

Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning
Bureau of Policy and Professional Development

Issue Date: Sept. 1, 2020

Effective Date: Sept. 1, 2020

Subject: ELRC Policy Communication – 20 #11 Keystone STARS Designation Processes for FY 20/21

To: Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRCs) and OCDEL Early Learning Resource Center Program Representatives

Priority: High

Category: Informational

Action: Yes. See Discussion and follow Next Steps

Required Response: No

PURPOSE

To advise Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRCs) of the Keystone STARS designation processes for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020. Virtual components have been added to the Keystone STARS designation process to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in early childhood education (ECE) programs. In addition, the expectations for STARS paperwork renewals are explained through this policy communication.

BACKGROUND

Keystone STARS is Pennsylvania's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). As such, all programs participating in Keystone STARS receive a designation of STAR 1 up to the highest STAR level, STAR 4.

Keystone STARS is a hybrid QRIS with required indicators related to structural quality at STAR 1 and STAR 2. STAR 3 and STAR 4 programs, while meeting all required indicators at the lower STAR levels, must also meet 2 additional required indicators and earn a percentage of points from optional points-based indicators. Allowing STAR 3 and STAR 4 programs to choose optional quality indicators that best exemplify their strengths in quality practices ensures that Keystone STARS encourages diversity and flexibility.

The Keystone STARS designation process requires programs to have a full onsite designation visit every 3 years. During this onsite designation visit, ELRC Quality Coaches or Designators meet with program leadership, tour the program, and speak with members of the teaching staff. The majority of the documentation and evidence for meeting the Keystone STARS Performance Standards is submitted to the Quality Coach by the program prior to the onsite designation visit. These onsite visits offer ELRC representatives a chance to see the program in operation, conduct interviews with program staff, and view confidential information contained in child and staff records.

DISCUSSION

The outbreak of COVID-19 across the commonwealth has required OCDEL to continually monitor the conditions posed by the pandemic and adapt accordingly. As a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic, OCDEL will allow for virtual components to the Keystone STARS designation process to mitigate the risk of virus transmission. Additionally, OCDEL has temporarily suspended the requirement for STAR 3 and 4 programs to have an external Program Quality Assessment (PQA) for FY 2020. In place of an external PQA, during FY 2020, STAR 3 and 4 programs will work with their Quality Coach and a member of the PA Key PQA Team to develop an Internal Assessment Process (IAP). This IAP will help to guide the program's Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) plan and activities.

OCDEL has directed ELRCs to grant six-month extensions to programs' Keystone STARS designations for all those with expiration dates from March through Aug. 31, 2020. These extensions were designed to allow programs to focus on health and safety practices rather than on activities associated with designation renewals.

Beginning Sept. 1, 2020, the designation process for Keystone STARS will include virtual options for both renewals and move-ups. This protocol will remain in place during the COVID-19 pandemic conditions and until further notice from OCDEL. This protocol will remain in place during the COVID-19 pandemic conditions and until further notice from OCDEL. Each ELRC will be implementing a virtual designation procedure that has been approved by OCDEL. These individualized plans allow each ELRC to meet the unique needs of the programs within their regions.

Designation Protocols with Virtual Components:

COVID-19 has directly impacted how ELRCs work with programs during their pre-designation and designation processes. Fortunately, some aspects of a typical designation already included virtual activities including:

- Use of PELICAN Provider Self Service (PSS) by providers to complete *Request for Keystone STARS Designation and Program Information Form* and *Enrollment Calculation Tool* (ECT)
- Use of Keystone STARS document uploader software through which providers can electronically submit evidence and documentation of meeting the STARS quality indicators directly to their Quality Coach
- Use of other electronic means including fax, email, scans as well as postal service by providers to submit documents and evidence to their Quality Coach
- Use of the SMART database by ELRC quality staff to both view evidence and documentation submitted by providers as well as verify that evidence as sufficient or insufficient in showing the STARS quality indicators

These processes should continue to an even greater extent during the COVID-19 pandemic. ELRCs will need to work with those providers who may require greater assistance in using these electronic methods.

