

KENTUCKY STARS FOR KIDS NOW PROCESS EVALUATION

Evaluation Brief #3

Providers' Perceptions of the Kentucky STARS for KIDS NOW Rating Process

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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](#)

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PROVIDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE KENTUCKY STARS FOR KIDS NOW RATING PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

As of May 2011, approximately 30 percent of Kentucky's early childhood education (ECE) programs (including preschools, licensed child care centers, certified family child care and regulated family child care homes) were participating in STARS for KIDS Now. Recognizing that a significant portion of available programs are not included in STARS, the Kentucky Department for Community Based Services, Division of Child Care has stated that one of the goals of the process evaluation is to improve STARS processes so that the system is consistently implemented across the state and participation is increased. Achieving this goal requires an understanding of the specific aspects of the rating process that either promote or inhibit participation in STARS.

This Evaluation Brief has three primary purposes:

1. Analyze providers' motivation to participate in STARS
2. Describe providers' perceptions of the STARS rating process
3. Analyze specific STARS grid requirements that are challenging for providers
4. Describe the implications for revisions to the STARS rating process and grid

The data presented here were collected through phone interviews with Type I, Type I School-Age (SAC), and Certified home providers, as well as their STARS Quality Coordinators (SQCs). While these data represent a sample of providers currently participating in STARS, their perspectives can help inform efforts to attract additional programs and develop further supports for those entering the system and moving through the rating process.

To briefly anticipate the findings, the following key themes emerged from this analysis:

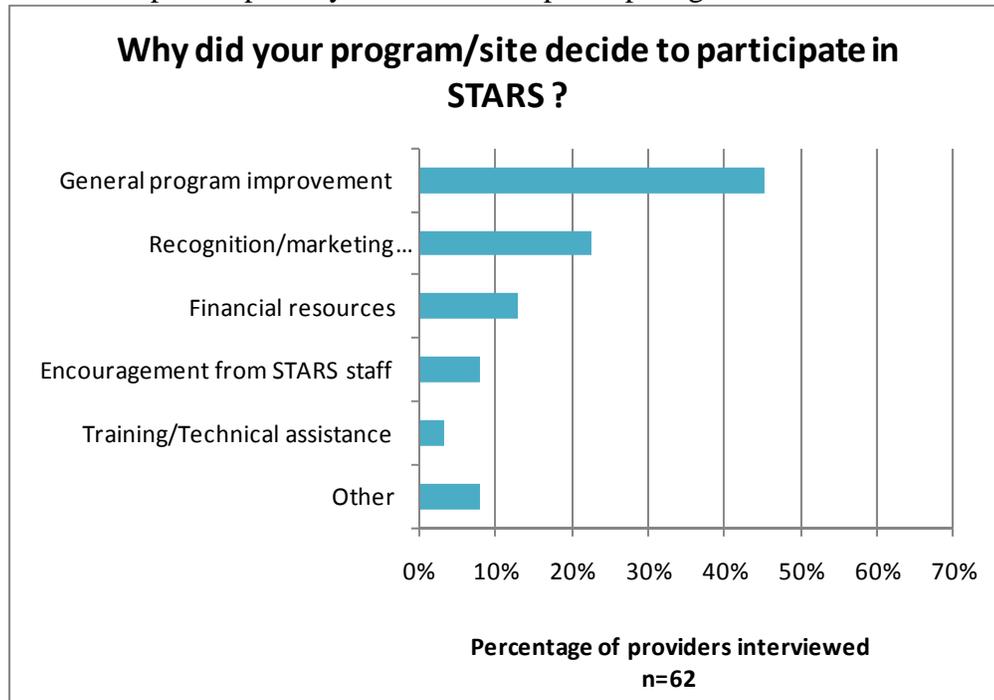
- Providers reported that program improvement was the main reason they chose to participate in STARS.
- Many providers felt that participation in STARS was important to parents/families; however, other providers reported that parents/families were not aware of STARS.
- Providers frequently reported that training and ERS scores presented the biggest challenges to meeting their current STARS level.
- Most providers reported that the STARS rating process was fair. The few who said it was unfair stated that the rating process resulted in an inaccurate representation of their program's quality.
- Many providers in this sample met ratio and family involvement indicators at higher STARS levels
- The ERS, clock hours of training, credential, and accreditation requirements are reported as the most challenging for Certified home, Type I, and Type I School-Age programs in this sample
- Financial incentives were most frequently cited as motivation to achieve higher STARS levels

This Brief is organized into five sections. The first and second sections highlight providers' motivation to participate in STARS for KIDS Now and their perceptions of the STARS rating process. These sections also include information about what SQCs believe motivated providers to participate in STARS and the challenges they believe providers face. The third section highlights the grid requirements *at higher STARS levels* that Certified Home, Type I, and Type I School-Age providers report meeting (in the phone interview with the evaluation team). This section will also discuss how easy or difficult providers believe it would be to meet the requirements they reported that they have not yet met. The fourth section addresses challenges to "moving up the grid" and highlights providers' perceptions of the barriers that prevent them from moving up to higher STARS levels. This section also highlights incentives that providers reported might motivate them to advance to higher levels. The final section of the Brief provides a summary of these findings and offers suggestions about how this information might support the Department for Community Based Services, Division of Child Care's work to expand STARS participation and increase the quality of care for children in Kentucky.

MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE IN STARS

Type I, SAC, and Certified home providers (n=62) were asked to identify their primary motivation for participating in STARS. Their responses were coded into one of seven preliminary categories: 1) So that parents/families would be able to see that we are committed to quality; 2) Access to training and technical assistance; 3) Additional financial resources; 4) General desire to think more about program improvement; 5) For Marketing purposes and/or competition; 6) Other (please specify); and 7) Don't know. These codes were then analyzed in STATA. The analyses resulted in a slightly different set of final response categories that are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Providers' report of primary motivation for participating in STARS



Over 40 percent of providers said that they joined STARS out of a general desire to think more about program improvement. One Certified home provider elaborated on this motivation by saying “it seems like the best way to increase my ability and knowledge, have more information, to do things correctly without second-guessing myself. I wanted to have someone to call who would have real answers for me about how things should be done.” Approximately 23 percent of providers interviewed said that they joined STARS in order to gain recognition as a child care program that is committed to quality. These providers reported that participation in the STARS system would demonstrate to parents/families that they provide higher quality child care than programs not participating, and would be an advantage in terms of marketing and competition. Financial resources, in the form of grants for program materials and professional development scholarships were cited by 13 percent of providers as their primary motivation to join STARS, and 8 percent of providers said that they spoke with members of the STARS staff that encouraged them to join. Access to training and technical assistance provided by STARS was cited by 3 percent of providers as their main motivation to participate in the system.

