared barriers or challenges to the process that could be addressed differently for future work. This included more time for the entire process and additional face-to-face meetings. Many ideas for changing this process centered on the workgroups.

When surveyed, workgroup members echoed the thoughts of many *Think Tank* members. According to the workgroup members, the workgroups fell short of being a vehicle that would fully engage stakeholders in this process. While the online platform for meetings and the ability to listen to meeting recordings on the PA Keys' website was cited as an important and effective process, it was clear that workgroup members would have liked the opportunity for face-to-face meetings and greater feedback. After sharing this, some workgroup members acknowledged the barriers to face-to-face meetings in a state as large as large as Pennsylvania. The online aspect of the workgroup did help to ensure engagement across the state. Interestingly, when thinking

about effective practices, many workgroup members shared the openness and transparency of the process, while many also desired more transparency and more input into the process.

Effective practices identified from this evaluation include:

- Support for the process, funding, and OCDEL leadership
- Skilled, resourceful facilitators to guide the process
- Intentional communication through PA Keys website, community meetings, and email between meetings
- Feedback loops and data usage to drive decision making

Challenges and barriers included:

- Missing voices in the work
- Time
- Geographic location of the meetings
- Needing face-to-face meetings for the workgroups

IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE ELEMENTS

Use of Data and Feedback Loops

After reviewing analysis across all data sources, evidence of feedback loops and the use of data were consistently found. In order to have a process that authentically engaged diverse stakeholders, feedback loops and intentional communication were vital. Thus, facilitators and OCDEL leadership intentionally built places in the process for feedback loops. Evidence of feedback loops and data shared met the criteria of:

“Using data and feedback loops to drive decision-making and promote continuous improvement...” (Metz et al., 2015)

First, the importance of communication was stressed. One communication strategy that was cited by participants as being effective was the

use of the PA Keys website to house:

- All relevant Revisioning documents
- Recordings of workgroup meetings
- Other Revisioning update webinar recordings
- Relevant data shared with the workgroups and *Think Tank*

One example of a feedback loop used to help drive decision-making was the regional town hall meetings held by *Think Tank* members. After drafting the core principles, members of the *Think Tank* went back to the community, held meetings, shared the draft, and brought back feedback to the larger group. As one participant shared, the data gathered significantly changed the final product for the core principles:

“Yeah, it’s interesting actually. So the draft core principles that went out for the regional town hall meetings looked very different than the final core principles after we incorporated all of the stakeholder feedback. And the think tank really challenged themselves when they came back to that meeting and all the stakeholders said, ‘No, no, no, no, no. This is what we wanted to see, or you’re not clear on this, or this isn’t working for us.’ And it really shaped what the final principles look like.”

Participant 1

Another participant shared the *intentionality* of feedback loops built into the work of the *Think Tank*.

“Then what was even more, labor intensive and time intensive, was they went out to the field and told people what was going on and asked for their input. The stake holders, there were community meetings held, there were systems for getting the information out to other providers. There were public webinars held. Information in their newsletter. The stake holders and the regional staff were provided with information products, materials, to use to also hold meetings. There was a process for them to bring that information

back, not just haphazardly, but there was an electronic process for people that were surveyed to provide input. It was sort of like there was this core of this huge group of stakeholders, but then there was this network that spread out all across the state, and they made sure that it was geographically, it covered the state. It was amazing.”

Participant 2

Workgroups were structured to use intentional feedback loops to further inform the work of the *Think Tank*. When forming the workgroups, the process was open to anyone in the field to join. Generally, each workgroup was tasked with the following related to their topic (Communications, Quality Indicators, PD System):

- Identify strengths of current system;
- Identify ‘wins’ for child care programs/providers in current system;
- Identify challenges to current system;
- Identify opportunities/recommendations for strengthening;
- Ask for information that may help you in thinking of new opportunities.

Information and data was collected from the workgroups in a variety of ways. For example, in the Communications workgroup, online surveys were distributed to review how Keystone STARS was reaching families and providers and to think about what is working well and what could be done differently. This data was then taken back to the *Think Tank* to help guide the process and the final products.

Another example is the use of an online platform for all workgroup meetings. The online platform was utilized to ensure meetings could reach people across the state. While some workgroup participants were frustrated to not see the chat box live in the online meetings (the online platform did not accommodate this), the meeting facilitators went back through the chat boxes and reviewed the feedback from the field. This feedback was then incorporated to help support

the Revisioning and to inform the development of the FAQ documents that were housed on the PA Keys website. The facilitators also used the chat boxes from the monthly Revisioning updates with OCDEL staff for the development of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents.

