

THE CHILD CARE QUALITY RATING SYSTEM (QRS) ASSESSMENT



Vermont Step Ahead Recognition System

QRS Profile

April 2010



MATHEMATICA
Policy Research, Inc.



Vermont STep Ahead Recognition System

QRS Profile

Prepared for:

Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation

Administration for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services
370 L'Enfant Plaza Promenade, SW
7th Floor West, Room 7A011
Washington, D.C. 20447

Project Officers:

Ivelisse Martinez-Beck
Kathleen Dwyer

Prepared by:

Child Trends

4301 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 350
Washington, DC 20008

Subcontractor to:

Mathematica Policy Research

600 Maryland Ave., S.W., Suite 550
Washington, DC 20024-2512

Project Director:

Gretchen Kirby, Mathematica

Co-Principal Investigators:

Kimberly Boller, Mathematica
Kathryn Tout, Child Trends

This document was prepared under Contract #HHSP233200800394G with the Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not represent the views or endorsement of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation of the Administration for Children and Families.



MATHEMATICA
Policy Research, Inc.



Child Care Quality Rating System (QRS) Assessment Study

PROFILE

Site:	Vermont
Program Name:	STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS)
Respondents:	Jan Walker Workforce Development and Quality Enhancement, Child Development Division, Vermont Agency of Human Services
Information Reviewed and Finalized:	March 15, 2010

Funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Conducted by Mathematica Policy Research with a subcontract to Child Trends (contract #HHSP233200800394G).

Vermont – STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS)

Program Information

This section provides general information about the QRS including the location, numbers and types of programs participating in the QRS, funding amounts, funding sources and goals.

Site name:	Vermont
Program name:	STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS)
Service area:	Statewide
Pilot:	Pilot Completed
Pilot time frame:	2003
Date full program launched:	2004
Voluntary:	Yes
Website:	www.STARSstepahead.org
Eligible programs:	Center-based programs, Head Start/Early Head Start, licensed family child care, school-aged programs, pre-K/comprehensive early childhood programs Other eligible programs include resort-based child care (non-recurring regulated care at ski resorts, gyms, etc).
Source of funds for eligible public program:	State, TANF, Title 1 and other funds
Total numbers of programs participating:	412
Number of participating child care centers:	132
Number of participating family child care programs:	126
Number of other programs participating:	After school programs: 38, Head Start Programs: 29, Public school preschool programs: 87
Percent of total programs enrolled in QRS:	24 % (Licensed homes: 10 percent, Licensed Programs: 46 percent)
Percent of programs at each rating level:	STAR 1=5 percent STAR 2= 12 percent STAR 3 = 26 percent STAR 4 = 34 percent STAR 5= 23 percent
Goals:	To improve the quality of child care in Vermont by recognizing the efforts of program to go above and beyond the regulatory standards.
Language from statute:	See Vermont ACT 62. The following is from that ACT. The commissioner of education and the commissioner for children and families shall jointly develop and agree to rules and present them to the state board of education for adoption under chapter 25 of Title 3 as follows:

- (1) To ensure that, before a school district begins or expands a prekindergarten education program that intends to enroll students who are included in its average daily membership, the district engage the community in a collaborative process that includes an assessment of the need for the program in the community and an inventory of the existing service providers.
- (2) To ensure that, if a school district begins or expands a prekindergarten education program that intends to include any of the students in its average daily membership, the district shall use existing qualified service providers to the extent that existing qualified service providers have the capacity to meet the district’s needs effectively and efficiently.
- (3) To require that the school district provides opportunities for effective parental participation in the prekindergarten education program.
- (4) To establish a process by which a parent or guardian residing in the district or a provider, or both, may request a school district to enter into a contract with a provider located in or outside the district.
- (10) To establish the minimum quality standards necessary for a district to include prekindergarten children within its average daily membership. At a minimum, the standards shall include the following requirements:
 - (A) A provider must have received:
 - (i) National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation; or
 - (ii) At least four stars in the department for children and families STARS system with at least two points in each of the five arenas; or
 - (iii) Three stars in the STARS system if the provider has developed a plan, approved by the commissioner for children and families and the commissioner of education, to achieve four or more stars within three years with at least two points in each of the five arenas, and the provider has met intermediate milestones

Rating Details

This section provides details about how the rating component is structured and the process that is used to rate programs.

Rating structure:	Points
Number of levels:	5
Length of time rating is valid:	1 year
	Note: In new rules to begin January 3, 2010 the QRIS will be 3 year certificate program with annual check that programs are still meeting standards determined at the initial determination of the star level.
Rating process:	The applicant indicates how many points in each arena they feel they are eligible for and provides documentation. QRIS Administrators verify that

documentation is appropriate and sufficient and notify provider and the Child Development Division (State) of the star level.

Method of combining points:

STARS has 15 possible points and 5 categories - 3 points can be earned in each category.

