

Keystone STARS is a voluntary, systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. Quality ratings are awarded to early and school-age care and education programs that meet a set of defined evidence-based performance standards. Keystone STARS includes four STAR levels; higher STAR levels are designated for providers meeting more rigorous standards for quality. A Keystone STARS designation informs parents that their children are in a safe, respectful environment in which they are learning new things every day to support their current and future successes in school and in life.

Designator Reliability

Since designators are housed throughout the commonwealth in each of the six Regional Keys, designator reliability visits are conducted to ensure consistency among designators when determining whether providers are meeting Keystone STARS performance standards. On a reliability visit, two designators complete the designation of a provider at the same time, but independently of one another. After the designation is complete, the results are entered in a database and then compared to determine reliability. Designators must complete a minimum of one reliability visit for every fifteen

Good, Better, Best

In order to establish greater consistency among Regional Keys, as well as offer practitioners/staff more information regarding individual standards, a framework was created which articulates the basic requirements to meet each Performance Standard as well as “better practice” which serve as the stepping stone to achieving “best practice.” The framework, titled

Designation of STAR levels is performed by six geographically distributed grantees (Regional Keys). During the STAR designation, a provider offers site-specific documentation (sources of evidence) of each performance standard. Once the provider has given appropriate documentation for each standard, and the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) has been conducted, the Regional Key is able to designate the achievement of that STAR level. To ensure equity, Regional Key designators do not designate any provider they work with in other roles.

center-based STAR 2, 3, and 4 designations, alternating between pairing with a designator from the same Regional Key and a designator from a different Regional Key. Designators are required to complete a reliability visit as soon as possible within the first quarter of the fiscal year and new designators are required to complete a reliability visit prior to independently conducting a STAR designation. Discussion at the conclusion of the reliability visit and monthly statewide designator calls and meetings also serve as mechanisms to enhance reliability.

Good, Better, Best (GBB), covers most performance standards by STAR level and provider type. It provides, in plain language, the rationale/philosophy behind the standard, supporting research/sources, best practice, resources, and sources of evidence. GBB cites salient research that serves as the evidence basis for each of the Keystone STARS standards

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and is intended to be a measure for providers to achieve best practice with standards that they were already meeting while maintaining a continuous quality improvement model. Additionally, the

document also serves as a tool for STARS staff to maintain consistency, as well as a reference regarding the elements of individual STARS performance standards.

STARS Designation Database

All reliability data is entered by a designator directly into an online database. The online system allows designators to add notes and identify if follow-up is needed. The system also allows designators to create automated reports, including summary reports, a list of action items for follow-up, and recommendations to the provider for future quality improvements. The

results of the reliability visits assist the state in determining if there are standards or sources of evidence that need to be better clarified, if any component of the designation process needs to be better defined, or if additional training or support is required for designators.

Findings

Table 1 presents the percent agreement for FY 2009-2010 and FY 2010-2011 by standard. During FY 2009-2010, designators agreed on 90.6% of the performance

standards. During FY 2010-2011, designators agreed on 96.6% of the performance standards.

Table 1: Designator Reliability for performance standard

	2009-2010	2010-2011
Director Qualifications	95.2%	97.5%
Director Development	93.2%	95.7%
Staff Qualifications	83.3%	100.0%
Staff Development	85.6%	98.8%
Child Observation/Curriculum/Assessment	84.5%	93.7%
Environment Rating	85.5%	83.3%
Community Resources/Family Involvement	93.6%	98.1%
Transition	91.3%	98.5%
Business Practices	92.9%	98.5%
Continuous Quality Improvement	92.0%	100.0%
Staff Communication & Support	90.5%	93.7%
Employee Compensation	93.7%	97.1%
Overall	90.6%	96.6%

Note: Multiple performance standards comprise each category.

Frequently, the source of disagreement is traced back to inconsistent definitions of evidence. This initiative has identified the need for further clarifying sources of evidence to be standard yet flexible. This cause of

disagreement is notably seen in the inspection of written improvement plans such as for the *Environment Rating* standard to address any ERS subscale score below a 3.0.

Next Steps

OCDEL is currently enhancing the Keystone STARS database to include pre-designation data. Pennsylvania will continue ongoing designator reliability efforts in order to ensure a standard protocol across and within

the regions for all designations. The Good, Better, Best document is a tool used by Provider, STARS Specialist, and Designator to help drive Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).