Overall, different strategies for feedback loops were used across the Revisioning process. For example, while the use of regional town halls were used for gathering feedback on the core principles, online surveys were used to gather feedback for the performance standards. One participant shares how different strategies were used:

“I think that the different tasks definitely necessitated a different strategy. The communications with the regional town halls around the core principles definitely allowed folks who maybe weren't as well versed in the research around what performance standards...maybe who aren't as deeply involved in the systems building work an opportunity to speak from their perspective about what they loved and valued about their programs. And really gave us a good understanding of the sentiments and the foundational values of what the STARS program needed to be. The piece around the performance standards was a lot narrower because we needed to help everyone move the conversation to a point beyond, ‘This is what I feel is important,’ ‘Research tells me this moves practice, or this impacts what children experience during the classroom time or the program time.’ So it definitely needed to move the conversation along in a different way. I think that it was more accessible for some... to be able to come to a town hall meeting. And they knew that they were going to spend two hours there and they were in a space that felt comfortable and welcoming to them to sort of talk about what they valued. The piece that came with narrowing the performance standards really was, you had to spend time moving through

each one of the performance standards and doing the survey associated with it.”
Participant 1

Data from these feedback loops drove decision making as the process of Keystone STARS Revisioning moved forward. In addition, data was incorporated on new findings in developmental science, trends in other states’ development of QRIS, and other data sources from the state of PA.³

LIMITATIONS

Although the researcher has taken numbers of steps to ensure a rich and trustworthy analysis of the nature and quality of the Revisioning process—one that included the perspective of multiple categories of stakeholders—the findings are limited.

The findings are grounded in the nature and collection of data, the perspective of those interviewed, and the researcher’s bias. The number of people interviewed was small in comparison to the number of people involved in and impacted by the Revisioning. As such, the findings from this investigation cannot be generalized beyond the Keystone STARS Revisioning process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section shares recommendations based on the evaluation findings.

Continue To Build And Utilize Feedback Loops To Further Engage Stakeholders In The New System

As the new Keystone STARS system rolls out, it is imperative to continue to utilize and build new feedback loops. The PA Keys website was cited as a helpful vehicle to hold online meetings and to save the recordings for people to view later as appropriate. Utilizing another platform for online meetings that allows chat boxes to be seen by

all participants could be effective. In addition, holding in-person focus groups across the state to hear feedback on the new system could generate opportunities for additional voices to be heard.

Continue To Engage The *Think Tank*

The continued engagement of the *Think Tank* may provide a touchstone for Keystone STARS. However, additional work needs to take place to integrate the missing voices identified in this report into the *Think Tank*.

One methodology the *Think Tank* could resume is the continuous use of the core principles. The creation of the core principles for Keystone STARS illustrates the power and the excitement of using feedback loops and truly embodying a stakeholder engagement approach. The core principles are a compass to help lead the way while implementing the new system. Embedding the core principles into next steps for an evaluation plan is prudent. This would include having checkpoints along the way to evaluate if the system is embodying the core principles and if any adjustments need to be made. An example of this is completing a cross-walk of the performance standards and the core principles. One of the interview participants completed this and in their words, “It was amazing to me, that I could actually chart out how those guiding principles were reflected in the revised standards” (Participant 6). All products of the new Keystone STARS system should be cross-walked with the core principles to deepen the credibility of the evaluation process and build on the momentum generated through the consensus of the principles.

Further, if the core principles are the compass for the system, they will need to be regularly revisited to ensure they are still representing the expectations of the field at large. It may be

³ Examples include the STARS Inquiry report and the Pennsylvania Technical Assistance Revisioning Strategic Plan with Workgroup Recommendations Report (2016).

helpful to have the *Think Tank* or another new group convene at a determined time interval (yearly, every 18 months, etc.) and review the core principles. An online survey and regional town hall meetings with the field could also help inform this process and bring additional data to review.

Continue The Revisioning Process

Many participants shared appreciation for the space and time allotted to think deeply about important issues. Space and time would need to be provided for these, at times challenging, conversations to continue.