Categories:

- 1.Regulatory History
- 2.Staff Qualifications
- 3.Families and Community
- 4.Program Practices
- 5.Administration

STARS levels based on points are as follows:

One Star =1 to 4 points

Two Star =5 to 7 points

Three Star = 8 to 10 points

Four Star =11 to 13 points

Five Star =14 to 15 points

NOTE: As of Jan. 3, 2010, there are still 5 categories to earn points but programs can now achieve up to 5 points in the "Program Practices" category. This the STARS arena where the score achieved on an Environmental Rating Scale assessment (or other approved tool) contributes to determining the points achieved.

In general, programs self-assess for one point, work with a consultant in using an approved assessment tool for 2 points, achieve an overall average ERS score of 4.0 and no subscale below a 3 for 3 points, achieve an average ERS score of 5 with no subscale below a 3 for 4 points and the program is accredited to achieve 5 points..

Method used to assess programs for infants/toddlers:

The Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R) is an approved program assessment tool.

Method used to assess programs for school-aged children:

Vermont school-aged care network plays a role in informing school-age providers on STARS and trained approved assessors conduct on-site assessments using the National After School Accreditation program assessment tool or School-Age Care Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS)

Different process used to assess family child care:

Yes. Approved assessment tools also include the Family Child Care Environmental Rating Scale.

	Family Child Care programs also have distinct requirements in the Administration category of STARS.
Different process used to assess Head Start/Early Head Start:	Yes. Head Start programs may use the environmental rating scales but most typically will document outcomes of PRISM review.
Different process used to assess accredited programs:	Yes. A streamlined application and automatic assignment of points typically will result in a 4 star level if programs are NAFCC, NAA, or NECPA accredited. NAEYC accredited programs are rated as 5 stars after submitting a brief application.
Events that trigger re-rating:	Change of location, licensing violation, program closes and reopens, or provides falsified information
Appeal process:	Yes. Programs can appeal to the STARS Grievance committee and then to the Human Services Board if not satisfied.
Availability of technical assistance for rating process:	Yes. (Previously noted, working with a mentor is embedded in the new (as of Jan3rd 2010) points that can be achieved in the program practices arena.)
Description of technical assistance for rating process:	QRIS Administrators provide technical assistance. In addition, CCR&Rs and the Vermont Community Loan Fund provide support for STARS.
Availability of technical assistance for preparatory process:	Yes
Description of technical assistance for preparatory process:	QRIS Administrators provide technical assistance and workshops as do CCR&Rs.

Quality Indicators for All Child Care Programs

Vermont uses the same set of rules for all types of programs. However, within the rules (in Administration and Management) there are different subsections. They differ for registered home providers and licensed providers. Requirements are comparable. Language used here is specific to the type of program.

This section describes the indicators used in a QRS to assess the quality of child care programs. The indicators are divided into the following categories: licensing compliance, ratio and group size, health and safety, curriculum, environment, child assessment, staff qualifications, family partnership, administration and management, cultural/linguistic diversity, accreditation, community involvement and provisions for children with special needs. A QRS may not have indicators in one or more of these categories, and the category labels used in the profile may differ from the site-specific category names used in a QRS.

Number of site-specific indicator categories:	5 categories
Site-specific names of categories used in the QRS:	Regulatory History

Staff Qualifications
 Families and Community
 Program Practices
 Administration

Licensing Compliance

Licensing requirements frequently serve as a minimal set of provisions to ensure that care and education environments are safe, healthy and provide for children’s basic needs. All QRS quality indicators described in this profile are beyond those required by licensing. Details on the licensing requirements for a specific state can be found at: <http://nrckids.org/STATES/states.htm>.

Licensing compliance included:	Yes
Licensing required for enrollment:	Yes
Licensing equivalent to the first level:	Yes
Licensing compliance referred to within:	Regulatory History
Source of evidence:	Verification from licensing
Comments:	The program is currently in compliance with all applicable regulations and any previous, substantiated violations have been corrected as required to the satisfaction of the Child Development Division. Programs that have not been in operation for more than one year at the time of application cannot earn points in this arena of Compliance History. A licensing specialist has visited and assessed the program in the past 2 years. Programs must be “registered” if caring for children in own home, and “licensed” if caring for children outside of home. Licensed is a more rigorous regulation than registered.

Ratio and Group Size

Ratio and group size requirements are frequently established in state licensing regulations. All QRS quality indicators described in this profile are beyond those required by licensing. Details on the licensing requirements for a specific state can be found at: <http://nrckids.org/STATES/states.htm>.

Ratio and group size indicators included:	No
--	----

Health and Safety

Provisions for health and safety are frequently established in state licensing regulations. All QRS quality indicators described in this profile are beyond those required by licensing. Details on the licensing requirements for a specific state can be found at: <http://nrckids.org/STATES/states.htm>. Health and safety indicators are also included in the Environment Rating Scales which are used in

some QRSs.

Health and safety indicators included:	No
---	----

Curriculum

A curriculum is a written document that provides a plan for intentional activities and interactions in an early childhood program. Indicators described in this section refer to requirements for the use of particular curricula or to demonstration that certain features of curriculum are in place. All QRS quality indicators described in this profile are beyond those required by licensing. Details on the licensing requirements for a specific state can be found at: <http://nrckids.org/STATES/states.htm>.

