

Keystone STARS Provider Survey 2008 Report on Results

Executive Summary

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

'I am so thankful for the Keystone STARS program! Without it, we wouldn't be able to offer the high-quality care that we do. They have played an instrumental role in moving the profession of Early Childhood Education to one viewed with respect and professionalism.' – STAR 2 Center in Blair County

The primary purpose of the Keystone STARS Provider survey is to gather information about the strengths and areas of improvement for the program. In October 2008, OCDEL disseminated the Keystone STARS Provider Survey to a random sample of 582 providers chosen from the 5,037 providers in the STARS system. This stratified random sample group of providers represented the provider type, geographical location, and STAR level of the state level demographic of Keystone STAR providers. Providers had the option of completing a paper survey or completing the survey online through Survey Monkey. Additionally, the link to Survey Monkey was posted on the PA Keys website, giving providers not selected in the random sample an opportunity to complete the survey.

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The Sample

A sample of 582 providers was selected randomly to participate in this survey. The sample consisted of Centers, Group Homes and Family Child Care Homes from all six regions and every STAR level. 374 surveys were returned for a return rate of 64 percent

STAR Level and Length of Time in STARS

Seventy percent of respondents are at STAR 2 or below (See Table1). Fifty-one percent of respondents have participated in STARS for more than 3 years (See Table 2).

Table 1

Number of Respondents by Provider Type and STAR Level

Provider Type	Start with STARS	STAR 1	STAR 2	STAR 3	STAR 4	Total
Center	18	76	95	42	57	288
Family	12	28	8	2	5	55
Group	2	19	3	3	3	30
No Provider Type	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total Respondents	32	124	106	47	65	374
Percentage of Respondents (%)	8.5	33.1	28.3	12.5	17.3	

Table 2

Reported Length of Time in STARS by Provider Type

Provider Type	< 1 year	1-2 years	2-3 years	> 3 years	No Response	Total
Center	26	35	56	167	4	288
Family	20	5	15	15	0	55
Group	7	5	9	9	0	30
No Provider Type	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total Respondents	54	45	80	191	4	374
Percentage of Respondents (%)	14.4	12.0	21.3	51.0	1.0	

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Reason for Increasing STAR Level

Nearly one-third (30%) of respondents cited Grant Funds as the main reason for increasing their STAR level. The other leading reasons given for increasing STAR level focused on financial support through Education and Retention Awards at 14.5 percent and supports through STARS Managers, the T.E.A.C.H. educational scholarship, and STARS Technical Assistance, all at approximately 10 percent.

Reason for Increasing STAR	Center	Family	Group	Total	Percent (%)
Grant Funds	43	10	4	57	29.6
Education & Retention Award	24	4	0	28	14.5
STARS Manager	16	3	2	21	10.9
T.E.A.C.H.	11	6	2	19	9.8
STARS Technical Assistance	15	3	0	18	9.3
Vouchers	9	3	1	13	6.7
Credit-Based Professional Development	6	3	1	10	5.2
Needs-Based Professional Development	6	2	1	9	4.6
STARS Core Professional Development Series	5	2	0	7	3.6
Health & Safety Materials	1	3	0	4	2.0
Mind in the Making	3	0	0	3	1.5
Early Childhood Mental Health	2	1	0	3	1.5
Total Respondents*	141	40	11	192	

*Note: Respondents who gave multiple responses to this question were not included in the total.

Ease of Completing Application

Forty-three percent of those who answered this question stated that they found the application easy or very easy to complete. Another 41 percent found the application somewhat easy. A total of 84 percent found the application process to be somewhat to very easy.

Provider Type	Very Easy (%)	Easy (%)	Somewhat Easy (%)	Somewhat Difficult (%)	Very Difficult (%)
Center	19.5	14.5	30.6	11.4	0.9
Family	6.1	0.9	7.1	1.2	0.6
Group	1.5	0.6	3.4	0.9	0.0
No Provider Type	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0
Total Percentage	27.2	16.0	41.4	13.6	1.5

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Ease of Completing Site Environment Checklist

Thirty-five percent of respondents answering this question felt the Site Environment Checklist was easy or very easy to complete. Forty-eight percent felt it was somewhat easy, for a total score of 84 percent finding it to be somewhat to very easy to complete.