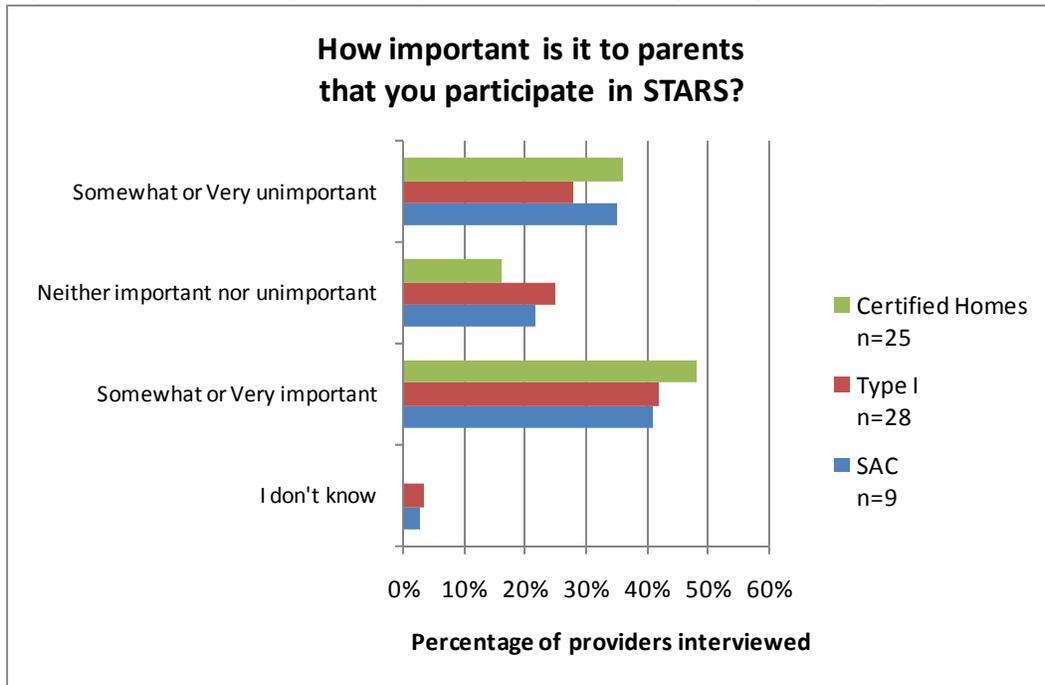
Several interviewees provided “other” reasons for deciding to participate in STARS. For example, a couple providers had prior experience with the STARS system and wanted to join once employed in a new location. A few providers stated that they felt participating in the STARS system benefited children’s development and would lead to increased school readiness.

IMPORTANCE OF STARS TO PARENTS

The importance parents and families place on a facility’s STAR rating may offer additional motivation for providers to join the system. For this reason, Certified home, Type I, and SAC providers were asked: “In your opinion, how important is it to parents that you participate in

STARS?” Their responses were coded as very unimportant, somewhat unimportant, neither important nor unimportant, somewhat important, very important, or I don’t know. Figure 2 highlights providers’ perceptions about the importance of STARS participation to parents/families, and how those perceptions vary by program type.

Figure 2. Providers’ report of importance of STARS participation to parents



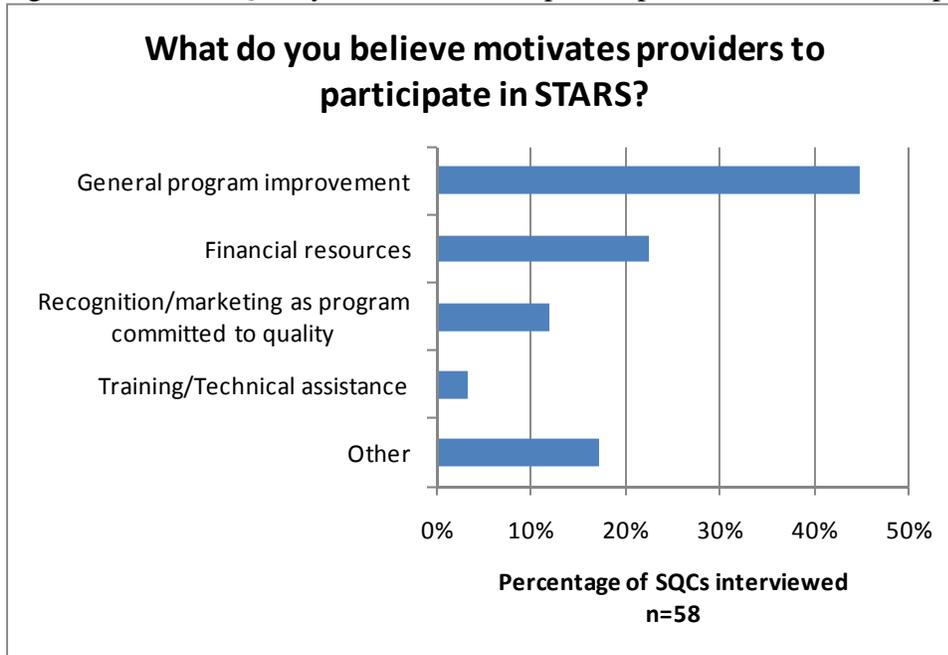
Twenty-eight percent of Type I providers and 35 percent of SAC providers said that they felt their participation in STARS was either “somewhat or very unimportant” to parents. Thirty-six percent of Certified home providers reported their participation in STARS as “somewhat or very unimportant” to parents. A few Type I providers suggested that their participation is unimportant to parents/families due to a lack of awareness of the STARS system and its relationship to child care quality. A Certified home provider said that perhaps STARS participation is unimportant to parents because they are only familiar with the setting in which their child receives care.

Forty-two percent of Type I providers and 41 percent of SAC providers reported that STARS participation was either “somewhat or very important” to parents. Almost half (48 percent) of Certified home providers reported that they believed their participation in STARS was very important to parents. Several of the Certified home providers interviewed said that parents ask about STAR level when they call to inquire about the program and that it's comforting to parents that providers are committed to improving their quality through participation in the system.

SQC PERCEPTIONS OF PROVIDER PARTICIPATION

STARs Quality Coordinators (SQCs; n=58) were asked: “what do you believe is [provider name]’s motivation for participating in STARS for KIDS Now?” Similar to what providers reported, almost half (45 percent) of the SQCs stated that “general program improvement” was a primary motivation for participating in STARS (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. STARS Quality Coordinators' report of provider motivation to participate in STARS



Twenty-two percent of SQCs interviewed suggested that the additional financial resources provided through the STARS system motivated providers to participate, which is slightly more than the 13 percent of providers reporting financial incentives as the main reason they chose to join STARS. Twelve percent of SQCs reported that recognition as a high-quality child care program motivated some of the providers they work with to participate in the system. Providers and SQCs reported access to training and technical assistance as a motivation to join STARS with similar frequency (3 percent).

Several SQCs cited “other” aspects of STARS participation that they believe motivated providers to join. According to one SQC, a provider who received a Success by Six grant was eligible to receive additional funding and technical assistance if she became STAR-rated. The SQC for a preschool for visually impaired children said that the providers wanted to show that high-quality child care is possible for this specific population. A few SQCs said that programs administered by an agency that encourages STARS participation, such as Head Start or the Community Action Council, are often required to join the system.