Curriculum indicators included:	No
--	----

Environment

Indicators in this section refer to features of the classroom environment. Further details about Observational Measures included in the QRS are included in a section below. All QRS quality indicators described in this profile are beyond those required by licensing. Details on the licensing requirements for a specific state can be found at: <http://nrckids.org/STATES/states.htm>.

Environment indicators included:	Yes
---	-----

Environment Rating Scales (ERS) included:	No
--	----

Range of recognized ERS scores:	To earn 2 points, the program must score no less than 3 in any area and should have an average score of 4 (If a program is assessed with the Environmental Rating Scale).
--	---

Description

1 point:

The program is evaluated using a self-assessment tool and has a written improvement plan based upon findings of self-assessment. Staff members provide input for and receive feedback in the assessment.

2 points:

The program determines through self-assessment that it has obtained the appropriate minimum score, and has an improvement plan based on this assessment. A CDD-approved STARS Assessor has verified the assessment. Staff members provide input for and receive feedback in the assessment.

3 points:

The program holds a current accreditation and has a written improvement plan based upon findings of an annual self-assessment

Additional indicators related to the environment (e.g., schedule, interactions, specific features):	None
--	------

Environment referred to within:	Program Practices
Environment source of evidence:	Documentation submitted, Observation, Self report, unverified
Comments:	<p>The tools that can be used for the 2 point assessment are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The Vermont Essential Practices Inventory (EPI -- appropriate for all program types) (For 2 points, 85% of items must be passed). -The Clifford and Harms Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) assessment tool appropriate to the program (Early Childhood, Infant-Toddler, School Age, Family Child Care Home) -National Afterschool Association accreditation observation tool (for afterschool programs)

Child Assessment

Indicators in this section refer to processes in place to assess, observe or monitor children's development on a regular basis. All QRS quality indicators described in this profile are beyond those required by licensing. Details on the licensing requirements for a specific state can be found at:

<http://nrckids.org/STATES/states.htm>.

Child assessment indicators included:	No
--	----

Staff Qualifications

Indicators in this section refer to specific educational or training requirements for staff. All QRS quality indicators described in this profile are beyond those required by licensing. Details on the licensing requirements for a specific state can be found at: <http://nrckids.org/STATES/states.htm>.

Staff qualification indicators included:	Yes
Indicators for teachers include:	Education, Training, Years of Experience
Indicators for directors include:	Education, Training, Years of Experience
Directors qualifications related to administration and management	No
Bachelors degree indicator for director:	Yes
Bachelors degree indicator for teacher:	Yes
Bachelors degree indicator for assistant teacher:	Yes
Description:	<p>1 point: In addition to qualifications defined in state regulations, at least 50% of staff members who have been employed in the program at least six months and are or could be alone with children must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Prepare an annual training plan (e.g. an IPDP) -

Complete 12 hours of professional growth activities per year above regulatory minimum, distributed across core knowledge areas as designated in the training plan. (Staff members may or may not hold certifications or college degrees).

2 points:

At least 50% of staff members who have been employed in the program at least six months and are or could be alone with children must have:

- At least CDA, 15 college credits, Associates degree or higher (BA, MA, PhD) in a relevant field.
- Certificate of completion from the Registered Child Care Apprenticeship Program or other nationally recognized child care credential.
- Professional development plan prepared annually.
- 24 hours of professional growth activities per year above regulatory minimum, distributed across core knowledge areas as per the training plan.
- At least two years experience in an early childhood or after school setting.

3 points:

At least 50% of staff members who have been employed in the program at least six months and are or could be alone with children have:

- A minimum of a BA, BS, MA, Ph.D. or 30 college credits in a relevant field.
- Professional development plan prepared annually.
- 36 hours of professional growth activities per year above regulatory minimum, distributed across core knowledge areas as per the training plan.
- At least five years experience in an early childhood or after school setting.

Staff qualifications referred to within:

Staff Qualifications

Staff qualifications source of evidence

Documentation submitted, Self report, verified System used to verify for some programs: Bright Futures Information System as verified by the Northern Lights Career Development Center.

Comments:

Currently 50% of staff is considered for points in STARS. In the new Rules Jan 3 all staff qualifications/training/experience will contribute to points earned in this category. A worksheet will assist programs in determining overall point level in the Staff Qualifications category.

Note: Staff are not broken out into groups like teacher, director, and assistant teacher.

Family Partnership

Indicators in this section refer to activities and strategies to involve and engage families. All QRS quality indicators described in this profile are beyond those required by licensing. Details on the licensing requirements for a specific state can be found at: <http://nrckids.org/STATES/states.htm>.

Family partnership indicators included:	Yes
Description:	<p>1 point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The program collects annual parent satisfaction survey and actively makes resources available to parents. -Program participates in professional networking at least four times a year. -Program has a written philosophy about the relationship between the parents and the program. <p>2 point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Routinely participates in community teams at least 24 hours per year. -Opportunities are available for parent involvement in the program that embodies the written philosophy of parent-program relationship. -The program is prepared to serve children with special needs including protective services (that is, is a Specialized Child Care Services site). <p>3 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Plays a leadership role in the early childhood or after school professional community.
Family partnership referred to within:	Families and Community
Family partnership source of evidence:	Self report, unverified, Self report, verified

Administration and Management

Indicators in this section refer to features of the administration and management of the program. All QRS quality indicators described in this profile are beyond those required by licensing. Details on the licensing requirements for a specific state can be found at: <http://nrckids.org/STATES/states.htm>.

