

# KENTUCKY STARS FOR KIDS NOW PROCESS EVALUATION

Evaluation Brief #1

## Executive Summary

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January 2012

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The Process Evaluation of Kentucky STARS for KIDS NOW was initiated in October 2010 by the Kentucky Department for Community Based Services, Division of Child Care to provide an examination and assessment of existing STARS components and to provide a basis for recommendations to improve STARS implementation statewide.

Kentucky is unique nationally in its investment in a process evaluation to address a set of comprehensive questions about the functioning of its QRIS after operating for over a decade.

The Evaluation questions and activities focused on five broad, interrelated components of STARS:

- The quality standards and measurement strategies
- The rating structure and process for assigning STARS levels
- The technical assistance provided to promote improvement
- The outreach methods to promote STARS to providers and to parents
- The collaboration, coordination, and administrative processes most supportive for STARS.

The Evaluation was conducted by Child Trends, a nonpartisan research organization located in Washington DC. The Evaluation was supported by funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided by the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Department of Community Based Services, Division of Child Care.

A series of Evaluation Briefs were created to provide summaries of the key findings. These Briefs include:

- [Executive Summary of the Kentucky STARS for KIDS NOW Process Evaluation](#)
- [Kentucky STARS for KIDS NOW Process Evaluation: Overview of Methods](#)
- [Providers' Perceptions of the Kentucky STARS for KIDS NOW Rating Process](#)
- [Technical Assistance Provided to and Received by Kentucky STARS for KIDS NOW Programs](#)
- [Collaboration and Coordination in the Kentucky STARS for KIDS NOW Technical Assistance System](#)
- [Alternative Rating Structures for Kentucky STARS for KIDS NOW](#)
- [Evaluation of Kentucky's Child Care Resource and Referral System](#)
- [Findings from the Kentucky Early Care and Education and School-Age Care Household Survey](#)

Suggested citation:

Tout, K., Starr, R., Isner, T., Daily, S., Moodie, S., Rothenberg, L., & Soli, M. (2012). *Executive Summary of the Kentucky STARS for KIDS NOW Process Evaluation*, Evaluation Brief #1. Washington, D.C.: Child Trends. Retrieved from: [www.kentuckypartnership.org/starsevaluation](http://www.kentuckypartnership.org/starsevaluation).

# KENTUCKY STARS FOR KIDS NOW PROCESS EVALUATION: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Process Evaluation of Kentucky STARS for KIDS NOW was initiated by the Kentucky Department for Community Based Services, Division of Child Care to provide an examination and assessment of existing STARS components and to provide a basis for recommendations to improve STARS implementation statewide. This Executive Summary provides an overview of key findings, strengths of the existing system and recommendations for areas to target for taking STARS to the next level of effectiveness.

Kentucky is unique nationally in its investment in a process evaluation to address a set of comprehensive questions about the functioning of its QRIS after operating for over a decade. For example, Kentucky is the first QRIS in the nation to engage in a systematic, empirical examination of alternative models for the STARS rating process. The use of evaluation data to reflect on options for revisions and enhancement to STARS is a model that will be useful for other QRIS to follow. The findings provide the Department for Community Based Services, Division of Child Care with a comprehensive set of potential targets for improvements as STARS enters its second decade. The Evaluation also identifies existing processes that are working well and areas of strength on which revisions and modifications can be based.

The Evaluation questions and activities focused on five broad, interrelated components of STARS:

- The quality standards and measurement strategies
- The rating structure and process for assigning STARS levels
- The technical assistance provided to promote improvement, and
- The outreach methods to promote STARS to providers and to parents
- The collaboration, coordination, and administrative processes most supportive for STARS.

This Summary is organized around the five components. For each component, key findings are presented and recommendations are offered that consider the current STARS context and implications for policy and regulatory changes. The potential cost implications of the recommendations are not explored fully in this Summary and will need to be addressed in follow up discussions based on the findings.

Further details about the research questions, methods and findings can be found in the Methods Brief, as well as in each Evaluation Brief in this series. Only short summaries are provided here.