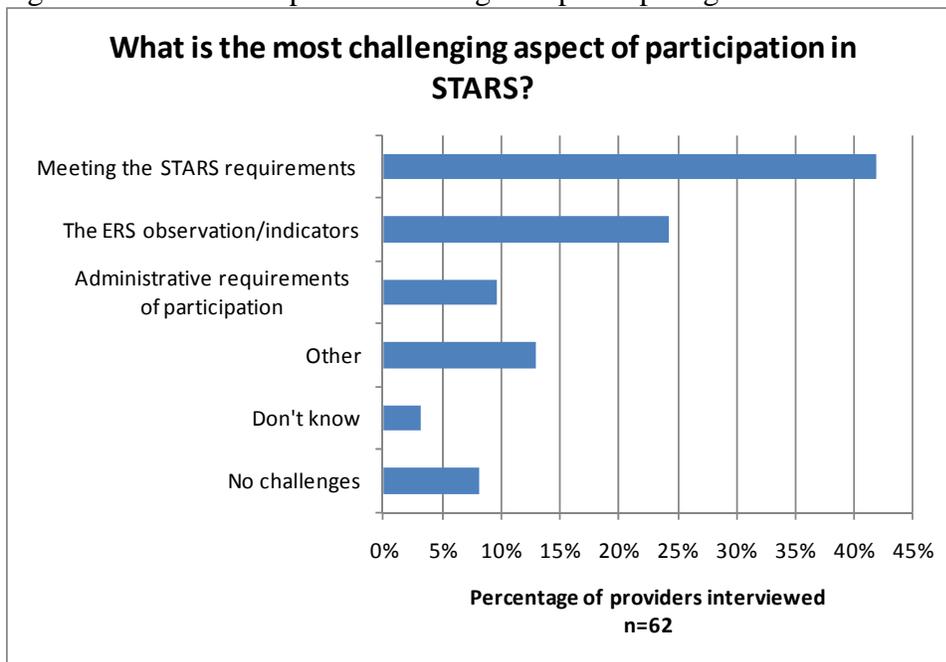
PERCEPTIONS OF THE RATING PROCESS

An additional goal of the process evaluation is to provide information that can help the Department for Community Based Services, Division of Child Care ensure that the STARS rating process produces a rating that reflects the quality of programs and promotes participation in the system across star levels. To address this goal, Type I, SAC, and Certified home providers were asked several questions regarding their perceptions of the current rating process, including the aspects of the process that they found most challenging, the barriers they overcame to achieve their current rating and whether or not they believed the current rating process was fair.

CHALLENGING ASPECTS OF STARS PARTICIPATION

Providers (n=62) were asked: “What is the most challenging aspect of participation in the STARS for KIDS Now system?” Their responses were coded into one of seven initial categories and entered into STATA. Further analysis of these data resulted in the response categories presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Providers’ report of challenges to participating in STARS



Responses to this question generally indicate the STARS requirements and ERS indicators are the most challenging aspects of STARS for providers. Many providers said that meeting the STARS requirements was the most challenging aspect of participation. The challenges these providers described included the additional time and financial resources needed to meet STARS requirements in addition to specific requirements such as training hours and credentials. For example, a Type I provider stated that meeting the credential requirements for staff was particularly difficult due to high staff turnover at her center. She said “I have two girls starting classes now to get their CDA, but by the time they get them they're here for a short time and then they're gone.” Similarly, a SAC provider said that the CDA requirements at Level 3 were challenging for her program because “It's hard to get staff to take classes and then once they do they are geared to early childhood and we lose a lot of our CDA people to early childhood centers rather than after school.” For one Certified home provider, meeting clock hour requirements by attending trainings was a challenge because her child care program is open 24 hours a day. According to a few interviewees, factors that were out of their control affected their ability to meet specific requirements. For instance, two SAC providers indicated that they would like to move up to higher star levels, but were unable to do so because the school system prohibits the program from offering paid vacation to staff. Level 1 providers were less likely than

either Level 2 or Level 3 providers to say that specific requirements presented the most challenges in the STARS rating process.

Many other providers indicated that the ERS observation and indicators were the most challenging aspect of participation in STARS. Several providers said that having additional people at the site during observations was challenging because it disrupted the day's routine and affected both the provider's and the children's behavior. The rating observation was particularly challenging for one Level 1 Certified home provider who said, "I'm always afraid I'm going to mess up. I have to prepare myself mentally and emotionally for the rating. I get overwhelmed and feel a lot of internal pressure." Specific ERS requirements were also challenging for a few providers. For instance, a Montessori school provider mentioned that dramatic play items are not usually found in Montessori classrooms, but are required to be present to receive a higher score on the ERS. Another provider said that having a large block area was not applicable in her program that serves visually impaired children.

Several administrative requirements of STARS participation, including paperwork and documentation of completed requirements, are most challenging. In addition, Level 1 providers, both Certified home and Type I, were more likely than Levels 2, 3, or 4 providers to report this apprehension to have observers present as the greatest challenge in the rating process.

Many Type I, SAC, and Certified home providers reported "other" challenges in the current rating process. A few Type I providers described difficulties in meeting requirements when there were discrepancies between the administration of their program and STARS. Another Type I provider stated that there were also discrepancies between her program's national accreditation and STARS. She said, "One says that you should have things hanging from the ceiling while the other says you should not. There are some major aspects of the room that they don't agree on." Similarly, a Certified home provider said it was difficult for her to keep the state regulations separate from STARS requirements and that she often confused the two. Other challenges cited include receiving input on the program from parents and keeping children engaged in learning.

Challenges in Meeting Current STARS Level

Type I (n=28), SAC (n=9), and Certified home interviewees (n=25) were also asked; "What was the biggest challenge you've overcome so far to get your current rating?" Some of their responses to this open-ended question pertain to the rating process itself, while others speak to grid requirements that may have posed challenges, including specific indicators of the ERS and training requirements.

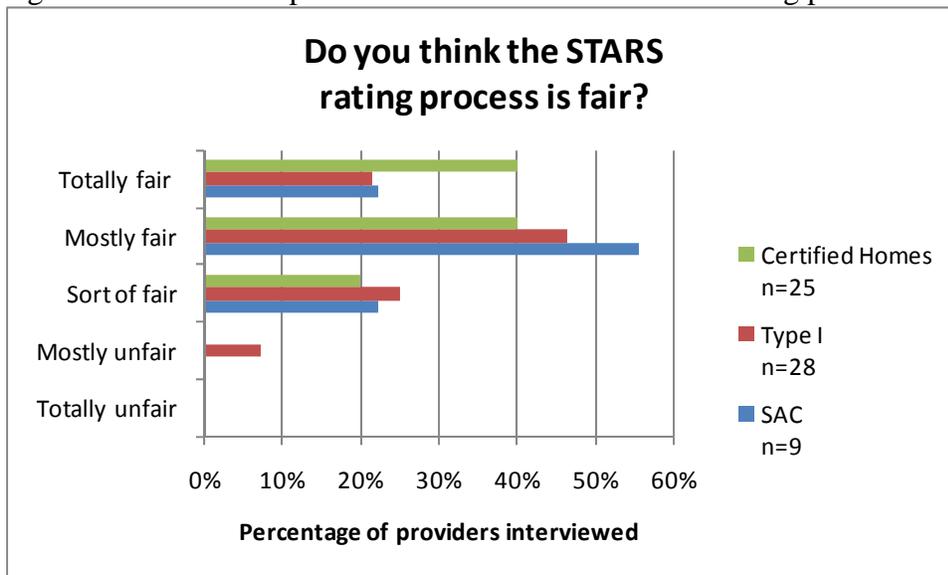
The requirements of the ERS also posed challenges for several Type I and Certified home providers. For Level 2 Certified home providers, the main challenges were remembering the ERS toileting procedures and meeting the requirements for outdoor play space. Type I and SAC providers at Levels 2 and 3 reported that the expense of purchasing materials for centers, including multi-cultural dolls, materials for math activities, and blocks was a challenge. In addition, two Level 2 SAC providers said that it was difficult to set up clearly defined centers in their settings due to space limitations. A couple Type I providers said they believed mistakes were made during the ERS rating process, and that these issues presented the biggest challenge in achieving their current STAR level.

A few Type I providers across STARS levels, including those in School-Age facilities, also said that meeting training requirements was particularly challenging. A Level 4 provider explained that the challenge lies in having adequate resources to maintain high-quality staff and provide them with appropriate training and benefits. A Level 3 provider said that having to go back to school to get the Kentucky Director’s Credential while managing multiple businesses was a significant challenge. A few Certified home providers also reported that meeting training requirements was a challenge in obtaining their current star level. A Level 2 Certified provider said “I thought I was able to get a 3, but I didn’t have all my training done yet because I thought I had more time to get it finished. Now I have to wait another year to apply for a rating.”