Administration and management indicators included:	Yes
Description of Administration and management indicators:	<p><u>Registered child care (family child care)</u></p> <p>1 point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The program has a contract or other written agreement with parent signature, written policies for exclusions due to child illness, payment for services and daily routine for children. <p>2 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The program has defined vacation, sick, holiday and professional day closings, with at least two categories being supported through parent fees. -At least one person in the program holds a membership in at least one professional organization. <p>3 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The program has a parent handbook written specifically for this program that includes program and guidance philosophy. -The program operates a financially sound business that conforms to federal standards for a small business including fees derived from a budget. -The program carries liability insurance. <p><u>Licensed Child Care (center-based)</u></p> <p>1 point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -All staff employed 6 months or longer and who are or could be left alone with children have an Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) and opportunities for professional growth. -These staff have regular opportunities to refine their skills through a system of feedback and guidance. -The program has an employee handbook detailing policies for at least hiring and firing, advancement, grievance, sexual harassment, benefits and child abuse reporting. <p>2 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Staff are provided with breaks within their scheduled work day.

-Staff have paid planning time of at least one hour per week without children.
 -Staff have a benefits package including, at minimum, two of the following: paid vacation, sick, personal or professional days
 -Staff have input in program policies.

3 points:

-The program has a salary scale that recognizes professional achievement. The median adjusted pay for all employees is at least \$11.30 per hour. This is 85% of Vermont's livable wage for a single person (\$13.30 per hour) without employer paid health benefits.

Administration and management referred to within:	Administration
Administration and management source of evidence:	Documentation submitted, Self report, unverified, Self report, verified

Cultural/Linguistic Diversity

Indicators in this section refer to provisions for responsiveness to cultural and linguistic diversity. All QRS quality indicators described in this profile are beyond those required by licensing. Details on the licensing requirements for a specific state can be found at: <http://nrckids.org/STATES/states.htm>. Cultural/Linguistic Diversity indicators are also included in the Environment Rating Scales which are used in some QRSs.

Cultural/linguistic diversity indicators included:	No
---	----

Accreditation

Indicators described in this section refer to accreditation by a national accrediting body. Accreditation is a process in which programs demonstrate that they meet standards set forth by the accrediting body. The standards are determined by the accrediting body. There is not a common set of standards used for early childhood program accreditation. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation, the National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA), the National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs (NAC) and the Council on Accreditation (COA) are commonly included accreditation systems used in QRSs for center-based programs.

Accreditation included:	Yes
If yes, accreditation is:	As a standard for which points are awarded, one criteria in highest rating, or used as highest rating
Comments:	If accredited through the National Association for the Education of Young Children, accreditation is equivalent to highest rating. If accredited through NAFCC, NAA, or NECPA, accreditation is one criterion in the highest rating.

The other process includes that accredited programs have a STARS streamlined application process.

Community Involvement

Indicators described in this section refer to the type or frequency of involvement in the community. All QRS quality indicators described in this profile are beyond those required by licensing. Details on the licensing requirements for a specific state can be found at: <http://nrckids.org/STATES/states.htm>.

Community involvement indicators included:	Yes
Comments:	In the Families and Community indicator category, options include that: -Routinely participates in community teams at least 24 hours per year. -Plays a leadership role in the early childhood or after school professional community

Provisions for Children with Special Needs

Indicators described in this section refer to provisions for children with special needs and the extent to which programs meet standards for inclusion of children with disabilities or other limiting conditions. All QRS quality indicators described in this profile are beyond those required by licensing. Details on the licensing requirements for a specific state can be found at: <http://nrckids.org/STATES/states.htm>. Provisions for Children with Special Needs indicators are also included in the Environment Rating Scales which are used in some QRSs.

Indicators that specify provisions for children with special needs included:	Yes
Comments:	In Families and Communities indicator category, providers must take training for caring for children with special needs in order to achieve 2 points and be a "Vermont Specialized Child Care Provider".

Application Process

Information in this section describes specific features of the application process in the QRS.

Requires self-assessment tool:	No
Description of self-assessment tool:	A self-assessment is required to get one point in "Program Assessment" category, but is not required for application.
Availability of preparatory process:	No
Requires orientation:	No
Time from application to rating:	Less than 3 months and depends on the provider and the quality of the application.

Can apply for particular rating:	Yes
Describe apply for particular rating:	The applicant (program) determines how many points it can obtain in each quality indicators category and submits an application with required verifications. QRIS administrators review the application and corresponding verification to determine points awarded.

Outreach

This section describes the strategies that a QRS uses to disseminate information to parents, providers/programs, and the public.