Table 5					
Provider Type	Very Easy (%)	Easy (%)	Somewhat Easy (%)	Somewhat Difficult (%)	Very Difficult (%)
Center	15.8	11.3	37.8	11.6	1.6
Family	5.5	0.9	6.4	2.5	0.0
Group	0.9	0.9	3.8	0.0	0.0
No Provider Type	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total Percentage	22.6	13.2	48.2	14.2	1.6

Helpfulness of STARS Manager/Specialist

Almost 60 percent of those who answered this question felt that their STARS Manager/Specialist was very helpful or essential to their participation in STARS. Another 16 percent of respondents indicated that their STARS Manager/Specialist was helpful, for total of 76 percent finding the STARS Manager/Specialist services ranging from helpful to essential.

Table 6					
Provider Type	Essential (%)	Very Helpful (%)	Helpful (%)	Somewhat Helpful (%)	Not Helpful at All (%)
Center	20.1	25.0	14.0	13.7	4.8
Family	3.9	5.1	2.1	2.7	1.2
Group	2.4	2.4	0.6	1.2	0.0
No Provider Type	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total Percentage	26.8	32.6	16.7	17.6	6.1

Sample of Comments: How could your STARS Manager/Specialist be more helpful?

- *'We have been very pleased with the support and help that was given by our STARS manager. I especially liked her individual meetings with directors.'*
- *'My STARS manager is extremely helpful. She asks questions, she listens and she provides all the guidance that I need. I could not request more of her at this point.'*
- *'Be more open to feedback and criticism. Give more samples and resources of what is needed. Explain things more clearly.'*
- *'Understand some of the centers are very small and need extra time. It is OK to push but not over the edge. Don't make sites feel obligated to participate, especially when there may only be one person doing everything.'*

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Ease of Start with STARS Grant Process

More than one-third (33.6%) of respondents thought that the Start with STARS process was very easy. Another 54 percent of respondents felt that it was somewhat easy, for a total of 88 percent finding the process somewhat to very easy.

Table 7				
Provider Type	Very Easy %	Somewhat Easy %	Somewhat Difficult %	Very Difficult %
Center	25.2	37.8	10.0	0.4
Family	6.7	10.5	0.4	0.0
Group	1.6	5.8	0.8	0.0
No Provider Type	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0
Total Percentage	33.6	54.6	11.3	0.4

Ease of Support Grant Process

Of the 258 respondents that answered this question, almost 80 percent said that the Support Grant Process was somewhat or very easy.

Table 8				
Provider Type	Very Easy %	Somewhat Easy %	Somewhat Difficult %	Very Difficult %
Center	19.7	38.7	16.2	1.9
Family	4.6	9.3	1.5	0.3
Group	1.9	5.0	0.0	0.0
No Response	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0
Total Percentage	26.3	53.4	17.8	2.3

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Ease of Merit Award Process

Of the 214 providers who responded to the question, more than three-quarters (77%) stated that the Merit Award process was somewhat or very easy.

Table 9				
Provider Type	Very Easy %	Somewhat Easy %	Somewhat Difficult %	Very Difficult %
Center	16.3	45.7	17.2	2.3
Family	3.7	7.4	1.8	0.4
Group	1.4	2.8	0.0	0.4
No Response	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total Percentage	21.4	56.0	19.1	3.2

Ease of Education & Retention Award Process

Eighty-one percent of the 192 respondents that rated the ease of the ERA process stated that it was somewhat or very easy. Eighteen percent felt that it was somewhat difficult or very difficult.

Table 10				
Provider Type	Very Easy %	Somewhat Easy %	Somewhat Difficult %	Very Difficult %
Center	23.9	42.7	14.5	2.0
Family	2.0	8.3	1.0	0.5
Group	1.0	3.1	0.0	0.5
No Response	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total Percentage	27.0	54.1	15.6	3.1

Ease of ERS Validation Visit Process

Of the 169 respondents that this question applied to, forty-two percent felt that the ERS Validation Visit Process was somewhat easy. Thirteen percent found it very easy.

Table 11				
Provider Type	Very Easy %	Somewhat Easy %	Somewhat Difficult %	Very Difficult %
Center	8.2	31.3	27.8	8.2
Family	3.5	6.5	4.1	2.3
Group	1.1	4.1	1.7	0.0
No Response	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total Percentage	13.6	42.0	33.6	10.6

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Ease of Requesting STARS TA

Seventy-nine of the 188 respondents who rated the ease of requesting STARS TA stated that it was somewhat or very easy. Only nine providers (4.8%) stated that requesting STARS TA was very difficult.