In addition to revisiting the core principles that are guiding the Keystone STARS system, it is important to also examine the foundation on which the system is built. This idea comes directly from one of the participants of the *Think Tank*, who in the interview challenged the Revisioning by saying there are inherent assumptions that still need to be examined.

“I think what we did, was to tweak the quality system itself, to make it more flexible. But, we didn't haggle, or debate, for example, about whether or not the early learning standard itself is needing to be updated; or that the assumption that early childhood ought to improve student test scores in third grade and beyond. Whether that assumption ought to be re-examined and, in not being examined meant that we worked under and accepted these big assumptions, but you really can't have a STARS system without these broad assumptions. So, the STARS system naturally follows these broad assumptions...To me, these are examples of what I call foundational issues. I just don't think there's enough decision power, or scope, or capacity, or time to examine them. But, without examining them, I think we are making tweaks, rather than in the true sense, revisioning what the system could be.”
Participant 7

This thought provoking perspective is important to keep in mind as further work and evaluation begins for Keystone STARS. There are still conversations to be had, missing voices to integrate and ideas to debate, “... if the Revisioning of the quality system can gradually lead to productive conversations and discussions, at all levels of the system, to question and re-examine those foundational issues I mentioned earlier, that would truly live up to the word ‘revision[ing]’. I think, without that, we can call it just a ‘revision’.” (Participant 7). OCDEL has an intriguing opportunity to push further and engage stakeholders even more in meaningful dialogue and enhance feedback loops for thoughtful policy development.

Begin To Develop And Implement A Robust Evaluation Plan For Keystone STARS

Next steps encompass the development and implementation of a robust evaluation for Keystone STARS. This includes utilizing an Implementation Science framework and making sure the focus and scope of the evaluation aligns with best practices, while considering the unique context of Keystone STARS. The final section of this report outlines evaluation recommendations.

Next Steps: Evaluation Planning

QRIS is considered a framework by researchers and policy makers⁴. Evaluation of this framework must be connected to the Keystone STARS logic model⁵, OCDEL's mission and goals, and the core principles adopted through the Keystone STARS Revisioning⁶. Thus, it is essential to evaluate all aspects of the framework, the building of the system, implementation, and impact. This evaluation completes a process evaluation of Revisioning (or building the framework for the system).

Next steps include:

Continue to utilize formative evaluation by beginning an implementation evaluation for:

- The pilot (June-July 2017)
- Year one (July 2017-June 2018)
- Year two (July 2018-June 2019)

Formative evaluation provides an opportunity to discover ways to improve the system (Patton, 2002). Specifically, an implementation evaluation will help discover: What do programs experience in the new Keystone STARS system? Has the system changed from original plans and expectations, how and why? (Patton 2002). Further, the implementation evaluation will help to examine the "...inputs, activities, processes and structures" (Patton, 2002, p. 161) of the logic model for Keystone STARS.

Evaluation must be responsive to the developing system of Keystone STARS. Thus, taking a developmental approach to evaluation is key (BUILD, 2017). This includes using Implementation Science to help design the evaluation. Beginning with a "strong formative evaluation component that can support and leverage the evolving, complex and innovative nature of QRIS" (BUILD, 2017 p. 2) is the best place to start⁷. In addition, the Keystone STARS logic model will guide, the research questions,

methods for evaluation, and measurement strategies⁸ (OPRE, 2011). On the following page is a figure demonstrating a recommended timeline and approach for evaluation⁹. Following the figure is a brief outline of the main evaluation times illustrated.

⁴As shared by Linda Smith (previous Deputy Assistant Secretary, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services) and agreed upon by other QRIS researchers (Tout and Maxwell as examples). See <https://www.childtrends.org/qr-is-building-the-research-base/> for more information.

⁵See http://www.pakeys.org/uploadedContent/Docs/Early%20Learning%20Programs/Keystone%20STARS/Revisioning%20STARS/Logic_Model_11-6-16.pdf for the Keystone STARS logic model.