Outreach to parents:	Yes
Method of outreach to parents:	Website; written materials available, disseminated through QRS contractors/partners
Outreach to providers:	Yes
Method of outreach to providers:	Website; written materials available, disseminated through QRS contractors/partners; mailings; other Child Care Resource and Referral agencies; information given to providers via QRS contractors/partners
Outreach to public:	Yes
Method of outreach to public:	Website; print advertising (press releases); information disseminated via QRS contractors/partners (especially through Referral services)
Percent of budget dedicated to marketing:	1%

Use of Observational Tools

The information in this section provides further detail about observational tools used in the QRS.

Observational tools used:	ECERS-R, FCCERS-R, ITERS-R, SACERS, Vermont Essential Practices Inventory (EPI), and National Afterschool Association accreditation observation tool
Describe how scores are used in the rating:	Scores are embedded in Program Assessment indicator category. 1 point: The program is evaluated using a self-assessment tool and has a written improvement plan based upon findings of self-assessment.

2 points:
The program determines through self-assessment that it has obtained the appropriate minimum score, and has an improvement plan based on this assessment. A CDD-approved STARS Assessor has verified the assessment.

To earn 2 points, the program must meet the specific point level needed to pass the assessment. If a program is assessed with the Environmental Rating Scale the program must score no less than 3 in any area and should have an average score of 4. If using the Vermont Essential Practices Inventory, programs must pass 85% of the items.

3 points:
The program holds a current accreditation and has a written improvement plan based upon findings of an annual self-assessment

The new program practices standards for use of the NAA assessment tool are: for 3 points, programs must score an average of 8 for every key and no standard below a 1. For 4 points they must score an average of 9 for every key and no less than 2 in the standards of human relationships and health and safety.

Frequency of observational assessment:	1 year
Method for choosing classrooms to observe:	All classrooms are assessed (with the exception of those programs that abide by Head Start and accreditation policies which have their own standards and are recognized and articulated to STARS).
Percent of classrooms observed in child care centers:	100%
Training for observers:	Yes. Instructor registry has a trainer approval process.
Initial reliability required:	No
Ongoing reliability required:	No
Observational tool comments:	Note: For the new model, programs will be assessed every 3 years.

Improvement Process

This section provides information about the strategies used to provide or support quality improvement in the QRS.

Training available that is linked to QRS:	Yes
Content of linked training:	Business Practices, Child Assessment, Environmental Assessment, Language and literacy, Safety, Social and Emotional Development, Specific Curriculum
Total duration of training:	20 - 50 hours
Trainer approval process:	Yes
Target population for training:	All providers
Onsite assistance available that is linked to QRS:	Yes
Content of linked onsite assistance:	Business Practices, Child Assessment, Environmental Assessment, Language and Literacy, Safety, Social and Emotional Development, Support in Navigating QRS
Onsite assistance frequency	Frequency varies as requested and available and/or linked to professional development
Length of onsite sessions	1 - 4 hours
Total duration of onsite assistance:	6 months - 1 year
Formal approval for onsite assistance provider:	No
Target population for onsite assistance:	All providers

Financial Incentives

A variety of strategies may be used to provide financial incentives to providers to participate in the QRS or to support quality improvement efforts. This section provides information about different financial incentives.

Tiered reimbursement:	<p>Yes 1 STAR=4% 2 STARS=8% 3 STARS=12% 4 STARS= 17.5% 5 STARS= 20%</p> <p>Jan. 3rd Vermont began a new model of enhanced payments on behalf of families to child care providers. The enhanced "Quality factor" ranges from about 5% to 40% above state base rate.</p>
Quality award/bonus:	<p>Yes, there is a onetime incentive payment based on the number of stars earned.</p> <p>1 STAR=\$250 2 STARS=\$500 3 STARS=\$1000 4 STARS =\$1150 5 STARS=\$1550</p>
Startup award:	No

Scholarship (T.E.A.C.H)	No. The Child Development Division provides bonuses for credentials and achievements on the Vermont Career Ladder as well as financial assistance for college coursework.
Wage enhancement	No (See scholarship)
Retention bonus:	No (See Scholarship)
Improvement grants:	Yes. The Vermont Community Loan Fund uses state funds and funds from child care license plate sales to award grants or low interest loans to programs to improve or expand facilities. STARS participating programs are prioritized.

Administration Details

This section provides details about the QRS administration and funding.

QRS lead :	Child Development Division of the Department for Children and Families of the Agency of Human Services Learning Partners, Inc. (a new administrator TBA will begin July 1 2010)
QRS lead type:	State agency, Other
Overall funding amount for most recent fiscal year:	Child Care Development Fund: \$1.2 million - includes enhanced "quality factor" payments to providers for services; Private Foundation Funding: \$50,000 for 1-3 star level bonuses; State: \$60,000 for 4-5 star level bonuses
Overall funding sources:	Child Care Development Fund, Foundation, State
Administration funding for most recent fiscal year:	\$116,000
Administration funding source:	Child Care Development Fund
Quality improvement funding for most recent fiscal year:	\$45,000 for legislative allocation and sale of license plates
Quality improvement funding source:	State
Evaluation funding for most recent fiscal year:	Information not available
Evaluation funding source:	Learning Partners, the contracted administrator, produces regular data reports and NCCIC dollars were used to plan for ongoing evaluation. STARS Oversight Committee and regular data reports from the contracted administrators (noted above) as well as BFIS data contributes to evaluation CDD also used NCCIC resources/consultant to plan for ongoing evaluation (so far this cost has been minimal).