The SMART database is fully functional with both the 2018 Keystone STARS Performance Standards and the 2020 Keystone STARS Performance Standards. All pre-designations and designations should be captured in SMART by ELRC quality Staff.

Frequent contact between ELRC quality staff and programs will be beneficial. Continued use of phone calls, email and virtual meeting platforms is encouraged. As a reminder, all contact between ELRC quality staff and a provider, including electronic and virtual contacts should be entered into PELICAN contact logs.

After programs have submitted the majority of all evidence in meeting the STARS quality indicators for their respective STAR level, they will be scheduled for a designation visit according to the ELRCs virtual designation protocols.

During the virtual designation visit, all items that would be viewed or conducted during an onsite designation visit should be verified to include, but not limited to:

- Confidential records of children, staff and leadership team
- Interviews with program leadership and teaching staff
- Tour of classrooms and building to include checking on elements in the program's COVID-19 Health and Safety Plan
- Discussion of reflective questions that align to Keystone STARS quality indicators

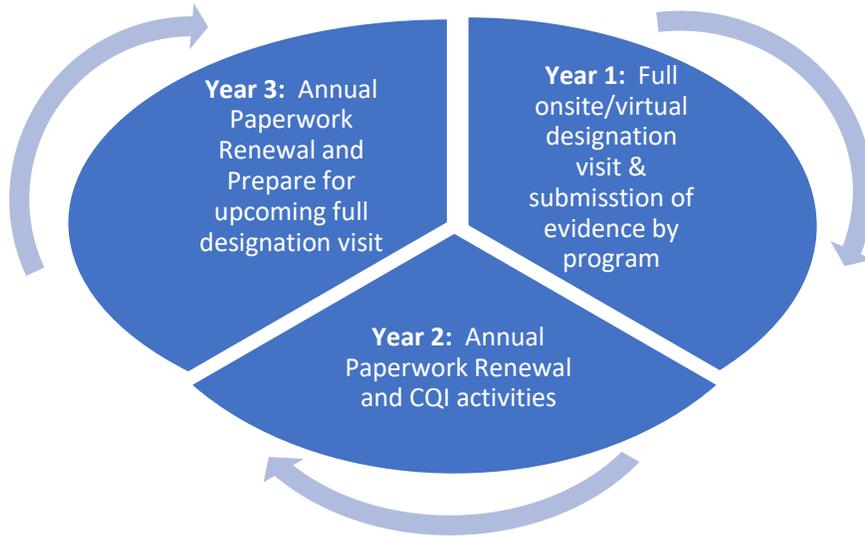
Following the virtual designation visit, programs may be asked to submit additional evidence and/or documentation in meeting STARS quality indicators to their Quality Coach. In cases in which the Quality Coach was unable to verify quality practices during the initial virtual designation visit, a virtual follow-up visit might be scheduled.

It is important that the integrity of the STARS designation process be upheld during the COVID-19 pandemic. There should not be any reduction in the amount or depth of evidence expected from providers to show implementation of the STARS quality indicators. While the types of evidence may change due to COVID-19 as well as the means of submitting the evidence to the ELRC Quality Coach, the level of quality expected at each respective STAR level has not changed.

Keystone STARS Paperwork Renewals:

All STAR 2, 3, and 4 Keystone STARS Programs are required to complete annual paperwork renewals at Year 2 and Year 3 of their 3-year Keystone STARS designation cycles in order to

maintain their current designation as depicted in the following Keystone STARS Designation Cycle illustration:



A program’s annual paperwork renewal at Years 2 and 3 serves as a touchpoint between a program and their Quality Coach. During annual paperwork renewals, ELRC quality staff will work with programs to ensure that CQI activities and practices are continuing in the program. Additionally, programs will need to show that their program teaching staff are continuing to meet the requirements for STARS Staff Qualifications and Professional Development during their annual paperwork renewals.