FAIRNESS OF THE RATING PROCESS

In addition to asking providers about challenges they face in the STARS rating process, interviewees were also asked whether or not they perceived the process to be fair. Figure 5 demonstrates the variation in provider perceptions of fairness across program types.

Figure 5. Providers’ report of the fairness of the STARS rating process



Most Certified home providers interviewed said they felt the STARS rating process was either “mostly fair” or “totally fair.” Several of these providers stated that the process was fair because the STARS requirements were appropriate expectations and benefited the children in their care. A few Certified providers said that the process was fair because STARS offers training and assistance to meet the requirements even though some of the requirements may be challenging to meet.

However, a few of the Certified home providers reported that the STARS rating process was only “sort of fair.” A couple of providers reported that they felt the rating was an unauthentic representation of the quality of their program. One provider said, “I know that there are daycare providers who aren’t as qualified as me but are better at meeting the silly requirements, like labeling boxes of things...It seems like there should be a better way to measure us than a one-

day observation. Anyone can be good for a day.” Another Certified home provider said that certain ERS requirements were especially challenging for family child care providers. She said, “when it comes to the playground, making it safer is expensive and when you’re not a big facility, it’s expensive to purchase all that to get it right.”

Almost half of Type I providers said the rating process was “mostly fair”, and several said it was “totally fair.” Again, these providers reported that the STARS requirements were clear and appropriate and were beneficial to the children and to the program staff. A few also said that their SQC was helpful and understanding in explaining the process and helping providers prepare for the rating.

Several Type I providers reported that the process was “mostly unfair” because they believe the raters are inconsistent. For example, one provider said, “I think it’s up to each rater because some will rate you higher on some things that others won’t.” Others said it is unfair because the requirements, particularly those that pertain to paid leave, are challenging and are geared more towards large centers. In the words of one provider, “To me, I don’t think that being able to give vacation time and holidays has anything to do with the quality of care the kids get.”

Most SAC programs said they perceived the STARS rating process to be “mostly fair” or “totally fair.” Most SAC providers agreed that the expectations of the STARS system were appropriate and that they were well prepared for the rating. One provider said “With all the pre-visits that I received, I felt like I had all the tools and resources and all the knowledge that I needed to in order to be successful and have a successful rating.” A provider who reported that the process was only “somewhat fair” said that “I think the STARS process focuses on early childhood, which is fine for our kindergarteners, but they have a hard time making that leap to school-agers and what’s appropriate for a school-ager.”

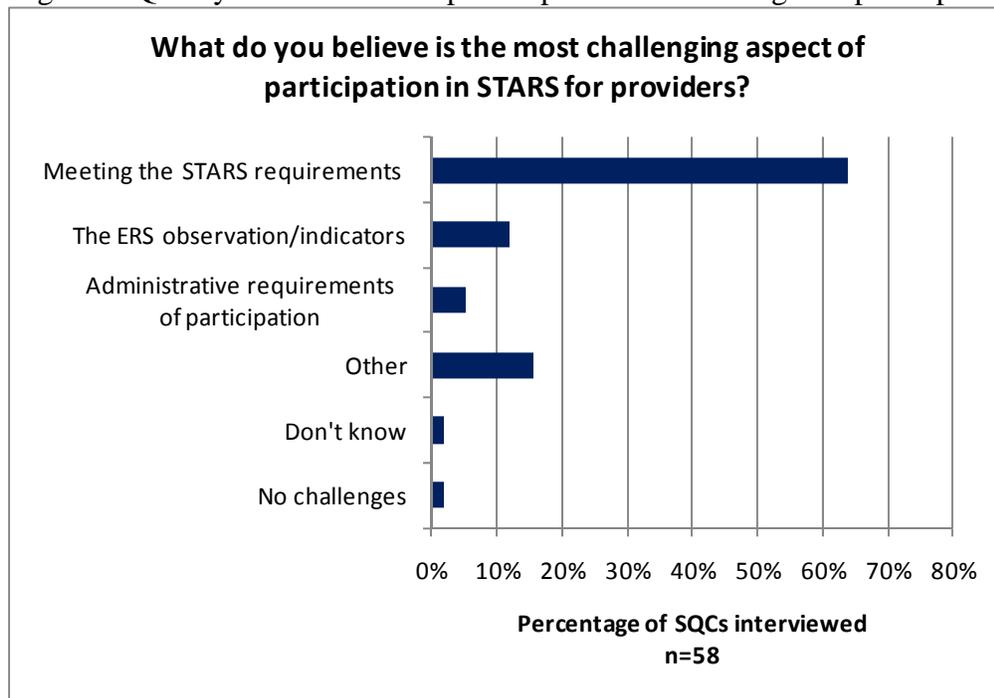
SQC PERCEPTIONS OF RATING PROCESS CHALLENGES

SQCs were asked “what do you believe is the most challenging aspect of STARS participation for [provider name]?” Their responses were coded into similar categories as those used for providers. Figure 6 shows that two-thirds of SQCs responded with a specific STARS requirement that was difficult for a provider to meet. Training and staff credentials were the requirements most frequently cited by SQCs as challenging for providers. Another SQC said it was difficult for a Certified home provider to complete the required training hours because the provider is in a rural setting and did not have access to convenient training opportunities. According to the SQC for a Type I provider, requiring 50 percent of center staff to have a Commonwealth Child Care Credential (CCCC) was particularly challenging for that provider.

The ERS indicators were also cited by several SQCs as challenging for providers. For instance, the SQC for a Certified provider said it was a challenge for that provider to get a 4.5 on the FCCERS-R. According to a few SQCs, finding space for learning centers and outdoor play was challenging for some providers. In addition, apprehension about having STARS observers on site was reported as a challenge for providers by a few SQCs interviewed.

Several SQCs perceived “other” challenges related to program setting/type. For instance, an SQC for a Certified home provider reported that it was a challenge for the provider to care for infants and children with special needs without the help of an assistant. The SQC for a faith-based Type I center reported that finding and using an appropriate curriculum was challenging. Another SQC stated that her work with Spanish-speaking providers was challenging due to language barriers.

Figure 6. Quality Coordinators’ report of providers’ challenges to participating in STARS



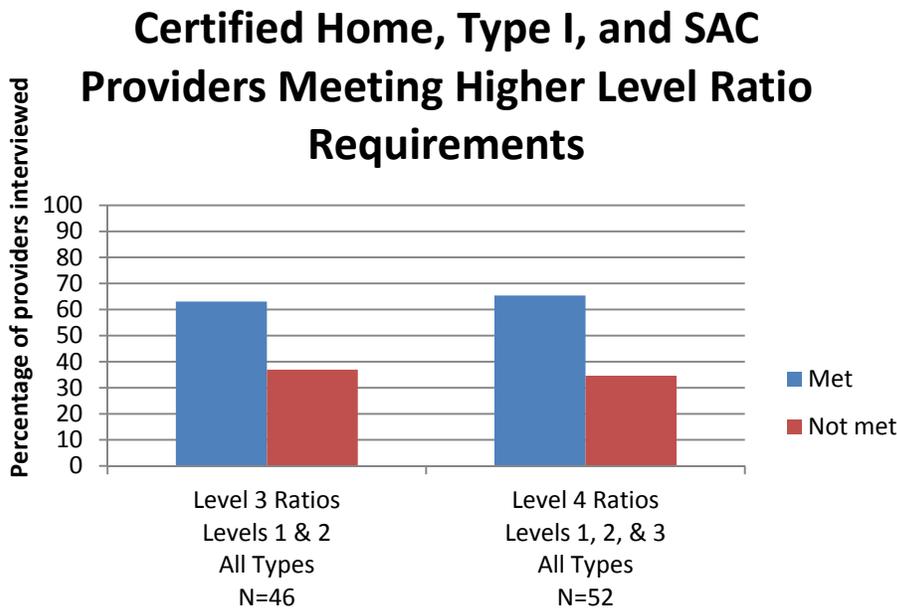
FINDINGS FROM STARS GRID REQUIREMENT ANALYSIS