Partners

This section provides information about the roles and responsibilities of partners in the QRS.

Partner 1 type :	Community Colleges
Partner 1 name:	Community College of Vermont (16 branches)
Partner 1 function:	The Community Colleges are home of the statewide system of Career Development Professional Development used in STARS (this system of professional development is called, "Northern Lights Career Development Center")
Work plan in place:	Yes
Partner 2:	State Agency Partners
Partner 2 name:	Child Development Division of the Department for Children and Families of the Agency of Human Services
Partner 2 function:	Collect/Validate to assign rating, evaluation, manage communication/information dissemination, provide financial incentives, system navigation support, technical assistance and quality improvement services, overall oversight and management of the QRIS. The Child Development Division oversees the work of QRS Administrator Learning Partners, Inc. and incorporates feedback from the STARS Oversight Committee which is made up of stakeholders and partners.
Work plan in place:	Yes
Partner 3 type :	Resource and Referral
Partner 3 name:	Vermont Association of Child Care Resources and Referral Agencies – 12 local agencies
Partner 3 function:	Conduct observations, manage communication/information dissemination, system navigation support, technical assistance and quality improvement services
Work plan in place:	Yes
Partner 4 type :	Independent, for-profit organization
Partner 4 name:	Learning Partners, Inc (Administrative)
Partner 4 function:	Collect/validate to assign rating, manage communication/information dissemination, system navigation support, technical assistance and quality improvement services, and process applications.
Work plan in place:	N/A
Comments:	The rules relating to the QRIS "STARS" were jointly

developed with the Vermont Department of Education and the Child Development Division of the Department for Children and Families of the Agency of Human Services.

Linkage of QRS with Other Systems

This section provides information about how the QRS is linked with other systems/standards including child care subsidies, professional development, state early learning guidelines, and core knowledge /competencies for providers.

Child care subsidies :	Yes
Description:	The link with subsidy is evident in the use of tiered reimbursement.
Professional development:	Yes
Description	Northern Lights Career Development Center unified system for professional development for providers including an on-line record of professional development.
Incorporation of other standards:	Yes
Description:	Northern Lights for Early Childhood Professionals Core competencies are embedded in PD system.

Evaluation

Status of evaluation :	Ongoing
List research questions for ongoing evaluation:	How many programs are now participating in quality above licensing requirements? How many programs improve as indicated by their point profile and star level? How many continue to participate over time and improve quality as indicated by participation/renewals and point level improvements? Quarterly STARS data and informational reports include all of this and other related information and is on the CDD website.
Evaluator type:	N/A
Published reports to date :	An implementation report is issued quarterly called, "Summary report of STARS application and participation." http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/pdf/cdd/stars/STARQuarterlyreport_1-09.pdf
Comments:	No evaluations have been done that are linked to child outcomes and there have been no evaluations comparing STARS versus non-STARS participating programs. However, there has been an ongoing collection of information to

 evaluate STARS.

Key Contacts

Category :	Overall management
Contact name:	Jan Walker
Organization:	Director, Workforce Development and Quality Enhancement, Child Development Division
Email:	jan.walker@ahs.state.vt.us
Phone:	802-241-2198
Category :	Rating process (including on-site observations)
Contact name:	Learning Partners, Inc. – Deb Curtis
Organization:	Owner Manager Learning Partners, Inc.
Email:	Learningpartners@aol.com
Phone:	802-479-5261
Category :	Tiered reimbursement and connections with subsidy
Contact name:	Carole Pomeroy
Organization:	Director of Operations Child Development Division
Email:	carole.pomeroy@ahs.state.vt.us
Phone:	802-241- 1215
Category :	Distribution of financial incentives
Contact name:	Jan Walker – Linda Clark, Administrative Assistant
Organization:	
Email:	Linda.clark@ahs.state.vt.us
Phone:	802-241- 1215
Category :	Quality improvements and support
Contact name:	Jan Walker - Cyndi Miller – Learning Partners (Deb Curtis)
Organization:	Cyndi Miller – STARS Oversight Committee Member and CCR&R Resource Development Specialist
Email:	cyndi@windhamchildcare.org
Phone:	802-254-5332

Category :	Data systems, monitoring and evaluation
Contact name:	Learning Partners, Inc. - Jan Walker
Organization:	
Email:	
Phone:	

References

Learning Partners, Inc. Summary report of STARS application and participation. January 2009.

<http://www.starsstepahead.org/> Accessed August 21, 2009

Learning Partners, Inc. Summary report of STARS application and participation. July 2009.