The following chart illustrates the paperwork that programs are expected to submit during both paperwork renewals and full onsite or virtual designations:

	STAR 2 Programs	STAR 3 & 4 Programs
Request for Keystone STARS Designation and Program Information Form	X	X
CQI Plan Update	X	X
Facility Staff Qualification Grid	X	X
Enrollment Calculation Tool (when available for FY 20/21)	X	X
Professional Development Tracking Grid STAR 3 & 4 Programs: Teaching Staff		X
Professional Development Tracking Grid STAR 3 & 4 Programs: Non-Instructional Staff		X

Request for Keystone STARS Designation and Program Information Form: Programs are expected to complete a Request for Keystone STARS Designation and Program Information Form at each paperwork renewal as well as during their full designation renewal. The form must be completed in its entirety and reflect current and accurate information. Additionally, programs

are expected to read and review the Keystone STARS Review, Reduction, Suspension and Removal Process by signing and dating Keystone STARS Attestation each year. ELRC quality staff will review the Request for STAR Designation to ensure the information is complete and accurate during each paperwork renewal. Programs are encouraged to complete this form in PSS.

CQI Plan and Update: A program's CQI Plan serves as a roadmap in goal setting based on an analysis of the program's strengths and areas in which improvement is needed in order to improve the experiences of children and families. Annual updates should include a review of the previous CQI Plan and:

- Summarize progress made toward achievement of both short-term and long-term goals
- Identify new goals and action steps based on reflective activities and other internal assessment activities
- Discuss any goals no longer deemed necessary
- Indicate individuals responsible for achieving goals
- Integrate goals related to the COVID-19 Child Care Health and Safety Plan

ELRC quality staff will review CQI plan updates against previously submitted CQI Plans and updates by programs to ensure that the plan reflects realistic goals and that progress has been made over the most recent year. Annual CQI Plan updates offer opportunities for programs to share successes with their Quality Coach and identify areas for focus in the next year.

Facility Staff Qualification Grid: By submitting their Facility Staff Qualification Grid, programs are expected to show that their staff have continued to meet the related STARS quality indicators during the most recent year. ELRC quality staff will review a program's Staff Grid to:

- Determine the percentage of staff turnover that occurred during the last year. While staff turnover no longer serves as a trigger for a new PQA visit or a designation visit, high staff turnover may signal additional supports would be helpful on the part of the Quality Coach.
- Ensure all staff hired during the last year have completed STARS 101 and 102
- Ensure all staff have either completed or updated their Self-Assessment in the Professional Development (PD) Registry during the last year
- Ensure all staff have either completed or updated their PD Plans in the PD Registry during the last year
- Ensure all staff have completed their profile in the PD Registry to the point where they are assigned a Career Pathway level or have applied for a Career Pathway level*

*Completion of one's profile in the PD Registry is an updated requirement in the 2020 Keystone STARS Performance Standards. Programs who last designated using the 2018 Keystone STARS Performance Standards will be expected to have their staff complete their profiles in the PD Registry during annual paperwork renewals beginning in FY 2020. This requirement reflects the goal of having early childhood work force data from across the commonwealth available in

order to make informed policy decisions that are reflective of the early childhood education profession.

Enrollment Calculation Tool (ECT): Following the release of the updated ECT tool for FY 2020, programs may be required to complete an ECT within 10 days of their designation expiration. The ECT offers both programs and quality staff an opportunity to review the current enrollments within a program as well as determine the percentage of children receiving child care subsidy, early intervention services, and in the case of groups and family child cares, the percentage of children receiving services through Child and Adult Care Food Plan (CACFP).

Professional Development Tracking Grid for STAR 3 & 4 Programs: Teaching Staff and Professional Development Tracking Grid for STAR 3 & 4 Programs: Non-Instructional Staff

At STAR 3 & 4, programs should submit both their PD Tracking Grids for Teaching Staff as well as for Non-Instructional Staff. These grids should reflect additional PD taken by staff over the last year and/or staff who have enrolled in credit-bearing coursework. When compared to previous completed PD grids, the current grids should show additional PD events completed.

NEXT STEPS

1. Share this information with appropriate staff.
2. Direct questions to your program representatives.