⁶See Appendix B for the OCDEL mission and Keystone STARS Revisioning Core Principles

⁷The BUILD Initiative's QRIS: Stakeholders Theories of Change and Models of Practice Study Report, Expert Panel Reflection and Recommendations <http://grisnetwork.org/resource/2017/qr-is-30-tools-and-resources>

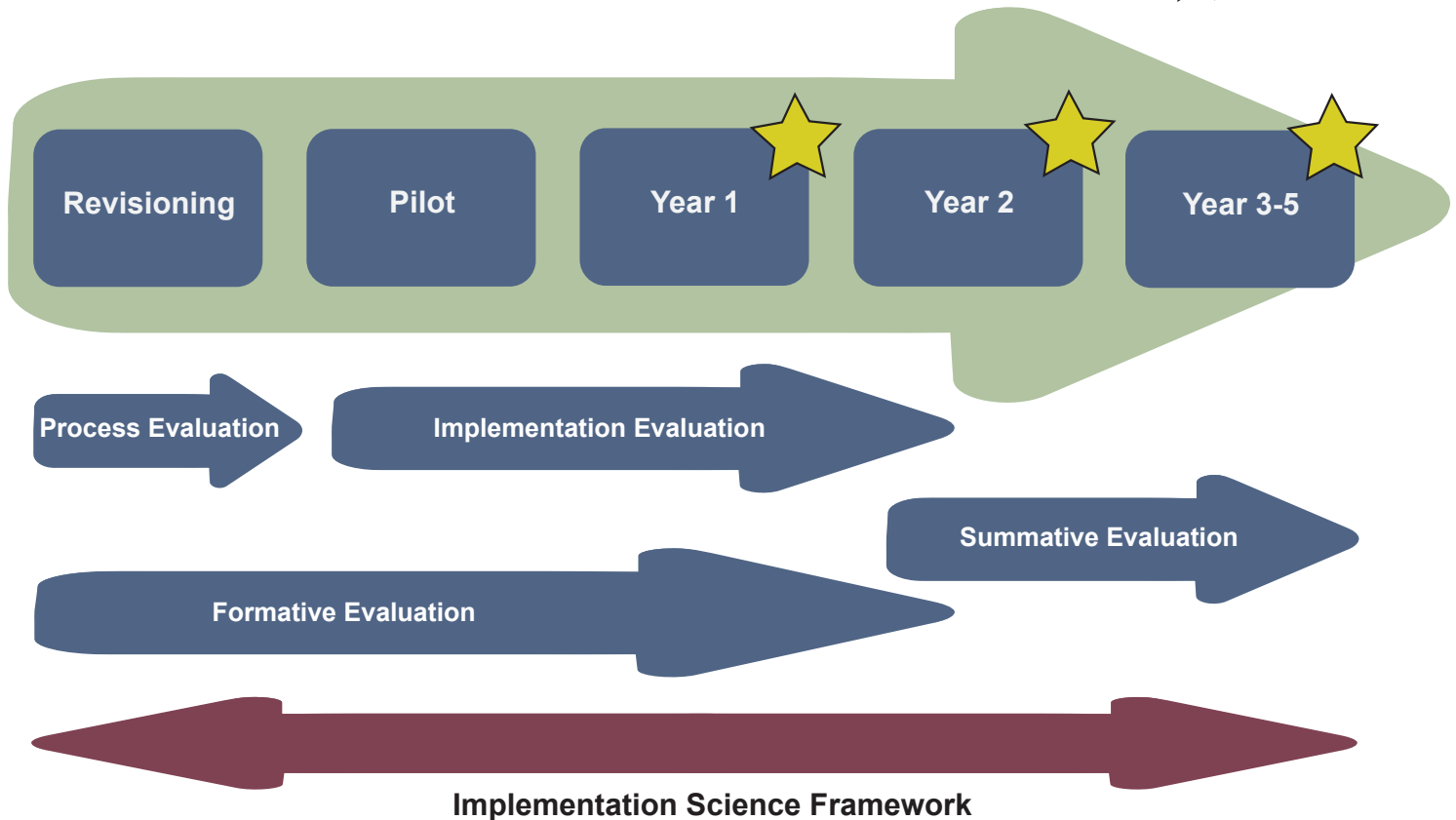
⁸For more information see: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/the-quality-rating-and-improvement-system-qr-is-evaluation-toolkit> pages 34- 38.

⁹This timeline was created with suggestions from the QRS Assessment Toolkit 2011.