Stars Step Ahead Recognition System for Child Care, Early Education and Afterschool Programs, Program Guide 2007.

www.STARSstepahead.org Accessed August 21, 2009

Stars Step Ahead Recognition System, You and STARS, A Provider's Introduction to the STEP Ahead Recognition System. Accessed August 21, 2009

Vermont's Step Ahead Recognition System for child care, preschool and afterschool programs, FAQ,

www.STARSstepahead.org Accessed August 21, 2009

Arenas of Action and Point Standards

Arena I. Compliance History

Programs should have few to no substantiated violations of the applicable CDD regulations for child care and education programs and should make every effort to know and adhere to regulations. Prior corrected violations do not exclude a program from participating, though they will limit the number of points that can be achieved. Programs participating in STARS cannot have outstanding, uncorrected violations of any kind. The length of time the program has been in operation is determined by the opening date of the current license or registration number.

Points	Standards	Indicators
	The program is currently in compliance with all applicable regulations and any previous, substantiated violations have been corrected as required to the satisfaction of the Child Development Division. Programs that have not been in operation for more than one year at the time of application cannot earn points in this arena. A licensing specialist has visited and assessed the program in the past 2 years.	verification from Licensing
1	The program is in compliance as defined above, has had no substantiated violations resulting in a Parental Notification and no general pattern of regulatory noncompliance within the past year. A licensing specialist has visited and assessed the program in the past 2 years.	verification from Licensing
2	The program is in compliance as defined above, has had no substantiated violations resulting in a Parental Notification and no general pattern of regulatory noncompliance within the past 3 years. A licensing specialist has visited and assessed the program in the past 2 years.	verification from Licensing
3	The program is in compliance as defined above, has had no substantiated violations resulting in a Parental Notification and no general pattern of regulatory noncompliance within the past 5 years. A licensing specialist has visited and assessed the program in the past 2 years.	verification from Licensing

Arena II. Qualifications and Training

In addition to the qualifications and professional development hours required by CDD regulations, the people working with children are experienced, well-trained and committed to ongoing professional development.

Points	Standards	Indicators
	All staff hold qualifications as required by applicable regulations. Any deficiencies have been remedied and any required corrective action has been completed.	the program is operating according to and in compliance with regulations
1	In addition to qualifications defined in state regulations, at least 50% of staff members who have been employed in the program at least six months and are or could be alone with children (1) prepare an annual training plan (e.g. an IPDP) and (2) complete 12 hours of professional growth activities per year above regulatory minimum, distributed across core knowledge areas as designated in the training plan. Staff members may or may not hold certifications or college degrees.	annual professional development plan with areas for growth indicated, confirmation of hours through professional development form, transcripts, certificate or other documentation
2	At least 50% of staff members who have been employed in the program at least six months and are or could be alone with children have (1) at least CDA, 15 college credits, Associates degree or higher (BA, MA, PhD) in a relevant field, certificate of completion from the Registered Child Care Apprenticeship Program or other nationally recognized child care credential, (2) professional development plan prepared annually, (3) 24 hours of professional growth activities per year above regulatory minimum, distributed across core knowledge areas as per the training plan and (4) at least two years experience in an early childhood or after school setting.	confirmation of degree or certification, confirmation of hours through professional development form, transcripts, certificate or other documentation, annual professional development plan with areas for growth indicated, work history for the last two years. Relevant fields for degrees include Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Developmental Psychology, Child Development or other fields with coursework relevant to children's growth and learning or relevant for a specific staff position.
3	At least 50% of staff members who have been employed in the program at least six months and are or could be alone with children have (1) a minimum of a BA, BS, MA, Ph.D. or 30 college credits in a relevant field, (2) professional development plan prepared annually, (3) 36 hours of professional growth activities per year above regulatory minimum, distributed across core knowledge areas as per the training plan and (4) at least five years experience in an early childhood or after school setting.	confirmation of degree, confirmation of hours through professional development form, transcripts, certificate or other documentation, annual professional development plan with areas for growth indicated, work history for the last five years. Relevant fields are as listed above.

Arena III. Families and Community

The philosophy of the child care program is to establish professional connections to support children and families within the local community. The program actively accepts its role as a member of a professional community and is willing to take a leadership role as appropriate.

Points	Standards	Indicators
	<p>The program meets regulations related to parent handbooks, policies and communications with parents as required by applicable regulations. Any deficiencies have been remedied and any required corrective action has been completed.</p>	<p>the program is operating according to and in compliance with regulations</p>
1	<p>The program collects annual parent satisfaction survey and actively makes resources available to parents. Program participates in professional networking at least four times a year. Program has a written philosophy about the relationship between the parents and the program.</p>	<p>submit a summary of parent satisfaction survey, list attendance dates of networking activities – conferences, workshops, provider group meetings, etc. (any member of the program may attend), describe parent resource system, submit written philosophy</p>
2	<p>The program adheres to all standards for one point (above) plus routinely participates in community teams at least 24 hours per year. Opportunities are available for parent involvement in the program that embody the written philosophy of parent-program relationship. The program is prepared to serve children with special needs including protective services (that is, is a Specialized Child Care Services site).</p>	<p>list attendance dates and describe activities to verify participation in a community team as a child care professional (teams include service or staffing teams for families -- e.g., IFSP, IEP, case plan, Head Start --, Success by Six, Early Childhood Council, CCSSA advisory board), describe parent involvement opportunities and how they relate to program philosophy, describe how children with special needs are served, describe parent resource system</p>
3	<p>The program adheres to all standards for two points (above) plus plays a leadership role in the early childhood or after school professional community</p>	<p>list leadership activities and dates where applicable, describe how leadership activities have impacted the professional community</p>

Arena IV. Program Assessment

In the Program Assessment arena, programs assess their environment and practices and have an ongoing plan for improvement and change based on the assessment. Program assessment involves comparing the program's practices to known standards, such as state regulations, developmentally appropriate practices or practices of accredited programs, and creating a program improvement plan to move the program toward stronger practices.

