

# ANNOUNCEMENT

## ELRC – 20 #14 Keystone STARS Designation Processes for FY 20/21



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

**Issue Date:** Aug. 31, 2020  
**Effective Date:** Sept. 1, 2020

**Subject:** Keystone STARS Designation Processes for FY 20/21  
**To:** All Licensed Child Care Facilities and other Early Childhood Education Programs Participating in Keystone STARS; Early Learning Resource Centers; and OCDEL Early Learning Resource Center Program Representatives

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## PURPOSE

To provide information on the Keystone STARS designation process and protocols for fiscal year 2020 to all Licensed Child Care Facilities and other Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs participating in Keystone STARS, Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRCs), and Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) ELRC Program Representatives. Virtual components have been added to the Keystone STARS designation process in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in 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 two additional required indicators and earn a percentage of points from optional point-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 three years. During this onsite designation visit, ELRC Quality Coaches or Designators meet with program leadership, tour the program, and speak with members of the

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teaching staff. The majority of documentation and evidence for meeting 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 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 Pennsylvania 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. 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 at [www.pastarsuploader.org](http://www.pastarsuploader.org) through which providers can electronically submit evidence and documentation of meeting the STARS quality indicators directly to their Quality Coach

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- 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

These processes should continue to an even greater extent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Providers are encouraged to reach out to their ELRC as needed for additional support with submitting documents and evidence through electronic means. Frequent contact between ELRC quality staff and programs will be beneficial. Continued use of phone calls, email and virtual meeting platforms is encouraged.

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 & 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 when the Quality Coach was unable to verify quality practices during the initial virtual designation visit, a virtual follow-up visit might be scheduled.

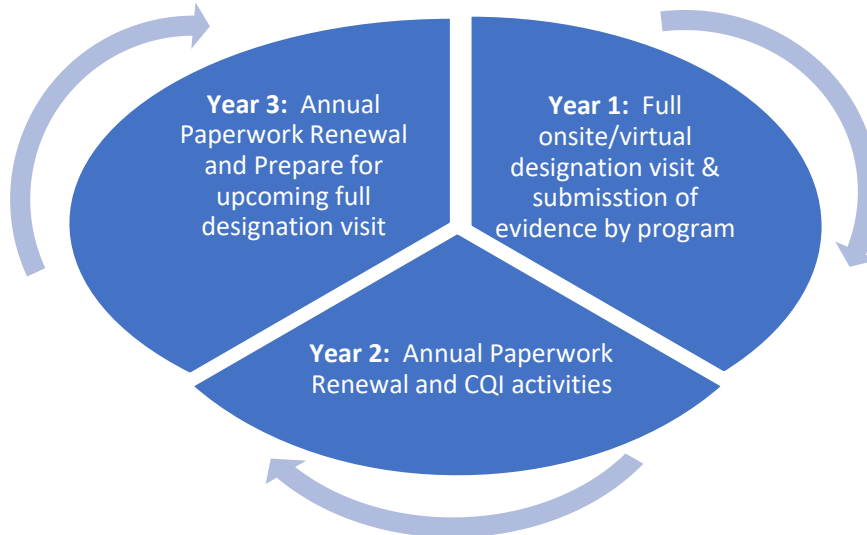
It is important the integrity of the STARS designation process be upheld during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the types of evidence may change due to COVID-19 and how evidence is submitted to the ELRC, the level of quality expected at each respective STAR level has not changed.

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

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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
<b>Request for Keystone STARS Designation and Program Information Form</b>	X	X
<b>CQI Plan Update</b>	X	X
<b>Facility Staff Qualification Grid</b>	X	X
<b>Enrollment Calculation Tool (when available for current FY)</b>	X	X
<b>Professional Development Tracking Grid STAR 3 &amp; 4 Programs: Teaching Staff</b>		X
<b>Professional Development Tracking Grid STAR 3 &amp; 4 Programs: Non-Instructional Staff</b>		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 and during their full designation renewal or when attempting to move up in STAR level. 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 and sign and date the Keystone STARS Attestation each year. ELRC quality staff will review the Request for STAR Designation

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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 to improve the experiences of children and families. Annual updates should include a review of the previous year's CQI Plan/update 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 may be beneficial for the program
- 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

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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. Review and share with appropriate staff
2. Please direct any questions to your ELRC