Certified home (n=25), Type I (n=28) and Type I School-Age (SAC; n=9) providers at Levels 1, 2, and 3 were asked whether or not they met individual requirements at the next highest STARS level. For instance, Level 1 providers were asked: “Does your program have an annual written ERS improvement plan?” If a provider responded that they had not met the requirement in question, they were then asked to rate the ease with which they believed they could complete it. These responses were coded on a 5-point scale: 1=very easy, 2=somewhat easy, 3=neither easy nor difficult, 4=somewhat difficult and 5=very difficult. If, for example, a Level 1 provider responded that it would be “very easy” to meet a Level 2 requirement, they were also asked to report how easy or difficult it would be to meet a Level 3 requirement, and so on. If a Level 2 provider responded that meeting a Level 3 requirement would be “very difficult,” it was assumed that meeting a Level 4 requirement would also be difficult. Level 4 providers were asked to report on both the grid requirement and category that were the easiest to meet, and those that were the most difficult to meet.

When reviewing the findings from this analysis, it is important to note that providers are asked to self-report on the indicators at the levels above their current STARS level. There are limitations to this approach as described in the Methods section of this Evaluation Brief. Missing data also present another limitation to consider. Grid requirements for which there are insufficient data are not included in this analysis.

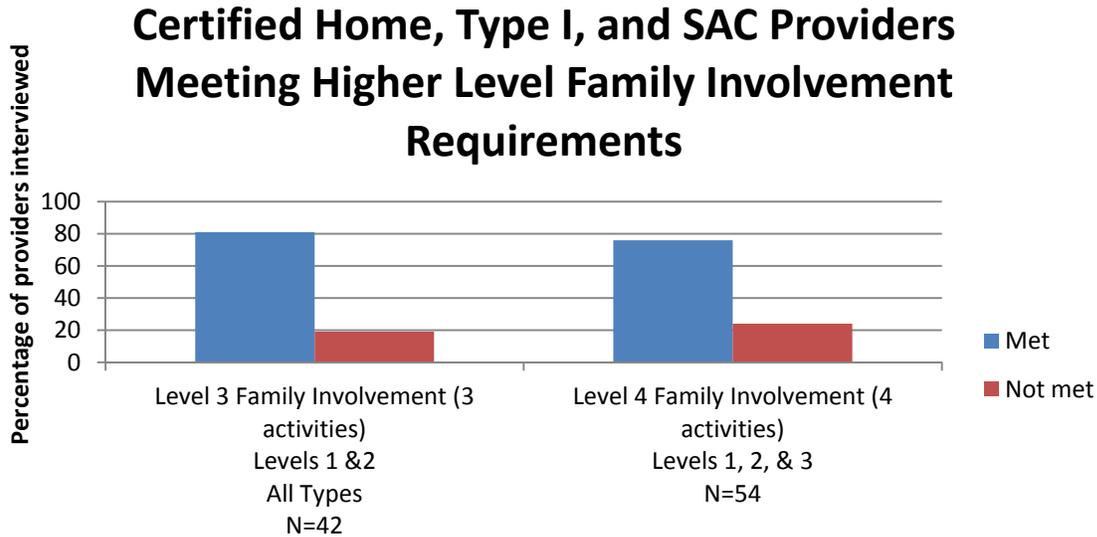
Analyses of interview data showed that Level 1, 2, and 3 providers already met several requirements at higher levels (Figure 7). For example, at Levels 1 and 2, over three-fourths of Certified home providers, almost one-half of Type I providers, and all SAC providers reported that they meet Level 3 ratio requirements. Similarly, at Levels 1, 2, and 3, three-fourths of Certified home, one-half of Type I, and approximately two-thirds of SAC providers said they already meet Level 4 ratio requirements.

Figure 7. Proportion of providers meeting higher-level ratio requirements



Many providers across program types also reported that they met family involvement requirements at higher levels (Figure 8). All providers in this sample offered at least two family involvement activities per year (a Level 2 requirement), and over two-thirds of all Level 1 and 2 providers reported that they offered at least four family involvement activities per year (a Level 4 requirement). Three-fourths of Level 1 Type I providers said they have a written plan for family involvement (a Level 2 requirement), and all Level 2 SAC providers said they have a documented procedure to collect feedback on the program from families (a Level 3 requirement).

Figure 8. Proportion of providers meeting higher-level family involvement requirements



Other grid requirements appeared to present greater challenges for the providers in this sample. The requirements at higher levels that were more frequently reported as “not met” by providers across program types include Environment Rating Scale (ERS) scores, training hours, credentials, and accreditation. These requirements are discussed in further detail below.

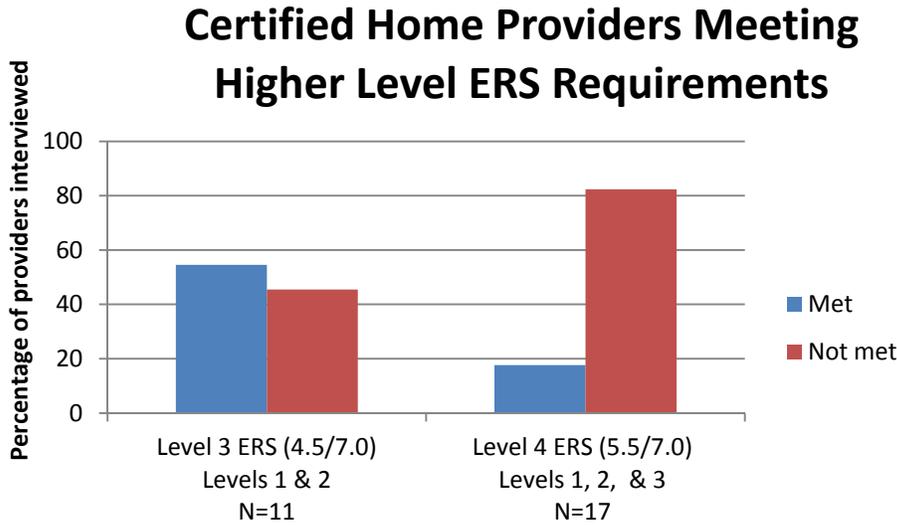
ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE SCORES

The majority of data on providers’ completion of the STARS grid requirements were self-reported. Administrative data on ERS scores collected from the Kentucky Department for Community Based Services, Division of Child Care were used to determine whether providers met ERS requirements at higher levels.

Certified Homes

Figure 9 shows the percentage of Certified home providers who met ERS requirements at levels 3 and 4.