## QUALITY STANDARDS AND MEASUREMENT

*How do current STARS standards align with existing quality frameworks?*

The standards used in a QRIS are a critical element of the system as they define the structure features and elements of practice that will be rated. They also provide the basis for quality improvement activities in the system. The standards that are included in a QRIS need to be research-based, measurable and represent a concise but rigorous set of benchmarks for programs to achieve. The standards also need to be differentiated by program type to reflect the different opportunities and constraints on quality in different settings. To date, there is not one set of empirically-validated standards, differentiated by program type, that are recommended for inclusion in a QRIS. Instead, the process for selecting standards typically relies on expert panels and workgroups with input from outside experts and community stakeholders (Zellman & Perlman, 2008). Indeed, this process was used for developing the original STARS standards, and the resulting standards (with revisions) have been incorporated into regulations (Howard, 2011). One goal of the Process Evaluation was to examine the current STARS standards and identify how well the requirements match established standards and expectations for the aspect of quality that are most important for programs, families and children. This analysis involved the development of a crosswalk that systematically compared the grid requirements (including the Environment Rating Scales) with other quality frameworks used to guide best practice in Kentucky including the Kentucky Early Childhood Quality Self-Study (QSS), the Kentucky Early Childhood Core Content (ECCC), national accreditation standards and quality standards included in other state QRIS as recorded by the Compendium of Quality Rating Systems and Evaluations (Tout et al., 2010). The crosswalk identified strengths and gaps in the current standards. Highlights of this analysis and the resulting recommendations are described below. The recommendations should be reviewed in light of the current national context in which the majority of existing quality rating systems have not yet developed the full range of standards outlined below.

### **Strengths of the STARS standards:**

- **The STARS standards are differentiated by program type.**
  - Similar to other QRIS nationally, STARS articulates a set of program standards that are differentiated by program types including Type 1 and Type 2 child care centers as well as Certified Family Homes.
  - This is an important recognition of the need to monitor and provide support quality in different types of early care and education settings using a common framework but articulating quality requirements that are appropriate for the setting.
- **The STARS standards demonstrate alignment with three quality areas: program structure, children’s experiences in the environment, and health and safety.**
  - The STARS standards (as well as items from the Environment Rating Scales and licensing regulations) address three foundational quality domains that are essential to providing children with a structured, healthy environment for learning.

- The domains of program structure, children’s experiences in the environment, and health and safety are important because they address the structural features in the setting that promote optimal exploration and interaction with the environment and that support early childhood staff/personnel in their work environment.

**Recommendations:**

- **Consider inclusion of STARS standards that more fully address *curriculum* used in an early childhood program.**
  - Current grid requirements and Environment Rating Scale items sufficiently address aspects of children’s learning environment by focusing on providing opportunities and appropriate materials and activities that can promote learning. However, these requirements do not focus on curricular features identified in the QSS that address the quality and nature of the interactions between the teacher, child and the curriculum components which research suggests is most closely linked to positive outcomes for young children.
  - Additionally, current standards do not require demonstration of curricula that are research-based or aligned with the Kentucky Early Learning Standards.
  - Specific recommendations to consider:
    - Incorporate a progressive set of standards that require programs to work towards the use of a curriculum framework that is aligned with the Kentucky Early Learning Standards.
    - Additional standards could address the training staff/providers have received related to curriculum or the extent to which the curriculum in use is aligned to child assessments.
    - Consider integrating additional observational measures which could tap interactions between children and teachers that are grounded in a strong curriculum (in center-based settings). Several states use the Classroom Assessment Observation Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta, La Paro & Hamre, 2008); however, it should be noted that this measure is appropriate only for center-based settings serving children over age three. At present, there are limited observational assessments to tap high quality curriculum implementation across settings and across ages.
    - Integration of standards related to curriculum would require corresponding adjustments to the technical assistance provided.
- **Consider inclusion of STARS standards that address appropriate *assessment* of children’s growth and development.**
  - Current STARS grid requirements do not include a focus on the use of appropriate early childhood assessment methods and tools.
  - Specific recommendations:
    - Incorporate new standards to document providers’ use of a research-based assessment tool. For example, Level 1 and 2 providers could work towards the use of child assessments to guide daily instruction/activities/lessons. Level 3 and 4 providers could work towards the use of an assessment from a state approved list/ research-based from approved list.