Figure 5

Keystone STARS Evaluation Timeline

★ Denotes a review of Core Principles



Formative Evaluation:

- Revisioning – Process Evaluation (Completed)
- Pilot (June-July, 2017): Implementation Evaluation
- Year one (July, 2017-June, 2018) and possibly Year two (July, 2018-June, 2019): Implementation Evaluation
 - Evaluate Inputs, Activities and Outputs from the Keystone STARS logic model

Summative Evaluation:

Years three – five (starting July, 2019), possibly Year two (July, 2018-June, 2019)

- Outcome and Effectiveness Evaluation
 - Evaluate: Short-term, Medium-term and Long-term outcomes in Keystone STARS logic model

NEXT STEPS:

The next steps outlined below highlight the need for preparation to implement a robust evaluation plan for Keystone STARS.

Form an Implementation Team of OCDEL leadership, stakeholders and evaluation experts.

- Team formation: This team should be small with intentional data and feedback loops while continuing to honor the stakeholder engagement approach.

Tasks:

1. Review the framework for recommended evaluation in this report
2. Utilize recommendations from the INQUIRE Quality Initiatives Research and Evaluation Consortium Data Tool

Kit (Friese, King, Tout 2013)¹⁰ in order to identify evaluation questions and the feasibility of collecting data on all questions.

3. Take into consideration the core principles adopted through the Keystone STARS Revisioning while developing evaluation questions.
4. Review the Keystone STARS logic model and the QRS Evaluation Toolkit's¹¹ recommendations for using logic models to evaluate QRIS.
5. Ensure stakeholders are engaged in the development and implementation of the evaluation (examples include: utilize suggested evaluation questions from *Think Tank* participants found in Appendix C of this report and/or consider additional feedback loops into the field)
6. Once an evaluation partner is selected, the implementation team can continue to help guide the work of the *Think Tank* in reviewing the core principles created through Keystone STARS Revisioning, connecting to evaluation updates and messaging to stakeholders

In conclusion, prioritizing evaluation and the use of data to drive decision-making will assist in the adoption of a continuous quality improvement mindset for the Keystone STARS system as a whole. A vital first step is to prepare intentionally to engage stakeholders in the evaluation process.

¹⁰ For more information see: (<http://www.researchconnections.org/childcare/resources/26915/pdf>)

¹¹ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/the-quality-rating-and-improvement-system-qris-evaluation-toolkit>



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APPENDIX A

Workgroup Quotes

Workgroups were effective because of the facilitators:

“The facilitators were very knowledgeable and were reflective in getting the group to think beyond just your own experience with STARS.”

“Meetings were well facilitated and move the agenda along. Felt work did get accomplished. Lots of forward movement and sense of accomplishment.”

Workgroups were effective because of the online format:

“Recording the webinars ensured that I could follow up on what was discussed even if I could not attend the initial meeting.”

“Online chat boxes and good leadership. Working with highly skilled and highly invested peers.”

“Different early learning providers from many different roles. Also how the group met was great because it allowed for participation from across the state without having to travel.”

Workgroups were effective because of collaboration and sharing of ideas:

“Communication: Relaying information to the group and asking for opinions. Having the meeting & webinars on the PA Key website to review.”

“The cross section of stakeholders; the experiences of the stakeholders; and the ability of the individuals to share their

knowledge about the system was extremely important for the work to be accomplished.”

“Team collaboration and hearing what others were thinking as well.”

In addition, responses shared perspectives of the workgroups ineffectiveness. For example:

“The workgroups were not nearly as effective as the *Think Tank* was. I rarely, if ever, received information about workgroup meetings, and therefore, rarely participated.”

“Not much to be honest, only the sharing of information from the moderators was somewhat effective.”

“I did not feel like the workgroups were effective. Instead of being truly a workgroup or having the opportunity to provide feedback, the only opportunity was to tune into the webinar and hear updates.”

APPENDIX B

Vision		
The Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning supports families and their children, from prenatal through school-age, by using data, research and stakeholder guidance to assure high quality services.		
Mission		
The Office of Child Development and Early (OCDEL) provides families access to high quality services to prepare children for school and life success.		
Goals		
Work effectively, collaboratively, creatively and successfully to ensure that all families have access to high quality programs for their children	Engage stakeholders in actionable ways that provide guidance on programs and policies	Identify and use key data and research to improve policies and practices
Priority Initiatives		
Integrating and Aligning OCDEL Services	Keystone STARS Re-visioning	Supporting the Early Childhood Education Workforce
Reducing Expulsion/Suspension and Promoting Inclusion in Early Childhood	Building Capacity for High Quality Early Learning Services	Child Care and Development Block Grant Reauthorization
The result: Better outcomes for our young children and their families		

Core Principles:

Keystone STARS is a responsive system to improve, support, and recognize the continuous quality improvement efforts of early learning programs in Pennsylvania. Our system is guided by three core principles:

- A whole child approach to education is essential to meeting the holistic and individual needs of each and every child and family.*
- Knowledgeable and responsive early care and education professionals are essential to the development of children and the support of families.*

- Building and sustaining ongoing positive relationships among children, families, early care and education professionals and community stakeholders is essential for the growth and development of every child.*

We believe inclusion, diversity, equity and respect are foundational values embedded in these principles.