Figure 9. Percentage of Certified Home providers meeting higher-level ERS requirements

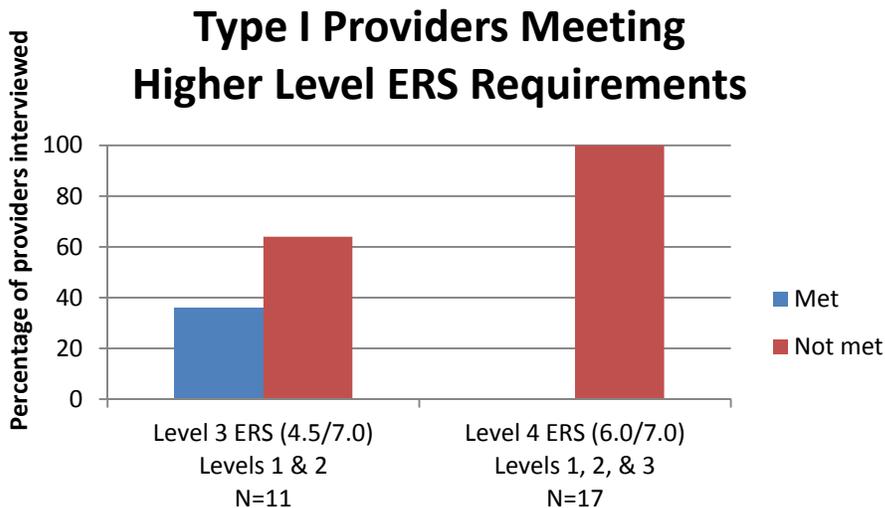


At the time of the interviews, six Level 1 Certified home providers had not yet received an ERS rating. The remaining Level 1 providers already met the Level 2 ERS requirement (at least 3.0/7.0). Over one-half of Level 2 providers met the Level 3 ERS requirement (at least 4.5/7.0), and about one-third said it would be somewhat or very easy to meet. Less than one-fifth of Level 2 and 3 Certified home providers already met the Level 4 ERS requirement (5.5/7.0). Over half of Level 1, 2, and 3 providers who did not meet the Level 4 requirement said it would be somewhat or very difficult to get a 5.5 on the ERS, while one-half said it would be somewhat/very easy to achieve.

Type I Facilities

Figure 10 shows the percentage of Type providers who reported meeting ERS requirements at higher levels.

Figure 10. Percentage of Type I providers meeting higher-level ERS requirements



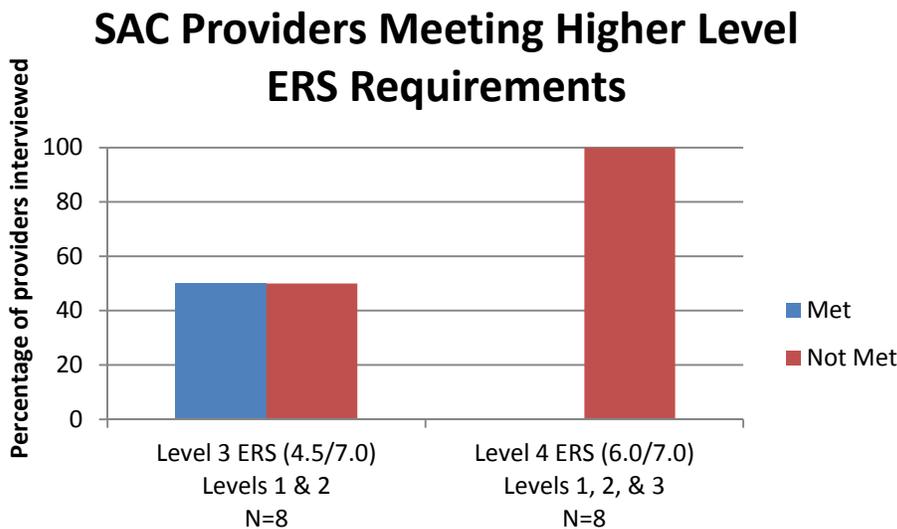
Six Level 1 Type I providers had not yet received an ERS rating at the time of the interviews. Approximately one-third of Level 1 and 2 providers received an ERS score of 4.5 or higher (Level 3 requirement). A little over one-fourth of Level 1 and 2 providers who had not met the Level 3 ERS requirement said it would be somewhat or very difficult to do so. Two Level 1 and 2 providers said it would be somewhat or very easy to get a 4.5 on the ERS.

No Level 1, 2, or 3 providers received a 6.0 on the ERS (Level 4 requirement). Approximately one-fourth of Level 1, 2, and 3 said it would be somewhat/very easy to achieve the Level 4 ERS requirement, while almost two-thirds said it would be somewhat/very difficult. The remainder were neutral about their ability to meet the higher ERS requirement (saying it would be “neither easy or hard”).

School-Age Care Facilities

Figure 11 shows that one-half of Level 2 SAC providers received an ERS score of 4.5 or higher (Level 3). Two providers said it would be somewhat/very easy to obtain a score of 4.5 on the ERS, and one provider said it would be somewhat/very difficult. No Level 2 or 3 SAC providers met the Level 4 ERS requirement (6.0/7.0), and almost all providers said it would be somewhat/very difficult to do so.

Figure 11. Percentage of SAC providers meeting higher-level ERS requirements



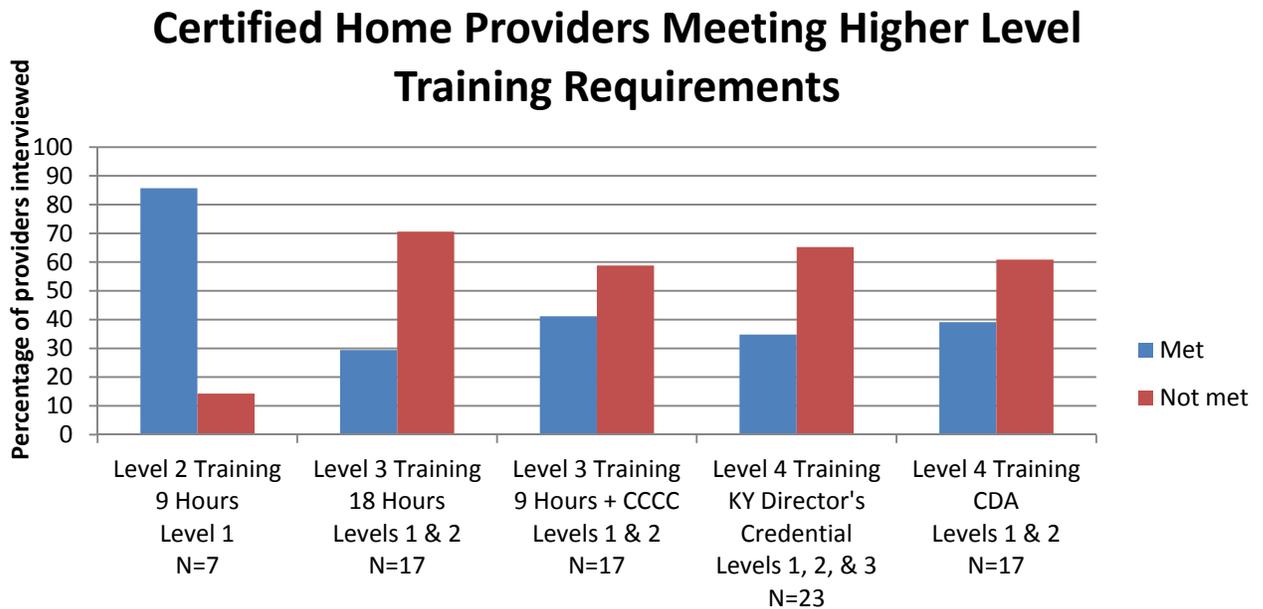
TRAINING AND CREDENTIALS

Certified Homes

Almost all Level 1 providers reported that they complete at least 9 clock hours of training or more per year (Figure 12). The one Level 1 provider who did not meet this requirement said it would be somewhat/very easy to meet that requirement. One-third of Level 1 and 2 providers complete at least 18 clock hours of training (a Level 3 requirement). Those who did not meet the Level 3 requirement said it would be somewhat/very easy to complete 18 hours or more of training per year. A little over one-third of Level 1, 2, and 3 providers have a Kentucky Director’s credential (a Level 4 requirement). Two Level 1, 2, and 3 providers several said it

would be somewhat/very difficult to obtain a Director’s credential, and about one-fifth said it would be somewhat/very easy.