- Further standards could be developed specifying that staff have received training on assessment processes and that assessment results are shared with parents and are used to guide individualized instruction and program planning.
    - The development of new assessment standards may be guided by *Kentucky's Early Childhood Continuous Assessment Guide* and the results of the *Early Childhood Outcomes Initiative*.
    - Integration of standards related to assessment would require corresponding adjustments to the technical assistance provided.
- **Consider inclusion of STARS standards that address *screening and referral*.**
  - Grid requirements related to screening and referral are distinct from those addressing assessment. Currently, STARS grid requirements do not include standards related to the use of appropriate early childhood screeners that can assist staff and other professionals in identifying developmental issues that may need further assessment.
  - Specific recommendations:
    - Incorporate new standards related to screening and referral that are separate from assessment standards and specify the use of appropriate screening tools to inform appropriate referrals as needed.
    - Additional standards could include requirements such as an expectation that staff have received training on using screening tools appropriately, the screening tools are used within a specific timeframe of child's enrollment/specified frequency throughout the year; and that results are shared with parents and are used to guide individualized instruction and program planning.
    - Integration of standards related to screening and referral would require corresponding adjustments to the technical assistance provided.
- **Consider inclusion of STARS standards that address *provisions for children with special needs***
  - The Environment Rating Scales cover some elements of provisions for children with special needs but typically only at a score of five or above on individual items.
  - State licensing standards include specific provisions related to children with special needs, but these standards are designed to address the basic health and safety of children with special needs.
  - Specific recommendations:
    - Incorporate new standards that require providers to support children with special needs and their families. For example: designs activities and instruction that support goals in IEP/IFSPs, and involve families in planning to meet the needs of their child(ren).
    - Additional standards could include the development of a written plan to refer parents to appropriate social, mental health, educational, wellness, and medical services.

- Integration of standards related to screening and referral would require corresponding adjustments to the technical assistance provided. Specifically TA that is tailored to meet the needs of directors/program administrators and TA designed for providers/classroom teachers.
- **Consider inclusion of STARS standards that address stronger elements of *family involvement/family partnerships*.**
  - Currently, STARS requires programs to provide up to four parent involvement activities a year. Minimal guidance is offered related to the quality, structure, or objectives for engaging parents and families. The STARS standards are similar to most QRIS in this domain because the extant research base is insufficient for providing guidance on appropriate standards and indicators.
  - Specific recommendations:
    - Incorporate new standards that help providers authentically engage and develop relationships with families. These standards can be incorporated into STARS in the following three ways:
      - *Progressive standards* increasingly require providers to offer opportunities for families to engage in more authentic and enriching ways (i.e. parent advisory board, regular teacher meetings, parent survey).
      - Standards that include *required and optional activities*, establishes a set of core activities that STARS deems are required of all providers, and a separate list of optional activities that providers can earn extra points for as they are able.
      - *Categorical standards* require Level 1 and 2 providers to select two or three activities from a predetermined subset of categories. Level 3 and 4 programs may be required to select five to six activities across all categories. These categories could include, for example, communication with families, family resources, facility-wide family activities, and individual family activities.
      - Integration of standards related to family involvement would require corresponding adjustments to the technical assistance provided.

*What options for alternative measures could be identified?*

In addition to a review of the standards, the evaluation team reviewed the set of observational measures currently in use in STARS. A recommendation was made in November 2010 to begin the process of transitioning from the Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS; Harms & Clifford, 1989) to the revision that was published in 2007. The Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale – Revised (FCCERS-R; Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 2007) was updated to be more appropriate for the range of age groups in family child care (which include infants, toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children), is more sensitive to cultural and socioeconomic diversity, and incorporates items on provisions for children with special needs into the main scale items and indicators. In addition, the authors will be phasing out support for the FDCRS. The transition preparation and planning in STARS are well underway.