APPENDIX C

Evaluation Questions Suggested From *Think Tank* Interview Participants

When asked what questions are of interest for future evaluations, responses from the *Think Tank* respondents varied (26 responded). Examples of questions included in future evaluation:

- Movement of programs with the new systems vs. the old STARS system
- Barrier for programs entry and movement
- Equity focused questions

“Do more children and families have access to high-quality early learning opportunities? Are children and their families receiving higher quality care? What outcomes are children experiencing in the new system?”

- Involvement and retention of programs in the new system

“It would have been nice to have statistics about how many providers have participated, moved up, dropped out...I'm very interested to know how many providers who previously did not participate in STARS become involved (not just by nature of being STARS level 1 due to licensing).”

- STARS Program's perception:

“...it would be interesting to ask the ECE program who were so against participation in STARS if the new system changed their minds? “

“Do programs feel that participation in STARS helps them with their CQI efforts?”

“Does STARS provide programs with enough supports in identifying their strengths and goals toward quality?”

“Does STARS provide programs with enough supports to develop a strategic plan to reach quality based on a programs particular set of strengths and needs?”

“Do staff feel that they gain things that are meaningful to their work with children and families because their program participates in STARS?”

“I am interested to see how supportive the system will be for providers who are operating at lower quality levels and how a coaching/mentoring model will work in the field.”

- Evaluation over time

“Is the system actually a ‘Quality’ system with a high level of integrity and accountability? Will the CQI plan/trainings be enhanced so that facilities are not just utilizing this obtain grants, but actually assessing and reflecting on needs of the facility as a whole in order to provide quality for children, not just to obtain ‘stuff’ to meet a score?”

“I would like to know how effective the communication around the new standards is. Did we reach everyone impacted by the changes? So we will know if we've succeeded when we can answer the question; did the quality of programs increase, how did it increase and did the increase in quality lead to better outcomes for children?”

“Will there be an evaluation after a year or time to see if things are working so that things can be fixed or make sure they are getting the results we originally established? Is Keystone STARS providing support to all stakeholders?”

“Does STARS provide a basic outline of what outcomes constitute quality without limiting programs in how they reach that quality?”
“What is the effect of supporting from top

down in the system to build strong team leaders, Will the professional development changes make it easier to access more training opportunities, How is it going to have administrators make determinations on training needs (what tools will they use to make some of those decisions), How will the new changes affect the workforce? Will there be more longevity?"

APPENDIX D

Additional Ideas To Improve The Revisioning Process From *Think Tank* Online Survey Respondents:

"Include more city and state regulating bodies in the conversation."

"More involvement in the selection and deletion of the actual final standards and indicators."

"Bring data and tough questions into the discussion. For example, shall we focus on reading/math when other research studies show that such outcomes are short-lived? Shall we use ECERS when studies show that ECERS do not predict child outcome?"

"It was great to have so many people participate in the workgroups and the only way to engage folks across the state is through a virtual platform. However, many providers that I spoke to throughout the process weren't aware of the workgroups and that they could participate so perhaps thinking of ways to communicate with providers in different ways may have been helpful. I just recently spoke with the director of a program in an urban setting that wasn't aware of the timeline for the new standards being released and didn't seem to have a sense that the Revisioning process was really happening."

"Toward the end, the work of the workgroups seemed rushed. I understand why, given the need to move quickly, but nevertheless, it is something that I would have considered changing."

"There should have been a moratorium if you will, on STARS activity this year, or at least some changes to the deliverables of the Regional Keys around STARS. Programs continued to be pushed to participate and take on things in the system (ERS for example) that cost time and money and will no longer be a part of the system. This 'business as usual' approach made the Keys appear to be out of step with the larger agenda while decreasing the fields faith that real change was coming."