Figure 12. Percentage of Certified Home providers meeting higher-level training requirements

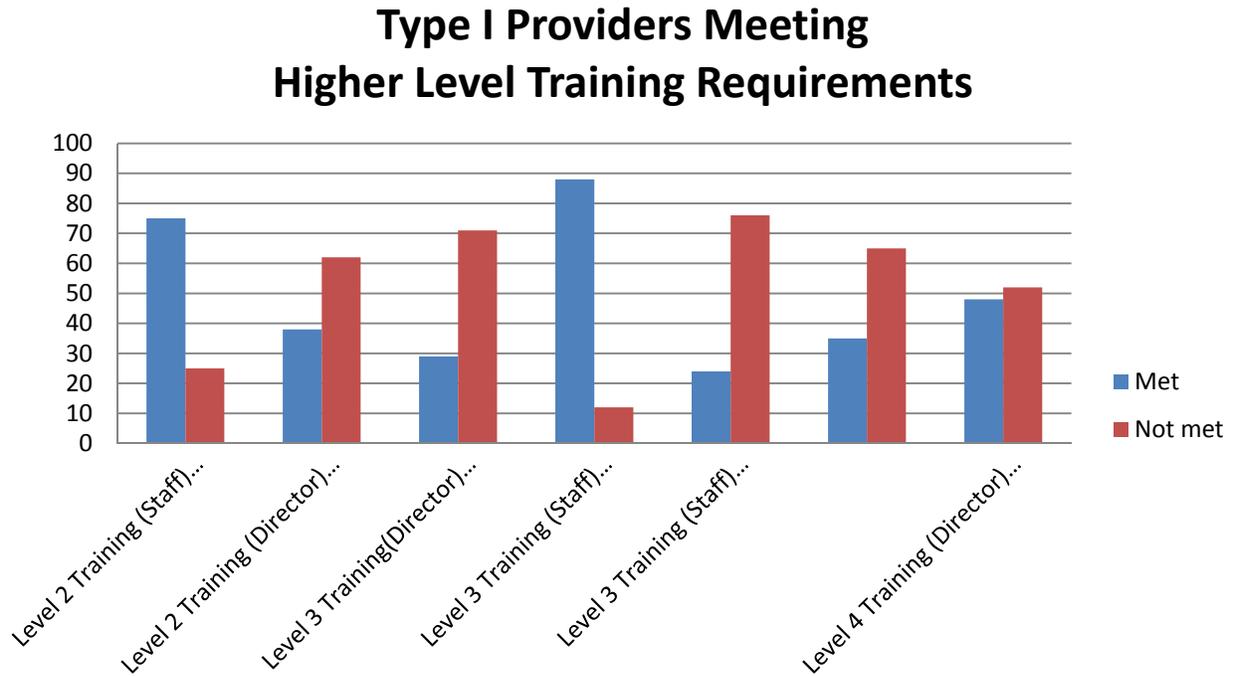


Over one-third of Level 1 and 2 Certified home providers have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential (Level 3 providers are required to have this credential by their 4th year in STARS, and all Level 4 providers must have it). One-third of Level 1 and 2 providers said it would be somewhat/very difficult to obtain a CDA, and only one provider said it would be somewhat/very easy.

Type I Facilities

Figure 13 shows that three-fourths of Level 1 Type I providers reported that the staff in their programs complete at least 15 hours of training annually (a Level 2 requirement). A little over one-third of Level 1 providers said they complete at least 18 hours of training annually (a Level 3 requirement). A little over one-third of those who do not complete at least 18 hours said it would be somewhat/very difficult to meet this requirement, and one provider said it would be somewhat/very difficult. Almost one-third of Level 1 and 2 providers reported that they meet 24 hours of training for directors annually (a Level 3 requirement). About one-fourth reported that it would be somewhat/very easy to achieve Level 3 director training requirements, and almost one-third said it would be somewhat/very difficult. The remainder said it would be neither easy nor difficult.

Figure 13. Percentage of Type I providers meeting higher-level training requirements

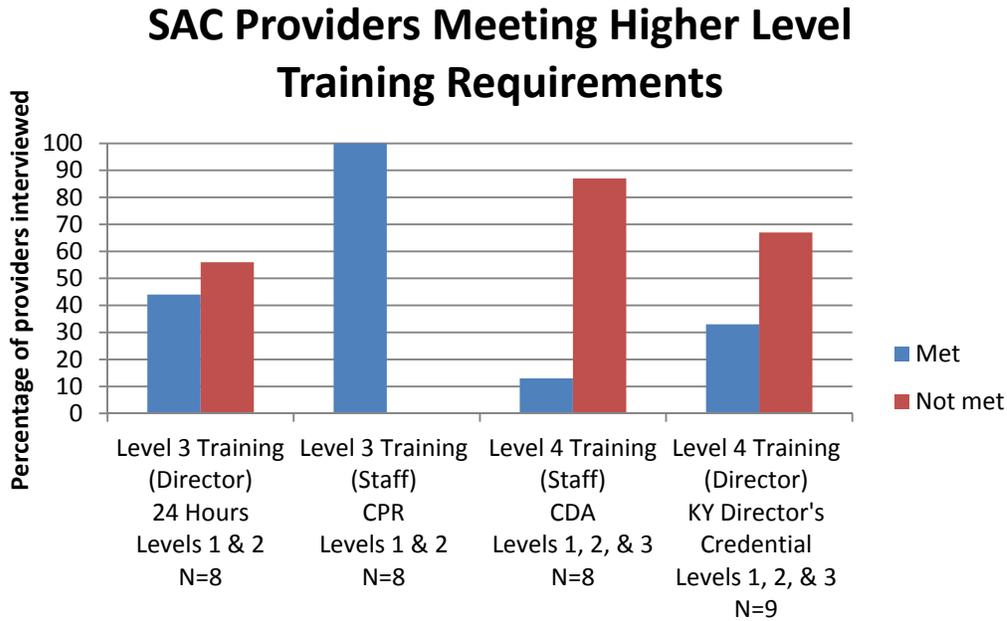


About one-fourth of Level 1 and 2 providers reported that their staff had a Commonwealth Child Care Credential (or higher). Only two providers said it would be somewhat/very easy to meet this requirement, while a little over one-half said it would be somewhat/very difficult. Approximately one-third of Level 1, 2, and 3 providers reported that there was one person (at minimum) with a CDA in each classroom at all times (a Level 4 requirement). The majority of providers who did not meet this requirement said it would be somewhat/very difficult to meet.

School-Age Care Facilities

Almost one-half of Level 2 SAC providers reported that they complete at least 24 hours of director training annually (a Level 3 requirement). About one-fourth of Level 2 providers said it would be somewhat/very easy to meet this requirement, and one-fourth said it would be somewhat/very difficult. Only one Level 2 SAC provider reported that there is one person (at minimum) with a CDA in each classroom at all times (a Level 4 requirement). Almost all SAC providers who have not met this requirement said it would be somewhat/very difficult to do so. One-third of Level 2 and 3 SAC providers have a Kentucky Director’s credential. One-third of those who did not meet this requirement said it would be somewhat/very easy to obtain a Director’s credential, and one provider said it would be somewhat/very difficult.