## RATING STRUCTURE AND PROCESS FOR ASSIGNING STARS LEVEL

*What rating process and structure could produce a valid rating for programs that accurately reflects and differentiates quality levels?*

Currently, the STARS grid and corresponding rating process uses a block structure in which all grid requirements in a level must be met before a rating at the subsequent level can be considered. If one requirement at the next highest STARS level is not met, a facility is assigned the lower level. Nationally, the bulk of QRS use a block structure to produce ratings (Tout et al., 2010). As described in the Methods Brief, the majority of Type 1 facilities are rated currently at a Level 2, while Certified Family Homes are distributed evenly across Levels 1, 2 and 3 (but not Level 4). The Evaluation found that nearly half of Type I facilities and about one-third of Certified Homes did NOT plan to apply for a higher STARS level at their next rating because of challenges meeting grid requirements at the higher levels. Two activities were conducted to gather information about how the current grid requirements and structure relate to the distribution of facilities across STARS levels and to analyze options for revision of the structure. First, a sample of providers across all levels was interviewed to determine which grid requirements were met above their current STARS level. This analysis produced an understanding of the most challenging indicators in STARS as well as those on which there is little variation (because the majority of providers are able to meet them). It also produced an understanding of strengths of the current structure. Second, data from the grid requirement analysis were used to create new, hypothetical rating levels for programs based on four alternative QRIS models. Results from these models were analyzed across program types to compare actual QRIS level with the hypothetical level achieved in the alternative model. Building on the results from these two activities, recommendations were developed. The strengths of the current system and recommendations to consider are provided below.

### **Strengths:**

- **The current rating structure is transparent and clear for programs.**
  - Programs report that they understand the grids and the process of moving from one level to the next. This is a strength of a block rating design because the levels and their requirements are transparent for the participants.
- **Programs are clearly meeting quality standards above their current rating level.**
  - The findings that many programs report that they meet standards at a higher level in STARS is a strength. Many programs in STARS engage in practices at a higher level of quality that can benefit children and families. This is an important finding to build upon when considering revisions of the structure.

### **Recommendations**

- **Review grid requirements that relate to the Child Development Associate credential, and consider revising the weighting and/or its stringency in STARS.**



- In the current STARS structure, the Level 4 requirement for a CDA-level-staff to be in a classroom at all times poses a significant barrier to achieving higher STARS levels.
- Placement in STARS and the weighting could be reconsidered to reflect the current status of the research on this indicator which would not necessarily support a requirement for a CDA-level staff to be in the room *at all times*.
- **Review grid requirements that relate to the Environment Rating Scales at Level 4 and consider revising the requirement, the weighting and/or placement in STARS.**
  - The grid requirement related to the ERS at Level 4 in STARS is an average score of 6.0. Recognizing a score above a 5.0 or 5.5 at the highest level of the QRIS is atypical among QRIS nationally, with most recognizing 5.0 (or lower) at the highest level.
  - Recognizing an average score of 5.0 or 5.5 would be above the average levels of quality observed in national studies of early childhood care and education settings (for example, the study of prekindergarten conducted by the National Center for Early Development and Learning and the Head Start FACES studies).
- **Engage in a process to consider a hybrid rating structure for STARS.**
  - The models presented in the Evaluation Brief on Alternate Rating Structures describe three optional structures for a hybrid rating process. Hybrid models combine the use of blocks and points in the designation of rating levels. Data from the Evaluation indicate that providers are meeting indicators above their current STARS level. A hybrid model offers an opportunity for the STARS level of a provider to reflect the quality indicators met at a higher level by awarding points for those indicators. There are different options for how the points are awarded and aggregated.
  - The selection of the most appropriate model for Kentucky will depend upon decisions on a number of dimensions, including:
    - The addition of new grid requirements in the areas of curriculum, assessment, provisions for children with special needs and family involvement/family partnerships. Decisions must be made about whether and how to include these new grid requirements. The relative importance of certain indicators can be signaled by placing them within a block or by weighting indicators with a standard multiplier or a higher number of available points.
    - The level of interest in designating levels *within* quality categories as well as designating an *overall* quality level. The availability of more information about quality within domains (through a points model or a hybrid model that incorporates levels within each domain) may be helpful to parents. Alternatively, it may provide too much information to some parents who are looking for a more straightforward rating.
    - The desire for a simple structure or a more complex structure. A simple structure (for example, a simple block or points model) would be more transparent and easier to understand, but it may not have the ability to reflect a more nuanced combination of quality components. A more

complex structure (for example, with weighted indicators or blocks within levels) and may allow for more fine-grained distinctions to be drawn between programs at different levels, thus resulting in greater validity of the levels. However, greater complexity will produce a greater likelihood of error in ratings calculations and requires additional resources to support data management processes.

