



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Quality Talks: Session 2

BACKGROUND

As part of William Penn Foundation's continued investment in education, on Tuesday, November 10, the Foundation hosted the second in a series of convenings called *Quality Talks*, to discuss new evidence about the provision of early childhood education. The second session of Quality Talks explored results of a new report, [*An Inquiry Into Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS*](#), that examined opportunities to improve Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS rating system. Pennsylvania is the first state to study the impact of its QRIS system, and below is a summary of key takeaways from the report and accompanying convening.

REPORT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

- Preschool-age children enrolled at STAR 3 and STAR 4 centers had higher academic outcomes (as measured by the Work Sampling System) than did children enrolled in STAR 1 and 2 settings.
- There is no evidence of differences between STAR 1 and 2 centers or between STAR 3 and 4 centers.

Recommendations

- ***Streamline the Keystone STARS system requirements to focus on improved child outcomes.*** Evidence suggests that STARS includes requirements that do not have a clear connection to child outcomes. However, the study points out that there are some components of the system, such as the Environmental Rating and Child Observation, Curriculum, and Assessment requirements, which have direct links to child outcomes. Researchers recommend prioritizing requirements with demonstrable links to improved child outcomes. Such a shift would simplify the rating system, create clearer paths to providing high-quality care, and ensure resources are being allocated to areas with the greatest impact on positive child outcomes.
- ***Redefine Keystone STARS as a path to quality.*** When originally conceptualized, the Keystone STARS ratings were intended to act as a road map to quality for early care programs to improve child outcomes. However, the current standards at each level serve as a set of requirements that providers are expected to meet, rather than a guide that helps providers improve quality from one level to the next. Researchers recommend reorganizing standards to create a clear progression of expectations through which early care providers can advance in order to improve their STARS rating and provide higher quality care.

- ***Design a model to guide system revisions.*** This research provides a road map to guide revisions and system operations, and identify important points of measurement and communicate how system expectations relate to the overall goal of improving student outcomes. Such a guide will help to create a plan and next steps for positive updates to the Keystone STARS program.

CONVENING DISCUSSION POINTS

Below are several points that were raised by discussants and audience members across the state during the convening on November 10. They are provided here as a brief summary for those who were not able to attend. These points do not necessarily represent the views of the William Penn Foundation.

- The respondents were not entirely surprised by the finding that there is no evidence of differences between STAR 1 and 2 centers or between STAR 3 and 4 centers. The system, along with others across the nation, was created with a focus on licensing as an entry point and accreditation as an ending point. In re-visioning STARS, it is critical that we figure out the steps between those two points with levels that adequately build on one another to reach high-quality programming that produces child outcomes.
- The re-visioning of the PA Quality Rating and Improvement System presents the opportunity for providers to work alongside OCDEL to create a stronger state system that is responsive to programming needs and requirements. Also, since families are the ultimate decision makers when it comes to their children's care and early education, we should ensure that they have an authentic voice as the system is being updated.
- Keystone STARS is only one part of Pennsylvania's early learning system and while it focuses heavily on care and education, the system as a whole includes other aspects of school readiness such as early intervention, health care and k-3 alignment.
- Director Networks, which provide support and learning opportunities through connection, are helpful in finding effective ways to balance compliance regulations and quality programming.
- As we revise Keystone STARS, it is important to align the career lattice with compensation, this will ensure that the early childhood workforce is competitive to attract and maintain high-quality teachers.

PENNSYLVANIA OFFICE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND EARLY LEARNING (OCDEL) NEXT STEPS

The steps below were shared by OCDEL Deputy Secretary Michelle Figlar. They are shared here for informational purposes. Questions related to this work can be directed to OCDEL.

In response to the results of this study, OCDEL plans to:

- Streamline STARS standards to focus on evidence based standards which support improved child outcomes, individual improvement activities, and monitoring and reporting;
- Modify required sources of evidence to meet Keystone STARS standards to maintain rigor without rigidity;
- Define Keystone STARS levels as steps to quality with meaningful progressions at each STARS level;
- Develop a plan for stakeholder engagement to refine Keystone STARS;

- Align STARS revisions with other Department initiatives, data systems integration, professional development and technical assistance; and
- Evaluate the current financing structure with national experts.