Points	Standards	Indicators
not rated	The program operates as required by applicable regulations related to curriculum, developmentally appropriate activities, child guidance, child-adult interactions and care giving. Any deficiencies have been remedied and any required corrective action has been completed.	the program is operating according to and in compliance with regulations
1	The program is evaluated using a self-assessment tool and has a written improvement plan based upon findings of self-assessment. Staff members provide input for and receive feedback in the assessment.	submit a program improvement plan, appropriate self-assessment tools must include content that addresses at least: 1) interactions between adults and children, 2) developmentally appropriate program, activities or curriculum, 3) health and safety standards, including indoor and outdoor spaces, 4) relationships and communication with families, and 5) administration, policies, business practices or personnel.
2	The program meets the standards of 1 point (above). The program determines through self-assessment that it has obtained the appropriate minimum score, and has an improvement plan based on this assessment. A CDD-approved STARS Assessor has verified the assessment. Staff members provide input for and receive feedback in the assessment.	submit Assessment Verification Form (provided by assessor) and program improvement plan based on the assessment and prior goals. Programs must obtain a specified score on the assessment to obtain 2 points in this arena. (See document "How to earn 2 points" for more information on assessments and minimum scores.)
3	The program holds a current accreditation and has a written improvement plan based upon findings of an annual self-assessment	verification of accreditation status through NAEYC, NAFCC, NAA or NECPA, program improvement plan or annual report to accrediting body

Arena V (a). Administration for registered child care

(Licensed programs use Arena V (b).)

Registered child care programs demonstrate a strong foundation for their home business. This includes designing and implementing clear operating policies, using sound business practices and recognizing their role as a professional.

Points	Standards	Indicators
	The program meets all applicable regulations related to business practices, policies, required certifications, permits, application and reapplication materials. Any deficiencies have been remedied and any required corrective action has been completed.	the program is operating according to and in compliance with regulations
1	The program has a contract or other written agreement with parent signature, written policies for 1) exclusions due to child illness, 2) payment for services and 3) daily routine for children	submit written policies
2	The program adheres to all standards for one point (above) plus has defined vacation, sick, holiday and professional day closings, with at least two categories being supported through parent fees. At least one person in the program holds a membership in at least one professional organization	submit written policies, list organization(s) where membership is held (national, state or local)
3	The program adheres to all standards for two points (above) plus a parent handbook written specifically for this program that includes program and guidance philosophy. The program operates a financially sound business that conforms to federal standards for a small business including fees derived from a budget. The program carries liability insurance.	submit copy of handbook, submit documentation of liability insurance, submit operations budget for the program that has been independently verified (verification can be from an accountant, advisor, instructor, or other independent source)

Arena V (b). Administration for licensed program

(includes early childhood programs, school age child care, licensed family child care and non-recurring care. Registered programs use Arena V (a).)

Licensed child care programs demonstrate a strong foundation for maintaining an experienced, well-trained and professional staff. This includes clear policies about fair labor practices, a structure to support appropriate professional growth and a commitment to fair compensation.

Points	Standards	Indicators
	The program meets all applicable regulations related to business practices, policies, required certifications, permits, application and reapplication materials. Any deficiencies have been remedied and any required corrective action has been completed.	the program is operating according to and in compliance with regulations
1	All staff employed 6 months or longer and who are or could be left alone with children have an Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) and opportunities for professional growth. These staff have regular opportunities to refine their skills through a system of feedback and guidance. The program has an employee handbook detailing policies for at least hiring and firing, advancement, grievance, sexual harassment, benefits and child abuse reporting.	describe professional development activities and how they relate to staff professional development plans, describe how professional development and growth is supported in the program (could include paid release time, stipends, in-house training and other supports), submit copy of employee handbook
2	The program adheres to all standards for one point (above) plus staff (1) are provided with breaks within their scheduled work day, (2) have paid planning time of at least one hour per week without children, (3) have a benefits package including, at minimum, two of the following: paid vacation, sick, personal or professional days, and (4) have input in program policies.	include indicators from above, describe how these standards are met
3	The program adheres to all standards for two points (above) plus has a salary scale that recognizes professional achievement. The median adjusted pay for all employees is at least \$11.30 per hour. This is 85% of Vermont's livable wage for a single person (\$13.30 per hour) without employer paid health benefits.	include indicators from above, submit salary scale, submit worksheet to calculate adjusted wage level (which includes pay, health care and dependent care)