- **When an alternative model has been developed, consider a process for requesting feedback from external reviewers who can provide quantitative and qualitative input on the new model.**
  - The process for requesting input from external reviewers on new or revised QRIS indicators or structures will be facilitated by developing an online process for review.
  - The online strategy has been used in at least two other QRIS to assist reviewers with the process of providing feedback and to provide the opportunity for automatic aggregation of feedback on the new model(s).
  
- **Consider articulating a separate set of grid requirements for Type I school-age programs.**
  - School-age care providers report that grid requirements specifying early childhood credentials (for example, the Child Development Associate credential or the Commonwealth Child Care Credential) are particularly difficult for them to meet.
  - Early childhood credentials may not be aligned with best practices in school-age settings. As Kentucky moves toward implementation of a School-Age Credential, this can be incorporated into STARS grid requirements for school-age facilities.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

*How can the STARS Technical Assistance process be enhanced?*

A central activity in a QRIS is the provision of technical assistance for programs to support their quality improvement. To gather information about the STARS Technical Assistance system, data were gathered from STARS Quality Coordinators (SQC), Professional Development Counselors (PD Counselors) as well as providers in Type I facilities, Certified Home Providers and School-Age Care programs to provide an understanding of the technical assistance that is provided and received in STARS. In this section, strengths of the current system are identified and recommendations are developed with the aim of further supporting and enhance STARS Technical Assistance.

### Strengths

- **Providers report positive experiences with their SQCs. They are pleased with the level of attention and support they receive in STARS.**
  - The providers participating in the Evaluation reported positive experiences with their SQCs. In addition to providing information about the types of activities they

participated in with their SCQ, providers also spoke about the motivational role of the SQC in supporting and encouraging their participation in STARS. Personal relationships that allowed providers to feel comfortable reaching out to their SQC with questions and concerns were cited by providers of each type and across each STARS level.

- Providers report receiving a variety of technical assistance from the SCQs. The SCQs provide coaching to assist with meeting Environment Rating Scale indicators. They also provide general support and information about STARS requirement, training opportunities and funding opportunities.
- **SQCs provide a variety of technical assistance supports and improvement strategies.**
  - SQCs report engaging in a wide variety of activities to support the providers on their caseload. These activities include the provision of resources on particular topics and on training, completing needs assessments and professional development plans, assisting with paperwork, observing the provider at work and giving them feedback and modeling best practices. SQCs report spending the most time and seeing the most benefit from activities related to improving scores on the Environment Rating Scales and observing providers in their work with children. These findings indicate that SQCs have a solid basis for engaging providers in more in-depth work related to curriculum and assessment for example.

## **Recommendations**

- **Continue providing an infrastructure that fosters positive relationships between SQCs and providers in STARS.**
  - The current TA system is well poised to meet the challenges of assisting providers in meeting new standards and/or learning about a new rating process. SCQs can build upon the positive relationship they have developed with the providers they serve to help them understand new requirements. Building upon this strength as any changes are made will help ensure a smooth transition.
- **In coordination with adopting new STARS quality standards, identify options for using the positive relationship developed between SQCs and providers as a springboard for promoting an increased focus on improving practices that relate to children's development.**
  - As new standards are included in STARS, the need for rigorous technical assistance on practices that support children's development will increase. It will be important to develop additional tools that SQCs can use to assess providers' needs and strengths and to identify individualized strategies that will be most effective in working with providers at all stages of need.
- **Support implementation of new technical assistance activities by offering intensive training, coaching and supportive supervision.**
  - As new STARS standards and/or revised rating structures are introduced, SCQs, PD Counselors and other technical assistance staff will need targeted training on

the new requirements and strategies for assisting providers. Best practices in implementation also suggest that offering a coach to support TA staff and a supportive supervision process (for example, accompanying TA staff on visits to facilities).

