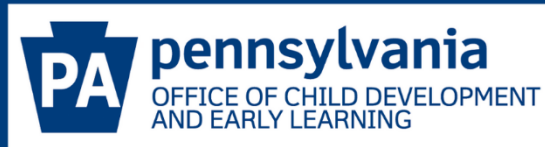


ANNOUNCEMENT

21 #08



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

Issue Date: Sept. 30, 2021

Effective Date: Oct. 1, 2021

End Date: Sept. 30, 2022

Subject: Keystone STARS Designation Extensions

To: All Regulated Child Care Providers; Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRCs); and The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) Early Learning Resource Center Program Representatives

From:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Tracey Campanini'.

Tracey Campanini
Deputy Secretary, Office of Child Development & Early Learning

PURPOSE

To provide information regarding granting one-year extensions to all Keystone STARS Designations effective Oct. 1, 2021 through Sept. 30, 2022 as providers navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant early childhood education (ECE) staffing crisis.

BACKGROUND

In Pennsylvania, child care employers are struggling to find, train, and maintain a qualified early childhood workforce due to the far-reaching effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While there are important initiatives being implemented to help stabilize, train, and educate the ECE work force through Pennsylvania's Professional Development Organizations (PDOs) and other organizations, these initiatives will take time. In the interim, Pennsylvania's ECE programs are struggling and facing the very real concern of losing their Keystone STARS rating due to the difficulty in finding and maintaining a strong, qualified work force.

DISCUSSION

To support the ECE community across the commonwealth, beginning Oct. 1, 2021 and through Sept. 30, 2022, OCDEL will grant one-year extensions to current Keystone STAR designations. These extensions will alleviate the stress on programs in completing full Keystone STAR designation renewals and annual paperwork renewals. Extensions will allow programs additional time to engage in thoughtful discussions with their current staff, their Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC), and their PDO, to plan for future staff professional development (PD) and education needs. Designation extensions will also allow programs to focus on the continuing priorities of health and safety related to the mitigation of COVID-19. Programs can also use the additional time to apply for the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Stabilization Grants from which funding can be used for staff recruitment and retention. Finally, the one-year extensions will also allow OCDEL additional time to analyze data and trends related to the ECE staffing crisis and better prepare for the field's future needs.

Expectations for Keystone STARS Programs During the One-Year Extension

Keystone STARS programs will be expected to maintain all quality activities related to the STAR level at which they are currently designated during their one-year extensions. While the extensions are intended to support programs during the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting ECE staffing crisis, the following expectations will be in place for STAR programs:

- STAR 2, 3, and 4 programs must maintain all required STAR 2 quality activities
- STAR 3 and 4 programs must also maintain the two STAR 3 and 4 required quality activities

Any lapses in maintenance of the required quality activities as outlined above could result in an appropriate action to a program's STAR designation including a Status Review, Reduction, Suspension, or Removal.

During the extensions, ELRC Quality Staff will continue to respond to complaints from parents and/or other community stakeholders regarding programs. Subsequent actions may include those outlined in the [Keystone STARS Status Review, Reduction, Suspension, and Removal Process](#).

In addition, programs who have been placed on a provisional certificate of compliance (CoC) through the Department of Human Services (DHS) due to certification violations will continue to have their STAR designation suspended while on a provisional CoC. When the program regains their regular CoC, their STAR level will be restored to their previous STAR level (providing the STAR did not expire while on the provisional CoC) with the previous STAR designation expiration date and **will not be granted a one-year Keystone STARS extension**. These programs will be required to meet **all** applicable 2020 Keystone STARS Performance Standards for their STAR level at time of designation.

If a program's current STAR expired while on a provisional CoC, the program will be moved down to a STAR 1 when a regular CoC is granted. To move up in STAR levels, the program will be required to meet **all** applicable 2020 Keystone STARS Performance

Standards and, if successful in moving up, will **not** receive a Keystone STARS extension of the new STAR level.

During the one-year STAR Designation extensions, programs are encouraged to engage in quality improvement activities which will ensure they are continually pursuing excellence and will be fully prepared to resume all designation activities following the extension period. These activities could include but are not limited to:

- Meet with ELRC Quality Coach to discuss their current activities, areas for growth, and how to best prepare for the return to regular designation activities.
- Review Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) plan to gauge progress made in meeting both long- and short-term goals and including new goals.
- Encourage program staff to enroll in additional education opportunities and utilize the supports of their regional PDO, Rising STARS Tuition Assistance, and T.E.A.C.H.
- Ensure that all program staff have completed their PD Registry Profile including applying for Career Pathway placement and developing their PD Plan.
- Collaborate with a member of the Program Quality Assessment (PQA) team to explore how Internal Assessment activities could support onboarding new staff members and planning for CQI goals related to classroom practice and staff PD.
- Ensure current staff have taken or are enrolled in required PD activities as well as those conducive for best teaching practices.
- Upload documentation and evidence in meeting the STARS quality indicators to the Document Vault located in organization profile in the PD Registry in preparation for their next upcoming designation renewal.

Programs Opting to Complete Designation Renewals as Normal During the One-Year Keystone STARS Extension Period

OCDEL recognizes that there may be programs who wish to complete their designations as scheduled and do not want their current designation extended. In these cases, the program should reach out to their ELRC at least 30 days, and up to 90 days, prior to their current STAR expiration date and communicate their desire to complete their designation renewal as normal. Programs who choose to forego the one-year extension will not be able to request a one-year extension at a later date.

Programs Wishing to Move Up in STAR Levels During the One-Year Keystone STARS Extension Period

Programs who wish to move up in STAR levels will be able to do so using the current 2020 Keystone STARS Performance Standards. In order to move up in STAR levels, programs will be required to meet all quality indicators at the respective STAR level to which they are attempting to move. These programs should reach out to their ELRC for guidance and next steps in moving up.

Internal Assessment Process (IAP) During the One-Year Keystone STARS Extension Period

The three-year cycle associated with Internal Assessment Processes will not be affected by the one-year STAR extensions. STAR 3 and 4 programs should continue to work with their Quality Coach and member of the Program Quality Assessment team to ensure they are completing their IAP as explained in the required Keystone STARS quality indicator EC 3.4.5.

NEXT STEPS

1. Child care programs
 - a. Direct any questions to your ELRC.
 - b. Follow guidance under the section labeled: *Expectations for Keystone STARS Programs During the One-Year Extension*.
2. ELRCs
 - a. Review and share with appropriate staff.
 - b. Follow ELRC Policy Communication 21 #20
 - c. Direct any questions to your program representative.