Table 12				
Provider Type	Very Easy %	Somewhat Easy %	Somewhat Difficult %	Very Difficult %
Center	28.1	32.9	12.2	3.1
Family	5.8	6.3	2.6	1.5
Group	2.6	2.6	1.0	0.0
No Response	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total Percentage	37.2	42.0	15.9	4.7

Helpfulness of STARS TA in Increasing Quality

Of the 196 respondents that answered this question, seventy-six percent rated STARS TA as helpful, very helpful or essential in increasing their facility's quality. One-quarter (25%) of these respondents felt that STARS TA was essential.

Table 13					
Provider Type	Essential %	Very Helpful %	Helpful %	Somewhat Helpful %	Not Helpful at All %
Center	17.8	21.9	14.7	11.2	8.6
Family	4.5	7.1	3.5	0.5	2.0
Group	2.0	3.0	1.0	0.0	1.0
No Response	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total Percentage	25.0	32.1	19.3	11.7	11.7

Rating of STARS Professional Development

Forty-three percent of the 316 respondents who answered this question felt that STARS Professional Development was very good or excellent. Another thirty-nine percent indicated that their STARS Professional Development experience was good.

Table 14					
Provider Type	Excellent %	Very Good %	Good %	Fair %	Poor %
Center	10.4	20.2	33.5	12.3	0.9
Family	3.4	5.3	4.4	1.2	0.6
Group	2.2	1.8	1.8	0.9	0.0
No Response	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total Percentage	16.1	27.8	39.8	14.5	1.5

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Sample of Comments from the Provider Survey

- *'The STAR program is wonderful- I tried getting NAEYC accreditation but there wasn't financial or technical support! A lot of requirements but no means to achieve it! STARS gives you both money and technical help!'*
- *'I speak for MANY providers when I say that the annual changes to the STARS process make it very difficult for providers to maintain a desire to continue the process. I work at a multi-site program and we have a MAJOR problem with the new requirement that the "Ounce/Work Sampling System" be used as the ONLY permissible tool for reporting children's outcomes. NAEYC endorses several systems. We have been successfully using a different (NAEYC endorsed) tool for a couple of years. It was expensive, required a lot of training and now has to be eliminated to meet the next STAR level requirement. In addition to changes for the staff, the parents of children in our program will have to adjust as well. If I wanted to run my program just like Head Start, I'd work for Head Start. I think that the required performance standards need to be a little more realistic. The other issue is the massive amount of paperwork that takes an astronomical amount of time and is extremely repetitive for multi-site providers. It is hard to improve program quality when much of the staff's "extra" time is spent on paperwork. There has to be a way to combine some of these forms.'*
- *'I'm very grateful to have Keystone Stars and my staff have a sense of pride with each new stars requirement they meet.'*
- *'I am glad to be a part of the STARS program and all it has benefited me and my home day care.'*
- *'I think STARS is a great idea. We get a lot of money for each STAR level but a lot is required of each staff. The biggest problem with child care facilities is the starting pay for the staff. Grant money helps with the toys, etc but that is still not enough. It is a shame we can't have a group health insurance program if you belong to STARS.'*
- *'I am so thankful for the Keystone STARS program! Without it, we wouldn't be able to offer the high-quality care that we do. They have played an instrumental role in moving the profession of ECE to one viewed with respect and professionalism.'*
- *'For the amount of money centers are awarded each year, and given the importance of high quality, I do not feel that the grant and STARS requirements are overly rigorous or time consuming. I feel they are appropriate for what is at stake!'*
- *'Something needs to be done to adjust the career lattice. I understand that the degree usually signifies a better understanding of educational needs; however it is sometimes at the expense of seasoned child care providers who have nurturing abilities that cannot be taught in college. It is also cost prohibitive for child care programs that are non-profit to hire both full time employees and give them benefits.'*

Additional comments or questions regarding the 2008 Keystone STARS Provider Survey may be directed to Catherine Cormany, Division Chief of Operations, Bureau of Early Learning Services, OCDEL (717) 265-8911 or ccormany@state.pa.us .