## PROMOTING PARTICIPATION AND AWARENESS OF STARS

*What strategies can increase provider participation in STARS?*

Encouraging high rates of provider participation is essential to a QRIS because it supports parents' use of the system and the possibility that they will have rated programs to choose from when they search for early care and education settings. High rates of participation also increase confidence among administrators and key stakeholders that more children with the greatest needs for high quality care will have options available to them (assuming coordinated initiatives to help them access and afford high quality options). In this section, the Evaluation draws upon existing STARS data and interviews with providers participating in STARS to identify strengths and propose recommendations for increasing provider participation.<sup>1</sup>

### Strengths

- **Participation in STARS is steadily increasing.**
  - According to data from the Human Development Institute at the University of Kentucky, participation of eligible programs in STARS has steadily increased and was at 40% in September, 2011.
  - This participation rate is significantly higher than the average rate documented in other voluntary QRIS (Tout et al., 2010).
- **Rating process changes initiated by the Department for Community Based Services, Division of Child Care in 2010 appear to facilitate greater participation in STARS.**
  - Changes made in 2010 to more efficiently link rating and licensing of programs appear to have facilitated an increasing number of programs in STARS.
  - The changes reduced duplication of efforts among the different components of the rating process and allowed for a quicker and more efficient designation of the rating.

### Recommendations

- **Focus outreach efforts with providers on the opportunity to engage in quality improvement.**
  - Providers reported that program improvement is one of their primary motivations for participating in STARS. Smaller proportions of providers report that increased recognition/marketing and financial resources are their primary motivations.

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews with providers who are not participating in STARS were not conducted and represent a gap in this analysis.

- **Harder-to-engage providers who have not “bought into” STARS may be encouraged by opportunities to receive targeted technical or financial assistance (including provision of free training and materials) to meet grid requirements.**
  - Providers who are participating in STARS report that meeting grid requirements and the Environment Rating Scale indicators are the most challenging aspects of STARS participation. These may be serving as particular challenges for providers who have chosen not to enroll in STARS

*What strategies can be targeted to Kentucky parents to increase their use of STARS?*

The Department for Community Based Services, Division of Child Care invested in a telephone survey of a random sample of over 500 Kentucky households to understand their current use of early care and education arrangements, their perceptions of the arrangements they use, the cost of their arrangements and their awareness of and use of Kentucky STARS for KIDS NOW. In this section, findings from the Kentucky Household Survey are described to demonstrate strengths of the current system and to support recommendations for increasing the use of STARS by parents in Kentucky.

### **Strengths**

- **Parents are eager for information about quality and to use STARS ratings.**
  - Parents see value in a Quality Rating and Improvement System. When STARS was explained to respondents participating in the survey, 2/3 of them reported that a higher STARS level would be “very important” in choosing a child care provider. Nearly 80% of respondents said that a higher STARS level would influence their decision if they were to choose a different provider from their current one. Finally, when asked how important STARS is in selecting child care (as one example in a list of possible influences), 86% of respondents reported that STARS is either “very important” or “somewhat important” in selecting child care arrangements. This was the case even though 77% of that group had not actually used STARS.

### **Recommendations**

- **Increase marketing efforts to inform parents of Kentucky STARS for KIDS NOW.**
  - The Household Survey findings revealed that 17% of respondents have heard of Kentucky STARS for KIDS NOW,
  - At this point, the use of STARS is limited by the lack of awareness by parents rather than by the lack of interest or seeing the value of STARS. The majority of parents would use STARS if the information was available to them when choosing care arrangements.
  - Efforts to increase marketing could include statewide strategies such as radio or TV ads, and a focus on helping social service (for example, the child care subsidy program) and early childhood programs inform parents of STARS. Only 4-6% of parents reported that their provider shared information about STARS with them,

either verbally or written, or that they were aware of their providers' current STAR level.

- **Align marketing campaigns with the qualities parents value in early care and education arrangements.**

- The Household Survey provides information on aspects of care that parents value the most. Knowledge of factors that influence parents' child care decisions can inform how STARS might be marketed most effectively. For example, when asked about what they look for in selecting a care provider, nearly 100% of respondents reported that a caregiver who provides reliable services, who they can trust, and who they feel comfortable with are "very important" factors in their decision about early care and education. And, nearly 100% of respondents reported that factors such as a caregiver with special training, who helps their child do well in school, who provides engaging learning activities, and the overall quality level of a program were either "very important" or "somewhat important" in choosing care.
- Although factors related to reliability, trust and comfort may be more difficult to capture in a quality rating than factors related to qualifications and learning activities, it is important to keep in mind parents' values when considering marketing and outreach.  
For example, since parents highly value feeling trust and comfort with a caregiver, marketing might focus on indicators that relate to STARS family communication requirements.
- Parents also value caregiver training and learning activities, suggesting that teacher education and training and the learning environment are also important aspects of STARS to market to parents.