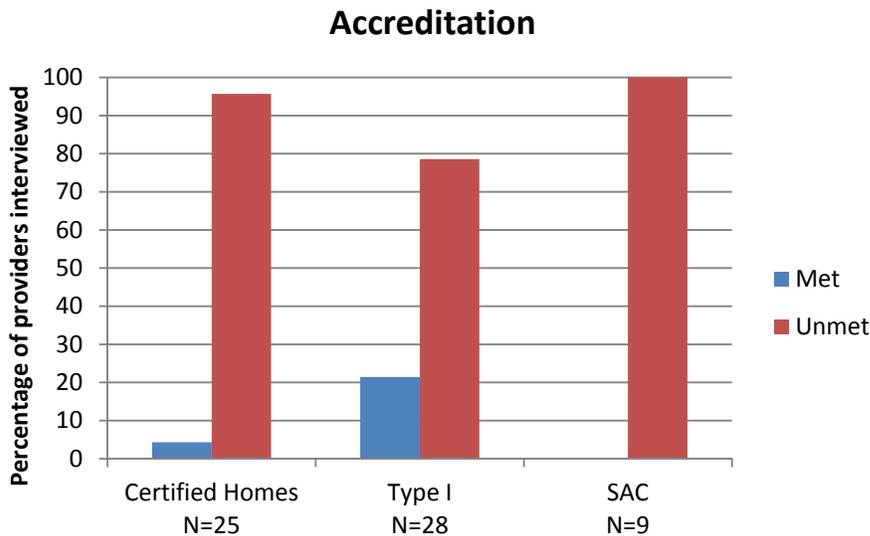
Figure 14. Percentage of SAC providers meeting higher-level training requirements



ACCREDITATION

Figure 15 shows the percentage of all providers who reported that their program was accredited by a nationally-recognized accrediting body.

Figure 15. Percentage of providers reporting that their program was accredited by a nationally-recognized accrediting body



Certified Homes

Only one Level 1, 2, or 3 Certified home provider is accredited by a nationally-recognized accrediting body (a Level 4 requirement). Less than one-fifth of Level 1, 2, and 3 providers said it would be somewhat/very easy to become accredited, and about one-fifth said it would be

somewhat/very difficult. More than half of the Level 1, 2, and 3 providers who are not already accredited said they did not know how easy or difficult it would be to meet this requirement.

Type I Facilities

Over three-fourths of Level 1, 2, and 3 Type I providers are not accredited. Type I providers were not asked to report the ease with which they believe they could meet this requirement.

School-Age Care Facilities

None of the SAC providers in this sample are accredited by a nationally-recognized accrediting body. SAC providers were not asked to report how easy or difficult it would be to meet this requirement.

LEVEL 4 PROVIDERS

Certified Homes

Due to the fact that Level 4 providers have already completed all of the STARS grid requirements, these providers were asked to report on the STARS levels that were the easiest and the hardest to achieve. The Level 4 Certified home providers in this sample both reported that Level 3 was the easiest to achieve and that Level 4 was the most difficult. Family involvement activities were the easiest requirement for these providers to complete, and the ERS rating was the most difficult.

Type I Facilities

Two Level 4 providers said that Level 3 was the easiest to achieve, and one provider said that Level 2 was the easiest. Level 4 was the hardest to achieve for two Type I providers, and one provider said that none of the levels were particularly difficult to achieve.

The easiest requirements for Level 4 Type I providers included family involvement and personnel. One provider explained that her program's administrative agency already offered staff paid vacation time, so meeting that requirement was not difficult. The hardest requirements for Level 4 providers were maintaining training hours and meeting all of the ERS indicators.

BARRIERS AND INCENTIVES TO "MOVING UP THE GRID"

PROVIDER PERCEPTIONS OF GRID REQUIREMENT BARRIERS

Certified Homes

Interview respondents were asked to report on the STARS level they planned on applying for at their next rating. Approximately 65 percent of Level 1, 2 and 3 Certified home providers said they would apply for a higher level. These providers were also asked to describe any challenges they anticipated in moving up to that higher level. A couple Level 1 providers reported that they needed to work on room arrangement and setting aside space for equipment. A couple Level 3 Certified home providers said that the cost of accreditation would be a challenge. Several other providers stated that they either did not know what challenges might arise or that they did not anticipate any particular challenges. The Certified providers who were not planning on applying for a higher STARS level reported that the training hours, Director's credential, and accreditation requirements prevented them from being able to achieve higher levels.

Type I Facilities

Fifty-two percent of Type I providers reported that they planned on moving up to higher STARS level at their next rating. The majority of these Type I providers said that getting additional credentials and training hours would be a challenge in moving up to a higher level. Those who were not planning on moving up to a higher level said that the requiring a provider with a CDA in each classroom at all times was particularly challenging. A few Level 2 providers said that they could not reduce their adult-child ratios to achieve a Level 3. A few other providers reported that the accreditation requirement prevented them from moving up the grid.

School-Age Care Facilities

The majority of SAC providers (8 out of 9) were a Level 2 at the time of the interviews. One of the SAC providers reported that they would apply for a Level 3 at their next rating but that the clock hours of training would be challenging for staff. Several SAC providers said that they were not able to move up to a Level 3 because their program could not offer paid leave to its staff. Another SQC provider said they could not move up to a Level 3 until one more staff member received a CCCC. The remaining SAC providers reported that their facilities were shared spaces, and therefore they were unable to make necessary changes to achieve a higher STARS level.

Overall, the qualitative information collected from providers reiterates the findings that suggest that the ERS, training and credential, and accreditation requirements are significant challenges that providers must overcome before advancing to higher STARS levels.

When asked what types of incentives would motivate them to achieve higher STARS levels, most providers cited additional financial resources. For example, a Type I provider said “If I was going for a 4 [the incentive] would be money because I would need help paying for the insurance.” One Type I provider said it would be motivating “if we could offer a salary increase for those that do get their credentialing or if there was a higher position we could give them.” Another Type I provider reported that as a “mid-range price center” she needed additional funding to maintain Level 3 or 4 ratios. A few Certified home providers reported that additional financial resources would enable them to purchase the equipment and supplies necessary to receive a higher score on the ERS. Several providers across program types reported that increased scholarships would motivate them to receive additional training hours and enroll in coursework related to early childhood education.

While financial incentives were the most frequently cited motivation to achieve higher STARS levels, free training, additional materials for children such as books and toys, and recognition as a high-quality program would motivate providers to complete additional requirements and advance to higher STARS levels.

SUMMARY

This Brief examines providers' experiences in STARS from a variety of perspectives. It includes a description of their motivations for participating in STARS and their perceptions of challenges in the rating process and in meeting specific grid requirements.

The provider and SQC perspectives described here offer valuable information about how STARS processes may be improved to increase participation and address current challenges. Data from this sample show that joining STARS is largely seen as a way to improve program quality, which implies that positive messages about the outcomes of participation are reaching these providers.

The providers in this sample were mixed in their perception of parent awareness of STARS. Some perceive that STARS is important to parents and families, but others believe that parents do not have a good understanding of the system and its purpose. Additional outreach to families may help to increase STARS participation, as more parents learn to consider STAR rating when choosing care for their children.

It appears that many of the challenges providers in this sample describe are due to their program's setting and factors they deem out of their control. These challenges include making space in one's home for child care equipment and materials, finding time for training despite busy work schedules, and managing the expectations of multiple monitoring and support agencies. Providers who struggle with these issues might benefit from further individualized assistance to overcome these challenges and move up to higher STAR levels.

Findings in this Evaluation Brief also provide valuable information about the STARS grid requirements that are "easy" for Certified home, Type I, and SAC providers to meet. According to the providers in this sample, ratio and family involvement requirements at Levels 3 and 4 are not particularly challenging.

The ERS score requirements at higher STARS levels do appear to present challenges for the providers in this sample. Clock hours of training, credential requirements, and accreditation also appear to be challenging for providers, particularly due to time and financial constraints. Most providers in this sample reported that they would be motivated to move up to higher STARS levels if they received additional financial incentives.

These findings can ultimately be used to inform discussions about revisions to the current STARS grid as well as technical assistance strategies that will support providers' success within the STARS system.