- **Target outreach strategies to parents who are currently making early care and education choices.**

- The Household Survey found that parents are generally satisfied with the arrangement they are currently using. Ninety percent of respondents reported that their current provider is their preferred, number one choice for child care. In addition, over 75% of respondents reported that they believe that their child "usually" or "always" experiences positive experiences at care such as getting a lot of positive, individual attention, appropriate activities, and that their child likes their provider. However, there is also evidence that parents have difficulty finding care arrangements. Only 58% of respondents felt that there were good choices for child care or early childhood education where they live (with 33% reporting that there were no good choices). While 49% reported no difficulty in finding the type of care or program that they wanted, one third reported at least some difficulty in finding care (including 8% reporting a lot of difficulty) and 15% had not found the child care or program they wanted. It seems that although parents typically feel satisfied once they have made a child care choice, many parents could use assistance in finding care arrangements that meet their expectations.
- As a result, STARS marketing approaches are likely to be more effective with parents who are in the process of choosing a care arrangement than with parents

who already have a care arrangement. Coordinating approaches with child care referral services and with other early childhood service providers (for example, pediatricians) may increase the success of these efforts.

## COLLABORATION, COORDINATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES

A final set of goals of the Evaluation was to determine the extent to which the multiple activities in a QRIS that relate to the rating process and the technical assistance process are coordinated and delivered in a manner that is efficient, effective, and non-duplicative. The Evaluation also focused on understanding the administrative systems and processes that support and monitor ongoing activities including data entry by SQCs. Recommendations were developed based on findings from interviews with Technical Assistance staff, Raters, and providers. In this section, strengths of the current system are identified and recommendations are proposed related to each strength.

### Strengths and Recommendations

- **Providers in STARS perceive the rating process to be fair. Acknowledge and build on providers' overall perception that the STARS rating process is fair as any changes are made to STARS.**
  - The majority of providers interviewed in the Evaluation reported that the STARS rating process is totally or mostly fair. Providers stated that the STARS grid requirements are clear and appropriate. Some also stated that SQCs are helpful in explaining the process to providers. It will be critical to build upon the success of STARS in garnering this positive perception by providers.
- **The coordination of technical assistance and supports for providers is functioning well. Acknowledge and build on providers' reports of positive experiences working with multiple Technical Assistance staff.**
  - Overall, providers report that they hear consistent messages about quality from the different technical assistance partners they work with on quality improvement. Type I centers were more likely to report positive experiences, so it will be important to continue to improve upon coordination of messages with Certified Home providers.
- **TA staff are positive about their role in the system and their working relationships with each other. Acknowledge and build upon the positive perceptions of collaboration and coordination reported by SCQs and PD Counselors.**
  - SCQs and PD Counselors report that they have good working relationships with each other. This is a strength of current technical assistance efforts.
- **Provide ongoing opportunities for training on STARS and opportunities for input on STARS design and processes from Raters and SQCs.**
  - Raters and SQCs express an interest in having additional opportunities to learn about STARS requirements and to provide their input and feedback on features of

STARS. It will be beneficial to offer these opportunities to engage these critical members of the STARS rating and technical assistance process.

- **STARS is supported by strong data systems that provide opportunities for tracking trends, managing the effective delivery of services and for validating the system’s effectiveness. Continue to support these systems and their vital role in continuous program improvement of STARS.**
  - The data systems used to support STARS management and tracking are a strength of the system. They offer administrators and contract managers the opportunity to monitor important trends in quality ratings and to track the delivery of services that are provided. These functions are critical for assessing the validity of the overall system and its effectiveness in achieving its goals for families and children.

As the Department for Community Based Services, Division of Child Care reflects upon these findings and considers strategies for taking STARS into its second decade, it will be important to continue grounding the planning in the goals that have been set by for an effective system: one “that is 1) consistently implemented across the state; 2) designed with appropriate checks and balances to ensure reliability and validity of the system; 3) non-duplicative and uses resources wisely; and 4) transparent to all involved.” These goals highlight a commitment to continuous improvement of the system, focusing on the experiences of participants and users of the system, and ultimately, to administering a system that achieves the goal of providing high quality care to families and children in Kentucky.